

From the Editorial

It is a pleasure to serve as guest editor for the current two volumes of West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning, the journal of the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL). RETRIDOL was established in 2003 as a means to broaden the reach of open and distance learning in the West Africa Sub-Region and serve as a regional representative of the Commonwealth of Learning, located in Vancouver, Canada.

There were dozens of article submissions received over the past several months, of which 16 have been accepted for publication in the current two volumes. On this point, tremendous credit is due to Prof Patrick E. Eya, Director of RETRIDOL, and his staff for promoting the journal and organizing the current two volumes. The reviewers must also be acknowledged for their diligence and feedback to the authors. Such work is challenging yet instrumental to ensuring the quality and relevancy of the articles accepted for publication in WAJOFEL.

The volume of contributions in the journal is also a sound reflection of the mutual impact of RETRIDOL – which has conducted dozens of workshops in the past 15 years across West Africa – and the commensurate growth in open and distance learning in the region. An exemplar is the National Open University of Nigeria, which boasts an enrolment of over 420,000 students, with plans to reach one million learners in the coming years.

To ensure that the impact and momentum of ODL continue in the region, the importance of research cannot be over emphasized. The intellectual pursuit to conceptualize projects, pose sound research questions, demonstrate outcomes, scrutinize interpretations and question assumptions is central to the development of the field. Ultimately, research should work in concert with planning, innovation, refinement, and so on in open and distance learning.

According to ECOWAS there is a population of 350 million inhabitants located in the group of 15 countries that comprise West Africa. The average median age is 19, half of the average median age of OECD countries. Such a demographic dividend bodes well for these young

nations if education can be better institutionalized. Strides have been made in formal education paving the way for greater participation rates in secondary and higher education. The costly nature of building universities, however, is proving unsustainable and even wasteful given the growing ubiquity of technology. No learning model has proven more adept in reducing costs and providing access than ODL.

These are important points that surface or underlie the articles in the current two volumes. They address important issues and trends in ODL and serve as a marker of distinction in comparison to conventional institutions. Scalability, access to differentiated populations, and an inherent reliance and comfort with ICTs are common themes to which institutions offering ODL regularly address and surface frequently in these two volumes.

In this volume the articles have been grouped into two major themes aligned to societal impact: Open and Distance Learning, Higher Education and Society; and Open and Distance Learning as a Mechanism to Address Social Shortcomings.

I hope readers will find the articles of value and seek to engage in research of comparable quality and intellectual rigour to further advance ODL in the West African Sub-Region.

The article titled “*Management and Funding Challenges Facing Higher Institutions in Some African Countries*” by **Dr. David Nwogbo** provides a broad overview of funding challenges for higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. With the countries in this expansive region having the world’s lowest participation rates in higher education (less than 15% of the age cohort) as well as very young populations, the issue of funding is acute, as demand for higher learning opportunity grows. This bodes well for the prospect of leveraging open and distance learning in the region, given it is predicated on widening access to higher learning in a cost-effective manner. The paper makes a call not for the usual expansion of ODL systems, but for a strategic plan and commitment to funding in Africa to assure that higher education opportunities are not squandered for the next (current) generation of learners in the world’s youngest region. The authors make a convincing case given funding as a proportion of GDP has not increased over 15

years from 2000 to 2015, despite incremental enrolment pressures. The author poses important question such as, what kind of policy measures should be implemented to enhance the funding of higher education at the individual governmental level? How can the growth potential of African economies be leveraged for improved funding of African universities? These are important concerns that will persist as important issues in the coming years. Addressing the funding issue is a challenge to which a collective response is warranted and may see advancement with the involvement of ECOWAS, which has recognized the value of ODL in the region.

