Asynchronous web-based technologies to support learning

by

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2001
Abstract

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Title: Asynchronous web-based technologies to support learning

This dissertation reports on an investigation into three web-based technologies to determine their usefulness and the extent to which they support learning. The study comprises three case studies, each examining a separate web-based technology, suitable for diverse groups of learners in terms of age group and background. The main contribution is to determine for whom and how these technologies could be used, with the intention of providing a systematic structure of web-learning possibilities for learners of different ages (children, undergraduates and postgraduates) and types of teaching (contact teaching and distance learning).

It was found that web-based technologies could support learning. Their usefulness depends on how the instructional design addresses the different aspects of web-based learning, and whether or not the course and web-based material match the characteristics/needs of the target group.

Key words: web-based learning; web-based technologies; collaborative learning; educational web sites; course management systems; web-based classrooms; learners’ characteristics; children; undergraduates; postgraduates; adult learning.
**Samevatting**

Kandidaat: Gabrielle Joy de Villiers  
Promotor: Prof. Dr J.C. Cronjé  
Departement: Inligtingkunde  
Graad: MA (Inligtingkunde)  
Titel: Asinkroniseerde webgebaseerde tegnologieë om leer te ondersteun

In hierdie verhandeling word verslag gedoen oor ‘n ondersoek na drie webgebaseerde tegnologieë, om hul bruikbaarheid te bepaal asook die mate waarin hulle leer ondersteun. Die studie bestaan uit drie afsonderlike gevallestudies waarin ‘n webgebaseerde tegnologie ondersoek word wat geskik is vir diverse groepe leerders in terme van ouderdomsgroep en agtergrond. Die hoofbydrae is om vas te stel vir wie, en hoe hierdie tegnologieë gebruik kan word, met die doel om ‘n sistematiese struktuur van web-leermoontlikhede te voorsien vir leerders van verskillende ouderdomme (kinders, voorgraadse en nagraadse studente) en verskillende tipes onderrig (kontakonderrig en afstandsonderrig).

Daar is bevind dat webgebaseerde tegnologieë leer kon ondersteun. Hul bruikbaarheid is afhanklik van hoe die instrusionele ontwerp verskillende aspekte van webgebaseerde leer aanspreek, en of die kursus en webgebaseerde materiaal aan die eienskappe/behoeftes van die teikengroep voldoen of nie.

**Sleutelwoorde:** webgebaseerde leer; webgebaseerde tegnologieë; samewerkende leer; onderwys-webwerwe; kursusbestuursisteeme; webgebaseerde klaskamers; leerders se kenmerke; kinders; voorgraadse studente; nagraadse studente; volwasse leer.
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# Brief Table of Contents

Abstract  
Samevatting  
Acknowledgements  
Brief Table of Contents  
Detailed Table of Contents  
List of Figures  
List of Tables  
List of Abbreviations  
List of Appendices  
Definition of Terms  
1. Introduction  
2. Literature review  
3. Case Study 1: Investigation of an educational web site  
4. Case Study 2: Investigation of a web-based CMS delivered by *WebCT*  
5. Case Study 3: Investigation of a postgraduate web-based classroom  
6. Conclusions and recommendations  
References  
Appendices
# Detailed Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samevatting</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Table of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Table of Contents</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Research problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Aim of research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Objectives of the research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Research questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Previous research</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Value of research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Methodology</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8.1 Research design</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8.2 Data collection methods</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Limitations of this study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Specific exclusion from this study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11 Outline of the dissertation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12 Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Aspects to consider for web-based technologies

2.2.1 Pedagogical/andragogical aspects

2.2.1.1 Pedagogical and andragogical didactic situations

2.2.1.2 Objectivist and constructivist epistemology

2.2.1.3 Collaborative learning

2.2.2 Affective/emotional aspects

2.2.3 Communicative aspects

2.2.3.1 Instructional/content interactivity

2.2.3.2 Social interactivity

2.2.4 Technological aspects

2.2.4.1 Benefits and limitations of web-based material

2.2.4.2 Types of CMC

2.2.4.3 Technological benefits and limitations of CMC

2.3 Distinguishing characteristics of learners of different age groups, and the differences and similarities between these age groups in the context of web-based technologies

