



BELIZE

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INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the Regional Focal Points Meeting for the Caribbean, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has requested that each participating country prepare a two-page report of ODL. The report should address the following sub-topics:

1. Key challenges and opportunities (not more than 3 each) for ODL.
2. Status of open and distance learning.
3. Top five (5) ODL priorities that Belize would like COL to take up during the next Three Year Plan 2012-15.

This report on the status, challenges, opportunities and priorities of ODL in Belize was developed based on consultations with the University of Belize and the junior colleges in Belize.

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Key ODL Challenges and Opportunities

The three major challenges affecting the use of ODL in Belize:

- The lack of ODL policies and plans at the national and institutional levels.
- The lack of local expertise to develop and deliver content using ODL means.
- The high cost of Internet bandwidth and computing equipment that are needed to deliver courses and programmes online.

The three key opportunities that Belize has with respect to ODL are:

- The use of ODL is practically untapped; therefore, providing a 'clean slate' for policies associated with ODL and their implementation and use.

- The willingness of organisations, especially at the tertiary levels, to use ODL, especially in the delivery of general education diploma (GED), short-term workforce training and teacher education and development programmes.
- The ability to increase access to and reduce the cost of education, especially for individuals who are not able to physically attend an education institution.

Status of ODL in Belize

In summary, the implementation of open and distance learning (ODL) is relatively new to Belize.

The Ministry of Education & Youth, with support from the Rotary International of Alberta, Canada, is implementing a distributed learning pilot system that uses a database application to provide online access to the national primary school curricula in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Language Arts and associated learning and assessment resources to teachers and students in six (6) primary schools country-wide.

The University of Belize (UB), with support from the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN), has made some strides in offering online courses. Currently, UB has about ten (10) courses that are offered online, one of which is fully online and the other nine (9) are blended. The Moodle Learning Management System is used by the University of Belize to support its online programme. Of the 140 faculty members at the University, fifty (50) of them have been introduced to the use of Moodle. Through its participation in the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), UB has committed to research the successes of ODL programmes in other countries with the goal of learning from their successes and failures. UB is currently developing plans for an ODL centre to support its ODL initiatives.

Other tertiary level institutions have expressed an interest in offering courses online; however, no concrete plans or steps have been taken to materialise this interest.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2012-2015 (NOT MORE THAN FIVE)

Belize's top five (5) ODL priorities for 2012-2015 are:

1. Development of a national ODL policy and strategic plan with specific implementation plans at the institutional level.
2. Expansion of the technical and human resource capacity of tertiary level institutions to deliver courses online, including their current face-to-face courses and a national general secondary education (GED) program.
3. Short-term training of teachers at all levels to use ODL techniques and access to long-term training programmes in Instructional Design.
4. Expansion of Belize's access to open courses available in the Commonwealth.
5. Development of the capacity and skills of teachers at all levels to use ICT in the teaching and learning process.