

Community Development through Open Learning and Distance Education

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Abstract

The global need for community development is greater now in the early 21st century than ever before. According to UNESCO, half of the world's 195 countries will have to expand their stock of education significantly, some with tens of thousands, if the goal development target is desired to achieve. Socioeconomic inequities, political instability, demographic changes and crises such as the HIV/AIDs epidemic have engendered huge shortfalls in teacher supply and low teacher quality in many developing countries. Education serves as the backbone in the development process. Open learning and distance education programs are serving as a pivotal part of the development process. It is now clear that "bricks and mortar" approaches to expanding teacher education may not be adequate if the current and projected shortfalls in teacher supply and low teacher quality are to be properly addressed. The study is designed to measure the perceptions of the teaching, learning community about community development with special reference to open and distance learning. It was descriptive study, which targeted teachers, students, community members and experts. Data analysis was carried out by using statistical techniques served by SPSS. Findings reflected that audience perceives open and distance learning as change agent and as a development tool. It is noticed that the target audience has driven, prominent performance by using the facility of open and distance learning.

Keywords: Community Development, Open and Distance Learning, Teachers, Students

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Introduction

The demand for qualified and quality teachers has been continuously on the increase the world over. The global need for teacher education is greater now in the early 21st century than ever before (Midgley, Hall, Hardiman, & Narine, 1986). Quite naturally, the teacher education programs have acquired renewed significance. In order to attend to the growing concern of teacher quality and teacher shortage, it is crucial to examine the core of the problem that is, the type of teacher preparation and training being provided (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Open and distance learning (ODL) has played an important role in initial teacher education and training since the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)/ UNESCO Institute of Education was set up in the 1960s. Open and Distance Learning (ODL), with the use of innovative information and communication technologies and media, can train teachers more readily than conventional approaches (Ife, 1995). The role of distance education is shifting from traditional education to technology enhanced open education. This shift has significant implications, and allows distance educators to play an important role in the fulfillment of the promise of the right to universal education (Gronbjerg, 1993). At little or no cost, universities can make their content available to millions. Open Educational Resources (OERs) are an innovation giving new opportunities for learning and distance education. Distance education based in OERs removes limits and offers the possibility of widening participation in education (Christenson & Robinson, 1989). This can include hard-to-reach groups which have little or no access to education or, for example small businesses and individuals who feel they could benefit from professional development and access to current knowledge about a topic of interest (Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002).

Community development (CD) is a broad term given to the practices of civic activists, involved citizens and professionals to build stronger and more resilient local communities (Georges, 1990). Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities (Christenson & Robinson, 1989). These skills are often created through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. Since the nineteen seventies the prefix word 'community' has also been adopted by several other occupations from the police and health workers to planners and architects, who work with more disadvantaged groups and communities and have been influenced by CD approaches (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

CD practitioners have over many years developed a range of skills and approaches for working within local communities and in particular with disadvantaged people. These include less formal educational methods, community organising and group work skills (Christenson & Robinson, 1989). Since the nineteen sixties and seventies through the various anti poverty programs in both developed and developing countries, CD practitioners have been influenced by structural analyses as to the causes of disadvantage and poverty i.e. inequalities in the distribution of wealth, income, land etc. and especially political power and the need to mobilize people power to affect social change. Thus the influence of such educators as Paulo Friere and his focus upon this works also being about politicizing the poor. Other key people who have influenced this field are Saul Alinsky (Rules for Radicals) and EF Schumacher ,Small is Beautiful (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

A number of different approaches to community development can be recognized, including: community economic development (CED); community capacity building; Social capital formation (Ife, 1995); political participatory development; nonviolent direct action; ecologically sustainable development; asset-based community development; faith-based community development; community practice social work; community-based participatory research (CBPR); community Mobilization; community empowerment; community participation; participatory planning including community-based planning (CBP); community-driven development (CDD); and approaches to funding communities directly.

Education and the community-wide empowerment that increased educational opportunity creates, form a crucial component of community development and certainly for under-served communities that have limited general educational and professional training resources (Grønbjerg, 1993). Workforce development and the issues and challenges of crossing the Digital divide, and increasing community-wide levels of Digital inclusion have become crucially important in this and both for affordable access to computers and the Internet, and for training in how to use and maintain these resources. Local communities that cannot connect and participate in the larger and increasingly global online community are becoming increasingly marginalized because of that (Georges, 1990). So where Urban development with its focus on buildings and physical infrastructure was once viewed as a primary path forward to community development, development of computer and online infrastructure and access, and the community enables they support have to become central areas of focus moving forward.

Distance education, distance learning, learning, or D-Learning is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically presented in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides "access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason, including taking an examination, have been referred to as hybrid or blended courses of study. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), aimed at large-scale interactive participation and open access via the web or other network technologies, are a recent development in distance education(Christenson & Robinson, 1989).