2.3.1 Characteristics of children as learners

2.3.2 Characteristics of undergraduate learners

2.3.3 Characteristics of postgraduate learners

2.4 Learning possibilities for children, undergraduates and postgraduates in the context of web-based technologies

2.4.1 Children

2.4.2 Undergraduates and postgraduates

2.4.3 Learner characteristics and design implications

2.5 Web-learning possibilities for contact teaching and distance learning

2.5.1 Contact teaching

2.5.2 Distance learning

2.6 Summary
### 3. Case study 1: Investigation of an educational web site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Research questions</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Literature review</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Motivational aspects of children’s web sites</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Evaluation of educational web sites</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Context and research design</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 International and national context</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Institutional context and research design</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Method</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Specifics of <em>Plane Math</em></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1 Nature of tutorial</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Results</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1 Pedagogical aspects</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1.1 What was the response of the children with regard to their own learning?</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1.2 How relevant is <em>Plane Math</em> to the school curriculum?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2 Affective/emotional aspects</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2.1 Did the children enjoy their learning experience?</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.3 Communicative aspects</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.3.1 To what extent does the site employ adequate Instructional Design (ID) principles?</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.3.2 To what extent does the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) promote learning or hinder it?</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.4 Technological aspects</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.4.1 To what extent does the technology support effective use?</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Summary</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Recommendations</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Case study 2: Investigation of a web-based CMS delivered by WebCT

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Research questions

4.3 Literature review

4.3.1 Instructional/content interactivity

4.3.2 Social interactivity

4.4 Context

4.4.1 International

4.4.2 National context

4.4.3 Institutional context and target population

4.4.3.1 Systems Development course

4.4.3.2 Maintenance Management course

4.5 Method

4.6 Specifics of WebCT

4.7 Results

4.7.1 Andragogical aspects

4.7.1.1 To what extent is WebCT an aid/obstacle to learners’ learning

4.7.1.2 Were learners satisfied with the nature of the feedback they received from their instructors via WebCT?

4.7.1.3 To what extent can collaborative learning be effectively stimulated on WebCT, using the bulletin board feature?

4.7.2 Affective/emotional aspects

4.7.2.1 What are learners' first impressions of WebCT?

4.7.2.2 What emotions, likes and dislikes do learners experience when using WebCT?

4.7.3 Communicative aspects

4.7.3.1 To what extent is WebCT user-friendly?

4.7.3.2 To what extent is WebCT an effective means of delivery?

4.7.3.3 What method of communication do learners prefer?
4.7.3.4 To what extent do learners value a bulletin board? 116

4.7.4 Technological aspects 118

4.7.4.1 What technological problems did learners/instructors encounter when using WebCT? 118

4.8 Learners’ comments matched against their characteristics 120

4.9 Summary 121

4.10 Recommendations 122

4.11 New features 124

5. Case study 3: Investigation of a postgraduate web-based classroom 125

5.1 Introduction 126

5.2 Research questions 127

5.3 Literature review 127

5.4 Context 131

5.4.1 International context 131

5.4.2 National context 131

5.4.3 Institutional context and target population 132

5.5 Method 135

5.6 Course outline 136

5.6.1 Background 136

5.6.2 Outcomes of the course 137

5.6.3 Components of the web-based classroom 138

5.6.4 Instructional strategy 141

5.7 Results 143

5.7.1 Andragogical aspects 143

5.7.1.1 To what extent was the course, with no face-to-face contact, effective in supporting the needs and learning of postgraduate learners? 143

5.7.1.2 To what extent can collaborative learning be effectively stimulated on the Internet? 146
5.7.2  Affective/emotional aspects
   5.7.2.1  What emotions, likes and dislikes do postgraduate learners experience in a fully online course?

5.7.3  Communicative aspects
   5.7.3.1  How effective was the design of the web-based material in facilitating learning?
   5.7.3.2  What features characterised the human-human interaction?

