

Theme 5: Scholarship in distance education research

The chapters in this section scope and analyse research levels and publication vehicles in the field of distance education. They also provide a contextualised open distance learning research framework and explore leading journals dedicated to distance education research that can be of importance for researchers in the field. The authors also identify gaps that could be useful for future distance education research.

Chapter 18:

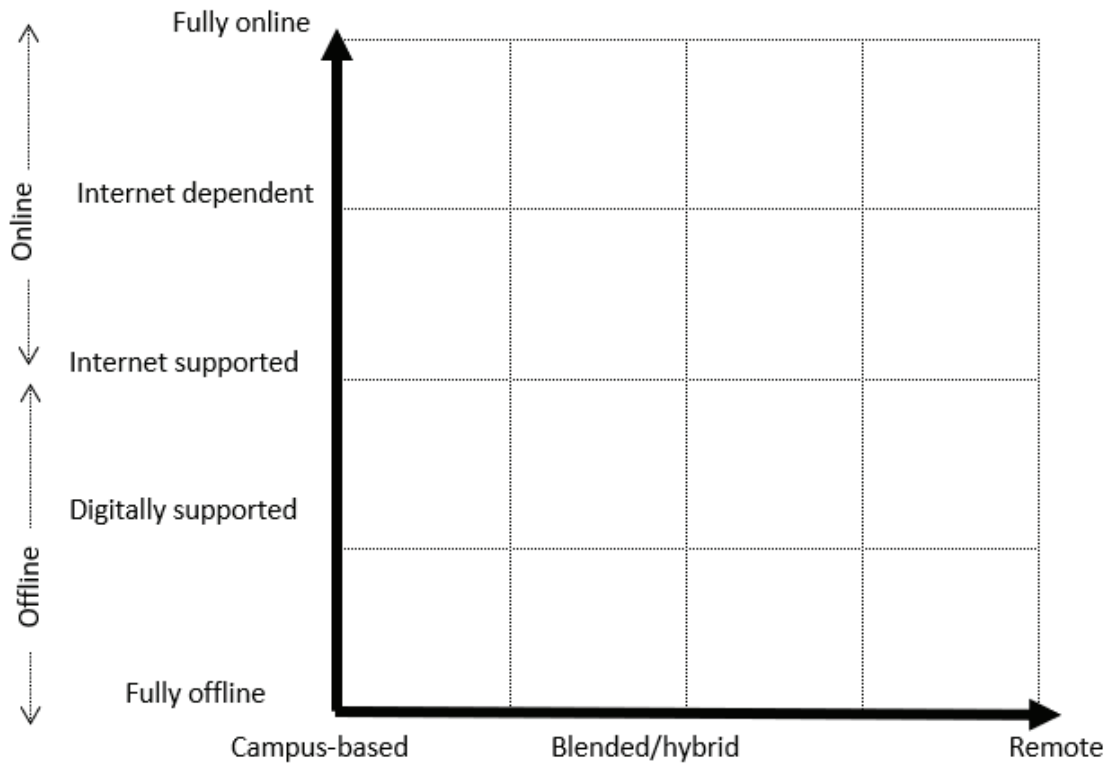
Scoping Open and Distance Higher Education Scholarship

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Introduction

A higher education revolution is currently sweeping all over the earth (Wolhuter and Jacobs 2021). The call, or demand, for higher education to open its doors to all, and the increasing value of higher education in an age of a knowledge society combine to make for a growth in enrolment numbers. One way in which universities worldwide are increasingly opening their doors to segments of the population for whom it was previously out of reach, is by means of open and distance education. The largest university in the world today in terms of enrolment is the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, which had more than three million enrolled students in 2021 (IGNOU 2021).

The aim of this chapter is to critically survey the corpus of scholarly literature on open and distance higher education, with the aim to determine a research agenda to guide the expansion of this mode of higher education, in South Africa in particular. It is apt to commence this article with a conceptual clarification of what is meant by open and distance higher education. On the website of the International Council for Open and Distance Education, the oldest (founded more than eighty years ago) and most extensive organisation of this kind, no definition of open and distance education can be found. However, the American Association of University Professors (n.d. par 1) defines distance education as education where ‘the teacher and student are separated geographically, so that face to face communication is absent, communication is accomplished instead by one or more technological media’. In the South African context, the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Postschool System* (DHET 2014) emphasises that a continuum exists in terms of digitalisation of learning and teaching, ranging from fully offline to fully online. Similarly, a continuum exists in terms of locality of the students, ranging from campus based to remote. It is captured in the adapted diagram that follows.



