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Reframing open, distance, and digital education: Purposeful design for distributed learners

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Abstract

Open and distance education has long been associated with access, flexibility, and learner-centred pedagogy. This paper aligns with and extends the argument that the field requires a fundamental shift in nomenclature, moving beyond legacy terms such as open and distance toward language that more accurately reflects pedagogical intentionality in contemporary digital contexts. It argues that debates about terminology should shift from delivery modality to intentional design, foregrounding student-centred, inclusive, and pedagogical approaches that recognise learner diversity, agency, and context. Drawing on practical examples from fully online postgraduate programs, including accelerated and block models, the paper illustrates tensions between efficiency and engagement while demonstrating how intentional design can support high-quality learning experiences. Through this lens, concepts, such as flexibility, are reconceptualised not as operational convenience but as a purposeful design principle for learners. The paper concludes by calling for a reframing of the core values of open and distance education through evidence-informed, pedagogically driven practice rather than continued reliance on contested terminology. This reframing is supported through guiding design questions: Who are our learners? Where are they located? What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring? And, what modes of access and engagement best support their learning? Together, these questions facilitate purposeful design for all learners.

Keywords

open education; distance education; digital education; online education; distributed learner; online learner; design



1 Introduction

This paper reframes open, distance, and digital education (ODDE) through a lens of purposeful design for distributed learners. For decades, scholars have debated nomenclature within the field of distance education, often motivated by a desire to remain relevant within changing educational landscapes (Keegan, 1980; Lewis, 1986; Lewis & Spencer, 1986; Rumble, 1989; Lewis, 1990). Despite these debates, there is a shared commitment to delivering accessibility, flexibility, and learner-centred pedagogy for distributed learners, especially in contemporary higher education. However, contemporary higher education is increasingly shaped by techno-centric and market-driven narratives that pressure universities to maximise efficiency, scale enrolments, and generate revenue (Busch, 2017; Olssen & Peters, 2007; Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2017). In response, institutions have increasingly adopted online and digital delivery models. This shift was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted long-standing distinctions between campus-based and fully online provision. As a result, global higher education has become more accepting of a continuum of learning modes, from fully face-to-face to fully online, and students are increasingly expecting such flexibility. Drawing on recent scholarship, this paper responds to calls for the field of ODDE to move beyond modality-based distinctions and instead foreground design, or designed education, as a critical lens for remaining contemporary and responsive. The term 'design' shifts the focus from logistical descriptors to the deliberate creation of purposeful, inclusive, flexible, and high-quality learning experiences.

To illustrate this lens, we present a case study of the postgraduate accelerated six-week online model. This model provides a rich example of designed education in practice, where learning experiences are intentionally structured to meet diverse learner needs while maintaining quality and flexibility. Within this case study, we return to foundational questions relevant to all learning: Who are our learners? Where are they located? What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring? And, what modes of access and engagement best support their learning? These questions form a useful framework for open and distance education that is purposefully designed for distributed learners. Using a six-week accelerated online model as a case, we demonstrate how this framework captures both enduring principles of distance education—such as accessibility, flexibility, learner-centredness, and interaction—and contemporary design considerations. In the sections that follow, we outline terminological and conceptual tensions in and use the questions as a framework to show how purposeful design plays a role in aligning ODDE with contemporary perspectives in the field.

2 Terminological and conceptual tensions

Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE) emerges from the historical tradition of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), which positioned education as a social good designed to extend access beyond the constraints of time, place, and institutional proximity (Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023). Early conceptions of distance education emphasised structured learning supported through planned guidance rather than continuous tutor supervision (Holmberg, 1977), a model that evolved from correspondence education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Wedell, 1969).

An ongoing debate within the field concerns the terminology of ODDE and, by extension, the naming and positioning of the *Journal of Open, Distance and Digital Education* (JODDE). Recently, this debate was re-visited by Nichols' article *What's in a name? Wrestling with 'ODDE'* (Nichols, 2024a) and the inaugural editorial by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2024), both of which invite critical reflection on how ODDE is conceptualised within an educational landscape shaped by digital

transformation and increasingly blurred boundaries between distance and conventional education. The significance of this discussion is further evidenced by the subsequent call for papers for a special issue of JODDE, titled Reclaiming “Open” and “Distance” Education in a “Digital” World, with Nichols serving as Guest Editor.

