

An analysis of E-journals in open and distance education from Mega Open Universities

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Abstract

This paper analyses the aims and advantages of selected e- journals on open and distance education from the internationally recognized mega universities and comparing the participation rates of authors from formal and non-formal universities. Discussing the process by which these maintain the standards and the reputation among the distance education community from worldwide. For this purpose by selecting the three e- journals from developed and developing countries available to open access across the globe. Those are I) The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning as IRRODL from Athabasca University-Canada, II) The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education as TOJDE from Anadolu University-Turkey and III) Global E-Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Education as GEJOFEDE from Indira Gandhi National Open University-India. Finally, discussing the impact of e-journals on print journals and various e-factors.

Keywords

E-journals, mega universities, open universities, open learning, distance education and editors

Introduction

The history of electronic publishing is very short if compared with traditional forms of publishing, but full of important events. The very first e-publishing came in the 1980's in the form of plain text e-mails. They were sent to the subscriber via a mailing list. After many changes, finally in the years 1994-95 appeared the very first e-journals. The first e-journal to be distributed was Electronics Letters online by IEE (Institution of Electrical Engineers) [6]. When the web was young, a common complaint was that it was full of junk. Today a marvelous assortment of high-quality information is also available on line, often with open access. Print and online journals, e-mail lists, books, databases, web sites – all the places scholars gather, work out, and communicate their ideas are collections of information. Taken as a group and integrated into an electronic environment, those various forms of communication can become a scholarly information system, a loose and changing collection of data and resources that serves the research needs of the scholarly community. Because electronic information can be collated, processed, and presented in multiple ways, it can become a scholarly information system, the central core of the technical-information, scientific-information and technical-information packages of the future.

Building on the tradition of print journals, the e-journals can be a forum where scholars articulate their needs – by writing, editing, and refereeing articles that evaluate and contextualize important resources. Scholars so these in print journals as well, but in an electronic format the resources can be hyperlinked and thus immediately integrated for the readers. With the help of Internet technology and website management, users can easily get the paper by searching by author, keyword, title, journal, year, and publication format. Search results can be viewed on the screen, or they can be mailed to the user directly formats; plain text, Bib Tex, or HTML. [9]

But, the online journals do not have the credibility of traditional journals. Because print journals have built their reputation by publishing some classic theoretical, scientific and technical papers, and because the quality and reputation of print journals are based on the standards maintained by the editorial boards, people usually think famous print journals receive more respect and are of higher quality. Thus, more and more papers are submitted to print journals. Reputation is based on good papers and good papers make the reputation ever better. That's the reason why people trust and like print journals. The same situation will happen to the electronic journals. However, due to the short history, online journals haven't established their reputation yet.

Compared to the print journals, the main disadvantage of online journals is the perceived quality of paper. As they often have a short history and have not had many years to publish famous papers, people may give online journals of less credibility. The only solution is the paper with peer-review. Peer-review, which is often considered the gold standard of scholarly publishing. This is the reason to choose the above three journals, IRRODL, TOJDE and GEJOFEDE which are having the great personalities and policy makers in open and distance education through out the world in the editorial board. Every paper is carefully read by experts who check the accuracy of the material, suggest improvements, and advise the editor-in-chief about the overall quality. With very few expectations, every paper published in these journals is the first rate. Besides peer-review, should the online journals offer access to online papers regardless of their type and quality? In other words, what is the balance between comprehensiveness of these online journals and the review process of the publications included? By considering all the above factors these three journals fulfill their functions subjected to online journals.

Background

Mega University

A mega university is a university with a large number of enrolled students in which distance learning techniques are used to deliver courses to them, which also makes the courses particularly cost effective. There are only 11 mega universities in 1997, today these are going to be 20 and many more in the Asian region (9 out of 20). The Asian region mega universities from Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Iran and Thailand. The mega universities from other regions are Canada, USA (from USA three), Germany, Mexico (from Mexico two), France, Spain, UK, and South Africa [8]. It simply implies that the higher education requirement in this region and the world wide through distance education without considering the developed or developing countries.