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Figure 1: Provision grid (DHET 2014)

The DHET (2014: section 1.7) states:

The requirements in this [distance education] policy refer to practices towards the right-hand side of Figure 1 in which it is assumed that students will rarely, if ever, be in the same physical location at the same time as their lecturer. This has profoundly different implications for student and staff roles and also for what facilities and resources need to be put in place and maintained.

This demarcation was adapted in the South African context—the *Draft Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET 2017: 362) explains distance education as follows: ‘A mode of education provision based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that are used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and learners. It is not necessary for learners to attend classes frequently and for long periods. Instead, it may use a combination of face-to-face interactions, different media, learner support mechanisms, discussions, and practical sessions.’ The emphasis is thus less on locality as such, but also considers the transactional distance between educators and students.

‘Open’ distance education is a term that became vogue in the British Commonwealth area since 1969, when the Open University in England was established (Technical University of Graz, 2019). It refers to extending (or opening) university access to sectors of the population historically excluded from university study, such as adult populations, the working population, and those financially or academically (i.e., not able to meet the stringent admission criteria) excluded from traditional contact tuition universities. The South African Draft Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2017: 363), while recognising ‘open (and) distance learning (ODL)’ as ‘the use of distance education methods to support the realisation of open learning purposes and principles’, takes the following position: ‘Omission of the “and” as in “Open Distance Learning”, and possibly the use of the acronym “ODL”, imply erroneously that ALL distance programmes are based on open learning principles. This policy framework does not support this term because of the ambiguity associated with its meaning.’ It then goes on and define open learning as (DHET 2017: 363):

An educational approach which combines the principles of learner-centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.

It thus emphasis the need for principles specifically, but not exclusively, for distance education programmes, as it should be infused in all learning and teaching spheres of post-school education.

To commence with, the global higher education revolution, with the rise of open distance higher education as one pivotal vector thereof, is reconstructed. Then the shaping of the global

higher education revolution and its vector of open distance higher education by the contours of the South African context is explained, followed by the research method, and lastly the findings of the research are presented and discussed.

The rise of open and distance education in the wake of the global higher education revolution

A higher education revolution is currently sweeping with tornado strength all over the world. This revolution commenced at (or soon after) 1990 and is continuing today with increased momentum. The global higher education revolution was probably succinctly and comprehensively outlined for the first time in the UNESCO report of Altbach et al. (2009). This was the result of societal drivers. The dimensions of the global higher education revolution will be explained, followed by an identification of the challenges in higher education left in the wake of the revolution.

At least six interrelated societal drivers are propelling the global higher education revolution. These are the global demographic dynamics, economic growth, economic transformation, globalisation and the information and communications technology revolution, the neoliberal economic revolution, and democratisation. The growth of the young population in the Global South means ever larger numbers of young people are knocking on the doors of universities for study. Since 1990, the world has entered one of the longest and most sustained economic upswings. This placed higher education within the reach of a growing number of people. The dawn of knowledge economies (that is, economies where the production and consumption of knowledge has become the driving axis), together with the neo-liberal economic revolution, have added new economic value to higher education. Globalisation—and in particular the information and communications revolution—has extended access to higher education to segments of the population that were hitherto excluded economically, geographically, and age-wise, especially by means of distance education. Democratisation has replaced the historically elitist view of the university and university access with the idea of education as a human right of all.

The dimensions of the resulting higher education revolution have been massification and democratisation, competition and differentiation, a shift in funding patterns and the rise of private and corporate universities, changing relations between university and state and between university and industry, rising managerialism at universities, the demand for relevance, a totally new professional working environment for academics, the restructuring of programmes and

curricula, a new research agenda, and renewal of teaching methods. The keyword of the global higher education revolution is massification: mass (even reaching to universal) higher education has replaced the historically elite or highly selective higher education. The massification is evident in swelling enrolments and enrolment ratios, as is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Massification of higher education: Global enrolment and enrolment ratio patterns

Year	1990	2010	2017
Global Enrolments (millions)	88.61	180.21	220.70
Global Gross Higher Education Enrolment Ratios (%)	14	30	38

(Sources of data: UNESCO 1993, 2019).