5.7.4  Technological aspects
   5.7.4.1  What technological problems are encountered in a fully online course?

5.8  Summary

5.9  Recommendations

6.  Conclusions and recommendations

6.1  Introduction

6.2  What role do the aspects under investigation play in web-based technologies?
   6.2.1  Pedagogical/andragogical aspects
   6.2.2  Affective/emotional aspects
      6.2.2.1  Motivation
      6.2.2.2  Satisfaction
      6.2.2.3  Frustration
      6.2.2.4  Conflict
   6.2.3  Communicative aspects
      6.2.3.1  Instructional/content interactivity
      6.2.3.2  Social interactivity
   6.2.4  Technological aspects
6.3 What are the distinguishing characteristics of learners of different age groups, and what are the differences and similarities between these age groups in the context of web-based technologies? 179
6.3.1 Children 179
6.3.2 Undergraduate learners 181
6.3.3 Postgraduate learners 181

6.4 What are the learning possibilities for children, undergraduates and postgraduates in the context of web-based technologies? 184
6.4.1 Educational web sites 185
6.4.2 Web-based CMSs 188
6.4.3 Web-based classrooms 191
6.4.4 Discussion lists/bulletin boards 193
6.4.5 E-mail 195

6.5 What are the web-learning possibilities for contact teaching and distance learning? 196
6.5.1 Contact teaching 197
6.5.2 Distance learning 199

6.6 Gaps in this study 201
6.6.1 Response of different groups 201
6.6.2 Collaborative group activities 201

6.7 Challenges arising 202
6.7.1 Contact teaching 202
6.7.2 Distance learning 202
6.7.3 Contact teaching and distance learning 202

6.8 Concluding remarks 203

References 204
Appendices 215
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Overview of the study 5
Figure 1.2 Diagrammatic illustration of the outline of the dissertation 14

Figure 2.1 Application of web-based technologies for different age groups and types of teaching 17
Figure 2.2 Pedagogical and andragogical didactic situations 21
Figure 2.3 Four quadrants of teaching and learning 24

Figure 3.1 Location of the two schools within South Africa 66
Figure 3.2 Screen capture from Plane Math 71
Figure 3.3 Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to pedagogical aspects 74
Figure 3.4 Children’s confidence levels 75
Figure 3.5 How Plane Math uses prior learning 76
Figure 3.6 Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to affective/emotional aspects 77
Figure 3.7 Children’s attitude to using Plane Math 79
Figure 3.8 Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to instructional adequacy 81
Figure 3.9 Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to cosmetic adequacy 83

Figure 4.1 Opening screen of WebCT 97
Figure 4.2 Screen capture of course content 97
Figure 4.3 Screen capture of bulletin board 98
Figure 4.4 WebCT – aid or obstacle? 100
Figure 4.5 Learners’ view on whether the online discussion facilitated collaborative learning 103
Figure 4.6   Classification of learners’ communication on the bulletin board 104
Figure 4.7   Learners’ first impressions of WebCT 106
Figure 4.8   User-friendliness of WebCT 113
Figure 4.9   The effectiveness of WebCT as a means of delivery 114
Figure 4.10  Method of communication learners prefer 115
Figure 4.11  Value attached by learners to a bulletin board 116

Figure 5.1   Opening screen of the web-based classroom 139
Figure 5.2   Extract from the bulletin board 141
Figure 5.3   Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to andragogical aspects 144
Figure 5.4   Opening screen of “inFLAMation” 147
Figure 5.5   Character of Susie 148
Figure 5.6   Calvin’s view of a flame 148
Figure 5.7   Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to affective/emotional aspects 151
Figure 5.8   Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to instructional/content interactivity 156
Figure 5.9   Areas of difference between the two groups, with regard to social interactivity 158
Figure 5.10  Classification of learners’ communication 159
## List of Tables

| Table 1.1 | Major research questions | 3 |
| Table 1.2 | Subquestions relating to the aspects under investigation in the various case studies | 6 |
| Table 1.3 | Related research topics | 9 |
| Table 1.4 | Data collection methods | 11 |
| Table 1.5 | Matrix of research questions and methods | 12 |
| Table 1.6 | Outline of dissertation | 13 |

| Table 2.1 | Five levels of web use in education | 19 |
| Table 2.2 | Terms associated with constructivism | 23 |
| Table 2.3 | Differences in learning between the objectivist and constructivist epistemology | 23 |
| Table 2.4 | Features of collaborative learning | 25 |
| Table 2.5 | Content and social interactivity | 29 |
| Table 2.6 | Benefits of CMC for learning | 34 |
| Table 2.7 | Limitations of CMC for learning | 35 |
| Table 2.8 | Benefits and limitations of web-based material | 36 |
| Table 2.9 | Technologies incorporated in asynchronous communication | 38 |
| Table 2.10 | Differences between a discussion list and a bulletin board | 39 |
| Table 2.11 | Technological benefits and limitations of CMC, and its design implications | 40 |
| Table 2.12 | Groups of learners and their generations | 41 |
| Table 2.13 | Characteristics of Generation X | 45 |
| Table 2.14 | Characteristics of adult learners | 46 |
| Table 2.15 | Differences between the different group of learners | 48 |
| Table 2.16 | Web-based technologies and their application for undergraduates and postgraduates | 52 |
| Table 2.17 | Characteristics of children, undergraduates and postgraduates and design implications | 53 |
Table 3.1 Research questions and their respective categories 60
Table 3.2 Motivational elements within web sites for children 62
Table 3.3 Description of the target population 73
Table 3.4 Children’s response to their own learning 74
Table 3.5 Curriculum adequacy 76
Table 3.6 Motivational effectiveness 77
Table 3.7 Instructional adequacy 81
Table 3.8 Cosmetic adequacy 83
Table 3.9 Most important differences between the two groups of children 84

