

NIACE Research and Development



Interim Key Findings



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Overcoming Social Exclusion Through Online Learning (Open University strand)

Abstract

The government has recognised that education is the key to overcoming social exclusion. Many research studies indicate that learning can improve health, community participation, family, economic and social life. However, the national education and training system is not addressing the needs of socially disadvantaged people. Online learning is a new approach that may be able to address some of the issues prevalent in traditional forms of education.

This project aims to investigate the potential of online learning to overcome barriers to participating in education by the socially disadvantaged, and to identify factors that might influence such students' participation in and successful completion of online courses. Participants' subjective views of the experience of online learning were sought.

Quantitative and qualitative data were obtained through telephone surveys and in-depth interviews, and a case study approach. The participants were an opportunity sample of Open University undergraduate students demonstrating characteristics associated with social disadvantage.

Research methodology:

- ❖ Phase 1, 2005: Pre-and post-test telephone surveys
Pre-and post-test face-to-face interviews
- ❖ Phase 2, 2006: Case studies

Key Findings

The main interim findings of the project are:

- ❖ Online learning may provide disadvantaged adults with a convenient and flexible opportunity for re-engaging with education.
- ❖ Some perceived advantages of online learning are technology aspects; contact with others; acquisition of new skills and knowledge.
- ❖ Some perceived disadvantages of online learning are also technology aspects. Physical discomfort from studying online and lack of face-to-face-contact are additional drawbacks.

Output

- ❖ Publication - Englebright, L. and Clarke, A. (2006) *Overcoming Social Exclusion Through Online Learning?* Submitted to Journal of Access Policy and Practice.
- ❖ Website: www.niace.org.uk/online

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