In an age of neoliberal economics, the state is retracting funding to higher education, and is making space for industry. Industry and the state (in as far as the state still is the largest financier of higher education) demand a say in turn in the running of universities. Neoliberalism is also visible in growing calls for relevance and in rising managerialism at universities. Students, in this context of neoliberal economics and democracy, also claim their rights. Sandwiched between managers and students are the academic profession, experiencing that their status, autonomy, and freedom get constantly eroded. The transportation, information, and communications revolution open new vistas for research, teaching, and the internationalisation of universities.

The global higher education landscape has left the sector with a substantial set of challenges to negotiate. These challenges are as follows: (a) The first relates to quality: what should be the upper limit of participation (in terms of both enrolments and enrolment ratios)? (b) Second, there is the issue of quality coming under pressure due to unchecked expansion on the one hand and dwindling public funding on the other hand. (c) There is also the problem of quality (in access and participation) which can well come to stand against the ideals of equality. (d) Then there is the problem of high attrition and wastage rates. Should the historically developed disciplines and the role of the university in the preservation and development of culture, make way for curricula, programmes, and research fields and projects structured around the imperatives of practical utility and financial gain/profit? Can a university still be a university and perform its functions when academic autonomy is taken away?

It was within the framework of this global higher education revolution that open and distance learning has undergone an accelerated expansion in the past 30 years. Since the mid-nineteenth century, there are signs of universities introducing distance delivery for a limited range of programmes. The University of London commenced such programme delivery with some programmes as far back as 1858. In 1892, the University of Chicago was the first university in the United States of America to begin a trial run with a small selection of programmes delivered by distance mode. As far as could be ascertained, however, the University of South Africa was the first university in history given an exclusive brief of distance education. This happened in 1946. It was, however, after the Open University of the United Kingdom opened its doors in 1969 that the trend took off. Similar universities were founded elsewhere in the Commonwealth and beyond—for example, the Open University of Canada in 1970, the National University of Distance Education in Spain in 1972, the Fernuniversität of Hagen in Germany in 1974, and the Open University of the Netherlands in 1983. New open universities—public as well as private—keep on being established.

In terms of student numbers, the growth of open and distance universities is even more impressive. Mention has been made of the incredible size of Indira Ghandi National Open University and the fact that it is, in terms of student numbers, the largest university in the world. However, the Open University of the United Kingdom is currently the biggest university in the United Kingdom as well as in Europe. Berberoğlu and Berberoğlu (2015: 2155) could identify twenty-three mega universities in the world (a mega university is a university with more than 100 000 students): ten of these 23 universities are open and distance universities.

It is clear that new information and communication technology has opened new vistas for higher education by means of open and distance education. Access has been granted to students who were excluded or hampered by reason of geographic, age, and financial factors from entering conventional contact universities. But what about epistemological access—very topical in especially Global South settings? A *prima facie* case can be made that distance education can aggravate epistemological access to disadvantaged students—for example, where such students lack internet access, stay far from libraries, or do not have the physical study spaces residential contact students have. The question then arises as to how to support distance education students with less-than-ideal epistemological access. Furthermore, just as the issue of epistemological access calls for a distinctive, mode-specific approach, pedagogy, writing of study guides, assessment, quality assurance, the professional environment of the academic profession, equality considerations in general, and any other facet of higher education has a distinctive, mode-specific manifestation in the distance education sector. Insights, best policies, ideas, and practices derived from scholarship

in conventional contact university settings cannot be directly extrapolated to distance education systems.

The shaping of the global higher education revolution by the contours of the South African context

While the societal drivers of the global higher education revolution are present in South Africa too, specific imperatives emanating from the South African context mean that the evolution of and challenges faced by higher education and by open and distance education as part of the higher education project, would give the higher education project in the country a distinct morphology.

The historical evolution of higher education in South Africa

Higher education in South Africa commenced as an importation from Europe and developed along lines of segregation. Higher education institutions too developed according to a segregated pattern: there were separate universities for various population groups.

