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*Research Paper Title:*

*Guidelines for Addressing Challenges and Opportunities in Developing an Interactive Online Teaching-Learning Community in ODL*

*Theme of the Paper:*

*Developing an Interactive Online Teaching-Learning Community in ODL*

**Prof. Anand Irabatti**
Asst. Professor-
Centre for online learning,
D.Y Patil Vidyapeeth Pune,
Mob- 9527151600
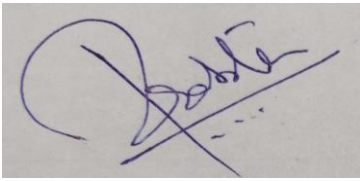Email ID: anandirabatti33@gmail.com


**Dr. Padmapriya Irabatti**
Professor
Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Pune
Mob No. 9850550219
drpriya.irabatti@gmail.com

# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby would like to explicitly state that the research article titled
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Name      :  Dr. Padmapriya Irabatti

Signature:


Date       : 12/01/2022

# Guidelines for Addressing Challenges and Opportunities in Developing an Interactive Online Teaching-Learning Community in ODL

**Prof. Anand Irabatti**

Asst Prof. - D.Y Patil Vidyapeeth Pune

Centre for Online Learning.

**Dr. Padmapriya Irabatti**

Professor- Symbiosis Centre for

Distance Learning, Pune

**Abstract**

For any country, education serves as most important element in its overall development. From last one decade Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is serving as key component of development process.

This paper highlights the guidelines for addressing challenges and opportunities in developing an 'Interactive Online Teaching-Learning Community in ODL'. The guidelines mentioned here are proposed for teacher and learners in online education.

This thematic research paper covers the teaching polices and strategies, application of technology devices, and solutions supporting teaching-learning community issues in ODL.

The paper concludes that developing online teaching learning communities is an encouraging pedagogical approach particularly for higher and adult education. The paper suggest the framework for developing an online teaching learning community for higher education which facilitate the online learning experiences.

**Key words:**

Open and distance learning (ODL), online learning communities, teachers, student interaction, Content, teaching pedagogy.

**Introduction:**

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) offers the education most preferably the Higher education to the students who are not present physically in the premises, who may not be able to be present in the traditional setting like physical classrooms. ODL provides the opportunity to learn for the students who are away from the source of information by time, distance or both.

Through ODL, Distance education format is shifting from conventional education to the technology based open education. Due to this shift there is significant change in the ecosystem of teaching learning communities. The role of educators is changing significantly towards fulfilling the promises to provide universal education. The educators are facing lot of challenges. They have to make the content available to the millions of learners at very low cost.

The new format of technology based open and distance learning though have many advantages which is making it a highly preferred learning format, it has many challenges to be handled tactically. Not only the educators but students who are new to this format may face many operational challenges while adopting this model of education.

ODL and online learning could be imparted either in synchronous or asynchronous way. But the precaution that educators need to take is that while imparting the online offering through any of these modes, the purpose should not be to re-create the online version of Face-to-Face model. Online learning has its own style which needs to be maintained. The delivery model should be so developed to help the learner to study independently yet effectively and in a healthy way. In online delivery, understanding the student psychology is very challenging. It is easier for the students to choose to not to participate in the sessions. The online education allows the learner to learn while earning and as it is more flexible in terms of time, location and pace of learning. But this does not make online learning easier than traditional face to face learning. It has got its own challenges which could be handled by adapting the following strategies.

**Research Methodology:**

Both authors of this paper have spent more than 18 years, in the capacity of teachers in

both Distance education as well as face-to face format. This paper is based on the findings of the authors' observation and experience in academics. As both the authors have extensive experience in Face-to-face and Distance education, they could clearly comment on the guidelines for Addressing Challenges and Opportunities in ODL as against Face-to-face mode. The authors have guided more than 2 lacks students through distance and face-to-face mode. Therefore the guidelines suggested in this paper are outcome of their extensive experience and participative observation.

On the basis of hard-core experience and various research project undertaken, authors are proposing following strategies for learners to learn effectively through ODL mode.

**1. Get Prepared:** Student should get organised before the semester starts. All the technical set up and the know how to access the online study material and inputs should be ready before the sessions start. Practice how to book and attend the sessions to ensure that there is not technical issues at the time of the first session. Also keep your study material and pen and paper handy to take the notes. These preparations would help the student to concentrate on online

lecture peacefully. The student should also ensure that the internet connectivity is sufficient to access the study material and attend the online session. The place with minimum distractions should be chosen to attend these live sessions.