Lewis’s (1986) early work and subsequent exchanges establish a foundational nomenclature debate in open, distance, and later online education. Lewis (1986) conceptualises open learning as a learner-centred philosophy rather than a delivery mode, foregrounding openness as a continuum of choices around access, pace, place, timing, content, and assessment, and emphasising the redistribution of power from institutions to learners. Lewis and Spencer (1986) extend this position into a more systematic and policy-oriented framework, explicitly disentangling open learning from distance education and educational technology, and highlighting how organisational strategy, quality assurance, and cost-efficiency shape the practical limits of openness and its role in widening participation. This conceptual grounding sets the stage for the Lewis–Rumble exchange, in which Rumble (1989) criticises the loose and interchangeable use of open and distance learning, arguing for sharper distinctions grounded in modes of provision and economic realities, while Lewis (1990) defends open learning as a values-based, relational concept whose heuristic and critical value lies in interrogating pedagogical intent, learner experience, and institutional power.

Nichols (2024a) identifies a central problem in the proliferation of overlapping descriptors used to characterise digital education, arguing that the field has become conceptually “muddled” (p. 221). Terms such as online and blended are frequently used without theoretical grounding, functioning as broad institutional labels rather than analytically precise categories. Johnson’s (2021) definition of online education, for example, focuses on digital delivery and physical separation, yet Nichols (2023) notes that the term is so expansive that it offers little explanatory value without further qualification (p. 145).

This ambiguity creates particular challenges for ODDE. While Zawacki-Richter and Jung (2023) position ODDE as an inclusive umbrella capable of encompassing diverse digital practices, Nichols (2024a) cautions that such breadth risks eroding its distinctiveness, especially as newer terms such as *hyflex* and *bichronous* compete for conceptual space (p. 227). As traditional universities adopt these labels—often detached from ODL’s theoretical foundations—ODDE is increasingly sidelined, not because its principles are obsolete, but because its terminology lacks traction in a market-oriented discourse.

Importantly, this is not a novel problem. Debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s around the definition of “open learning” in the UK, notably by Rumble (1989) and Lewis (1990), reveal long-standing tensions between educational values and institutional adoption. These earlier discussions underscore that disputes over nomenclature are rarely neutral; they reflect deeper struggles over authority, legitimacy, and purpose within the academy.

Contemporary ODDE extends this lineage through digital technologies that support asynchronous and synchronous interaction, aligning with Moore’s (2007) conception of transactional distance as a function of structure, dialogue, and learner autonomy. Zawacki-Richter and Jung (2023) and Mishra (2025) extend this debate into digital education, emphasising that rapid technological adoption and evolving practice require terminological clarity alongside pedagogical intentionality. Mishra specifically notes that design is a broadly applicable principle across teaching and learning strategies, reinforcing that the field’s advancement depends on intentional, evidence-informed, and adaptable pedagogical practice. Together, these works trace an evolution from definitional clarification to operational and design-focused frameworks, highlighting the enduring tension between conceptual precision, learner-centred philosophy, and practical implementation in ODDE.

In parallel, higher education has seen rapid growth in techno-centric and market-driven models of digital provision (Busch, 2017; Olssen & Peters, 2007; Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2017). These models are typically framed through terms such as online, blended, hybrid, and hyflex, reflecting institutional strategies to enhance flexibility, scalability, and competitiveness. While such approaches may adopt similar technologies to ODDE, their orientation is often operational rather than pedagogical, prioritising efficiency and institutional integration over explicit commitments to access or equity (Selwyn, 2016; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). The result is not simply pedagogical divergence, but a terminological and conceptual tension.

3 Resolving the tension through a critical design discourse

Across these terms, a common thread is the notion of purposeful design for distributed learners. Using a critical design lens, we introduce this concept as a way to move beyond conventional categorizations. A critical design lens offers a way to move beyond terminological competition by shifting attention from what digital education is called to how it is intentionally designed. From this perspective, ODDE's defining contribution is not its mode of delivery, nor its claim to a particular label, but its principled design orientation—one that foregrounds learner agency, inclusivity, and social purpose (Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023).

This helicopter view addresses Nichols' (2024a) concern that ODDE's reliance on historically loaded terms such as open and distance risks obsolescence (p. 229). Rather than attempting to stabilise or defend terminology, a purposeful design approach positions ODDE as a normative framework for digital education. This can be achieved through a set of design commitments that can be used to interrogate, evaluate, and reshape practices across online, blended, and hybrid contexts, which will be presented and discussed in the case study.