According to Sir John Daniel higher education faces a crisis worldwide, to face this crisis the development of "mega-universities" - distance-teaching institutions with more than 100,000 registered students "is the most significant response to these crises and a seminal educational phenomenon of our times". The mega universities are also cost-effective. The unit costs per student are never more than half the average costs in the national university system. One of the reasons for their cost-effectiveness is that they can tap the traditional universities for teachers. Distance education offered by mega universities is also a flexible form of teaching and learning, the quality of which can be at least as high as that of traditional universities. In Britain, the Open University ranks number 10 out of 77 English universities. Graduates of Thailand's Open University have the highest rate of acceptance into the graduate schools of other Thai universities. The open university in the UK and the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India also have accrediting functions, which is an indication of their high standing. The UK open university has taken over the work of a British accrediting body, the Council for National Academic Awards, and the Indira Gandhi National Open University has a Distance Education Council that is responsible for supervising and promoting distance education at all Indian Universities. [2]

Selected Online Journals and their structure of contents

The common aims & scope of these online journals are very similar in nature, due to the tremendous developments in information and communication technologies, the world over, which have facilitated exchange of views, innovations and individual/institutional works in forms that can communicate faster than before. On the other hand, there are equally developments in theorization, innovations, reforms and research in the fields of open, distance, flexible and lifelong learning in both the developed and the developing worlds. These are taking place within distance teaching and open education institutions as well as the formal mainstream systems.

IRRODL

The purpose of this (International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning) referred, interactive, online journal is to contribute and disseminate to practitioners and scholars worldwide scholarly knowledge in each of three areas: theory, research, and best practice in open and distance learning. Because the aim of IRRODL to become the premier international journal of open and distance learning, it seeks high quality submissions in each of these three areas. In harmony with the open learning philosophy that distance education should serve to remote barriers to those who, given their geographical location, previous level of schooling, or other life circumstances would otherwise not be able to access distance education opportunities, subscriptions are free to individuals. Regardless of geographical location, anyone connected to the Internet will have free access to the journal.

With the possible exception of "theme issues", each of IRRODL will contain the following sections: these are 1) main section, 2) notes, and 3) web conferences. [4]

TOJDE

The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, is a peer-reviewed e-journal. International in scope, this scholarly e-journal will publish refereed articles focusing on the issues and challenges of providing theory, research/information services to students enrolled in any level of distance education on open learning applications. It will particularly strive to meet the continuing education needs of practitioners and educators by providing a forum for the discussion of extended learning strategies, policies and practices, and trends in information technology as they impact the delivery of any kind of the student support services for distance learners and faculties. Articles may be theoretical, philosophical and/or quantitative analyses of distance education/open learning and teaching issues, and may take the form of case studies, research studies, or general interest reports. Sample topics: role/history of distance education, standards for such services, organizational/planning of new services, for distance learners, etc. Book reviews, conference reports, literature reviews, news items, editor's note, announcements of conferences and publications, and letters to the editor etc. are also allowed.

TOJDE has three sections: 1) articles, 2) reviews, and 3) news. [7]

GEJOFEDE

The Global E-Journal of Open, Flexible & Distance Education aims at providing a forum for exchange, between the developed and the developing worlds, of ideas, innovations, research outcomes, best practices, development in print and non-print resource materials, and information on national/ regional/ international seminars/ workshops/ conferences in areas of open, distance, flexible, lifelong and e-learning at all levels of education. The focus is largely on, but not restricted to, *planning and management, innovations and change, and research and development* in these fields. This internationally referred, contributed and abstracted journal is available mainly in electronic form. However, it is also available in paperback print form for those who would like to read it that away.

