

Oyeyemi Ololade Aitokhuehi¹

Organisational Structure of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) at Nigerian Universities

Abstract: The emergence of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria was driven by demographic shifts, increasing enrolment rates and the need for lifelong learning. The primary objectives of ODL are to provide second-chance access to quality education and promote equity by extending educational opportunities to individuals who might otherwise be excluded. ODL also leverages the expertise of existing educators, thereby helping to mitigate both internal and external brain drain in the country's tertiary institutions. The Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) has accredited five single-mode and twenty-nine dual-mode ODL institutions. This paper explores the underlying rationale, historical development and key activities of ODL institutions in Nigeria. The establishment of ODL has significantly influenced the field of adult education, enhancing access to learning, fostering innovation and collaboration, capitalising on technology-driven advantages and improving the acceptance of ODL programmes, while promoting greater autonomy.

Keywords: access, enrolment mode, open and distance learning (ODL), Nigeria

Organizaciona struktura otvorenog i učenja na daljinu na univerzitetima u Nigeriji

Apstrakt: Pojava otvorenog i učenja na daljinu (*Open and Distance Learning*, ODL) u Nigeriji bila je podstaknuta demografskim promenama, sve većim stopama upisa i potrebom za celoživotnim učenjem. Prvenstveni cilj ODL je da se na taj način obezbedi „druga šansa“ za pristup kvalitetnom obrazovanju i unapredi pravičnost pružanjem mogućnosti za obrazovanje pojedincima koji bi inače iz njega bili isključeni. U sistemu ODL se koristi stručnost postojećih predavača, što doprinosi ublažavanju i unutrašnjeg i spoljnog odliva mozгова iz visokoškolskih ustanova u zemlji. Nigerijska Nacionalna komisija za univerzi-

¹ University of Lagos, Nigeria, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0772-635X> (oaitokhuehi@unilag.edu.ng)

tete (NUC) akreditovala je pet institucija koje realizuju ODL i dvadeset devet institucija koje realizuju i ODL i konvencionalno visokoškolsko obrazovanje. U ovom se radu istražuju osnovni razlozi, istorijski razvoj i ključne aktivnosti institucija koje realizuju ODL u Nigeriji. Uspostavljanje ODL je značajno uticalo na oblast obrazovanja odraslih, budući da se njime povećava dostupnost učenju, podstiču inovacije i saradnja, koriste prednosti tehnologija i poboljšava prihvaćenost ODL programa, a istovremeno se promoviše i veća autonomija.

Ključne reči: pristup, način upisa, otvoreno i učenje na daljinu (ODL), Nigerija

Introduction

Nigeria, with a population of over 232 million, is the most populous nation in Africa. Its population is projected to reach approximately 440 million by 2050 (Itasanmi, 2020; Pontianus & Oruonye, 2021; Worldometer, 2025). The country spans a landmass of about 923,768 square kilometres and is home to over 274 ethnic groups. Nigeria comprises 36 states, with Abuja serving as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Education is the cornerstone of national development. It empowers individuals, shapes their values and equips them with the skills needed to contribute meaningfully to societal progress. As scholars have argued, genuine national development requires a significant proportion of the population to be well-educated and trained. Education involves the positive application of knowledge to cultivate citizens who value justice, flexibility, fairness, knowledge and efficient and effective use of resources (Balarin & Milligan, 2024). It is therefore essential to create avenues that enable broad access to education, rendering the concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) a timely and valuable initiative within Nigerian society.

Policy Framework for Education in Nigeria

A nation's policy framework serves as a blueprint for shaping its education system as a means of driving national development. To formulate a meaningful policy, a country must first identify its core philosophy and national goals. According to Jegede (2016), key considerations should include:

- a. What kind of citizens does the nation seek to develop?
- b. Where should the nation be in the next ten to fifteen years in terms of human capital, resource development and infrastructure?

- c. What are the guiding principles for communal engagement, freedom, social justice and inclusion to foster diversity?
- d. How should the nation engage with other countries in the global community?