**2. Make A Time-Table**: Student should identify the time required to complete each task like attending live sessions, recording and eBooks / eLearning as per his/her pace or convenience and grasping capacity. He/ She should prepare the timetable by considering all his professional and personal obligations. The time table should be so framed to be in touch with studies on continuous basis. Generally the students take the breaks of months and thus loose interest in the studies. Similarly, the timetable for assignment and exam should be also prepared to complete the program in validity time.

**3 Participate actively and connect with your classmates and professors:** in Online earning the student learns better through active participation by taking initiatives in preparing from the material, by connecting with his/her professors and by simultaneously doing co-curricular assignments and activities suggested in the course material. The element of interaction with other classmates proves to an effective

tool for learning effectively. We will discuss in detail the role and importance of student interaction in ODL in the later part of this paper.

Active participation is also expected for getting your queries resolved. Therefore the student should not hesitate to ask questions either during live sessions, doubt clearing sessions, chat sessions or through various query handing platforms.

In ODL and online learning the accountability of learning remains more with the learners. Whether it is about booking the classes, completing the submissions and assignments in time or appearing for the exam, the professor may not be there to remind the deadlines to the learners. They should manage and complete all these tasks and ensure the compliances in time.

**4. Take guidance for projects and submissions**: Majority of the higher education programs include project reports, mini-projects and submissions. These project are not only academically important but also are very important for getting the practical experience of the concept learnt in the program. Therefore communicate regularly with your professors and other staff members of the institute for academic and operational help in preparing the project report by following all the necessary project guidelines.

In case of group projects divide the various tasks of the project appropriately and communicate it to all the group members to avoid any type of confusion while getting evaluated for the project work.

Teachers and learners are two important pillars in online education. There are few guidelines for teachers also which may help them to deliver efficiently and effectively.

**1. Collaborative Content development:** there are many sources for preparing the content for online learners. OERs (Open Educations Resources) are emerging as innovative tools and are creating new content and reference material for learners in ODL. The OERs are becoming increasing important in ODL format as it is removing all the limitations and creating the possibilities of wider participation in education process. There are many unprivileged learning communities where the education haven't reached. The OERs could be of great help to such student's communities who have very little access to education.

The multimedia tools like Google classrooms, zoho, Piktochart.com,

Beautiful.ai, Slides.com, allow the interactive presentation

2. **Online Quizzes, surveys and polls**: Teachers can use the tools like SurveyMonkey, Typoform, and Easypolls for checking the progress of the students and collecting the data related for any task or feedback.

**3. Games and Simulation:**

Even the Teachers imparting Higher education programs can use the option of Games and simulation techniques for making classes interactive. These techniques could be used for teaching comparatively complex and generic concepts. Many free applications like Microsoft teams, Zoom, FaceTime are available for conducting games and simulation through group chats.

**4. Customised learning management system.**

Customised Learning management system designed by considering the program specific teaching learning pedagogy play very important role in online learning. Such LMS can use various evaluation and learning tools like quizzes, discussion forums, online activities, submissions…etc to ensure the complete learning and evaluation effectiveness. The Institutes

should also ensure that all these tools of the LMS are mobile responsive which makes learners to access the content any time any place and are convenient to handle.

**5. Be flexible.**

Online teaching-learning requires flexibility in course structure. The delivery of the content should use blended pattern to make it suitable for different students from different background. Also it demand the huge flexible mindset by both important stakeholder, i.e., by students as well as by teachers. Students and teachers should be able to adapt to the changing online learning tools without lagging behind. Whenever required, the teachers and students should be able to switch smoothly between various teaching learning pedagogies effectively.

**Content protection and privacy policy:**

The content is the life blood of any ODL institute. Content differentiates any ODL institute form the other similar institutes. Therefore protection of intellectual material and content is very important. Institute should have clearly defined privacy policy for protecting the content in the form of study material, question bank, eLearnings, lecture notes…etc. this privacy policy should be strictly following while dealing

with the outside vendors in the outsourced projects.

**Online learning demands few infrastructural set up and non-availability of which can result into its failure.** Every institute involved in the ODL format or online learning should ensure that student is not deprived from complete learning due to its online format. Therefore the ODL institute should be careful for below mentioned infrastructural requirements.

As online teaching is not same as traditional face to face teaching it require different set up and mindset. It should be ensured that the learners have the access to the appropriate tools and gazettes for attending the online sessions. All youngsters are having smart phones now a days. Therefore the content delivered should be mobile friendly.

Along with gazettes, the internet bandwidth and speed is equally important. Delivered content should be both in synchronous and asynchronous form to help the students from the region having low bandwidth.

