

Open and Distance Learning

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Abstract

Open and distance learning is one of the fastest growing fields of education, offering individuals and groups of learners flexible learning opportunities that free them from the constraints of time and place. Open and distance learning systems are constantly evolving to address the needs of students as technology changes. Its potential has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web which has made open and distance learning even more desirable, accessible and almost trendy; as is evident by the growing number of distance learning institutions.

Today, the acquisition of knowledge and lifelong learning has become an integral part of our lives, and distance learning plays a strategic role in meeting this need. The advancement of internet technologies such as Web 2.0 have allowed for the exploration of new methods of lecture delivery; considerably increasing the richness of teaching materials now available to students; reinforced by developments in information and communication technologies such as cheaper laptops and mobile broadband; making distance learning more accessible to learners.

The focus of this dissertation is on the role of open and distance learning in education. It investigates the background and effectiveness of such learning methods and explores the learning side tools and support currently available. It will also analyse how the use of computer based technologies has and can be used to further enhance open and distance learning. The advantages and disadvantages of open and distance learning as well as other methods of teaching will also be explored.

Finally, this dissertation intends to introduce a method of solving some of the problems associated with the online delivery of open and distance learning courses and demonstrates a prototype which makes the delivery of distance learning courses more interactive by allowing learners customise their learning environment.