Educating citizens remains one of the most critical development agendas for countries worldwide ... and Nigeria is no exception. The National Policy on Education outlines five core goals of Nigeria's Philosophy of Education, placing emphasis on the pursuit of a democratic society where equality, equity and social justice thrive towards building a self-reliant and interdependent economy in a competitive world because the citizens have opportunities to fully develop their potentials, innovate and contribute meaningfully to making the nation great (Enokela, 2022).

In articulating the National Policy on Education, the Federal Government of Nigeria recognised education as the most powerful tool for societal transformation. Lasting socio-economic change, it acknowledged, can only be achieved through an educational revolution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Olayiwola et al., 2010). The NUC serves as the regulatory body overseeing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigerian universities. It is responsible for regulating all university-based ODL programmes and has developed official guidelines that constitute the Federal Government's policy on ODL.

In 2024, Nigeria's Federal Minister of Education, Professor Tahir Mammam, inaugurated a three-day stakeholders' roundtable in Abuja to review and adopt the draft stand-alone National Policy on Open, Distance and e-Learning (NUC, 2024). The roundtable aimed to address key issues such as the participation of ODL students in the Law School and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, a one-year mandatory national service programme providing recent university graduates with employment opportunities. The Federal Government's ODL policies have been developed to tackle challenges in the ODL system, especially quality assurance.

The Main Goals of Open and Distance Education

Open and Distance Education (ODE) plays a vital role in advancing Nigeria's educational goals. In 2009, the NUC issued guidelines for the implementation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the country. These guidelines outlined the available educational options for citizens who have completed senior secondary education. According to the policy published by the NUC (Aboderin & Govender, 2019; Jimoh, 2013), the objectives of ODE include:

- i. Promoting quality and equitable access to education for individuals who cannot afford formal education or who belong to vulnerable groups in society;
- ii. Providing specialised certificate courses for employees to meet evolving workplace demands;
- iii. Ensuring standardisation of curricula, particularly at the tertiary education level;
- iv. Leveraging expert teachers across sectors and workplaces to mitigate the impact of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions.

Concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) plays an important role in Nigeria's educational landscape and various scholars have offered differing definitions of the concept. According to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL, 2020), ODL provides distance education (DE) opportunities designed to reduce or eliminate physiological, social, economic, environmental and other barriers ... such as prior learning, employment status, workplace commitments, disability or incarceration ... that may hinder access to quality education. In essence, the "openness" in ODL represents a deliberate effort to remove unnecessary obstacles to accessing learning.

Distance Education (DE), meanwhile, refers to a teaching and learning process in which the teacher and learner are separated in time and/or space and instruction is delivered using simple multimedia tools. DE involves two-way communication and may occasionally include face-to-face sessions for tutorials or peer interaction. COL clarifies that open learning and distance learning are not synonymous, but that they are complementary concepts that are often used together under the umbrella of Open and Distance Learning.

ODL, therefore, represents an educational mode in which the facilitator and the learner are physically separated, relying on various media, including print and digital technologies, to support the learning process (Akpereka & Okudare, 2018; Jegede, 2016). It is a flexible model that enables individuals to pursue academic advancement without being physically present in a traditional classroom setting. ODL has recently gained significant popularity due to technological advancements and the growing demand for accessible education (Kılınç et al., 2021).

One of the key advantages of ODL is the flexibility it offers learners to set their own pace and schedule. This is especially beneficial for individuals with work obligations, family responsibilities, or other constraints limiting their ability to attend conventional universities. A range of technologies and platforms

allows students to access learning materials, communicate with instructors and peers and submit coursework from the comfort of their homes.

Importantly, ODL has the capacity to reach a broader audience, including individuals living in remote areas. It also promotes lifelong learning by enabling people to upgrade their knowledge and skills through higher education, aligned with their personal circumstances and lifestyle.