The system of segregated education generated much grievance and resistance amongst Black South Africans. This grievance revolved around a number of objections. The first was the inequality in the system of segregated education. Other objections included the elitist nature of education and the Eurocentric nature of education in which curricula emphasised the European natural and cultural heritage and neglected the African natural and cultural heritage. In the socioeconomic turmoil in South Africa in the period preceding 1994, schools and universities became a rallying point of unrest, civil disobedience, and boycotts (Booyse et al. 2011).

The dialectics of the global higher education revolution and the national imperatives since the 1990s

Thus, when the African National Congress (ANC) took over government in 1994, they designed a new education system, based—at least in terms of stated objectives as these appear in White Papers, Acts, and other policy documents—on the principles of desegregation, equal education

opportunities, democratisation, and multiculturalism (Wolhuter 1999). It is the dialectics between the driving forces of the global higher education revolution, the imperatives emanating from these stated ideals as per stated policy, and the constraints of the local context that explain much of the post-1994 reconstruction of higher education and its fortunes. Higher education enrolments grew impressively (although not out of proportion compared to global trends) from 495 355 to 966 384 in 2016 (latest available figures).

As has been mentioned above, open and distance higher education in South Africa commenced when the University of South Africa was given an exclusive distance education mission in 1946. Since then, this institution has been on a growing curve. In line with the latest expansion drive which commenced in 1990, under the combined force of national socio-political imperatives and the forces driving the global higher education revolution, enrolment growth at the University of South Africa accelerated. This is true even after the Technikon RSA (a distance higher education institution which provided higher education of a technical vocational bent) was amalgamated with the University of South Africa in 2002. Strikingly mirroring the international pattern, the University of South Africa with its current student body topping the 350 000 mark, is now by far the largest university in South Africa. Following the University of South Africa in its prime position in the South African university sector, several other universities in South Africa have also followed to develop open and distance education arms. For example, the open and distance section of the North-West University has over 30 000 students. There is also a sector of private higher education institutions, making use of open and distance education but the size of this sector is small in terms of student numbers.

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Challenges faced by higher education, particularly open and distance higher education in South Africa

The same challenges figuring globally are also besetting the South African higher education landscape, in particular the open and distance education sector. Sometimes these challenges are present with greater intensity, or more acutely, due to the realities of the South African context.

It should be stated first that—notwithstanding the impressive enrolment growth since 1994, and notwithstanding the fact that, as has been mentioned above, there is no answer as to how much higher education is enough—compared to other upper-middle-income countries the university sector in South Africa is grossly underdeveloped. For example, compared to the 20.48 per cent

gross higher education enrolment ratio of South Africa, that of Brazil (by no means an exception) is more than double that figure at 50.49 per cent (UNESCO, 2019). On the equalisation front, the composition of the student body is approximating, though still not corresponding exactly, the population profile. This is the least of the problems besetting South African universities on the equalisation front. Deficient epistemological access accounts for high failure rates, more so in the distance education sector. Graduate unemployment, though small, is growing. Furthermore, graduate unemployment is skewed as attrition rates are skewed between the population groups (students from disadvantaged backgrounds and dysfunctional secondary schools being affected by deficient epistemological access) thus wiping out many of the gains made on the equalisation front at the entry point of university education.

Aim of the study

In the section above, the current global higher education revolution and the pivotal place of open and distance higher education in that revolution were discussed to provide background and to use as conceptual framework for the study. It enables us to critically assess the recent available body of scholarly literature on open and distance higher education, towards determining a research agenda to guide the expansion of this mode of higher education, in South Africa in particular.

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Research Method

Robson (2011) contends that in a research project, research methods employed at three levels should be distinguished. These are the levels of data collection, data processing, and data interpretation.

