

## **NEW DIRECTIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR ODL: BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been undergoing incremental change over the past decade with the rapid flow of globalization and internationalization. At the surface level, the ODL platform seems to be volatile as greater challenges lie behind the pillars of open learning that ensures quality, flexibility and sustainability to its applicants. At the same time, it has become a promising alternative to the traditional classroom learning, helping university to move toward a vision of lifelong and on-demand learning.

This paper aims at building a collaborative business model that can be adapted in an ODL setting keeping in mind the institution, students and stakeholders. It intends to identify effective management and efficient leadership who will be flagship in taking Open University into new heights. The objective is obvious as to make an analysis of anticipated variables of change, challenges, hindrances, facilitation, environment, and technology at ODL for the next decade. Accordingly, strategies are to be framed and effective policies are to be drawn through collaborative approach of leader and management-“an heuristic thought process”. It will also delineate the new trends in education management with special reference to ODL.

This study is futuristic but the approach is empirical, with a vision of bringing competitive edge to education for all. As for methodology, the researchers sought opinions of various stakeholders in education and analyzed the priorities to be set in this area. The paradigm shift is from tutor to content and to learner where learning is taking place in a wider perspective with openness to creativity, novelty of ideas, active participation of the learner and stakeholder. ODL has to create a learning environment, coping with the challenges of technological developments involving digitalization and processing of information, emergence of new wave of economies, demographics and ageing population, changes in society and family structures. This necessitates fostering strong rapport between facilitator and learner with a robust support and encouragement of authentic/open leadership.

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**Keywords:** Leadership, Collaborative, Stakeholder, Employability Skills

### **Introduction**

Twenty first century witnessed a huge leap in industrial and technological developments. Sweeping changes took place in all facets of human life, for example, the Green Revolution in 1970s transformed agriculture leading to self-sufficiency in food. In 1980s, the White Revolution multiplied production of milk. Information Technology (IT) revolution in 1990s transformed the very idea of employment and accelerated globalization and internationalization. Finally, in 2000, saw a revolution in Higher Education, opening the platform of knowledge to all including the disadvantaged and those denied access to traditional education. Many words and terms that are used today have never been used by previous generations. E-learning, distance learning, open learning and blended learning are

some of the terms which are commonly used in literature and business these days. With the rapid development of multimedia technology, open and distance learning (ODL) has become a new kind of teaching model and people can teach and learn anytime and anywhere.

Distance education is defined by the association for educational communication and technology according to Schlosser & Simonson (2006) Institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors

Distance can be broadly categorized into two major components: they are distance teaching and distance learning. As per Simonson (2009) Distance teaching is the efforts of the educational institution to design develop and deliver instructional experiences to the distant student so that learning may occur. Education and distance education is comprised of teaching and learning.

### **Globalization of Education**

The academic discourse on globalization generally focuses on its economic and political effects ignoring the shifts and changes it has produced in the underlying values and perspectives on the people affected. A new tidal wave of change in the form of globalization has become an inescapable reality of life. While the ripple effects of globalization are felt in almost all spheres of life, they are most palpable among the college-going youth or the 'netizen' generation. In ODL too, it has brought far-reaching demands to both students as well as stake holders. It opened up new vistas of teaching and learning, transforming the traditional notion of education. "World is flat" a new dimension of education is the integration of various variables crossing beyond the geographical boundaries as ODL compete to gain competitive advantage. Globalization means inviting more complexities, challenges, cultural differences, diversity etc.

As per Porter (2008) Globalization has been described as the combined phenomena whereby people are more globally connected than ever before through international travel and international communication, where information and financial capital are transmitted almost instantaneously around the globe, and where goods and services produced in one part of the world are ubiquitously available. Porter (2008) goes on to say: "Globalization describes the political, economic, and cultural atmosphere of today. While some people think of globalization as primarily a synonym for global business, it is much more than that. The same forces that allow businesses to operate as if national borders did not exist also allow social activists, labor organizers, journalists, academics, and many others to work on a global stage." Globalization has also brought concurrent changes in institutional structures like shift from annual to semester systems, internal and external student mobility, immigration and migration patterns and functions tending towards standardization. The corporatization of education whereby it is now treated as a business venture is becoming the norm today.

### **Leadership and Stakeholders in ODL**

No matter how flat the world becomes, ODL should adopt to this change in an organic way. Coping with the change needs very effective leadership in education who can take the education into new heights. Both D'Agostino (2000) and Teddlie and Stringfield (1993), for example, report that leadership of the principal was the key factor in helping create a strong shared mission and vision in the school, which in turn was related to teacher effectiveness. The leadership literature tends to be quite prescriptive in nature, and factors such as transformational rather than transactional leadership, instructional rather than administrative leadership and leadership rather than management have all been posited as key elements of organizational effectiveness. Thomas Sattelberger (2011) states that instead of forming

strategic field marshals and ego-boosted autocrats-“humble, servant leaderships need to be revitalized.