The NUC has accredited the following five open universities in Nigeria to offer distance learning programmes (NUC, 2025a):

- a. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a federal institution operating as a single-mode university delivering ODL. NOUN currently operates over 72 study centres across the country.
- b. Miva Open University in Abuja is a private online university offering both undergraduate and graduate programmes.
- c. Iconic Open University in Sokoto is a fully operational private institution offering open, distance and e-learning. Its main campus and headquarters are in Sokoto. The university combines online theoretical instruction with in-person practical sessions at designated learning centres, enabling students to study from their preferred locations.
- d. Al-Muhibbah Open University in Abuja is a private open university featuring multiple study centres and access to e-library resources.
- e. West Midlands Open University in Ibadan is an NUC-approved provider of ODL programmes.

A number of other federal, state and private universities have embraced ODL, providing various courses and programmes to meet diverse educational needs. This system is called a dual-mode system and it comprises both conventional learning and ODL. Table 1 below lists universities in Nigeria offering ODL. There are fifteen federal, six state and eight private ODL universities.

Table 1. List of approved Distance Learning Centres (DLCs) at Nigerian universities as of April 2025

S/N	UNIVERSITIES	ODL CENTRES	Status
1	University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State	Distance Learning Centre	Federal
2	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State	Centre for Distance Learning	Federal
3	University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State	Distance Learning Institute	Federal
4	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Borno State	Centre for Distance Learning	Federal
5	Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa State	Centre for Distance Learning	Federal
6	University of Abuja, Abuja	Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education	Federal

S/N	UNIVERSITIES	ODL CENTRES	Status
7	University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State	UNN Centre for Distance and e-Learning	Federal
8	Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna	Distance Learning Centre ABU, Zaria	Federal
9	Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger, State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Federal
10	University of Ilorin, Kwara State	Centre for Open and Distance Learning	Federal
11	Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto	Centre for Open and Distance Education (CODE)	Federal
12	University of Benin, Edo State	Centre for Distance Learning and Research Institute	Federal
13	University of Calabar, Cross River State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Federal
14	University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Federal
15	Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State	Open and Distance Learning Centre	Federal
16	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Osun State	LAUTECH Distance Learning Centre	State
17	Lagos State University, Lagos State	Lagos State University Open and Distance Learning	State
18	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye Ogun State	Open and Distance Learning Centre	State
19	Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State	Open and Distance Learning Centre, Agbani	State
20	Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Portharcourt, Rivers State	Institute of Distance Education	State
21	Nasarawa State University, Nasarawa State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	State
22	Joseph Ayo Babalola University Osun State	JABU Centre for Distance Learning	Private
23	Babcock University, Ilishan, Ogun State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Private
24	Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	Open and Distance Learning Centre	Private
25	Igbinedion University, Edo State	Centre for Open and Distance Learning	Private
26	Mountain Top University, Ogun State	Open and Distance Learning Centre	Private
27	Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Private
28	Covenant University, Ogun State	Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning	Private
29	Nile University, Abuja	Centre for Distance Learning	Private

Source: NUC, 2025b

Understanding the concept of ODL empowers future learners to make informed decisions about their educational pathways and to explore the wide range of opportunities available. ODL provides a flexible and accessible route to educational success both to those pursuing a degree, acquiring new skills and those advancing professional development.

Rationale for ODL in Nigeria

Several scholars have articulated the rationale for establishing ODL centres in Nigeria. It has been widely argued that ODE is essential to strengthening the conventional education system, which is struggling to meet the demands of a growing population. The number of higher education institutions remains inadequate compared to the large number of individuals seeking to further their education (Adamu, 2022; Jegede, 2016; Nworgu et al., 2021). These scholars broadly categorise the justification for ODL into three key areas: demographic changes, rising enrolment and lifelong learning.

Demographic Changes: The socio-political and economic challenges of delivering education to Nigeria's large population, amidst limited financial and other resources required to meet developmental requirements, are substantial. Sustained population growth and increasing demand for education at all levels have made ODL a necessary complement to the traditional system. According to projections by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2014) and the African Development Bank (2014), Africa is expected to have the world's largest workforce in the coming decades. At the same time, the continent is experiencing a rapid youth population growth rate, exceeding 60 per cent.