At the level of data collection, a literature search was done. The keywords [Open] OR [Distance Learning] AND [Higher Education] using EBSCO HOST was used to retrieve a sample of peer-reviewed article publications. The sample was limited to journal articles published in English over the ten years preceding the data analysis—namely, between 2012 and 2021—justified by the need to focus on the current research agenda. Second, the sample was limited to journals which the library of the universities to which the authors are attached had access to. This search yielded 127 publications. Upon closer scrutiny it appeared that 29 of these publications were not relevant to the field of higher education. The final sample was therefore 98. This figure represents a rather

low total, showing that research focusing on open and distance higher education does not figure high on the higher education research agenda. This finding also tallies with previous research done on topics that feature or are absent from the higher education research agenda. Wolhuter (2014) did a content analysis of the themes of all articles which were published from 2001 through 2010 in the following high ranking higher education journals: *Research in Higher Education*; *Journal of Higher Education*; *Studies in Higher Education*; *Higher Education*; and *Higher Education Research and Development*; as well as on all articles published during the same ten-year period in *The South African Journal of Higher Education*. In neither the list of twenty most frequented research topics in the set of foreign journals, nor in the South African journal list, does open and distance higher education figure (Wolhuter 2014: 283–284).

At the level of data processing, a content analysis was carried out. Information on each of the following aspects of each publication was extracted, juxtaposed, and summarised:

- Indexing (Web of Science, SCOPUS, etc.)
- The specific journal where research was published
- Methodological approach
- Theories used
- Topics covered, using the Tight's (2012) classification of themes of research in higher education studies
- Region

At the level of data interpretation, this research employed the method of using international comparative perspectives, derived from the field of scholarly enquiry known as comparative and international education, to illuminate a domestic education issue. Comparative and international education is characterised by a three-in-one perspective—that is an education system perspective, a contextual perspective, and a comparative perspective (Wolhuter et al. 2018) on education systems (national education systems, as well as education systems at other geographical levels). Second, these education systems are studied within their societal contexts in which they are embedded, which are the shaping forces of education systems and in which the effects or results of education efforts are visible. Third, various education systems, are juxtaposed and compared within their societal contexts. Such comparisons throw into relief the features of various education systems, as well as education-societal contextual interrelationships. In view of the compelling force of globalisation there has lately been a contention that the field of comparative education—

as it was historically known—should be superseded by comparative and international education. International education is then here used as defined by Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014: 60)—namely, scholarship studying education through a global lens.

The use of comparative-international perspectives is a widely accepted and appreciated method to approach not only the issues of educational praxis and for identifying best policies and practices to guide domestic education reform, but also of illuminating the theoretical edifice of scholarly pursuits—that is, of stimulating and guiding the domestic scholarship project (Wolhuter, 2014). In this research the latter objective is pursued as a contribution of getting scholarship informing open distance higher education development in South Africa on track. As in any comparative education study, the proviso is that similarities and differences between the domestic context and that abroad should be thoroughly accounted for and factored in before any recommendations regarding learning or benefitting from the foreign experience are made.

Findings

Publication fora

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The six most common journals in which the papers were published, as well as the number of papers which were published in each of these journals, are presented in Table 2. Indexing was considered using two platforms—namely, the indexing lists as received from the South African Department of Higher Education and Training in 2021, as well as the Fidelior meta-database.

Table 2: Publication Fora (n=98)

Journal	n	Data bases (indexing)	Country
The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning	28	BFI; WoS	Canada
Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education	12	BFI; DOAJ; ERA; NORW; SCOPUS; WoS	Turkey
Distance Education	5	BFI; ERA; NORW; SCOPUS; WoS	Australia

Online Learning Journal	5	SCOPUS;	United States of America
Propósitos y Representaciones	5	DOAJ; ERIH-PLUS	Peru
Other	43		

In total, the 98 articles in our sample were published in 35 different journals. More than a quarter (28.6 per cent) was published in a single journal—namely, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, while 27.6 per cent is published in four other journals.

All five of the journals in Table 2 are recognised for their quality by indexing bodies. More than two-thirds (68.4 per cent) of the articles were published in journals listed by Web of Science (WoS). Furthermore, 43.9 per cent were published in journals listed by SCOPUS and 33.7 per cent are available on the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Only nine articles were published in non-indexed journals, but none of these were flagged by the Fidelity Meta-database as not adhering to best publication practice. This suggests that while the academic discourse on open distance higher education takes place in limited publications, research on open and distance learning is predominantly research of a high order quality, based on the journals (indexing features) in which the selected papers were published. Also, it must be noted that the five journals are hosted in diverse geopolitical locations, which in our view is a strength.