Table 4.1 Subquestions relating to aspects under investigation in Case Study 2 88
Table 4.2 General web principles 90
Table 4.3 Description of learners using the web-based CMS 99
Table 4.4 Possible factors accounting for the difference in learners’ response 101
Table 4.5 Undergraduates’ comments regarding feedback 102
Table 4.6 Learners’ comments regarding their first impressions 107
Table 4.7 Learners’ comments regarding their feelings about WebCT 109
Table 4.8 Value learners attached to the bulletin board 117
Table 4.9 Learners’ problems with technology 119
Table 4.10 Instructor’s problems with technology 119
Table 4.11 Characteristics of Xers matched against their comments 120
Table 4.12 Characteristics of adult learners matched against their comments 121

Table 5.1 Subquestions relating to aspects under investigation in Case Study 3 127
Table 5.2 Description of the learners participating in the web-based classroom 132
Table 5.3 Andragogical aspects 144
Table 5.4 Positive factors that contributed to collaborative tasks 149
Table 5.5 Factors that were counterproductive in collaborative tasks 150
Table 5.6 Affective/emotional aspects 151
Table 5.7 Instructional/content interactivity 156
Table 5.8 Social interactivity
Table 5.9 Learners’ experience of interaction
Table 5.10 Technological aspects

Table 6.1 Target population of learners in each case study
Table 6.2 Principles derived from the case studies
Table 6.3 Feedback each group received and expected
Table 6.4 The Millennial Generation learners’ experience of *Plane Math*
Table 6.5 Generation X learners’ experience of *WebCT*
Table 6.6 Postgraduate learners’ experiences of *RBO* and the Maintenance Management course
Table 6.7 Characteristics of learners of different age groups
Table 6.8 Web-learning possibilities for educational web sites targeted at different age groups
Table 6.9 Implications of educational web sites for instructional design and promotion of learning for different age groups
Table 6.10 Web-learning possibilities for web-based CMSs targeted at tertiary learners
Table 6.11 Implications of web-based CMSs for instructional design and promotion of learning for tertiary learners
Table 6.12 Web-learning possibilities for web-based classrooms targeted at tertiary learners
Table 6.13 Implications of web-based classrooms for instructional design and promotion of learning for tertiary learners
Table 6.14 Web-learning possibilities for discussion lists/bulletin boards targeted at different age groups
Table 6.15 Implications of discussions lists/bulletins boards for instructional design and promotion of learning for tertiary learners
Table 6.16 Web-learning possibilities for e-mail targeted at different age groups
Table 6.17 Implications of e-mail for instructional design and promotion of learning for different age groups
| Table 6.18 | Web-learning possibilities for contact teaching and its implication for instructional design and promotion of learning | 198 |
| Table 6.19 | Web-learning possibilities for distance learning and their implication for instructional design and promotion of learning | 200 |
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGI</td>
<td>Common Gateway Interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIE</td>
<td>Computer-Integrated Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Course Management System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTP</td>
<td>File Transfer Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCI</td>
<td>Human-Computer Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTS</td>
<td>Higher order thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTML</td>
<td>Hypertext Mark-up Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Instructional Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCTM</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Outcomes-Based Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAQA</td>
<td>South African Qualifications Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBI</td>
<td>Web-based instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWW/Web</td>
<td>World Wide Web</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td><em>Plane Math</em> questionnaire</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Expert review checklist for <em>Plane Math</em></td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td><em>WebCT</em> questionnaire</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td><em>RBO</em> questionnaire</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definitions of Terms

Asynchronous communication
Where the transmitting and receiving of messages takes place at different times.