Aligning three major components, the institution, student and stakeholder is very crucial and important in achieving the goals of the ODL. As per Silns and Mulford’s (2002) comprehensive study of leadership effects on student learning provides some cumulative confirmation of the key processes through which more distributed kinds of leadership influence student learning outcomes. Their work concluded that “student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them”.

**Collaborative Approach**

A collaborative approach is absolutely necessary and should be looked at from the macro perspective in order to instill team work. As per Furman (2004), members must respect the worth and dignity of all individuals involved in collaboration. They convey a sense of acceptance and that individual views and values are welcomed. Secondly, the collaborative process must enable participants toward full participation and open inquiry in specific carefully constructed spaces or forums that facilitate opportunities for democratic exchange, deliberation, and inclusion of all voices.

Lynda Gratton (2011) writes about how the world of work will look in 2025 recommending five forces that would shape our working future. The first of these is ‘technological developments’ involving robotics, digitalization and processing of information. The second is ‘rapid globalization’ and the emergence of a new wave of economies. The third is ‘demographics’ and ageing population. The fourth, changes in society and family structure-will lead to a high number of families in which both parents work and men take a more active role in childcare. Finally carbon foot-print concerns will encourage more localized production and working. The stakeholders of education expect that students need to focus on developing their specialist skills and mastery. They need to stand out from the crowd to be skilled collaborators in corporate sector.

Technology has swept the paradigm shift in education. Since there is change from traditional teacher centered learning to modern student centered learning. Online multi media has supported student centered concept very well. As per Constance Steinkuehler, Kurt Squire, (2009), the traditional structure of knowledge flow was textbook→teacher’s notes→teacher lecture→ student→crumbles.

Old school thought as per Constance Steinkuehler, Kurt Squire, (2009), stops Cell phones are banned, internet access is severely curtailed, and educators scramble to do whatever they can to reinforce the traditional walls around the classroom. Literally and figuratively, we firewall out the digital world looming outside. Designers of instruction appear to not yet be ready to confront the challenges that virtual worlds pose.

**Model of Collaborative Business Approach**

An exploratory study has been done to apply Whipple JM., Russell D (2007) “Building supply chain collaborative model into higher education perspective. Level I depict an early stage of planning, formulation, integration. Level II here the relationship tends to improve with more seriousness in formulation of teams, participative decision making etc level III is objectively based with framing pre-determined goals to be achieved. Integration, relationship, partnership is at a very serious degree. Wherein all partners, stakeholders believe in win-win approach if they mutually work and share together. High level of trust, accountability, transparency etc exists

Parameters	Level I Coordination	Level II Cooperative	Level III Collaborative
People	Limited faculty, staff,	Faculty, staff, student	Faculty, staff, student – to

	student – to - faculty, staff, student interaction .Problem solving approach is in traditional way-hierarchical, bureaucratic	focused on joint decisions ,accountability increases from individuals role to formation of a team	- faculty, staff, student focused on problem solving, cross functional, Accountable for long term planning and execution strategies
Parameters	Level I Coordination	Level II Cooperative	Level III Collaborative
Process	Focus on traditional standardized data of processing, reporting, registration formats etc	Joint planning in involving a cross functional team, representation from faculty, staff, student as well as stakeholders	Fully integrated process, involvement of all stakeholders in planning, formulating stages and continuous feedback from the stakeholders. Student is usually the channel master
Technology	Technology to support teaching and learning. Mass data collected and stored at central level department. Low level of data interpretation and analysis	Technology to facilitate teaching and learning. Data transferred to specific concerned departments still it is restricted. Evolution of data mining	Technology empowers and facilitates teaching and learning. Technology actively supports learning organization. Transferring integrated data, access to all stakeholder partners. Optimum utilization of data by inferences, Co-relation, regression etc
Decision Making Involvement	Authoritative, Confined to heads of departments usually the Deans, professors, registrar etc	Involvement of operational team also (Assistant professors, research associates ,student council representative etc)	Active Participation and involvement from all at all levels(top to bottom) including stakeholders (internal as well as external)
Alliance level	Partnering for mutual benefit. Main parties interaction are between University with students	Partnering with all stakeholders (University with community, government, industry, alumni etc)	Partnering with all stakeholders globally(University other than stakeholders is partnering “Best in Class” different foreign bodies like teaching, research, assessment, accreditation, industries, Co-op programs, Social responsibility etc)
Parameters	Level I Coordination	Level II Cooperative	Level III Collaborative
Time Horizon	Short term planning, more task driven, Active, Improving with phases	Medium term planning more towards specific event. Reactive ,Improving	Long term focused on future plan. Proactive ,continuous improvement
Relationship	Ad hoc teaching for students, weak relationship	Students committed to a specific program finally graduating, Good conducive relationship building	Lifelong learning for students, alumni an essential player in teaching and learning. Strong relationship exists
Organizational level	Operational focused – tacking day to day issues. Example Scheduling, students issue of attendance/absences etc	Tactical/Managerial focus on execution. Example Revision of curriculum as per the program learning outcome, accreditation plans etc	Strategic-focus on long term improvement plans Example Vision, mission focused on student centered learning, community

			encouragement , stakeholder involvement and initiatives present etc
Information	Department focused, low level of playing. Integration of information at infant stage	University focused, Easy data available within the university	Integrated multi university oriented, globally access, readily available
Knowledge Level	Learning, research & development, knowledge exchange management, KPI's excelling at national level.	Learning, research & development, knowledge exchange management KPI's excelling at regional level.	Learning, research & development, knowledge exchange management KPI's excelling at global level.
Examples	University at a specific location	University at a specific location but satellite campuses at strategic locations across globe	University at a specific location but satellite campuses at strategic locations across globe, also extending specific department or centers at Industry premises