Recent scholarship on open and large-scale higher education converges on the argument that access, flexibility, and scale are not intrinsic properties of technology or institutional form, but outcomes of intentional educational design. Nichols (2025) reframes the notion of the mega-university around "opening education by design," arguing that availability, inclusivity, scalability, and sustainability must be deliberately aligned through institutional strategy rather than assumed as natural consequences of size or digital delivery. Naidu (2025) similarly emphasises that openness and flexibility only become pedagogically meaningful when they are purposefully designed to connect learner contexts, teaching intent, and system-level supports. Case evidence from Southern New Hampshire University illustrates how this design logic operates in practice, with LeBlanc (2025) demonstrating that large-scale participation and student success can be achieved through learner-centred system design, standardisation, and integrated support structures rather than through technological expansion alone. Extending this analysis globally, Mishra and Panda (2025) show that open universities across diverse national contexts rely on comparable design principles—particularly around learner support, curriculum organisation, and institutional coherence—to sustain access and quality at scale, even as they respond to differing policy, economic, and cultural conditions. Collectively, this literature suggests that contemporary debates about openness and scale in higher education are best understood as questions of design alignment rather than modality, technology, or institutional category. Hence, the motivation to reframe ODDE through a lens of purposeful design for distributed learners.

Such a lens also clarifies the limitations of techno-centric models. Selwyn's (2016) critique of technology in education as a "technical fix" highlights the risks of technology-first approaches that privilege scale and efficiency over pedagogical depth (p. 68). Olssen & Peters (2005) highlight techno-centric narratives that promote digital tools for efficiency and commodification. Busch

(2017) discusses how "open" initiatives (e.g., open education resources) are co-opted into techno-centric, market-driven frameworks that prioritize online scalability over genuine openness. By contrast, ODDE's value lies in making design choices explicit—particularly those related to equity, access, and learner support—thereby providing a coherent response to the fragmented terminological landscape (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

Seen through a critical design lens, the tension surrounding ODDE terminology may not be a failure of definition but a symptom of a sector that has prioritised institutional branding over pedagogical coherence. ODDE's relevance, therefore, does not depend on resolving terminological ambiguity, but on asserting purposeful design as the primary site of educational meaning.

4 Applying a critical design discourse to an ODDE case study

Building on this purposeful design reframing of ODDE as a purposeful design for distributed learners, the following practical case study examines the fully online accelerated six-week postgraduate model. The case study applies a set of foundational design questions drawn from the distance education literature. Rather than treating modality as the primary analytic category, these questions foreground learner context, experience, and engagement as the starting point for educational design. In doing so, they function both as an evaluative framework for the case study and as a transferable design heuristic for ODDE contexts.

4.1 Online accelerated postgraduate six-week models

The online accelerated postgraduate six-week model has emerged as a transformative approach in online higher education, offering a structured yet flexible alternative to traditional semester-based systems (Goode et al., 2022; Southern Cross University, 2022). This model has been embraced in various ways in Australia, the UK, the USA, Asia, Europe, and Africa (see tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix). Accelerated models typically compress traditional semester-long courses into shorter, intensive periods, often spanning 6–8 weeks. This approach enables postgraduate students to earn their degree quickly (Martin et al., 2020). It also builds on the assumption that students can balance study with work and family commitments. By doing so, adult learners can obtain relevant qualifications that help them advance or accelerate their study and career outcomes.

Fully online accelerated postgraduate models embody ODDE values by offering flexible enrollment, accommodating diverse learners like working professionals, and scaling efficiently through digital platforms, aligning with ODDE's inclusivity and scalability goals (Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023). Moore's (2007) transactional distance theory supports this, as these models' blend of structure and dialogue can lessen the sense of separation between learners and instructors. Complementing this are longstanding adult learning principles which emphasize that mature learners approach education differently due to their accumulated life experiences, self-direction, and practical needs (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Kolb, 1984).

The models rely on digital tools, such as learning management systems, synchronous conferencing technology, and asynchronous forums, to facilitate flexible learning, ideal for postgraduate learners juggling professional and personal commitments. Martin et al. (2020) describe these as "bichronous," blending asynchronous self-paced study with synchronous real-time interactions, such as webinars, to balance flexibility with engagement. Some other types of accelerated models have shorter term timeframes (e.g., five to six-week terms with the University of Phoenix), or longer term blocks (e.g., six-month terms with Western Governors University, or 15-week terms with Open University UK).

