Taking Stock of Our Journal's Journey: A Statement of Impact

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Abstract

Pausing to take stock of progress on a journey can achieve many things, including identifying how far you've come, which way you've come, and which way you want to go. A statement of impact for the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (JOFDL)* has been prepared, taking stock of the Journal at the current time in its journey. This statement identifies the Journal and its impact in terms of reach, use, and contribution to global academic research and publishing. The Editorial is rounded off with an overview of the articles in this issue.

Keywords: open learning; statement of impact; journal metrics

Introduction

Taking the time to pause on a long journey, to take stock of how far you have travelled and what the journey has been like, is a good thing. It provides measures to ensure you are on track, that the journey is resulting in clear achievements, and that there is a clear path ahead. In New Zealand the academic community took time in 2018 to do just this, with the 6-yearly Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) round. The purpose of PBRF is "to ensure that excellent research in the tertiary education sector is encouraged and rewarded" (Tertiary Education Commission, n.d.). JOFDL assisted many academics in this process by furnishing information on the extent of readership of their articles published in JOFDL, and in identifying the range of locations in which JOFDL articles may be accessed—including search engines, journal databases, and websites.

In this Editorial we take a look at the Journal itself—its impact and its contribution to research and academic publishing. These conclusions were formalised in our application to *Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities*. Cabell's International[1] provides a wide range of services for journal publishers and academics. It also provides analytic services, and whitelists and blacklists of journals. Blacklisted items include predatory journals, while the whitelist identifies and quantifies bona fide journals. The directory describes this whitelist as a "curated list of over 11,000 academic journals spanning 18 disciplines [which] guides researchers and institutions in getting the most impact out of their research" (Cabells Scholarly Analytics, 2017, n.p.) and provides institutions and academics with some surety of the quality of the journals they are engaging with. The following Statement of Impact for our Journal now appears on Cabell's Whitelist.

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[1] https://www2.cabells.com/

JOFDL's Statement of Impact

The *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* (JOFDL) is a peer reviewed, gold open-access online journal. JOFDL has been published since 1995, starting under the title of *Journal of Distance Learning* and evolving to *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* in 2011. It publishes articles related to open, flexible, and distance learning, broadly defined. It originates in New Zealand and, until recently, has focused on the Pacific Rim. But it now has global coverage and reach. It's the flagship journal of the Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand (FLANZ), previously known as DEANZ (Distance Education Association of New Zealand).

The Journal's impact on the field of open, flexible, and distance learning is most noticeable in Australasia but it has had a more global impact in recent years. While the number of articles is reasonably low, the number of citations these articles have received rates well. The Journal has published 129 articles over its 23-year lifespan. Of these 129 articles, 6 have been cited more than 50 times, 4 have been cited between 20 and 49 times, and a further 24 have been cited between 10 and 19 times. This indicates the Journal is being read, and articles are of sufficient value for other academics to include in their work.

An additional measure of impact is the number of views for each article, which has been recorded since the Journal went online in 2011. Of the 129 articles to date, 7 have had their abstracts viewed more than 1000 times, and a further 59 have had more than 500 views. In addition, 8 articles have been viewed in full more than 500 times, and a further 27 articles were viewed more than 200 times. This indicates a general level only because access is also available through several journal databases and clearing houses that include JOFDL articles.

Influential articles include "Becoming a 'communal architect' in the online classroom: Integrating cognitive and affective learning for maximum effect in web-based education" by R. Woods and S. Ebersole (2003), which has been cited 74 times and viewed in full over 1000 times. This was an important work for its time. Another article with similar statistics is "The disruptive potential of the Massive Open Online Course: A literature review" by J. Jacoby (2014), which has been cited over 68 times and presents a detailed and useful literature review on an emerging topic in the field.

As the content in this Journal is largely practitioner- and academic-based, and focuses on emerging practices in the emerging field of open, flexible, and distance learning, the overall impact is difficult to measure. Journal content shares new thought about practice in this developing area of education and also explores concepts and applications. For a small journal with a comparatively low volume of articles, it appears to have a surprisingly high readership and value.

Articles in this issue

This issue contains three articles from around the world, and this Editorial. These papers present research in aspects of open, flexible, and distance learning, providing a rounded view of current areas of development. It's a collection that's likely to appeal to a broad range of readers. Articles in the current issue are described below.

The first article by Heredia, Carvalho, and Vieira is a study that looks at a networked learning approach to the design of distance learning in higher education in developing countries. A case study drawn from a Brazilian university identifies critical elements in design—including social context and social arrangements in the learning materials, learning management system, and interaction between students. These have particular relevance for success in distance learning in

developing countries and help identify ideas and processes which may aid the success of this form of learning in this context. The Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework was chosen as the basis for this study, and the use of re-usable design ideas is explored and applied in the context of distance learning in developing countries.

Henrikson looks in detail at the impact of the design of instructor presentation formats in online learning, particularly its impact on student responses in discussion forums. Student responses in discussion forums in an American online course were analysed with the Community of Inquiry and Practical Inquiry models as the primary lenses, to identify if there were any significant associations between type of lecture presentation and the depth of cognitive presence in the initial discussion forum. The findings and practical implications of this research include a verification of the importance of teaching and social presence in online learning to improve student engagement, and an identification of the quality of the activities to achieve this aim as an important factor.

The article by Weaver and Barnard explores the behaviour of second-year psychology students as it relates to their use of information sources while studying in an online distance learning context. The study took place in the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, one of the largest online distance learning institutions in the country. Assignment reference lists for two assignments, from 36 students, were analysed—giving a total of 72 reference lists. Results indicated that sources recommended by the instructor or library staff, including the textbook, were the most used. Sources found elsewhere were less likely to be referenced. In addition, the number of sources referenced positively correlated to the assignment mark achieved. This was particularly the case for recommended sources such as the textbook. This study builds on earlier research by the same authors with first-year psychology students, and shows results consistent with that study.

Conclusion

Taking stock of the current position of the Journal serves to highlight some of its achievements over the preceding years. It also serves to provide some assurance to both authors and readers that this journal provides a useful contribution to the field of open, flexible, and distance learning. This Editorial provides a statement of impact which identifies some useful measures of impact in a quantifiable way with analytics and metrics, including number of article citations and numbers of article views. These indicate a good readership of the Journal despite the small number of published articles. It also shows high citation statistics for key articles, attesting to the value of the content and of the Journal itself. The Journal's journey continues.

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Biographical notes

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Alison is an information scientist and Director of Research at InfoSolutions. She conducts research in health information, is completing a Doctorate in Education, and contracts in the education sector. She is a Fellow of the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA). Her research

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