Population

The target population in this study were teachers, students, community members and experts working in district Lahore or residing or contributing in any form for teaching learning process or community development.

Sample

A sample of 150 teachers, 150 students, 150 community members and 150 experts were selected for this study. Purposive sampling technique was used for the purpose. The total size of the sample was 600.

Instrument Development

Purposeful instrument was developed for data collection with the consent and help of experts.

Procedures

The researcher approached sample size and get questionnaire filled. The proper permission and clearance were acquired before approaching targets.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using SPSS, statistical package for social sciences.

Table 1

Showing the responses of Teachers about ODL

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	4.7
Disagree	8	5.3
Neutral	5	3.3
Agree	54	36.0
Strongly Agree	76	50.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 7% of the teachers were strongly disagreed with this statement that ODL can develop community, 8% were disagreeing, 5% did not show any response, and 54% teachers were agreeing with it, whereas 76% teachers were strongly agreed. The majority of teachers feel that ODL can develop community.

Table 2

Showing the responses of Students about ODL

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	6.7
Disagree	12	8.0
Neutral	19	12.7
Agree	58	38.7
Strongly Agree	51	34.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 6.7% of the students strongly disagreed with this statement that ODL can develop or contribute in community development, 8% were disagreeing, and 12.7% did not show any response and 38.7% students were agreed with the concept, whereas 34% students were strongly agreed with it. The conclusion showed that 72.7% of students were in favoring with this opinion. The majority appreciated that idea that ODL is effective for community development.

Table 3*Showing the responses of Community Members in General*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	6.7
Disagree	18	12.0
Neutral	32	21.3
Agree	48	32.0
Strongly Agree	42	28.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 6.7% of the community members in general strongly disagreed with this statement that ODL can develop the community, 12% were disagreeing, 21.3% did not show any response, and 32% members were agreed that ODL is important for community development.

Table 4*Showing the responses of Experts in General*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	5.3
Disagree	17	11.3
Neutral	37	24.7
Agree	52	34.7
Strongly Agree	36	24.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 5.3% of the experts were strongly disagreed with this opinion that ODL can develop the community, 11.3% were disagreeing, 24.7% did not show any response, and 34.7% expert were agreed that the status of the teaching profession who are involved in ODL can develop the community. Whereas 24% expert were strongly agreed with that statement. The conclusion showed that 58% of the experts were in favor that ODL can develop the community.

Table 5
Response of NGO workers

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	4.7
Disagree	8	5.3
Neutral	24	16.0
Agree	76	50.7
Strongly Agree	35	23.3
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 4.7% of the NGO workers were strongly disagreed with this concept that ODL is important for community development, 5.3% were disagreeing, 16% did not show any response, and 50.7% NGO workers were agreed that teacher can take up a leading role in community development. Whereas 23.3% NGO workers were strongly agreed with that statement. The conclusion showed that 73% of the NGO workers felt comfortable that teacher can equip communities with skills and develop it.

Table 6
Response of Sociology Teachers

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	6.7
Disagree	26	17.3
Neutral	23	15.3
Agree	61	40.7
Strongly Agree	30	20.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 6.7% of the sociology teachers are strongly disagreeing with this statement, 17.3% are disagreeing, 15.3% do not show any response, and 40.7% sociology teachers agree that a teacher has the opportunity to serve his society as a teacher and can develop it, whereas 20% sociology teachers are strongly agreeing with that statement. The conclusion showed that 60.7% of the teachers who are teaching sociology at the college level were agreed that ODL teacher has the opportunity to serve his society by developing it.

Table 7*Response of Female Teachers*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	4.0
Disagree	17	11.3
Neutral	35	23.3
Agree	47	31.3
Strongly Agree	45	30.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 4% of the female teachers were strongly disagreed with this statement that ODL can develop the community, 11.3% were disagreeing, 23.3% did not show any response, and 31.3% female teachers were agreed that it is interesting to work for community development, whereas 30% female teachers are strongly agreeing with that statement. The conclusion showed that 61.3% of the female teachers feel comfortable if ODL teacher uses diversified methods for community development, it is workable.

Table 8*Response of Male Teachers*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	36	24.0
Disagree	41	27.3
Neutral	26	17.3
Agree	29	19.3
Strongly Agree	18	12.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 24% of the male teachers strongly disagreed with this statement, 27.3% were disagreeing that, 17.3% did not show any response, and 19.3% male teachers were agreed, whereas 12% male teachers were strongly agreed with the concept that ODL learning can develop the community. The conclusion showed that 51.3% of the male teachers were agreed that ODL is an effective tool for community development.

