



# Open and Distance Learning

## Key Terms & Definition

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## Open and Distance Learning: Key Terms and Definitions

**Artificial Intelligence** in education refers to the application of artificial intelligence (AI) for supporting student learning outcomes or facilitation of educational goals, including educational administration. AI refers to the capacities of computing systems to perform cognitive tasks associated with human minds. As such AI may cover a range of technologies and methods, such as machine learning, natural language processing, data mining, neural networks or an algorithm.

**Assistive Technology** refers to tools and technologies that assist with full participation of an individual in various activities, including, but not limited to learning. Assistive technologies in the context of learning may include specialised computer software and hardware that increase mobility, hearing, vision, or communication capacities of people with disabilities.

**Asynchronous Learning** involves the use of technology to enable sharing of learning resources and the exchange of ideas within a network of learners and teachers who are separated by time and/or space. Examples of asynchronous learning are discussion forums and email interactions. In both cases there is a time lag between interactions.

**Augmented Reality** in education involves the addition of computer-generated information to a real-world environment with a view to creating a more interactive learning experience enhanced using multiple sensory modalities such as sound, touch, movement or smell.

**Blended Learning** involves a combination of online and face-to-face learning experiences. Some examples of blended learning are flipped classroom, online interaction followed by face-to-face teaching, online learning supplemented by a face-to-face practical, etc.

**Blockchain** is a cumulative list of digital records that are linked together and where each successive entry links to the complete record of what has gone before as verified by transaction data and a time stamp. This makes data in a blockchain resistant to historical modification. In education, blockchain technologies can be used primarily for student records and credentials.

**Competency-based Education (CBE)** is an approach to teaching, learning and assessment which focuses on learners demonstrating the knowledge, skills and attitudes in highly specific units regardless of time, place, or pace of learning, usually in authentic contexts.

**Distance Education** is a process of teaching and learning characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place for most of the educational transaction, mediated by technology for delivery of learning content but with possibility of face-to-face interaction for learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction, and provision of two-way didactic communication. Distance is about the transactional distance and not the physical distance. It is a conceptual construct with two key dimensions: structure and dialogue. Programmes with more structure and less dialogue are considered to have more distance.

**Distributed Learning** is an approach which enables teachers, learners and content to be in different places and for engagement to happen independently of time or space.

**e-Learning** is an umbrella term that refers to the use of any digital device or media (multi-media) for teaching and learning, especially for delivery or accessing of content. Thus e-Learning can take place without any reference to a network or connectivity. The digital device used by the learner to access materials need not be connected to a digital network, either a local area network or to the Internet (or even to a cell phone network if a Tablet is used as a terminal or access device).

**Flexible Learning** is the provision of more choices to the learners in terms of when, where and how they learn. Flexible learning may include use of online learning, workplace-based learning, part-time learning, distance learning, and many forms of face-to-face teaching and learning with options to fast track and defer courses.

**Flipped Classroom** is a form of blended learning where learners read or watch online lecture materials at home, before participating in interaction in a classroom environment.

**Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** refer to a range of technologies and tools used to create, collate and communicate information and knowledge. ICTs are used in daily life to prepare documents, talk to others by phone, listen to radio and watch television programmes. Some ICTs involve one-way communication, while others facilitate two-way communication. Some can include only one medium (e.g. telephone), while others can handle more than one medium (e.g. computer and television).

**Learning Management System (LMS)** often also called course management system or virtual learning environment, is a web-based software system that assists teachers to manage courses and deliver lessons online. It helps in administration, tracking and reporting of the learning process. An LMS usually has the following constituent components: content creation, organisation, delivery, learner support interactions, assessment and grading, and management of the learning process.

**Learning Technologies** are those that are used for enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment. In other words, it is the use of a range of ICTs for teaching, learning and assessment. Learning technologies can be deployed as tools for drill and practice, tutorials, information retrieval systems, simulations, communication, etc.

**Lifelong learning** is the ongoing, often voluntary, and self-motivated learning throughout the life of an individual for personal and/or professional reasons. Lifelong learning may include formal, non-formal and informal learning.

**Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)** is an online course available for large enrolment on the open web, where ‘open’ largely refers to open registration, and not necessarily courses that are openly licensed.

**Micro-credential** is a digital certification such as a “digital badge” that provides valid evidence of achievement of specific knowledge, skills or competences after going through a structured learning experience. Micro-credentials can be shared on social media and verified by others, including employers.

**Microlearning** refers to small units of learning that can be completed in a short time. These “bite-size” chunks of learning can be aggregated into larger lessons/ modules or programmes of learning. The term also refers to the process of using small chunks of multi-modal resources for just-in-time learning in the workplace or in professional development programmes.

**mLearning** or mobile learning is defined as the provision of education and training using mobile devices such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), tablets, smartphones and mobile phones. While learning is not mobile, it is about teaching and learning through the use of mobile devices, anywhere, anytime.

**Online Learning** is e-Learning with a mandatory involvement of a digital network which a learner needs in order to access at least part of the learning materials and services. Online learning refers to network-enabled teaching and learning that allows the learner to have increased interaction with content, teachers and other learners.

**Open and Distance Learning (ODL)** is the provision of distance education opportunities in ways that seek to mitigate or remove barriers to access, such as finances, prior learning, age, social, work or family commitments, disability, incarceration or other such barriers. “Open” refers to a commitment that removes any unnecessary barriers to access learning. Distance education refers to teaching and learning that temporarily separates teacher and learner in time and/or place; uses multiple media for delivery of instruction; involves two-way communication and possibly occasional face-to-face meeting for tutorials and learner-learner interaction. Open learning is not the same as distance learning, but both are complementary and hence the two terms are often used together as open and distance learning.

**Open Educational Practice(s) (OEP)** can be defined as the deliberate use of OER in teaching and learning (referring to the best ways of reusing, re-mixing, redistributing, retaining and revising OER) or a broad commitment to and practice of cooperation, collaboration and sharing of resources and expertise for social interaction, knowledge creation and peer learning.

**Open Educational Resources (OER)** is defined by the UNESCO OER Recommendation 2019 as any “learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others.”

**Open Learning** refers to policies and practices of openness in entry requirements (with minimal or no restriction on qualifications), choice of courses, place of study and time, etc. It is an educational philosophy where learning can happen anywhere, anytime from any resource, and therefore, can also inform practice in face-to-face institutions.

**Open Schooling** is the provision of schooling (teaching and learning) opportunities making use of open, distance and innovative e-Learning methods which do not necessarily require teachers and learners to be in the same place at the same time. It refers to the physical separation of the school-level learner from the teacher, and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the separation and provide education and training.

**Open University** is a type of single-mode distance teaching institution that also offers flexibility in terms of choice of courses, entry requirements, learning media and approaches, choice of courses, time and place of study. Courses and programmes of an open university may offer different degrees of openness in their provision based on the nature of the studies and the legal contexts of operation.

**Synchronous Learning** is the opposite of asynchronous learning, where a learner interacts with teachers and/or learners online at the same time from a different place.

**Technology-enabled Learning** refers to the application of some form of digital technology to teaching and/or learning in an educational context to support and facilitate student learning.

**Transformative Learning** is an approach to learning which deliberately explores dilemmas that force the learner to question his or her own assumptions through critical thinking and questioning.

**Virtual Reality** in education involves the creation of a simulated experience that can be similar to the real world.

**Virtual Universities/Cyber Universities** are higher education institutions or networks of higher education institutions responsible for the design, development and offering of courses and programmes in flexible and online environments.