INTEGRATING SKILL-BASED LEARNING INTO OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL): NEED AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: The article shows how important skill-based learning is for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs, and why that makes it such a hard challenge. Open and distance learning (ODL) is an innovative form of education, which is characterized by its adaptability, flexibility and lifelong learning emphasis for an all-inclusive group of geographically or socially dynamic individuals. This special issue analyzes what changes have come, trends from the past and new needs put on the labor force. It argues that skill-based Open and Distance Learning (ODL) modules are not only useful for job-seeking but also consistent with industry needs, economically profitable to the building region in terms of employment, and help bring economic development. As technology and modular formats have made it much easier to master new skills, however, there are still some problems. These include equal access to information and communications technology, enough hands-on learning opportunities for students, opportunities to obtain feedback by inquiry and help the student to integrate what they have been taught. The analysis shows that by addressing such regulatory problems with reforms, industry collaboration and curricular improvement, open and distance learning institutions that provide vocational training will produce graduates not just capable in terms of practical skills. This can make distance education more useful. And even better. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a learning approach that concentrates on skill-acquisition, vital for obtaining good employment. This kind of learning uses technology as one of its main forms, especially in vocational education.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Skill-Based Learning, Employability, Technology Integration, Vocational Education

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1.0 Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has transformed our concept of Education. For almost anyone around the world, an Open and Distance Learning school brings flexible and easy-to-reach education. Knowledge-based economies have new requirements for educational institutions as well. They must offer opportunities for people who can't spend much or any time on campus - perhaps because they live far away; who live in an area with no colleges nearby; or who suffer disability of any type (Ghosh et al., 2012). It is ODL that and studies concentrate on the comparison and superiority of other methods to find a different means of learning. Using multimedia, technology and novel ways of teaching, the subject is taught to students face to a combination of unconventional with traditional media, such as a publishing house or an electronic version. Disputing the Internet ODL back to correspondence education hesitantly carried through much of this century, and even today, electronic transmission is being used ever more hours a day as a result of new technology development. The internet infrastructure is everywhere now, but this wasn't always the case, and it has made ODL (Open and Distance Learning) much more effective than before. Teachers and students can talk to each other on time. Many more people take to ODL these days for various social and material reasons than any other kind of originality does. For instance, those with a job already on their hands, people living far from cities, and those who have physical impediments or material obstacles in the way.

Being easy to access is one of ODL's brightest spots. It helps to expand people's chances in education and solves the problems of professional growth. For example, it makes it possible for people to receive vocational and technical training, improve their careers, and continue studying throughout their lives. This not only contributes to the development of the individual but also to economic development at large. ODL's flexible delivery methods, which range from self-paced online courses to dynamic virtual classrooms, let students select when and how they want to interact with course material. This method suits people with different learning styles and

life situations. ODL will be promising in the future, but it also has some problems. Keeping students motivated in the absence of the usual classroom structures, making effective curricula integrating hands-on learning, and giving everyone fair access to technology are all ongoing issues. To help students adapt to the school rhythm and keep them from dropping out, support systems must be strengthened to meet the needs of distance learners. This means putting in place complete feedback mechanisms, opportunities for collaboration, and administrative support. Policymakers and schools are always working on how to improve Open and Distance Learning (ODL) so that it is both useful and of good quality. How important Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is for achieving universal education and knowledge societies that are open to everyone has been repeatedly emphasized by UNESCO and other international organizations. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can make distant learning more effective and useful by tailoring program designs to fit the conditions of different regions and leveraging new technologies.

2.0 Need for Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
The following are the needs of ODL education that are described as :

2.1 The demand for Skill-Based Education in ODL: In Open and Distance Learning (ODL), learning by doing is becoming more and more important. The reason for this is that the job market is changing rapidly. More and more people must be able to keep up with these changes. ODL programs help students learn important skills that they can use on the job. To help students learn, these programs often use a variety of teaching approaches, such as online courses, hands-on exercises and real-life projects. Skill-based learning in ODL is assuming an increasingly important role in education, as it provides students with the necessary preparation for the challenges of today's work world.

2.2 The Need for Skill-Based Learning in ODL: In India, where higher education is changing, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems are putting more emphasis on skill-based learning. Adding skill development to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs makes it easier not only to get a job but also to meet the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The National Skills Network (2025) and the NEP (2020) both say that this policy focuses on vocational integration and the practical development of skills. It is designed to shorten the gap between what students learn at school and what they need to know for work. That makes Open and Distance Learning (ODL) graduates more attractive to employers.

2.3 It is very important to close the gap between School and work: It is of great significance to reduce the gap between schools and society. Our nation's businesses require practical skills. They include the ability to employ technology, good communication, problem-solving skills, and the ability to get along with others. More than simply theoretical knowledge, it is these practical abilities that employers today value highly (Siilc, 2025; National Skills Network, 2025). Such a focus on learning at the workplace, which also has recourse to productivity training, on the other hand, is the Art learning environments valuable rather than the E content delivery mode. This kind of teaching aligns students much better with actual work practices and gets rid of the divisiveness between the university and the workplace. Research shows that the graduates of well-designed Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs, which teach specific skill sets, are more competitive in the current job market. This is because they have practical training and their coursework is recognized by industry (National Skills Network, 2025; NEP, 2020)

2.4 Enhancing Access to Vocational Skills via ODL: Everyone can find time to learn. It is more difficult for students who live far from colleges, have little income, or don't conform to the usual educational pattern to participate in practical training--although this is precisely what they need (National Skills Network, 2025). This is a most useful Direct Televised teaching method for Chinese language learners. (Austin and Zubrow, 2020) They are made up of skill-based teaching resources that use Open and Distance Learning (ODL) schools. Students gain hands-on experience through these venues and obtain qualifications recognized in their industry (NEP, 2020; National Skills Network, 2025).