Additionally, there are a lot of unemployed young people in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, who will need an alternative to the conventional educational system. ODL presents a viable alternative to conventional education. The urgent need to provide Education for All (EFA) remains critical regardless of location or social context. In line with SDG 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all requires fair access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (United Nations, 2015).

Rising Enrolment: The increasing demand for enrolment in tertiary education has made the adoption of ODL in Nigeria a necessity. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) administers the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), which serves as the entrance examination for secondary school leavers seeking admission into higher education

institutions. However, the average university admission rate has remained at approximately 33%, as shown in Table 2 below. This situation underscores the urgent need for a more practical, reliable, effective and cost-efficient educational alternative ... one that ODL is well positioned to provide. According to the data presented in Table 2, more than 60% of qualified applicants are denied admission, not due to a lack of academic credentials, but because of serious infrastructural and resource limitations. Traditional lecture halls and classrooms can only accommodate a finite number of students at any given time and in any specific location, making it impossible to meet the growing demand through conventional means alone.

Table 2. Admission Trend in UTME (JAMB)

Year	Number of Applicants	Number of Candidates Admitted	% Admitted
2015	1,475,600	522,856	35%
2016	1,592,462	598,837	37%
2017	1,722,269	582,681	33%
2018	1,653,127	587,781	36%
2019	1,886,509	619,397	33%
2020	1,949,983	551,553	28%
2021	1,351,284	429,351	32%
2022	1,761,262	693,398	39%
2023	1,595,779	639,263	40%
2024	1,992,660	397,000***	20%***

*** (Estimated Number and Percentage Admitted)

Source: Joint Matriculation Admission Board (JAMB) (2025)

ODL has helped alleviate the shortage of spaces for continuing tertiary education in Nigeria.

Lifelong Learning is the third key justification for ODL and has gained significant international attention. It is increasingly being integrated into national curricula around the world. Central to this concept is the idea that learning should be a continuous, lifelong pursuit ... accessible, flexible and adaptable ... supporting the development of a “learning society” or “knowledge society.” The global shift toward ODL reflects a growing awareness that individuals must constantly adapt to changes in all aspects of life. In today’s rapidly evolving world, lifelong learning is essential for navigating everyday challenges. It should not be viewed merely as a privilege or even a right, but rather as a necessity for everyone, regardless of age, to effectively cope with the rapid rate of change that we encounter daily in the workplace, the classroom, the home, the local community and global society.

History of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

The origins of ODL can be traced back to the period when shorthand was taught through correspondence by Anna Tickner and Caleb Phillips. In 1728, Caleb Phillips placed an advertisement for students in the *Boston Gazette*. According to reports, Sir Isaac Pitman created the first distance learning course in the contemporary sense in 1843 (Taylor, 2001). By providing feedback on quizzes, assignments and exams, he encouraged creativity in his students. With its external degree programme, which was founded in 1828 and chartered in 1858, the University of London was reportedly the first university to provide distance learning programmes at the higher education level (University of London, n.d).

Distance learning in American higher education started in 1873 at Illinois Wesleyan University, where President Samuel Fallows promoted an “external degree” programme inspired by the University of London. The programme allowed students to earn their bachelor’s and graduate degrees in absentia (Distance Educator, n.d). Programmes like the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, which offered mailed home-study and diploma courses, helped popularise correspondence education. The broader Chautauqua movement, named after Chautauqua Lake in New York, became a cornerstone of adult education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Hartinger & Thal, 2005).

The International Conference for Correspondence Education (ICCE), a global association for distance education, held its first meeting in 1938. This organisation later evolved into the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), now headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden (Holmberg, 2005; ICDE, 2023). The emergence of dedicated institutions for open and distance learning, commonly referred to as open universities, began with the establishment of the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU). Founded by the Labour Government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson, the UKOU served as a model for similar institutions around the world (Daniel, 2011). It inspired the creation of other open universities, including Athabasca University in Canada and the Canada Open University, both established in 1970 (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Similarly, Spain established its National Open University in 1972 (López et al., 2021), while Germany founded FernUniversität in Hagen in 1974 (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

In Nigeria, the roots of ODL can be traced back to correspondence education at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) level, which was a prerequisite for admission to the University of London. The concept of distance education in Nigeria was later formalised with the establishment of the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI) in Kaduna in 1976, which was granted full legal status

in 1987 as an independent distance learning institution. NTI became Nigeria's first dedicated distance education institution, created to address the shortage of qualified teachers needed to implement the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme launched in 1976. The Institute later supported the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced in 1999. Its initial focus was on training second grade (TC II) teachers.

The Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) programme was introduced in 1990 following the decision to make the NCE the minimum qualification required for teaching in Nigeria. The Institute also introduced the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme in 2005 (Fayomi et al., 2015). Earlier, in 1974, the University of Lagos started the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit, which was renamed the Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) in 1999 and eventually became the Distance Learning Institution (DLI) in 2004 (DLI, University of Lagos, 2020). The DLI aims to provide university education across a range of disciplines to help meet the country's human resource needs in areas such as teaching, law, accounting, nursing and technical education.

The University of Ibadan entered the field of distance education through its External Study Programme (ESP), which was later renamed the Centre for External Studies (CES) and is now known as the Distance Learning Centre (DLC). Established in 1988 by the University Senate within the Department of Adult Education, the programme was designed to provide working teachers with opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills through in-service training. This initiative enabled participants to progress from holding an NCE certificate to earning a full university degree. Similarly, the University of Abuja introduced comparable programmes and established its Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education in 1992 (Mohammed, 2017).

The history of ODL in Nigeria is marked by the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Initially founded in 1983 as the National Open University (NOU) by an act of the National Assembly, it was conceived as the country's first tertiary institution dedicated to distance learning. Its creation was driven by the Federal Government's recognition that the growing demand for education could no longer be met through traditional, in-person methods alone (Ubabudu, 2023). However, shortly after its inception, the institution was temporarily shut down and in 1984, the military government, which had replaced the civilian administration, suspended the legislation under which the Open University had been established (Ajadi et al., 2008).

Years after its closure, the renewed push to establish the Open University was largely motivated by the need to fill the gap created by the Federal Government's crackdown on the poor-quality outreach centres of several conventional universities across the country. This decision was also driven by the desire to harness emerging advancements in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), which had begun to transform instructional delivery in distance education. These factors ultimately led to the revival of the previously suspended NOUN Act (Fayomi et al., 2015; Oyekan & Peter, 2017).

NUC's Key Guidelines on ODL in Nigeria

Rationale for ODL: As stated in the National Universities Commission (NUC) publication, the rationale for introducing ODL in Nigeria is to guide distance learning practices in line with international standards and global best practices. The NUC outlined a "code of good practice" that specifies performance standards related to teaching and learning through the ODL mode, including the provision of adequate learning support (NUC, 2024).

Philosophy of ODL: The philosophy underpinning ODL in Nigeria is grounded in clear commitments to accessibility, flexibility and lifelong learning. These core principles must be explicitly articulated and are intended to guide the implementation and operation of ODL systems across the country.

Eligibility to Offer Degree Programmes through the ODL Mode: The NUC has defined eligibility criteria for Nigerian universities wishing to offer degree programmes via the ODL mode. Dual-mode universities (i.e., those offering both conventional and distance education) are required to apply to the NUC for either revalidation or accreditation as ODL institutions, depending on their status. All universities intending to run degree programmes through ODL must submit an application to the NUC and undergo an evaluation process. This includes an assessment of both human and material resources, including learning support facilities, to ensure that they can adequately deliver teaching and learning. Only universities accredited by external and internal experts will be authorised to offer programmes within their verified areas of competence (NUC, 2024).

Scope of ODL Activities (Subjects/Academic Disciplines Offered): Each university applying to run ODL programmes must demonstrate its capacity to deliver instruction in specific disciplines or specialisations. In light of existing technological and infrastructural limitations in the country, the following academic fields are currently approved for delivery through the ODL

mode: Education, Administration /Management Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts/ Humanities and Applied Sciences

Entry Requirements: According to the ODL guidelines, all candidates seeking admission into degree programmes offered via the ODL mode must meet the minimum national entry requirements for university admission (Inegbedion et al., 2016).