Baby Boomers
Adults born between 1941 and 1960.

Bulletin Board
An electronic area for posting, displaying and receiving information.

Collaborative learning
A learning process which emphasises group or co-operative efforts among academic staff and learners, and which stresses active participation and interaction on the part of both learners and instructors. Knowledge is viewed as a social construct and therefore the educational process is facilitated by social interaction in an environment that facilitates peer interaction, evaluation and collaboration (Hiltz, 1995).

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)
Any form of interpersonal communication that uses some form of computer technology to transmit, store, annotate, or present information created by one or more participants. It can help to achieve fundamental educational objectives such as: focusing on active learning, placing the responsibility for learning with learners, and encouraging peer review and teamwork (Wolz, 1997 in: Edwards and Clear, 2001).

Contact teaching
Traditional class teaching, supplemented by computer lab sessions.

Course Management System (CMS)
CMSs refer to tools that support the design, delivery and management of online courses (Firdyiwek, 1999).

Curriculum 2005
A curriculum based on the ideal of lifelong learning for all South Africans. It aims at equipping learners with the knowledge, competencies and orientations needed for success after they leave school or have completed their training. Its guiding vision is that of a thinking, competent future citizen (South Africa, 1997a).
Curriculum 21
A new, revised and streamlined curriculum, to replace Curriculum 2005 (Pretorius, 2000).

Discussion list
Uses list-processing software and distributes e-mail to all subscribed users on the list. It is useful for one-to-many communication. A moderator is optional (Clarke, 1998).

Distance learning
Distance learning is an instructional delivery system that connects learners with educational resources. Distance learning provides educational access to learners not enrolled in educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students. The implementation of distance learning is a process that uses available resources and will evolve to incorporate emerging technologies (Porter and Lane, 2000).

Educational web sites
Educational web sites, in this specific context, refer to web-based tutorial and practice environments.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP)
Standard method of moving files across the Internet.

Flaming
A “flame” refers to any message or article that contains strong criticisms, usually irrational or highly emotional.

Generation X
Generation X refers to people born between 1961 and 1981. They are the generation after the Baby Boomers, currently in their twenties.

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)
The discipline concerned with the design, evaluation, and implementation of interactive computing systems for human use and the study of major phenomena surrounding them (Dix et al, 1998).

Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML)
The language used to create Web documents (Kennedy, 1997).

Internet
A co-operatively run global collection of computer networks with a common addressing scheme (Kennedy, 1997). The Internet includes the World Wide Web
communication technologies (including e-mail, discussion lists, bulletin boards, newsgroups, and real time chat), File Transfer Protocol (FTP), Gopher, Telnet, and Usenet.

Instructional Design

Instructional design is the systematic design of teaching and learning environments (Liaw and Huang, 2000).

ITFORUM

An electronic discussion forum where people from around the world discuss theories, research, new paradigms, and practices in the field of Instructional Technology. The list is open to anyone interested in Instructional Technology, including postgraduate learners in the field. Leaders in the field are invited to write a short paper, which is posted on the list prior to discussion. This guest discussant remains available electronically on the list for a period of one week to discuss, debate, or answer questions from subscribers (Surry, 1994).

Lurking

The practice, particularly of “newbies” (newcomers to the Internet), of reading messages and information posted on interest newsgroups and discussion lists without posting or participating themselves (Clarke, 1998).

Millenial Generation

People born since the early 1980s (Zoba, 1997).

Open learning

Open learning strives to provide unhindered access to learning resources so that technologically-supported freedom of information may be turned into freedom of education for people pursuing their own learning needs. It emphasizes personal autonomy over studies (Kirkup and Jones, 1996 in: Edwards and Clear, 2001).

Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)

An approach which requires learners and lecturers to focus their attention on the desired end results of learning, and the teaching and learning processes that will guide learners to these end results (Geyser, 1999).

Web-based classroom

An online learning environment attached to the Web, that supports collaboration between learners through Computer-Mediated Communication, within the context of
constructivist learning. It delivers material to adult learners at locations other than
the course delivery centre, and simulates aspects of a physical environment.

Web-based technologies
Technologies that run on the Internet or the Web, including web sites, web-based
course management systems (CMSs), web-based classrooms, discussion lists, e-mail,
etc.

World Wide Web (Web)
Graphic and text documents published on the Internet that are interconnected through
clickable “hypertext” links (Kennedy, 1997).