In case of live session, schedule of the sessions is very important as student may be attending the session from different time zones. Also the duration of the session should be shorter for effective delivery of the inputs. To increase the student attendance and participation the collaborative activities such as Group discussion, games, quizzes…etc. could be taken.

Session feedback is next important task to ensure the student satisfaction and address the student grievances in time. As far as possible the feedback mechanism should be automated and should be made mandatory before closing the session.

**Need for Student interaction:**

It is been proved that students learn easily through peer interactions. In online learning they are deprived of this interaction. Therefore the teacher engaging online session should create many such opportunities of interaction during and after the session. The students should get ample chances to connect virtually with each other and the feel of getting heard.

**Literature Review**

Researchers have long pointed out the importance of student interactions in the teaching and learning process. Vygotsky (1978) states collaborative learning is necessary in building one's own cognitive process. Among group members, if they

cannot share their knowledge effectively, it can lead to poor learning outcomes (Soller, 2004). To test the difference of collaborative learning and individual learning, Ellis et al. (1994) compares the problem-solving results between fifth graders who worked with a partner and those who worked alone. The result shows that 75% of the paired students solved the problem with new mathematical rules while only 32% of the students working individually came up with a solution.

Besides active communication, interaction, online presence, and moderated discussions, the formation of an online community is one of the key elements for high-quality online education. Fostering interactivity in an online community is the main indicator of success in online courses (Bender, 2003; Salmon, 2001). Swan (2003) points out that learners' interactions among classmates is one of the five areas of interactivity. Therefore, promoting student interactions in distance education courses is important for setting up an online learning community.

Of course, student interaction is not easy and possible everytime particularly in online learning and just one or two activities are not sufficient. Student interation activiities should be a continuous

and ongoing process. It is the responsibility of teachers or mentors to see that every studetn's point of view is heard and yet there is no chaos in the class.

Below are further justifications to understand the importance of students' interactions. When students are given chance to interact, they tend to think more critically are more careful while expressing their opinion. This helps them to think more on the concept and thus they remember the concept more easily than by reading or by listing the lecture. Infact for introvert students interacting in online sessions is less scary than speaking before entire class. In general students feel comfortable to share their rebellious ideas in online sessions. Online classes also give the opportunity to post anonymously of course under teacher's monitoring if students are conscious about public judgement.

**Validation of the student engagement remotely:**

Teacher using face to face mode for long time may advocate F2F mode for effective student control and higher student engagement. But believe us after working in online teaching for more than eight years, we can conclude that, with little upskilling

and understanding the online teaching tools, it is easier to authenticate the students work remotely. However, it requires change in designing the assignments and changing the way the assignments are presented and submitted for review. The teacher's role here is to closely monitor the online activities of the students. For this teacher can use more formative assessments where students working in group could keep that indirect control on each other and they should be allowed to use more online resources which could be tracked by the teacher online. Teachers should communicate and use the plagiarism check for individual submissions to put the control on quality of submissions. There could be some assignments based on additional reference material. The teacher can make it mandatory to mention the references form the given reference material while replying the questions in the assignments. If possible any form of online interview can also help the teacher to authenticate the student's preparations because student can only reply spontaneously in online interviews if he/she is thoroughly prepared. Simultaneously further check on login time and time given by students to submit the online assignment could be evaluated to authenticate his

contribution and involvement in the submission.

**Conclusion**

This is thematic paper which discusses and suggests the requirement and guidelines Addressing Challenges and Opportunities in developing an interactive online teaching-learning community in ODL. To get the effective and expected output from the ODL both learner as well as teachers need to follow certain guidelines and discipline.

Ideally online learner should always be prepared with his time table by keeping his other professional and personal obligations. He/she should participate actively and take the regular guidance from his/her mentors or teachers for academic elements.

Teachers imparting online education is expected to be more alert and innovative in their teaching pedagogy. They should continuously develop the relevant content collaboratively. They should make use of online quizzes, surveys and polls and other games and simulation techniques to make the teaching-learning more interesting the effective. Customised learning is one such innovative approach which ensures the complete learning and evaluation effectiveness. The teachers need to be

extra-flexible while dealing with their ODL students. Teachers dealing in ODL should be very efficient in allowing student interactions as student interactions are one of the most important elements responsible for the fruitful learning by the students.

Content protection and privacy is the collective responsibility of the entire institution imparting the online education. It could be concluded that the student interaction is one of the complicated issue that needs more research to increase its understanding and importance, as it applies to significantly in ODL.

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