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Themes

Malcolm Tight (2012) has identified the following categories of themes in higher education scholarship:

1. Teaching and learning (for example, approaches to studying, learning, and pedagogical styles)
2. Course design (assessment, competences, curriculum, etc.)
3. The student experience (access, motivation, diversity, success)
4. Quality (evaluation, monitoring practices, standards)
5. System policy (funding, policy studies, national policies)
6. Institutional management (departments, leadership and governance, structures, relationships between institutions and industry, as well as community)

7. Academic work (career, mobility, training, women academics)
8. Knowledge (nature of research, nature of university, disciplinarily)

The frequency of occurrence of these themes in the sample of articles analysed is presented in Figure 1.

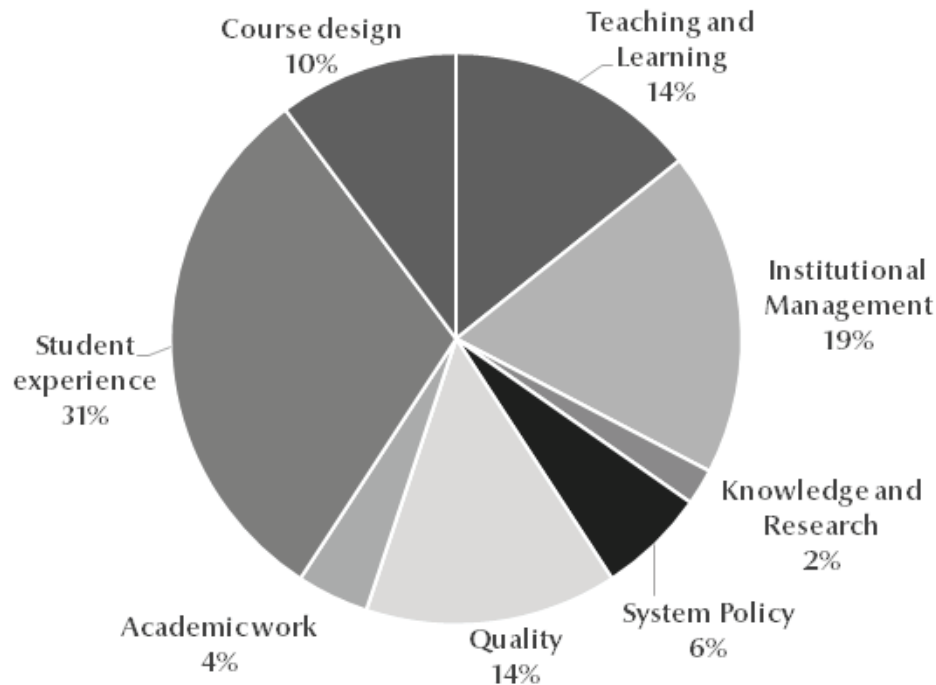
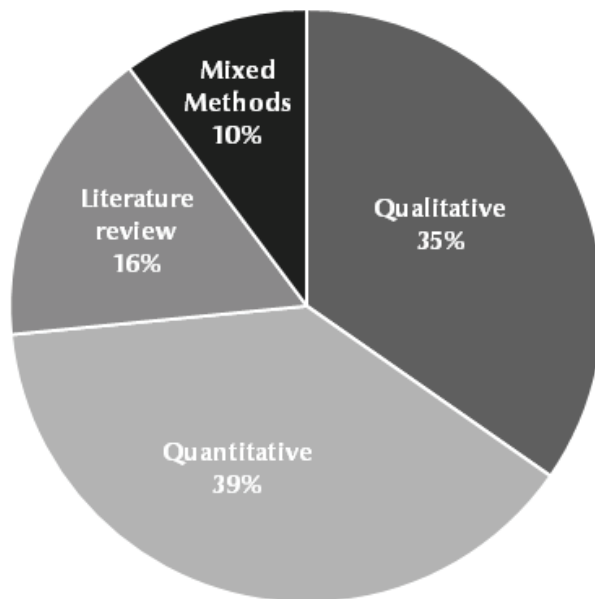


Figure 1: Classification of themes according to the classification of Tight (2012) (n=98)

It seems that the dominant discourse amongst ODL scholars is on *Student experience*, with 30 of the 98 articles addressing this theme. Issues pertaining to *Institutional management* (18 articles), *Quality* (14 articles), and *Teaching and learning* (14 articles) also received attention. It must be noted that the emphasis in the articles were thus predominantly on practice and less on knowledge creation, with *Knowledge and research* being the focus of only two of the articles.

