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Title : The 'Intellectual Structure' of Online Distance Education – Towards a Research Agenda

Synopsis:

This presentation is an attempt to describe the 'intellectual structure' of the distance education discipline towards a research agenda. Publication of research results in peer-reviewed journals is the most important means of dissemination, discourse and application to practice in the discipline of distance education. However, there has been little work analyzing the relationships and influence among these journals. The journal network presented here as a 'communication system' is a contribution to a better understanding of the relationships and patterns of scientific information exchange in distance education. This bibliographic study is based upon a sample of 1,416 scholarly articles published over 6 years in the 12 most widely cited international distance education journals. The results help us understand the regional, international, impact and influence factors related to publication in these journals and across the discipline.

Furthermore, research questions should be posed within a theoretical framework embedded in a validated structure of research areas. In this presentation a validated classification with 15 research areas is proposed that was developed through expert responses in a Delphi study. Based on this structure, a literature review was carried out (N=695 full papers published in five prominent distance education journals) to identify gaps and priority areas in distance education research.