

Openness and flexibility: How open education can facilitate flexible learning

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http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Openness_and_flexibility

Abstract

Openness aids flexibility - and open education can facilitate flexible learning. Ten ways in which open education helps to enable flexible learning are suggested - maximising accessibility, archiving and security, authentic advertising, agile resources, cost reduction, community service, knowledge commons, and time flexibility and efficiency.

Key terms

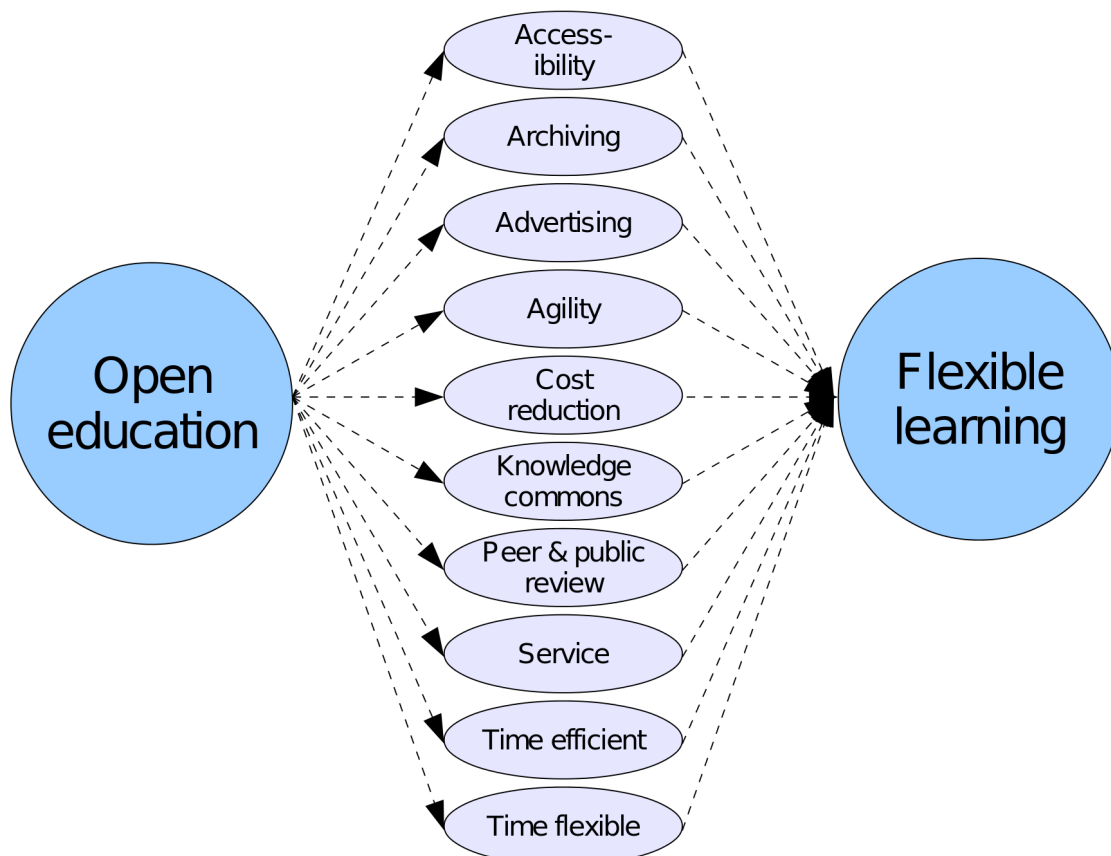
Openness (openism) refers to a philosophical preference for public transparency over opaqueness or closedness.

Flexibility refers to dynamism over staticism. A flexible system or process has a fluidity that allows similar processes to occur in a variety of situations and circumstances.

Open education typically refers to educational programs which use open educational resources (OERs) and/or provide public access to the learning materials and activities.

Flexible learning emphasises learner-centred design and delivery, allowing multiple pathways to maximise learning quality for a wide variety of learner needs and circumstances.

Ways open education can facilitate flexible learning



Ways in which open education can facilitate flexible learning

- 1. Accessibility**- Due to the user freedoms associated with the open licensing of OERs, these materials can be accessed in wide variety of ways to help provide access to learners with different needs (e.g., open text can be readily voice synthesised or made large font for people with limited hearing and visual capacities respectively or printed in hard copy). OERs can be easily modified, improved, and forked to better meet learner needs. Resources which are subject to vendor lock-in often have limited accessibility and hence also flexibility.
- 2. Archiving and security**: When educational materials are open are to the public, the materials can be more readily version-archived. Use of open materials provides greater security for the continuity of a program e.g., a textbook can't go out of print, a teacher can't leave and take all the teaching materials without leaving a copy behind (both unfortunately prevalent phenomena).
- 3. Authentic advertising** - Opening access to educational materials and activities provides exposure to large volumes of online visitors who can experience authentic advertising (WYSIWIG - what you see is what you get), along with branding and acknowledgement of the contributing institution(s). Smaller institutions can make a relatively large impact by developing open educational resources, as they can reach a wide audience, particularly if focusing on the great many topics which currently lack high quality OERs.
- 4. Agile resources** - Open educational materials are readily recyclable (e.g., re-mixed, re-packaged, re-developed) for other purposes (e.g., intensive delivery, short courses, and separate modules) because they have open licenses.
- 5. Cost reduction** - Using open educational materials is less costly for learners and institutions (e.g., textbook cost - Commercial, copyright restricted textbooks have become increasingly costly and offer limited freedoms for use/reuse and much inflexibility). Open textbooks are needed - innovation opportunity.
- 6. Knowledge commons**: Using open education materials provides educators and learners with access to the rapidly increasing knowledge commons (human knowledge in the public domain or available under open licenses). Making use of the knowledge commons in education provides teachers and learners with a wide array of flexible resources. Contributing open educational resources to the knowledge commons provides community service to the broader community. Thus, the open education can actively utilise and contribute to the knowledge commons and the common good.
- 7. Public and peer review**: When educational materials are open the public, the public and peers can provide review. When educators are aware that a wider audience may scrutinise and critique the educational materials, these materials are likely to be developed to a higher quality. A feedback stream from the public and peer communities provides rich, valuable information about how educational programs can be improved.
- 8. Service** - Open education provides community service, an ethically and morally important purpose of publically and privately-funded educational institutions. Contributing to the knowledge commons facilitates access to materials by learners and teachers with a variety of needs and interests, reducing barriers to access and engagement to educational and knowledge.
- 9. Time efficient** - Open practices (e.g., licensing, access, formats) costs time in the short-term (if the norm has been to used closed/restricted practices) and saves time in the long-term.
- 10. Time flexible**: When educational materials are open to the public, participation in learning can (at least in theory) take place at any time for any one e.g., a keen participant can start early and participants can progress at different rhythms and paces