Table 9
Response of Male Teachers

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	19	12.7
Disagree	52	34.7
Neutral	40	26.7
Agree	26	17.3
Strongly Agree	13	8.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 12.7% of the male students strongly disagreed that ODL can contribute to community development, 34.7% were agreed, 26.7% did not show any response, and 17.3% male students were agreeing with it, whereas 8.7% male students were strongly agreed with that statement that community can be developed by ODL. The conclusion showed that 47.4% of the male students were agreed that the community development process can be enhanced through ODL.

Table 10
Response of Female Students

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	20	13.3
Disagree	38	25.3
Neutral	26	17.3
Agree	41	27.3
Strongly Agree	25	16.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 13.3% of the female students strongly disagreed with this statement, 25.3% were disagreeing, 17.3% did not show any response, and 27.3% female students were agreed that the job of ODL teacher is very ideal for community development, whereas 16.7% female students were strongly agreed with that statement. The conclusion indicated that they 44% of the female students appreciate if teacher learn new methods of teaching, especially with reference to community development, it can play a more effective role.

Table 11*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Students' response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	4.7
Disagree	21	14.0
Neutral	23	15.3
Agree	62	41.3
Strongly Agree	37	24.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table shows the response of students about the extension possibility of the ODL system indicates that 4.7% of the students were strongly disagreeing with this statement, 14% were disagreeing, 15.3% did not show any response, and 41.3% students were agreed, whereas 24.7% students were strongly agreed with that statement. The conclusion showed 66% were in favor of the extension of ODL systems for more students.

Table 12*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Teachers' response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	13	8.7
Disagree	32	21.3
Neutral	23	15.3
Agree	40	26.7
Strongly Agree	42	28.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 8.7% of the teachers strongly disagreed with this statement, 21.3% were disagreeing, 15.3% did not show any response, and 26.7% teachers were agreed with that statement, whereas 28% teachers were strongly agreed that domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended country wide for improving teaching learning system.

Table 13*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Community Members' response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	17	11.3
Disagree	41	27.3
Neutral	25	16.7
Agree	49	32.7
Strongly Agree	18	12.0
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 11.3% of the community members strongly disagreed with this statement, 27.3% were agreed, 16.7% did not show any response, and 32.7% community members were agreeing that domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended and more facilities may be included for better learning of students.

Table 14*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Expert's response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	4.0
Disagree	7	4.7
Neutral	25	16.7
Agree	60	40.0
Strongly Agree	52	34.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 4% of the experts were strongly disagreed with this statement, 4.7% were disagreeing, 16.7% did not show any response, and 40% expert were agree whereas 34.7% expert were strongly agreed with that statement that domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended nationwide especially with the objective to develop the community. The conclusions showed that 74.7% liked the idea of ODL extension.

Table 15*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Rural Developers' response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	8.0
Disagree	29	19.3
Neutral	33	22.0
Agree	45	30.0
Strongly Agree	31	20.7
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 8% of the rural developers were strongly disagreed with this statement, 19.3% were agreed, 22% did not show any response, and 30% rural developers were agree whereas 20.7% rural developers were strongly agreed with that statement that ODL learning may be extended to more rural areas as it can be an effective tool for community development.

Table 16*Domain of Open and Distance Learning may be extended- Urban Developers' response*

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	17	11.3
Disagree	36	24.0
Neutral	31	20.7
Agree	46	30.7
Strongly Agree	20	13.3
Total	150	100.0

The above table indicates that 11.3% of the urban developers were strongly disagreed with this statement, 24% were disagreed, 20.7% did not show any response and 30.7% urban developers were agreed to facilitate more people by the ODL as it is a direct source of civilization and community development. The conclusion showed that 44% of the urban development can't express their points briefly. The majority of urban developers appreciated the idea of ODL learning extension.

Findings

After analysis of the data the following findings were drawn:

1. Most of the students, teacher, experts and community members were agreed that teacher professional skill matters for learning, especially in ODL as the tutor and reference material teachers and experts can play very significant role in the ODL process by infusing ideas of community and value development in material as hidden curriculum.
2. The majority of the students favored that educational set up is healthy for the student's ODL learning.
3. Students' majority could understand each other problem in ODL education set up, although they are sitting away from each other.
4. A large number of students were strongly agreed that teacher professional skill may be upgraded for ODL system.
5. Most of the students felt comfortable with their ODL material.
6. Students' majority had no issue in studying with each other in any ODL fortnight or any necessary class
7. The majority of the teachers agreed that ODL educational set up has some weak points in itself regarding teaching learning process but can be improved.
8. Some of the teachers were disagreed with a community development approach by ODL.
9. The female Students' majority did not feel anxiety in ODL educational set up while learning.
10. The majority of the experts supported the ODL and favored its nationwide extension.
11. A large number of Rural and Urban developers supported the idea of ODL systems for community development.
12. Parents also appreciated ODL system for its positive features.

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