Nature of ODL: The NUC stipulates that all academic programmes delivered through ODL must utilise interactive texts as a primary method of instruction. These should be supplemented with electronic resources such as CD-ROMs, DVDs, USB drives, e-books, simulations, etc. ODL should be implemented in its authentic form, meaning that learners should not be required to attend traditional face-to-face classes except where clearly justified ... such as for examinations, occasional facilitation sessions, or practicum requirements.

Delivery of ODL Programmes: The NUC (2024) issued the following recommendations on the delivery of ODL at Nigerian universities:

- a. Pedagogy: ODL programmes shall follow a pedagogical model that does not rely on face-to-face interaction but is instead facilitated through appropriate resources. Learning objectives should be clearly defined and each programme must include well-written study guides that are regularly reviewed and updated.
- b. Admission: Students should be able to sign up for classes at any study centre in Nigeria or the rest of the world with a uniform level of service.
- c. The study centre system ought to provide students with both social and academic support. Study centres should serve as learning community hubs and comply with established standards for equipment and facilities.
- d. Cost-effective provision of study facilities should be encouraged through partnerships, such as shared “university centres.”
- e. Students are expected to have access to ICT tools to support their learning. All study centres must ensure functional internet connectivity for applicable programmes.
- f. Continuous assessment (CA). Assessment must include both continuous and summative components: Continuous assessment should consist of at least one graded task for every 40 hours of study. It should include six tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and computer-marked assignments (CMAs), designed to promote learning through feedback. Summative assessment (examinations, portfolios, etc.) must

- validate learning outcomes and be conducted with integrity. External moderation should be incorporated for quality assurance.
- g. Assessment tasks should take up 10% of total study time. Both continuous assessment and final examinations contribute to the final course grade.
 - h. Marking and feedback should be provided promptly ... ideally within three weeks. ICT solutions may shorten this timeline. These timeframes are essential to maintaining the credibility of ODL qualifications.
 - i. ICT-based automated assessment can reduce workload, but institutions must employ sufficient qualified staff to oversee tutoring, resource development, assessment and programme delivery. Each programme should have at least six academic staff members, though staff may be shared across programmes. The staffing mix should follow NUC guidelines for academic ranks: Senior Lecturer: Lecturer I: Lecturer II and below = 20:35:45. Staff must be qualified in both the subject matter and ODL pedagogy. There should be student counsellors on hand to provide information, advice and guidance (IAG). Each cluster of up to four programmes should have at least two administrative staff and each study centre must include at least one Senior Lecturer and IT support personnel. External or internal technical support must also be available.
 - j. Academic Support and Tutoring: Each academic programme must maintain a tutor-to-student ratio of 1:50. Tutors should be trained in ODL delivery or hold recognised ODL credentials. Various communication channels (e.g. mail, phone, email) should be used to meet students' needs. Feedback on assignments and examinations must meet international standards, be timely (within three and ten weeks, respectively) and provide constructive guidance on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.
 - k. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). IAG services should reflect national policy and best practices, while complying with institutional policy and the Learner Support Framework. Students should have access to information, advice and guidance about the programmes (including counselling services).
 - l. Administration: There must be verifiable evidence of sound logistics supporting ODL programme delivery. This includes availability of relevant software, consistent power supply and academic guidance. A robust Management Information System (MIS) should enable ongoing programme monitoring and evaluation.

- m. Efficiency: Institutions must provide verifiable evidence of learner participation and outcomes, demonstrating the effectiveness of each academic programme.

Case Study: Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Table 3 below provides a concise overview of the ODL programme offered by the Distance Learning Institute (DLI) at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The University of Lagos is presented as a case study to illustrate the outcomes and observed results of best practices in establishing ODL centres in Nigeria.