Methodological approaches

Statistics on methodological approaches used by authors are presented in Figure 2.



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Figure 2: Methodological approaches used by authors (n=98)

It seems that the most common method was that of quantitative studies (mostly surveys) followed by a wide range of qualitative studies, including studies based on document analyses, narrative analyses, and the analysis of interviews. The articles, however, were focused almost exclusively on a single case or institutional studies, whereas longitudinal and comparative studies were found wanting.

Theoretical bases

The percentages of published papers in which the research was placed within a theoretical framework were quite low (24). Scholars who did make use of theory, used transactional distance theory most often (Moore 1997) (used by six of the 24 who used theory), but some articles used other theories including the theory of connectivism (Chandrappa 2018), Holmberg's theory of didactic conversation (Holmberg 1999), and self-determination theory (Musbah, 2022).

Location of study

The next category that we analysed was the location of the study by region, with the results displayed below.

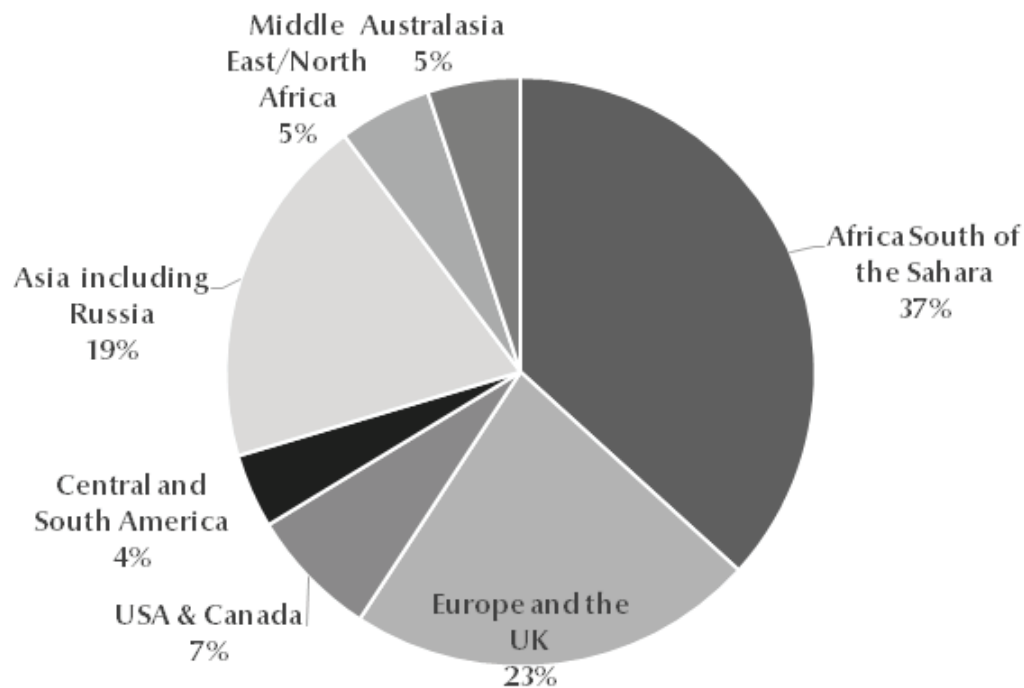


Figure 3: Location of studies included in the sample

The most common region in which studies in our sample was conducted, was Africa South of the Sahara, followed by Europe, and the United Kingdom. We need to point out that a number of factors could influence this finding, including access to journals and language of publication. Due to limited budgets, journals behind paywalls cannot always be accessed by us, and we were limited to English publications. The only point to take from this is that there is indeed research on open distance higher education being conducted on our continent.

Discussion

90 The majority of journals in which research related to open and distance higher education were published, were SCOPUS and WoS(ISI) indexed journals. This testified to scholarship on open and distance higher education, at least those that make it to publication in peer-reviewed journals, as being high-quality research. The journal where most researchers in this league found a publication forum is the *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning (IRRODL)*. The fact that there does not exist a journal exclusively focusing on open and distance *higher* education could suggest a lacuna. In view of the growing force of open and distance higher education in the world, such a journal which provides a common room for exchange and symbiosis of scholars and scholarship in this field is indeed needed. It should be noted that three peer-reviewed scholarly journals focusing exclusively on *online higher* education do exist. Furthermore, it is common practice that scholarly work on distance education in higher education is published in established journals such as *IRRODL* and *Distance Education*.