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### **A Paradigm Shift in Education**

Some of the new trends taking place in student learning process interfacing with massively multiplayer online (MMO's) are Education Institute instead of focusing on providing syllabus contents, focus should be on providing criterion for selecting contents. MMOs are tremendously in use. In classroom, students may login multiple learning sites like discussion in a chat room, watching live presentation, preparing assignment etc., a multitasking concept. Old school thinks that the students are not mentally present but they are virtually on the go of learning process. In virtual classrooms, remote learners are developing skills through experience in virtual laboratories and simulated environments.

Concept of mass learning process has taken shape, earlier traditional students were expected to learn and solve problems individually or in group of 2 to 5 but now the group is virtually widespread in hundred to thousand and working together to solve in ringing solutions. Students are not just mere learners but they are also information producers. Curriculum base of the courses were structured and firm, but now due to technology directly interfacing students, the students are empowered in generating information for themselves and becoming producers of information.

### **Trends in Classroom Technology**

Classroom was traditionally a place of information inflow; source was the teacher but now its students who are the gatekeepers of information "bringing world in the classroom." The young generation of last three decades is conceived as "digital natives"; Prensky argues that they have "grown up among digital technologies like computers, video games and portable phones" (2001:2). Fairman investigated the relationship between teachers and students as a result of introduction of computers in classroom. She found that teachers' recognition of their students' digital skills had persuaded them "to see themselves as partners in learning with their students..." (2004:1). Constance Steinkuehler, Kurt Squire (2009) argues that, if students are going to participate as genuine producers in the online social and informational networks that virtual worlds represent, it is imperative that learning to design messages be a part of the curriculum. He also ascertains student autonomy and design toward their goals and not just yours. Finally, we need to carefully enable and manage student

autonomy and control our curriculum by creating engaging, driving challenges that draw students in.

Focus is on active student learning in this virtual world of learning (Davenport and Beck, 2001), in which students can, at any time, ‘be’ anywhere they want. An important goal, then, is to develop curricular experiences that attract their engagement. We need to build on their goals and desires, help them develop advanced skills and knowledge, and then ‘catapult’ them into new trajectories of being in the world.

### **New Dimensions of Learning**

A main objective of ODL is to shape and mould students in sharpening their employability skills as per Cynthia M. Webster, Jacqueline Kenney (2011). For all the recent focus on “work-ready” skills training, few would dispute that the primary purpose of a university education is to develop intellectual curiosity and inquiry. Creative and innovative problem solving prefigure discipline-specific knowledge and skills and are a precursor to lifelong learning. Because we live in a world where a wealth of information can be accessed almost instantaneously, the development of generic research competencies beyond information acquisition is essential. Research requires much more than just information retrieval; it is the critical, analytical and integrative thinking that renders information valuable. Deep understanding is not automatic, but instead requires engaged and sustained research, in which a thorough examination and interpretation of information is conducted within an ever-growing body of knowledge.

Concept of research based learning is very important in honing critical thinking, writing skills wherein student will able to demonstrate its research skills. As per Baxter (2000), research based teaching (Brew, 2010) conceptualizes the functions of research in learning and teaching in two ways: (1) Research-based learning that presents students with both the opportunity to conduct research and to develop research skills within their courses. (2) Research-enhanced teaching that emphasizes the integration of a lecturer’s research into the courses they teach. Finally MMOs will enable us to rethink what it means to be "literate" in a globally networked, online, "flat" (Friedman, 2005) world - and perhaps even give us some ideas about the kinds of teaching and learning necessary to get us there.

### **Conclusion**

ODL has to act with a vision of bringing competitive edge to education for all and recognize the new paradigm shift in instruction. Learning is taking place in a wider perspective with active participation of learners, instructors and stakeholders. This should help ODL centers to reconsider their strategies to equip their learners with adequate technological and employability skills.

Change of winds from coordination to cooperation and finally reaching on collaborative thought brings forth the power of stakeholders in fulfilling the strategic vision, mission, goals, objectives etc of the ODL institution. It is been proved in business by partnering with your suppliers and customers proves agility ,lean, profitability etc.Thus this collaborative model is also yielding favorable results in ODL institution by way of enhancing learning outcomes to students which tends to improve the employability of students with pacing well with information and communication technology

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