Table 3. Outcomes of NUC's Implementation Framework at DLI (University of Lagos, Nigeria)

Attribute	Description	Results
Philosophy and Objectives	• Aligned with the university's overall policy	Yes
	• Objectives clearly stated	Yes
	• Fully consistent with the philosophy of ODL	Yes
Admission	• In line with national minimum admission requirements	Yes
Curriculum	• In line with Minimum Academic Standards	Yes
Pedagogy/ Learning Resources	• Learning objectives (LOs) are clearly defined in the Self-Learning Materials (SLMs).	Yes
	• Pedagogical approaches in SLMs are appropriate to meet the Los	Yes
	• Study guides effectively guide learners through the SLMs	Yes
	• SLMs are updated frequently, at least once every 5 years	Yes
	• SLMs are tailored to ODL: interactive, comprehensive, accessible, contemporary and learner-friendly	Yes
	• Learning resources (LRs) incorporate ICT.	Yes
	• LRs meet international standards (e.g. e-learning).	Yes
	• LRs are relevant to the programme provided (e.g. labs, studios and practice placement).	Yes
	• Creativity/innovation in LR provision.	Yes
Assessment	• Continuous assessment promotes learning through feedback and meets national standards, including tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and computer-marked assignments (CMAs).	Yes
	• Summative assessment verifies achievement of learning objectives.	Yes
	• Assessment process demonstrates integrity (e.g. quality assurance, exam procedures, academic honesty)	Yes
	• Evidence of external moderation is available.	Yes

Attribute	Description	Results
Staffing	• Adequate number of qualified academic staff responsible for programme leadership, resource development, assessment and tutor supervision (minimum of six per programme, though staff may serve multiple programmes)	Yes
	• Faculty possess appropriate subject expertise and ODL pedagogical skills	Yes
	• Student advisors (IAG) are available	Yes
	• Minimum of two administrative staff for up to four academic programmes; technical support is available (in-house or outsourced)	Yes
	• Study centres comply with national staffing policy, including presence of IT support and at least one Senior Lecturer	Yes
Academic Learning Support	• Tutor-to-student ratio of 1:50 is maintained	Yes
	• Tutors are trained in ODL methods through workshops, seminars and conferences	Yes
	• Multiple communication channels are used (mail, phone, email, etc.) to support student needs	Yes
	• Marking and feedback meet international standards	Yes
	• Feedback on assignments and examinations is provided promptly (within 3 and 10 weeks, respectively)	Yes
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	• IAG is consistent with institutional policy and the Learner Support Framework aligned with national policy	Yes
	• Programme-specific IAG is available, as are student counselling services	Yes
Administration	• Verifiable evidence of strong logistical support for ODL academic programmes	Yes
	• Robust institutional support relevant to the programme is available (e.g. software, power supply, guidance).	Yes
	• A functional Management Information System (MIS) is in place for programme monitoring	Yes
Efficiency	• Verifiable data on student input/output rates is available	Yes
Employer Feedback	• Evidence of feedback from employers of graduates	Yes
Viability	• Viability demonstrated through effective provision and utilisation of necessary resources (staff, infrastructure, study centres, funding).	Yes

Source: Distance Learning Institute (DLI), University of Lagos (2020)

Note

To be granted **full accreditation status**, a programme must achieve a minimum score of 70% in each of the following core areas:

- Pedagogy and Learning Resources
- Academic Learning Support and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) (combined)

- Assessment
- Staffing

The University of Lagos DLI has received full accreditation for all courses approved under its ODL programme, confirming compliance with the NUC accreditation policy.

Impact of ODL Good Practices on Adult Education at Nigerian Universities

Launch of ODL by Nigerian universities has impacted the practice of adult education in several ways:

Access: ODL has helped bridge university admission gaps, expanding access to higher education for both learners and institutions. Individuals who previously may have lacked the opportunity to attend tertiary institutions have benefited immensely. Many ODL centres have graduated students working full-time and individuals who may not have been able to attend traditional classes alongside younger students. For their part, institutions have gained a more extensive student body, generating additional revenue for universities.

Technology-Driven Advantages: The use of technology has enhanced participation in ODL programmes. Learners can participate asynchronously or synchronously, offering greater flexibility in the teaching-learning process. Technology has also helped develop new and effective teaching methods. Many ODL centres have advanced equipment and media to improve learner engagement and retention. Additionally, universities have benefitted from streamlined processes for enrolment, result management and other learner services.