As Australian academics working in this model for over 15 years, we approach this work from an Australian context. In the online postgraduate space in Australia, Keypath Education partners with 11 Australian universities. Open Universities Australia partners with 28 Australian universities. Online Education Service partners with ten Australian universities. It is also common practice for Australian universities to deliver accelerated models in partnerships with Online Program Managers (OPM). Shah & Lim (2024) indicated that 33 of the 42 Australian universities provide over 850 courses through OPMs. The majority of these institutions target domestic students with their online offerings. However, it is also becoming common practice for universities to extend their accelerated offerings offshore.

4.2 Case study framing: Using design questions to enable ODDE concepts

The online accelerated postgraduate six-week model has emerged as a transformative approach in online higher education, offering a structured yet flexible alternative to the traditional semester model.

The case study is framed by a set of questions that support purposeful design for distributed learners, including:

- Who are our learners?
- Where are they located?
- What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring?
- And what modes of access and engagement best support their learning?

Taken together, these questions reflect enduring concerns within distance education regarding learner heterogeneity, contextual constraints, and the alignment between pedagogical intent and modes of access. They also foreground design as a relational practice—one that emerges from the interaction between learners, technologies, institutional structures, and pedagogical values.

In the sections that follow, we respond to each question by describing how to use the question within the context, followed by supporting literature that responds to the question. This approach provides an illustrative rationale for the role of purposeful design for distributed learners within ODDE.

4.2.1 Who are our learners?

When considering who our learners are, the design perspective encourages educators to look beyond simplistic categorisations. Rather than viewing students as merely remote individuals seeking flexible options, this design approach recognises learners as complex individuals with unique backgrounds, needs, and preferences (LeBlanc, 2025). This shift prompts the development of detailed learner personas and thorough needs analyses, leading to more adaptable and personalised learning journeys and anchoring it to why learner identity matters for design.

The accelerated six-week postgraduate model is explicitly designed for learners who are already professionally situated and, for some universities, academically prepared. These learners are typically time-poor, goal-oriented, and strategically enrolled, seeking rapid progression and clear alignment between study and professional practice. Research on accelerated and block models indicates that such learners value concentrated focus and reduced cognitive switching, particularly when studying one unit at a time (RMIT University, 2024; Yang et al., 2017). However, evidence from Southern Cross University and comparable implementations suggests that this assumed readiness is unevenly distributed. While equity cohorts—including low socio-economic status, first-in-family, and non-English-speaking background students—often show

strong gains under block models (Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021; Loton et al., 2020), other groups, particularly novice or international learners, may experience increased cognitive load and adjustment challenges (Goode et al., 2022; Irvine et al., 2020). From a design perspective, this underscores the need to assume learner autonomy without assuming homogeneity, positioning learner identity as a critical determinant of pace, assessment design, and support structures.

4.2.2 Where are they located?

The question of where learners are located takes on new meaning under this design paradigm. Instead of focusing solely on geographical distance, the design approach considers the broader distributed learning context, including various environments such as homes, workplaces, and public spaces. Consequently, educators are challenged to create learning experiences that are effective and engaging across diverse settings, emphasising context-aware and adaptable design rather than merely overcoming physical distance. To do this, the field needs to move from simply stating “fully online” or “geographically dispersed” and instead, connect location to constraints and opportunities.

Learner location in this model is best understood not merely as geographical dispersion, but as a condition of distributed participation across time, professional contexts, and domestic spaces. Students engage from workplaces, homes, and regions affected by infrastructural instability or environmental disruption, as evidenced by Southern Cross University’s post-2022 flood experience, where online accelerated delivery supported continuity and retention. Such contexts demand design approaches that prioritise asynchronous-first engagement, predictable weekly rhythms, and flexible participation windows across time zones. However, location also intersects with uneven access to digital infrastructure. Persistent inequities in bandwidth, device availability, and learning environments—particularly in regional, low-socioeconomic status, and Global South contexts—limit the extent to which accelerated models can deliver equitable access without additional design and support interventions (Southern Cross University, 2024; Yang et al., 2017). From an ODDE perspective, location thus becomes a socio-temporal design constraint rather than a logistical problem to be solved through modality alone.