GEJOFEDE has four sections: 1) conceptual and research papers, 2) causes and innovations, 3) print, and software review and 4) conferences and events. [3]

An analysis of selected e-journals

The systematic collection of data for theoretical analysis for these three journals from WWW only. The following URL's 1) <http://www.irodl.org/>, 2) <http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/> and 3) <http://www.ignou.ac.in/> an gives the total back and current issues of their volumes with numbers published in each year from starting of these journals. Table.1 gives the number of volumes and issues issued in each year of these three journals. By observing the table, the growth of issues in each year are increased, this itself signifies that the requirement of peer reviewed online e-journals from world wide and the quality imposed by these journals are well recognized. But the participation rates of authors are significantly varies from year to year by observing the various figures below. Table2.gives the detailed analysis of various editors from editorial board. In each journal by considering only the editorial board members only. The participation of authors for this analysis various from journal to journal. For IRRODL- articles from main section (with out

editorial) and research notes only, TOJDE- except news all other sections considered and to GEJOFEDE- only articles and review sections considered.

Table1. Volume numbers and number of issues issued in each year by these three journals.

YEAR	IRRODL			TOJDE			GEJOFEDE		
	MONTH	VOL.	NO.	MONTH	VOL.	NO.	MONTH	VOL.	NO.
2000	July	1	1	January	1	1			
				July	1	2			
2001	January	1	2	January	2	1	February	1	1
	July	2	1	July	2	2			
2002	January	2	2	January	3	1	February	1	1
	April	3	1	April	3	2			
	October	3	2	July	3	3			
				October	3	4			
2003	April	4	1	January	4	1	June	1	1
	October	4	2	April	4	2			
				July	4	3			
				October	4	4			
2004	April	5	1	January	5	1			
	June	5	2	April	5	2			
				July	5	3			
				October	5	4			

Table 2. Classification of editors from various countries - i) developed ii) developing and iii) others.

Name of journal	Total number of <i>editorial board staff</i> only	Editors from developed countries	Editors from developing countries	Others*	Editors from open universities**
IRRODL	90	56	31	3	13
TOJDE	48	23	24	1	13
GEJOFEDE	40	18	16	13	6

* Represents the persons from UNESCO, and various world wide educational bodies.

** Editors including both developed and developing in the total number of members in editorial board.

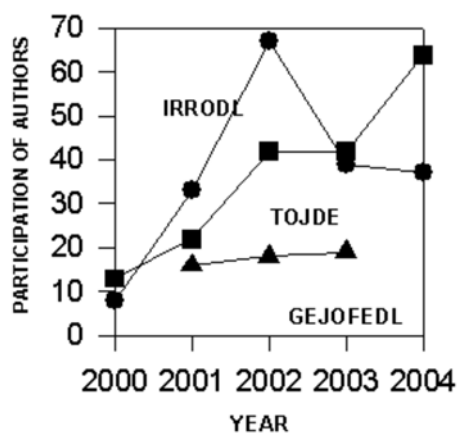


Figure 1. Total number of authors participation by year wise

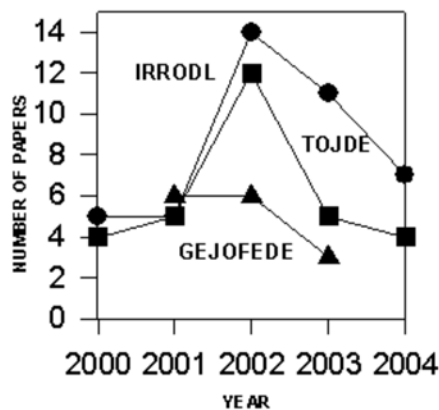


Figure 2. Papers from Open University Faculties

From figure 1 and figure 2, IRRODL, and TOJDE starting simultaneously, but issues and participation rates of faculties are various in each year. GEJOFEDE maintaining constant issues per year. By summing up all the issues and number of papers are increases and decreases in each year. Now TOJDE plans to extent its readers by reaching every part of the world. That it will focus on the regions by giving much more places to the contributors from the regions as North Africa, Middle East, New Turkic republics, Baltic countries and Eastern Europe countries. This strategy will be realized via the items placed below;

- i. My showing experience on effective use of distance education in formal and non-formal education field.
- ii. By providing communication among the educators, educational technologist and distance education experts and providing opportunity to share the new strategies and ideas about distance education.