2.5 Supporting Lifelong Learning: Mishra & Bartram (2018) assert that in a constantly changing market, open and digital platforms are important; they allow people to learn new skills as they walk, in a regimented way aligned with what is now being taught, and at their own pace. (NEP, 2020) Open & Distance Learning offers "micro-certificates which are small-scale qualifications for skill courses that build on each other. These let workers keep their skills up to date throughout a lifetime of employment. This plan promotes lifelong learning, making it easier for people to keep up with the new needs of employment and technological development (NEP, 2020). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, along with other national skill programs, attaches enormous importance to vocational training. Skills make it possible to find a job, comprehensive development of industry

needs and enterprise education in higher open and distance learning (NEP, 2020; National Skills Network, 2025). Skill-based learning can help open and distance learning (ODL) schools achieve these policy aims. Through practical experience in courses, industry connections, and curricula calibrated for employability, courses can contribute to skill development. Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions adapt their courses to the demands of the labor market and local employment trends by collaborating with sector skill councils and industry experts to design updated course materials today(National Skills Network, 2025).

2.6 Making Open and Distance Learning Better and More Useful: Research has shown that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments promote 21st-century skills with a high grade of success. These skills include analytical reasoning, effective communication, creativity and technological competence. These abilities are well known t0 have a significant impact on how employable graduates are (Mishra & Bartram, 2018; National Skills Network, 2025). When Open Distance Learning (ODL) programs include practical tasks, projects and simulations, the perceived value and actual outcome of distance education degrees as credentials for the labor force are advanced too. This not only makes Open and Distance Learning (ODL) better, but also makes it more practical for today's workers' needs. (National Skills Network, 2025).

3.0 The Role of Technology in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
Technology is an integral aspect of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), changing the way we teach and learn. Knowledge can be spread by various means, among which are online platforms and films or innovations in technology that enable you to cooperate closely with others. Such tools help students learn at their own speed, wherever they are. They also help teachers to create and spread learning materials, thus making reaching more people easier. Technology also makes it easier for people to talk. It allows students and teachers to talk to each other, leave comments, and engage in real-time cooperation. This makes the learning process more habit-forming and efficient. Also, with technology, data can be used to tell how good students are doing and then use data in teaching more. The same can be said for learning. However, hub have to use technology in ODL to achieve the results. Given such problems, using technology in ODL is of great importance.

Over a period of more than sixty years, ever since its founding just after World War II, the Open and Distance learning system has tried to make use of higher and more advanced technology. ODL provided a variety of interactive content delivery, learner support and test formats via many kinds of ICT method and platforms (Islam and Hasan, 2016; Singh, 2021). Learning management systems, video lectures, online forums and multimedia resources are all elements of the technology used in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. These technologies mean that judging rationally speaking the geographical and time constraints can be eliminated,   so that students can use the free periods between lectures when their computers are not occupied by others (Islam & Hasan, 2016; Singh, 2021). There are also advanced ICT frames of reference, such as the Technology Integration Matrix and models of ICT integration in ODL, which provide direction for institutions. Schools and other organizations that follow these frameworks should do more than merely exchange their obsolete resources. They should establish and promote transformative designs which facilitate active, collaborative and real learning experiences (Singh, 2021). Strategic use of technology, in ODL not only makes it easier to transmit educational information, but also fosters inclusive teaching methods, encourage feedback all the time, and implement higher-order thinking skills that are crucial for today's knowledge-based society (Islam & Hasan, 2016; Singh, 2021).

4.0 Challenges and Prospects of Skill-Based Learning Through Open and Distance Learning
Trying to add skill-based learning into Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has problems, such as: not having enough access to technology. Not being able to give quick feedback - by the time you get a reply, it's too late (Zhang & Ulrich, 2014). Feeling isolated and having trouble conveying this through email or phone (Cobb & Hillman, 2005). Meanwhile, universities offering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) find it difficult to provide student support. They also have difficulty teaching teachers the new methods of education that effectively integrate theory and practice, while using digital tools to help students acquire new skills (Mishra, 2001; Upadhyay, 2025). However, there are good prospects. Open and distance learning (ODL) can employ modular, stackable courses, open education materials and partnership between business and academia to make acquiring new skills flexible, affordable and geared to getting a job. This is especially meaningful for those already working and others who don't have enough access to services (Mishra 2001; National Skills Network 2025). Research also shows that well-organised Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments can help students develop the important job skills of the 21st century: the ability to communicate well, problem-solving, and self-learning. This, in turn, increases the chance of learners' employability and helps national skilling programmes (Mishra 2001; Osei-Tutu et al. 2022).

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the major points of this study are highlighted. A condensed review is given of the key results and why they speak to us. Also, the limitations of the study are listed, along with suggestions for future study. The scientific values and needs for future research of the findings of this study are particularly Important. In conclusion, skill-based learning, which is integrated with Open and Distance Learning (ODL), is essential as a means of bridging the gap between academic education and workforce needs, especially in today's rapid information technology-driven society. With ODL, students have the flexibility and accessibility to catch up on a lifetime of learning that touches lightly on areas not directly useful to their job. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions are actively taking strategic reforms, implementing new curricula and cultivating relationships with business to provide education that is relevant to jobs and enhances employability, although there are still some issues take challenge, such as the need for equal access to ICT, constructive feedback systems, more structured opportunities of work experience, training for teachers much better. A predictable system with degrees that serves the public well encourages students to keep acquiring practical skills and thinking critically, and it gives them room to accommodate their own interests. This changes the meaning of degrees as a whole.

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