Innovation and Collaboration: The establishment of ODL institutions has encouraged innovation and collaboration within the university system, fostering a sense of connection and community among ODL stakeholders.

Accreditation: Regular accreditation of ODL programmes has enhanced their acceptance and credibility. By ensuring adherence to quality assurance standards, accreditation aligns local programmes with international benchmarks for adult and youth learning systems (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Commonwealth of Learning, 2021).

Flexibility and Learner-Centred Approaches: ODL programmes offer unparalleled flexibility in learning schedules, allowing adult learners to balance their studies with their professional and personal responsibilities. This learner-centred

approach respects the autonomy of adult learners and accommodates their diverse lifestyles, a core principle of andragogy (Augustine, 2016).

Autonomy: The enforcement of good practices by the NUC has promoted the autonomy of Nigerian higher education institutions. This, in turn, has promoted a more accountable and efficient university system, motivating both learners and institutions toward greater productivity.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning: ODL has played a critical role in institutionalising the concept of lifelong learning. By providing continuous learning opportunities, it enables adults to reskill or upskill, thereby responding to the dynamic demands of the labour market and fostering a culture of ongoing personal and professional development.

What Made a Practice a Good One?

- a. Efficient and effective teaching methods and technologies,
- b. Accessibility of ODL programmes
- c. Inclusivity of learners in ODL programmes
- d. Reduced learner attrition rates
- e. Robust learner and institutional support systems ... Pre-enrolment support, ongoing academic support, help-desk support, post-programme support, monitoring and impact measurement, completion assistance and alumni tracking (tracer studies).
- f. Conducive learning environment. Learners can attend classes from the comfort of their homes or workplaces. Technology has made the learning experience more interactive, enjoyable and engaging for both learners and instructors.
- g. Diverse Self-Learning Resources (SLRs) in various media formats, including:
 - Printed Course Modules
 - Audio recordings (radio lectures and voice-over modules on rewritable CDs)
 - Audiovisual resources
 - o Studio-recorded virtual course facilitation videos
 - o Screen recordings using CAMTASIA
 - Learning Management System (LMS)
- h. Course Module Development (CMD), providing learners with a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- i. Prompt and effective feedback systems.

- j. Open Educational Resources (OER) Policy has expanded access to quality learning materials. Benefits include easy dissemination and expansion and regular updating of course content, improved material circulation, cost reduction for both learners and institutions and continual enhancement of learning resources
- k. Flexibility.

Lessons Learnt

- a. The Federal Government, ODL centres and society must collaborate to ensure the provision of adequate and high-quality education for all. Numerous testimonies of transformed lives resulting from the establishment of ODL centres across the country highlight the significant impact of this initiative.
- b. Ongoing advocacy is essential to dispel misconceptions about ODL and promote its wider acceptance among stakeholders.
- c. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has played a crucial role in regulating the establishment and accreditation of ODL centres. Its oversight has contributed to greater order, quality assurance and credibility in the higher education system.
- d. Regular accreditation exercises help uphold high academic standards, thereby enhancing the relevance and value of ODL to society.
- e. Both employers and the broader society have over the years come to recognise and accept the certificates awarded to ODL graduates as valid and credible qualifications.

Conclusion

ODL in Nigeria has made significant progress over the years. The NUC plays a key role in enforcing policies governing the establishment and operation of ODL centres, particularly in response to emerging educational needs. Nigeria's ODL structure comprises federal and state open universities, private ODL institutions and distance learning centres housed within conventional universities. These institutions collectively work to provide accessible and flexible education to a broad range of learners, including working professionals, students in rural areas and individuals unable to attend traditional universities due to various constraints. The establishment of ODL centres provided accessible and quality education to a diverse population and is continuously evolving to meet the changing needs

of learners and the demands of society. The ODL system has opened access to university education, combated enrolment challenges and ensured that Nigeria's lifelong learning needs are satisfied.

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