

Willa Louw, Bureau for Learning Development, University of South Africa, South Africa

Dr Willa Louw is currently the coordinator for learning development at the Institute for Curriculum and Learning Development (ICLD) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Due to prior work place experience in journalism and teaching, distance education is close to her heart. She also has previous experience as lecturer, lecturing academic skills and languages for many years. Presently she is involved in the development of study material for Outcomes-Based Education in distance education as part of the national curriculum paradigm followed in South Africa.



Taking the Distance Out of Distance Education through the Means of mLearning

How do you react when you receive a short message system (SMS) from the university where you are enrolled? You probably would feel excited to be part this new adventure called learning, which is described by Lusunzi (1998:1) as "The success of the beaming process is increasingly measured by the high number of satisfied customers and low number of drop-outs, and not pedagogical imperatives".

"A course is much more than a package of study materials... they (the learners) must be supported in various ways. They may be distant from their teaching institution, but they must not be isolated" (Dhanarajan: 1996).

The aim of this panel discussion is to determine if learner support through mLearning will help the learner to feel less alienated and to see how SMS's can be best implemented in the Distance Education environment so that it is beneficial for all learners.

One of the most effective means of support in the distance learning environment is to make contact with the learner, anything that will bring the lecturer and the learner closer together where there could be a "meeting of minds" (Lusunzi, 1998:7). As this student struggle to cope with all this information as well as the demands of learning by a distance they come to realize that they need help, so much so that without intervention they might drop out (Molefi, 1999).

Through mobile support, learners' throughput rates might be improved and the quality of the learning experience enhanced. Active learning might immerse where previously inactive studying took place.