4.2.3 What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring?

Understanding what prior knowledge and experiences learners bring becomes crucial in the proposed purposeful design approach. Moving away from assumptions of a homogeneous learner base, this perspective values the diverse backgrounds of students. It encourages the creation of flexible learning pathways and diagnostic tools that can accommodate and leverage different levels of prior knowledge, helping learners connect new information with their existing experiences and contexts. This is where institutions can most clearly demonstrate learner-centred design and move beyond simplistic assumptions that students have professional experience and toward how that experience is *activated* pedagogically (LeBlanc, 2025).

The design of fully online accelerated postgraduate six-week models explicitly leverages learners’ prior professional knowledge as a pedagogical resource rather than a prerequisite to be assessed. Case-based learning, workplace-aligned assessments, and applied projects enable learners to integrate theory with practice, drawing on existing expertise and location to deepen engagement within compressed timeframes. Evidence from Southern Cross University and similar programs indicates high levels of student satisfaction where experiential knowledge is foregrounded and legitimised within assessment design (Southern Cross University, 2021). At the same time, research cautions that such approaches may be less effective in disciplines requiring extended conceptual development or cumulative knowledge building, raising questions about the

transferability of the model across STEM and humanities contexts (Roche et al., 2024). A purposeful design ODDE lens, therefore, positions prior knowledge not as a uniform asset, but as a variable to be intentionally mobilised, scaffolded, or supplemented depending on disciplinary and learner characteristics.

4.2.4 What modes of access and engagement best support their learning?

This question directs attention to the modes of access and engagement that most effectively support learning. Here, access is not understood merely as the availability of platforms or technologies, but as the degree of alignment between learners’ contexts, pedagogical intentions, and the design of learning engagements.

The modes of access and engagement adopted in accelerated six-week postgraduate models reflect a deliberate balance between structure and flexibility, consistent with ODDE principles. One access and engagement consideration is when and how content is accessed. This can be best illustrated by deliberate choices for curriculum design, such as one-unit-per-term designs, and pedagogical design, such as active learning. Both choices are known to reduce cognitive overload, support sustained focus, and result in better academic outcomes than passive instructional approaches in short-format and online courses (Freeman et al., 2014; Lamon et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2017). Another access and engagement consideration is how students access their teachers in the accelerated model. Teaching presence is designed with the perception of constant availability through asynchronous interaction and synchronous moments that are predictable, scaffolded, and timely, mitigating a transactional distance outcome (Moore, 2007). This requires consideration for the teaching voice, including instructor actions embedded in the asynchronous course design and those enacted during the delivery of the course in response to specific circumstances (Van Wart et al., 2020). This is often enabled through less traditional academic workforce models that unbundle the role of the teacher (Gilmore & Nguyen, 2023). In addition, the intensity of these modes amplifies the importance of robust support systems that offer a holistic approach to teaching. For example, evidence indicates that tutoring, advising, and academic skill development significantly influence success in accelerated formats, yet their availability remains uneven across institutions and regions (Hardt et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2024). Where such supports are absent or under-resourced, accelerated engagement designs risk academic quality and exacerbate burnout and attrition, particularly for learners with limited prior experience in online study (Gilmore, 2023; Stone et al., 2021).

In summary, these purposeful design questions foreground core ODDE concepts in ways that decouple them from contested nomenclature, allowing attention to shift from labels of delivery to the purposeful design of learning, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions to guide purposeful design for distributed learners

| Design Question | ODDE concepts foregrounded |
|--|--|
| Who are our learners? | Learner-centredness; learner autonomy; equity and inclusion; heterogeneity of learner identities and needs |
| Where are they located | Openness across time and place; access; flexibility; socio-temporal context of learning |
| What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring? | Recognition of experiential knowledge; dialogue; social construction of knowledge; relevance and authenticity |
| What modes of access and engagement best support their learning? | Transactional distance (structure, dialogue, autonomy); interaction; learner support; pedagogical intentionality |

Viewed collectively, these design decisions demonstrate how ODDE principles can be enacted without reliance on modality-based descriptors. And, the accelerated online model illustrates how attention to learner context, experience, and engagement can function as a coherent design framework—one that is both grounded in the distance education tradition and responsive to contemporary higher education conditions.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper shifts the conversation away from increasingly imprecise and contested terminology toward design questions that foreground purposeful learning for distributed students. The historical ethos of open and distance education—grounded in access, flexibility, and learner-centred pedagogy (Lewis, 1986; Lewis & Spencer, 1986)—remains highly relevant in global higher education. However, the legacy terms “open” and “distance” no longer adequately capture or advance pedagogical practice in contemporary digital contexts.