Drs Angelo Nicolaidis and Joseph Mensah Onumahs' contribution in their article titled "*Ethics, issues and challenges in quality global Online Distance Higher Education provision*" is a welcomed addition to the under-reported topic in the ODL literature (ethics), particularly in the digital age. Amidst widespread adoption of technology-enabled learning in higher and adult education, there is an infinite volume of information online and the ease with which to access it raises questions on ethics and cheating that can undermine ODL as a legitimate mechanism for learning. Sites such as turnitin.com or writerbay.com are examples of how online learning has opened doors for deviant behaviour. In this context, Drs Nicolaidis and Mensah Onumah present an expansive overview of the technologies impacting higher learning. The authors pose important questions on the legitimacy of online assessments and e-cheating that is balanced with a series of recommendations. Building time into a course to expose learners on ethical guidelines, academic integrity, plagiarism, etc. may prove to diminish deviant behaviour. Sustaining the integrity of learning in an ODeL setting, they argue, is rooted to learner support with a commensurate investment on the part of faculty to continuously guide students. While adequate learner support is known to be foundational to a successful ODL learning context, the role of instilling ethical behaviour into a course is an important complement to content that should be granted greater emphasis in the process of learning.

The premise of **Njeze Miracle Eka** in the article titled "*Students' Awareness of Plagiarism in Some Selected Universities in South-western Nigeria*" is two-fold. It seeks to ascertain the awareness and motives for engaging in plagiarism among distance learning students

in Nigeria and it seeks to ameliorate the problem by encouraging universities to be more proactive in mitigating the problem. This includes to better educate students on what plagiarism is, how to avoid plagiarizing and the consequences of engaging in such activity. The author, Ms Njeze Miracle Eka, utilized a survey to acquire information from 71 students in three universities in the south-western area of Nigeria. The findings reveal that awareness of plagiarism is high, but that students regularly engage in copy and paste of information online without citation. Findings also revealed that proper referencing was low among students across the three institutions. Reasons for engaging in plagiarism included external pressures and seemingly having little concern for the existence of plagiarism software, such as Turnitin. Given that enrolment growth is forecasted to increase considerably in Nigeria and the Sub-region in the coming years, competition amongst students will only increase, and pressures to cut corners or ignore policies on plagiarism will potentially rise. Institutions should heed such a warning and recognize and inculcate in learners the potential pitfalls of plagiarism regardless of whether a student is found guilty or not. Plagiarism is a clear example of breaking rules and is effectively stealing. Given the larger societal concerns around corruption, nurturing tomorrow's leaders to follow rules and be productive and engaged citizens should be an important role for universities. As such, addressing the issue of plagiarism more forcefully is an apparent necessity in the participating institutions, and perhaps an issue amongst other universities in the country.

Dr. Aminu Kazeem Ibrahim in the article titled "*Psychometric Properties of Study Centre Directors' Behaviour Expectation Scale (BES)*" focuses on determining the expected behaviours of Study Centre Directors in the Entire National Open University of Nigeria system. The bedrock of open universities is the study centre. The nature of open universities, particularly mega universities which enroll over 100,000 students, is decentralization. Like India's Indira Gandhi National Open University and the Open University of China, which combine to enroll nearly five million learners, the National Open University of Nigeria reaches its students through an intricate network of study centres. Their overall purpose is to deliver tutorials and provide a point of physical contact for distance learners. As such,

understanding how study centres are organized, how they operate, and how they are managed is important. The well-performing study centres may inform operations of the less successful study centres creating a community of practice whereby information and other aspects may be shared, tested, and implemented. This is the nature of the study by Dr. Aminu Kazeem Ibrahim, who applied a validated research scale to determine expected behaviours of study centre directors throughout the National Open University of Nigeria system. Four behaviour expectations were identified and centred on: 1) managing staff and students; 2) financial prudence; 3) community advocacy; and 4) managing self/university dictates. The sample included 98 staff distributed equally across three study centres located in the northwest of Nigeria. The findings demonstrated that centre directors' behaviour trait for managing staff/students was related to the trait for mobilizing community where the centre is located. This indicated that the two traits are essential for successful management of study centres. Likewise, study centre directors' ability to be prudent in financial management related positively with the directors' ability to have self-control and abide by university dictates.

In the article titled "*Open Distance Learning and the Management of Electoral Violence in Nigeria*", **Dr. Olusola Matthew Ojo** makes an interesting argument to justify that ODL may serve as a means to ameliorate political violence in Nigeria, specifically as a means of impacting democratic education among the citizenry. As Africa's largest country by population, Nigeria is a fragmented society. Amidst the Muslim-dominated north and the Christian-dominated south, there are over 250 ethnic groups dispersed throughout the country. In Nigeria's post-colonial state, the author argues that electoral violence has manifested itself through two prominent channels: the inducement of violence among youth groups fomented by the political elite, and the commensurate lack of democratic education in the formal school systems. Given the nature of the ODL system in Nigeria, which is organized through NOUN and several dual-mode institutions, the author argues that the reach ODL has may be the most effective way to curb electoral violence in the country, particularly among youth and the larger population. The premise of the article is to impart a viable democratic education curriculum through ODL. The author calls on

NOUN to be an agent of change to stem the tide of electoral violence in the country. The offering of courses in democratic education, and to mass produce materials on the subject for public consumption, irrespective of institutional affiliation to NOUN, is deemed as an essential societal contribution the University could and should make to the benefit of all Nigerians.