Conclusions

It is rather challenging to express conclusions in such a shifting or adoption environment from traditional print medium to e-medium across the world. However, the quality and cost effectiveness of e-journals is the complex phenomena analyze compare to the print journals. The increasing number of mega universities signifies that the further requirements and responsibilities for providing higher education opportunities to the policy makers especially in developing countries. The drawing conclusions from above discussions are

- The advantages of e-journals are discussed with reference to the open and distance education in the changing environment from print to electronic medium.
- The editorial board from various regions across the globe clearly indicating the quality of publication of each paper/articles through peer-review for online publishing of these selected journals for open access.
- The gaining momentum by the participation of authors not only from open and distance education faculty is clearly indicated the quality and importance of open accessing through online journals from mega universities in both developing and developed countries.
- Participation of Open University faculties signifies that the complex role of them not only for academic other administrative and technical activities especially from developing countries.
- The increasing number of issues and acceptance of various papers from starting, signified that the worldwide communication between the open and distance teaching community to cover all the current issues.
- Finally, the online journals from mega universities crates a base for open forum for discussing the issues in open and distance learning through out the world by observing the various contents presentation systematically.

Discussions on e-publishing

The evolving phase of digital libraries is bringing us close to the turning point where publications, especially journals in open and distance education, predominantly only appear in an electronic format. The use of electronic journals has grown, although this innovation has not yet been fully adopted by the policy makers and innovators in distance education even in the developed countries. To be adopted, an electronic journal should perform the same functions as its predecessor, the print journal, such as building a collective knowledge base, communicating information, validating the quality of research and building distance education communities.

Several characteristics of e-journals may promote their adoption by users. They may lower publishing costs and speed the publishing process, as manuscripts can be published only days after acceptance. They demand less space in libraries. A hypertext structure enables navigability between the article, its references, respectively citations, and other related material. This, in turn, potentially, increases the breadth of access to new information and new kinds of data, such as video- or audio-clips, or original research data in the appendices of the articles. They may increase the adaptability of the contents of the article, as the reader can view the basis of the conclusions made by the author. The electronic journal does not need to set the same limitations on the length of the article as its printed counterpart. Even if the article itself is not long, the appendices containing necessary information are also not subject to the same page limitations.

The services called e-journals in this study have maintained the structure of the journal and can be searched by search terms, volumes, and issues. In this respect they are compatible with the requirements of performing the same functions as their printed predecessors. The publication channel of the articles is clearly observable, which may be important from both the author's and the reader's point of view. From the e-journal information can be found through out-links to related material, to related citations or most frequently cited items. These versatile search possibilities, to some degree, can compensate for the complexity of a Web service, caused by the necessity to use an Internet connection and a computer to read an article. A lot of relative advantage, compared to printed journals, is gained through utilizing the

hypertext structure, navigability and the possibility, also, to link new kinds of materials (audio, video) to the articles. An interesting feature of an article is the existence of out-links from it to related or cited material, provided by the publisher. In many cases, e-journals can be characterized as personalized and specialized. On average, they are more heavily used than the article files, which also offer full text journals in a digital form. The e-journals among themselves, but also compared to article files differ from each other greatly in composition, and it can be argued that they can learn from each other.

It would be also interesting and important to study, whether these online journals really strengthen connections between the distance education community of various regions, and whether this communication has any impact on the quality and quantity of the quantitative and theoretical production in all. In this study, the quantitative methods focused on electronic journals were used to determine the characteristics and use of the digital journals and articles. A qualitative feature, which seems to describe the utilization of the hypertext structure of electronic publications is the existence or absence of out-links from the articles, enabled by the publication channel.

However, it was very interesting that the distance education community in world take of their own journals to perceived their regions and forms the forums for open discuss on the issues of open and distance learning. For this purpose the EURODL is the best forum through out the world to up date the current issues in open and distance education not only to the European region. The facilitating and constraining factors creating revenue from Web-Based journal publishing through many ways.

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