Building on the work of Nichols and others (LeBlanc, 2025; Mishra & Panda, 2025; Nichols, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2025; Naidu, 2025), this paper contributes to the conversation by reframing the discussion around key design questions: Who are our learners? Where are they located? What prior knowledge and experiences do they bring? And what modes of access and engagement best support their learning?

Accordingly, the focus moves from delivery modality to purposeful design that recognises learner diversity, agency, and context. Within this framing, flexibility is not treated as an operational convenience or a response to market pressures, but as a design commitment that enables meaningful engagement for distributed learners. This perspective is illustrated through a postgraduate case study of a fully online accelerated model, demonstrating how such principles can be enacted in practice. Lastly, we proposed reframing ODDE through the lens of purposeful design for distributed learners, an approach guided by questions that ultimately support *all* learners, regardless of context.

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Appendix

| Aspect | Australia | UK | USA | Asia | Europe | Africa |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| Key Partnerships | Broad reach (e.g., UNSW, RMIT with Keypath, OES); focus on postgraduate programs | Elite UK institutions (e.g., Exeter, London with Keypath, 2U); TNE emphasis | Mix of elite (e.g., USC with 2U, AP) and regional (e.g., UT Arlington with AP) | Prestigious hubs (e.g., NUS with 2U) and TNE (e.g., Deakin via FutureLearn) | Leading UK (e.g., Exeter) and Western Europe (e.g., IE Spain with 2U) | South Africa focus (e.g., UCT with FutureLearn); pan-African (UNICAF) |
| Term Structure | 6-8 weeks common (e.g., Monash 6-week); 6 terms/year consistent | 6-8 weeks emerging (e.g., Kaplan's Essex Online); less standardised than Australia | 6-8 weeks standard (e.g., Phoenix 5-6 weeks); 6 terms prevalent | 6-8 weeks emerging (e.g., Keypath); 6-12 weeks flexible (upGrad) | 6-8 weeks growing (e.g., Keypath); 6-12 weeks common (FutureLearn) | 6-8 weeks rare (e.g., GetSmarter); 6-12 weeks flexible (UNICAF) |
| Services Provided | Full-service OPMs dominate (e.g., Keypath, OES); SEEK integration for OES | Full-service (e.g., Kaplan) vs. platform focus (FutureLearn) | Full-service dominant (e.g., 2U, AP); Coursera blends MOOCs and degrees | Full-service (Keypath) vs. platforms (Coursera) and upskilling (upGrad) | Full-service (2U) vs. platforms (FutureLearn) and executive (Eruditus) | Platforms (Coursera) and short courses (GetSmarter); UNICAF hybrid |
| Funding Model | Revenue-sharing dominant (40-60%, e.g., Keypath, OES) aligning with high-OPM adoption | Revenue-sharing (e.g., 2U) alongside fee-for-service (FutureLearn), reflecting flexibility | Revenue-sharing (50-60%, e.g., 2U) facing pushback; fee-for-service rising | Fee-for-service (Coursera) more common than revenue-sharing (2U) | Diverse: mix of revenue-sharing (Keypath) and fee-for-service (FutureLearn); nonprofit (Kiron) | Fee-for-service (Coursera) and scholarships (UNICAF); revenue-sharing rare |
| Market Impact | High adoption (33/42 universities with OPMs); OES leads locally with over 850 courses showcasing scale | Nearly 50% of UK universities partnered; Kaplan, FutureLearn prominent | 550+ colleges, 2,900+ programs (GAO, 2022); market saturation | Nascent but growing (e.g., India via Coursera); TNE significant, but lag behind TNE | Less mature; FutureLearn, Coursera lead via TNE and scale over OPMs | Limited penetration; Coursera, UNICAF lead in access-driven growth |
| Critical Observations | Australia leads in OPM adoption and acceleration; Crowded market risks redundancy; quality vs. profit tension | Slower shift to acceleration; quality scrutiny on rapid terms | USA leads in OPM adoption and acceleration. Consolidation (e.g., AP-Wiley) and regulation (ED, 2023) reshaping market | TNE and MOOCs dominate over OPMs; quality risks in short terms | Fragmented adoption; TNE drives growth over local OPMs | Nascent market; rely on TNE and platforms; access prioritized over acceleration; quality gaps |