Chukwuka, C.A.C in the article titled “*National Open University of Nigeria and Reformation of Prison Inmates through Open and Distance Learning*” looks to reform prison inmates through Open and Distance Learning in National Open University of Nigeria. Like other Open Universities in the emerging world context, the National Open University of Nigeria embraces its mission to serve the hitherto unreached. It is no small feat that NOUN has reached a current enrolment of over 400,000 learners. As an institution that was re-established only 17 years ago, it has made inroads in areas that other universities disregard or overlook. NOUN has penetrated prison walls to engage with and offer learning opportunities for those who have been relegated to the margins of society. In 2018 NOUN awarded degrees to nearly 500 individuals, including two who had obtained a doctorate. Given the success of such an initiative, the current study explored the extent to which inmates, as prospective ODL learners, perceive this mode of learning as a means of positively impacting the reform process, and consequently reducing recidivism. The study was situated in Ikoyi Prison in Lagos State and surveyed a sample of 1,640 inmate respondents, of which 500 completed surveys were received. Amongst the respondents, 299 were male inmates, 99 were female inmates and 102 were prison officers. The findings revealed positive perceptions of open and distance learning as a means of positively impacting reformation, while also reducing recidivism. The study is important as a foundation research that can lead to further inquiry into the topic. Given the importance of prisons as locations of reforming rather than punishing delinquent and criminal behavior, the mode of ODL may be a welcome complement to educational training in Nigeria, and the larger West Africa Sub Region.

The article titled “*Preventing Recidivism in Nigerian Prisons through Access to Education: The National Open University of Nigeria Prisons’ Special Centres Intervention*” by **Niyi Adegoke** looked at

issues of recidivism among ex-convicts. The article differs from the other on ODL in prisons as it acquired input from inmates who had returned to prison as a result of recidivism. The main objectives of the study were to examine participants' reasons for recidivism and to ascertain if access to education may be a factor in reducing criminal activity upon release from prison. Data was acquired primarily through questionnaire, of where there were 121 respondents. Respondents were located in three prisons in Lagos State and were enrolled in the National Open University of Nigeria's prison study centres. The three most common factors for recidivism were unemployment, low skill and prison conditions. The majority of respondents agreed that quality education would likely result in a drop in recidivism. The authors conclude with a series of recommendations, including wider adoption of NOUN's prison-based programmes, which are tuition free, and that the government should add focus on developing entrepreneurial skills in inmates.

The premise of **Dr Opatete, Johnson Ayodele & Dr. Inegbedion, Juliet Obhajajie** in their article titled "*Assessment of Lecturers' Knowledge and Readiness for Open Education Resources in Nigerian Open and Distance Learning Universities*" is to ascertain if there are significant differences within faculties relative to gender, academic rank and discipline. If such knowledge can be verified, it may serve to better inform where investment in OER can be better focused. The sample was based on a large pool of academics working in five single and dual-mode universities in Nigeria. In total, 690 valid responses representing 13% of the entire sample were used. Findings revealed that knowledge of OER was inversely proportional to academic rank; full professors possessed less knowledge about OER than their counterparts at lower academic rank. Paradoxically, full professors showed to have the greatest inclination toward adopting OER in their courses. Further, female academics possessed more knowledge on OER than male academics. There was little variation in academics' readiness to use OER across disciplines. Senior faculty, who are assumed to be less technology savvy or inclined to engage with OER may be one population to target in the uptake of OER. As senior ranked academics they are in a position to be less risk averse and are likely at a more favourable point in their career to share and disseminate their

knowledge. Pairing junior and senior faculty in the assembling of OER may be the most salient inference drawn from this study and presents an avenue for further research and experimentation.

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