Knowledge Management in Open Distance E-Learning Programmes:
Strategies, Challenges, and Best Practices for Sustainable Educational Access

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role of knowledge management (KM) in strengthening the sustainability, inclusivity, and effectiveness of Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) programmes. Using a multi-case study design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected across diverse ODeL institutions. Data sources included document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Findings highlight both success factors—such as leadership commitment, unified digital platforms, and peer-driven communities—and barriers including fragmented communication channels, limited training, poor infrastructure, and inconsistent policies. The chapter proposes a best-practice KM framework for ODeL, offering implementation guidelines for policymakers and practitioners, as well as strategies for continuous improvement and learner retention. Emerging directions such as AI-driven KM, inclusivity for learners with disabilities, and post-pandemic sustainability are also discussed. Overall, the chapter contributes to both scholarly debate and applied practice.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of this chapter is to explore how effective knowledge management (KM) practices underpin the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of Open Distance E-Learning (ODeL) programmes. By investigating the strategies, tools, and organizational cultures that facilitate knowledge creation, sharing, and utilization, this chapter will illuminate the critical role of KM in promoting universal access to quality education, particularly for marginalised and geographically dispersed learners. In the post-COVID-19 era, where remote learning has become both a necessity and an opportunity, understanding KM in ODeL is essential for sustaining learner engagement, institutional resilience, and progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

Open Distance E-Learning (ODeL) offers flexible, technology-mediated education that transcends physical barriers to learning. However, the success of ODeL depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the effective management of knowledge assets, ranging from pedagogical designs and learning materials to faculty expertise and learner-generated insights. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999) underscores the interplay of cognitive, social, and teaching presence in ODeL; this chapter extends CoI by examining how KM systems and processes reinforce each presence and foster a sustainable learning ecosystem.

DEFINING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ODEL

Knowledge Management (KM) is broadly understood as the systematic process of creating, capturing, storing, sharing, and utilizing knowledge to achieve organizational objectives (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Dhamdhere, 2015). It involves both tacit knowledge, personal, experiential insights held by individuals, and explicit knowledge, which can be codified, documented, and transmitted across platforms and organizational units. In higher education, and particularly within Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) contexts, KM plays a pivotal role in ensuring that learning resources, pedagogical practices, and institutional strategies are not only preserved but are continuously adapted to meet the evolving needs of learners (Ubon & Kimble, 2002).

The importance of KM within ODeL arises from the inherent characteristics of distance education. Unlike traditional face-to-face environments, ODeL depends heavily on distributed resources, asynchronous interactions, and virtual knowledge-sharing systems. In such contexts, knowledge flows between faculty, instructional