Table A.1 categorises these models across Australia, the UK, the USA, Asia, Europe, and Africa, detailing key aspects such as partnerships, term structures, services, funding models, market impact, and critical observations.

| Institution | Structure | Delivery Method | Target Audience | Outcomes |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Southern Cross University (SCM) | 6-week terms, 1-2 units per term, up to 6 intakes/year, institution-wide, W1-6 teaching, W7-8 break | Fully online via Blackboard, Zoom; immersive active learning (case studies, workshops), AI tools | Non-traditional learners (working adults, regional, first-in-family) | 88% pass rate, 17% completion increase, 92% satisfaction (Southern Cross University, 2022; 2024a) |
| Victoria University (VU Block Model) | 4-week blocks, 1 unit per block, 8 blocks/year, at uni 3 days per week for 3 hrs at a time, 3-day assessment turnaround, institution-wide; | Hybrid (on-campus + online via VU Collaborate), active learning (tutorials, practical tasks) | Diverse undergraduates, working adults | 10-12% pass rate increase, improved retention, slight satisfaction dip (Loton et al., 2022) |
| Hexamester Model: RMIT Online/VU Online/UNSW Online (Keypath model) | 6-week terms, 1-2 units per term, up to 6 intakes/year, Week 0, W1-6 teaching, W7 assessment | Fully online via Keypath Education via Blackboard/Canvas, Zoom; project-based active learning | IT/business/design professionals | Significant enrollment growth since 2019, specific metrics less publicized (HolonIQ, 2022) |
| University of Phoenix (Online Model) | 5-6 week terms, 1 unit per term, up to 12 start dates/year | Fully online via proprietary platform; asynchronous content, live sessions, practical focus; Blackboard LMS | Working adults, career switchers | High accessibility (1M+ graduates), 38% bachelor's completion rate (EdSurge, 2024; U.S. News) |
| Western Governors University (Competency-Based Model) | Self-paced, 6-month terms, two terms per year, monthly starts on the first day of any month | Fully online via custom platform; on-demand resources, mentor support, competency-based assessments | Adult learners, working professionals | 75% bachelor's completion, 95% employer satisfaction (WGU, 2024) |
| Open University UK (Block and Flexible Model) | Two 15-week semesters per year | Fully online via FutureLearn, VLE; self-study with tutor support, optional live tutorials | Lifelong learners, part-time students | 76% degree completion, 150,000+ students annually (OU, 2024) |
| Southern New Hampshire (Competency-based model) | six 8-week undergraduate terms annually; five 10-week graduate term, accelerating completion | Career-Aligned Active Learning; Brightspace LMS; Asynchronous focus with weekly instructor check-ins via Zoom; Continuous competency assessment via practical tasks (e.g., portfolios) and quizzes, minimizing exams; Dedicated advisors, 24/7 tech support, and peer forums, building on SNHU's student-centric reputation. | working professionals | 68% campus graduation rate (U.S. News, 2024) |
| Open College Australia (Competency-Based Model) | Vocational units (e.g., Certificate III in Business) delivered in six-week blocks, with rolling monthly intakes. Option to stack into diplomas over 12-18 months. | Practical, Self-Directed Learning. Focus on hands-on tasks (e.g., bookkeeping exercises) via asynchronous videos and simulations. Minimal live interaction, emphasizing independence; OpenSpace LMS; Competency assessment tied to industry standards, no exams; Success coaches available via email/phone, supplemented by online forums. | Learners targeting rapid skill acquisitions | |
| Open University Australia (OUA) | four continuous OUA study periods (OUA study periods 1-4). Each study period is 13 weeks duration and includes a one-week break. | OUA's platform integrates partner university LMSs (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas), with mobile access. | Everyone | completion rates varying by partner (e.g., 60-80%) |

Table A.2 consolidates this research into nine distinct accelerated and block education models, including Southern Cross University (SCM), Victoria University (VU Block Model), the Hexamester Model (used by RMIT Online, VU Online, and UNSW Online via Keypath), University of Phoenix (Online Model), Western Governors University (Competency-Based Model), Open University UK (Block and Flexible Model), Southern New Hampshire (Competency-Based Model), Open College Australia (Competency-Based Model), and Open University Australia (OUA).