Conspicuous lacunae in the corpus of publications surveyed are firstly the dearth of theory undergirding research in the field and forming a framework within which to interpret and to order such research. The majority of publications surveyed were based on literature or documentary study. Furthermore, the majority of publications were based on a small sample and a single context. While such studies may provide depth and highlight the shaping force of contextual factors, the bigger picture remains absent.

The most common themes were focused on the practice of open and distance higher education provision. This includes a focus on teaching, learning, and student experience. On the other hand, drawing from Tight (2012) there is limited research on:

- **Knowledge production related to open and distance learning**—the nature of research, open

and distance learning disciplinarity, forms of open and distance learning knowledge, and the nature of open and distance learning universities

- **Academic work**—in the context of open and distance learning: academic development, academic roles, academic careers, the changing nature of academic work and academic work in different countries
- **Quality**—open and distance learning course evaluation, grading and outcomes, national and international open and distance learning monitoring practices and standards
- **System policy**—the open and distance learning policy context, national open and distance learning policies, comparative studies, open and distance learning funding

It seems that the most compelling need in the field of scholarship of open and distance higher education is that of a comprehensive, all-encompassing theory. A lexical definition of a theory is, 'a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing explained' (English Oxford Living Dictionary 2019). A theory should meet a number of requirements. Halverson (2002: 42) tables four requirements. First, a theory should explain the phenomenon under investigation. Second, it should allow reasonable inferences of the phenomenon to be made (by the researcher or by anyone reading, studying, or using the theory). Third, it should make (even facilitate or stimulate) discourse about the phenomenon possible. Fourth, it should allow recommendations for practice (for the improvement of practice) to be made or be deduced from the theory. If these criteria of Halverson could be accepted, it follows that a theory on open and distance higher education should encompass the entire distinct morphology (all structural components) and ecology (societal context as shaping factor) in which open and distance higher education function. While such a theory should reflect the universal features (and interrelationships between these features) of all open and distance higher education institutions and learning-teaching systems, it should at the same time also contain enough plasticity to fit the diverse contextual contours existing in various parts of the world. While the theories found in the literature corpus contain notions worthy of pursuit, none of these theories has yet been developed sufficiently to meet the requirements with respect to a theory of open and distance higher education as put forth by Halverson.

When constructing a theoretical framework for open and distance higher education, covering the entire morphology and ecology of open and distance higher education and having the potential of both ordering knowledge production on open and distance higher education, and providing guidance in the improvement of practice, perhaps the best place to look for an outline is the edifice

of the scholarly field of comparative and international education. As was explained above (under research methodology), comparative and international education is a scholarly pursuit focusing on education systems, the interrelationships between these systems and their societal contexts in which they are embedded, and a comparison between education systems in their contextual embeddedness. As such, this field has built up, during a long evolution, considerable conceptual tools to analyse the morphology and ecology of education systems.

Conclusion

Open and distance higher education has demonstrated a meteoric rise in the past half a century, even somewhat longer. However, this rise has not been matched by a commensurate rise in scholarship. Much more cause for concern is the fact that a theoretical edifice—ordering knowledge on this mode of higher education and guiding reform in improving open and distance higher education—has not yet emerged. South Africa has been a pioneer in the global emergence of open and distance higher education, and while the University of South Africa is by far the largest university in the country and has made a commendable contribution towards making higher education accessible and attainable for many who otherwise would not have received that opportunity, much of that evolution has happened on a trial-and-error basis or was based on the institutional memory of that institution and its faculty. Given the trailblazing record of South Africa in the global evolution of open and distance higher education, and given the caveats of theory and scholarship infrastructure developed out of the imperatives and context of the Global North (as was demonstrated in this article when the availability of journals was discussed), there is much scope and an onerous task for South African scholars of higher education to develop theory and pedagogy based on such theory and for taking open and distance higher education forward in the twenty-first century.

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