



SOUTH AFRICA

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REPORT ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Challenges

- Lack of diverse curriculum and materials for Open and Distance E-learning (in all languages).
- Technology and ICT infrastructure (Technology here means not just bandwidth, but the necessary hardware platforms, software, processes and applications, including mobile telephony, necessary for effective student and academic management and learner support).
- Insufficient regulatory framework.

Opportunities

- South Africa has a strong National Qualifications Framework that provides a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning. The NQF makes it easier for learners to enter and exit the education and training system in an ODL environment.
- SADC has prepared a draft ODL policy framework for Southern African states to support the development of ODL in member countries.
- The Ministry of Higher Education and Training has affirmed support for the development of Open and Distance E-learning opportunities as part of the post-school system in its strategic plan for 2010/11 -2014/15. This will enable access to funding and other required resources for the expansion of ODL in the country.

Status of Open and Distance/E-Learning in South Africa

Policy Framework on Open and Distance Learning

The Policy on Distance Learning for Public Higher Education Institutions is in the final stage of production, but is not yet ready for distribution. Currently the Department of

Higher Education and Training (DHET) has been tasked with the development of open and distance e-learning opportunities in the country as part of the post-school system. The DHET is in the process of developing an integrated ODL policy framework focusing on governance and management, public acceptance and perception of ODL, access, curriculum, quality assurance, research development, monitoring and evaluation, accreditation and certification, collaboration, networking and partnerships, funding and budgeting. This will be in line with the requirements of the SADC Regional Open and Distance Learning Policy Framework.

Funding

South Africa is in the process of reviewing its funding model for Higher Education Institutions. A student registered in Distance Learning was counted as 0.5 FTE (full time equivalent) while students registered in face to face institutions were counted as 1 FTE. This is being addressed to reduce the funding bias against distance students.

Throughput rate

Many students in Distance Learning are taking four to six years to complete a programme that should have been completed in three years. This is an issue of serious concern that is currently being researched to find ways to improve this.

Career guidance

As part of the initiative for promoting ODL, the department has launched a career advice services project together with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The project aims to establish a national, comprehensive, independent and inclusive career development multi-channel helpline to bring services and resources to all learners.

The National Association of Distance Education and Open learning in South Africa (NADEOSA)

The NADEOSA is holding its annual conference in August 2011. The main objectives of this conference are to identify practices that will help realise the currently under-realised potential of ODL to contribute to national goals and to become a study option of choice for both new school-leavers and those seeking ongoing lifelong learning and professional development. The conference will cover the following topics:

- Building a robust post-schooling ODL sector;
- Improving pass rates and throughput in undergraduate ODL programmes;
- Improving ODL's contribution to the supply of graduates with scarce skills;
- Making ODL a more attractive option for post-graduate study.

Ongoing Initiatives as reported in the 2008 country report

The most significant provider of distance learning in the country remains the University of South Africa, although many other universities are now offering selected courses as distance modules. The FET college sector is still lacking in ODL opportunities, as is the schooling sector, with the exception of the private providers. The Education departments continue to work with the national broadcaster (SABC) to provide learning opportunities via radio and television. The Department of Basic Education still hosts the Thutong Education Portal that provides resources for teachers and is also funding a teacher laptop project to provide teachers with access to online resources.

TOP ODL PRIORITIES FOR 2011 – 2015

1. Further development of the policy framework for ODL for the country.
2. Development and implementation of governance, management and quality assurance standards for ODL.
3. Diversification of the ODL curriculum in order to meet the diverse needs of learners from different socio-economic and language backgrounds, as well as learners with disabilities. The curriculum should include:
 - health education;
 - poverty eradication issues;
 - skills building for the country.
4. Improve the funding model and mainstream the funding for ODL within the education budget of the country.
5. Proactively attack the issue of the NEET (not in education, employment or training) youth in the country via ODL opportunities.

South Africa would appreciate any assistance from COL in terms of technical advice and support in fulfilling the priorities as listed above.