Analysing the Need for Distance Learning:
a Tool Developed in the Context of a European Project

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Abstract

In 2002, the European Commission approved a project "I AM L3", dealing with open and distance learning in adult education. The purpose of this project is to provide prospective providers with tools to analyse their needs and with strategies to successfully implement ODL. In this paper, we report on the results obtained by the task force that focused on the analysing tool. More specifically, we discuss the variables identified as input to the expert system - the core of the analysing tool.

Content

In 2002, the European Commission approved a project "I AM L3, Introducing Appropriate Methodologies for Life Long Learning", dealing with open and distance learning in adult education. The project is funded under project number 100258-CP-2002-1-BE-GRUNDTVIG-G1. The authors of this paper were assigned as content managers for the project.

The aim of the project is to implement a database of ODL products, to implement an application allowing institutes of adult education to find ODL products appropriate to their specific situation, to write a manual containing a theoretical framework as well as examples of good practice and to design courses and to offer in-service training based on the manual

In this paper, we report on the analysing tool. This tool consists of a checklist of variables, presented to the prospective provider of ODL through a dynamic website.

First, we discuss the methodological issues involved in putting together the list of variables. Next, we present the different categories of the variables:

- context variables
    - provider
    - target group
    - content
    - course
    - class
    - infrastructure
    - support
    - legal aspects
    - budget
    - …
- needs and wishes
    - type of ODL
    - interaction
    - learning styles
    - content
    - learning outcomes
    - functions of LMS
    - standards
    - return on investment
    - …

We will then discuss some of the 250+ variables subsumed under these categories. We will focus especially on variables that are relevant to the success of ODL. Finally, we will introduce the audience to the tools on the project's website.