

EDITORIAL

The West African Journal of Open Flexible and E-Learning (WAJOFEL) has established a reputation as a credible outlet for research in open, distance and e-learning (ODEL) in Africa. Volume 14, number 1 is a special issue dedicated to honour Professor Olufemi Peters, the outgoing Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja. The special issue has been given the rather apt theme: *Advancing Open, Distance and Flexible Learning: Innovations, Impacts and Inspirations in Higher Education in Africa*, which celebrates Professor Peters' distinguished academic legacy and his substantial contributions to higher education through ODEL and Technology-Enabled Learning. I have the singular privilege of editing this special issue in his honour. Over the years, he and I have come to know each other fairly well and related professionally in significant ways. I will say more on this in a short while.

The issue is organised into two parts. Part A of the issue contains academic papers, while Part B contains mainly tributes, reflective pieces, and a personal interview with the subject himself. The papers in the current issue are a hybrid and collage of solicited and commissioned articles from a variety of scholars, leaders, colleagues, associates, and mentees of Professor Peters. The focus areas of the call for articles cover the primary areas of interest that have defined Peters' passion and strategic engagements in ODL theory and practice. As would be expected in a long career extending over three decades, fourteen areas were explicitly identified, ranging from assessment, ODL innovations, technology enabled learning, science teaching and learning, research and development, micro credentials, management of ODL, learning analytics, learner support, curriculum development and learning design, continuing professional development, generative AI and emerging technologies, quality assurance, and sustainability of distance higher education and open universities. Through units such as RETRIDOL, the Postgraduate School, ACETEL, the Directorate of Quality Assurance, and of course, the creation of the position of the office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Technology, Innovation & Research, Peters was able to implement his vision for transformation in the advertised foci in a sustainable way. Towards the end of his

tenure, his passion was developing a robust learning analytics framework and micro credentials system within a lifelong learning and competency-based framework, generative AI and emerging technologies; having substantially addressed the burdens of history of NOUN which he inherited in terms of the poor brand differentiation, low parity of esteem of students, poor perception of quality of programmes, inadequate supportive technology infrastructure, as well as poor service orientation. Perhaps, the only areas where he could not make a transformative impact are the issues of the sustainability of distance higher education and open universities. In fact, there is still much to do at NOUN and the entire Nigerian University System (NUS).

In Issue 1A of this volume, we have a combination of research articles spanning all the advertised areas, pedagogical and exploratory pieces, case studies, and researched reflections. The topics are varied and reflect the specialties, experiences, and interests of the contributors and their understanding of the needs and complexities that define the context, spaces, and milieus of the ODeL topography. The contributions are not overly celebratory, but converge in the essential motifs that course through Professor Peters' legacies. Together, the two parts of this special issue define the fabrics of Peters' 'long trek' through the forest of ODeL, with each article forming a strand in the tapestry of research, practice, and praxis, while the tributes and reflective pieces add colour and panache.

Volume 14, Number 1A

The articles in this number are organised into four broad sections, viz.:

1. Policy, Governance, and Institutional Development;
2. Employability, Skills, and Lifelong Learning;
3. Equity, Access, and Community Impact;
4. Technology, Innovation, and Pedagogy.

Contributors are from a wide range of institutions in Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia, Cameroon, and India. We shall attempt to present a precis of each contribution without attempting to claim fidelity with the author's great intellect.

Moeketsi Letseka, Morakinyo Akintolu, Mohamed A. A. Mitwally, and Ramashego Mphahlele elaborate on ‘The Role of the UNESCO Chair on Open Distance Learning (ODL) in Advancing Innovation and Flexibility in Distance e-Learning.’ The paper explores the role and contribution of UNESCO to ODL at the University of South Africa in advancing innovation and flexibility in distance e-learning, and provides a review of the UNESCO Chair on ODL’s research and innovation initiatives and impact in distance e-learning.

Elifas Tozo Bisanda’s paper is on ‘The Role of Open Universities in Expanding Access to Higher Education.’ In a very lucid and illustrative manner, the paper examines the distribution of open universities worldwide and assesses the advantages and disadvantages of open online and distance education.

In his article on ‘ODL Adoption in Cameroon Higher Education and Determinants from Dual-Theory Investigation’, **Michael Nkwenti Ndongfack** investigates how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cameroon can explore the potential of ODL to meet the increasing demands for higher education. The paper argues that for ODL adoption to succeed, institutions must address internal capacity gaps, promote leadership engagement, and align institutional culture with digital innovation.

Abdalla Uba Adamu, a former Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria, writes on ‘Nigerian Innovations in ODL: Demarginalising the Marginalised in NOUN.’ He foregrounds some critical interventions made by the NOUN to cater for the marginalised groups in Nigeria in promoting gender equity, supporting the physically challenged, and incarcerated individuals in correctional centres. This is a very interesting paper which should be followed up with a cost-benefit analysis of the approaches adopted by NOUN towards demarginalising the marginal, especially the overall benefits of the extensive study centres’ outlook of the institution.

Patrick Eke Eya and Gloria Mgboyibo Eya write on ‘Pedagogical Policies and Environmental Sustainability Measures in Open and Distance Learning Systems’. Drawing on both quantitative data and

qualitative insights from 20 Centre Directors across Nigeria, the study investigates how sustainability is embedded within the pedagogical policies and institutional practices of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Tunde Adegbola's paper is a very well-informed industry partner's perspective on employability, skills and lifelong learning, and skills acquisition through ODL. According to Adegbola, NOUN provides flexible learning options for students in wide ranging undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional courses in Arts, Sciences, Education, Health Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Law, Management Sciences, and more. The author draws on his rich experience as an industry partner to the African Centre of Excellence on Technology Enhanced Learning (ACETEL), NOUN. Although the paper concludes that the NOUN has deliberately avoided courses of study that put emphasis on the development of core psychomotor skills, the policy and regulatory environment in which the institution exists needs to be interrogated for a rounded view.

Felix Kayode Olakulehin writes about employability as an emergent issue in Open, Distance and E-Learning, with insights and lessons from the National Open University of Nigeria. The study identifies critical employability factors, including digital literacy, self-directed learning capabilities, and practical skill development, as essential for ODL graduate success. While employability remains a critical issue in higher education discourses, its abstraction from the endemic systemic and structural context remains curious. This has tended to lead to very many confusing paradoxes, one of which is the fact that Nigerian graduates excel abroad while the institutions that produce them are considered irrelevant.

Helen Titilola Olojede writes in the pet area of Professor Peters, micro-credentials. The author highlights the confusion regarding its amorphous nature, in terms of definition, components, and constituents of micro-credentials and its relationship with the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and traditional education. Thus, the paper addresses the following: what are micro-credentials, and how are they like or different from MOOCs? How should we understand micro-credentials

and traditional degrees? The paper attempts a conceptual clarification of micro-credentials, discusses the merits and the challenges.

Dorothy Ofoha provides practical insights as regards the use of micro-credentials to enhance employability skills and lifelong learning in ODL contexts. The paper, taken together with that of Olojede, provides a rounded interrogation of the concept and practices of micro-credentials in the ODL space. The paper demonstrates how micro-credential courses can be effectively designed, delivered, and integrated within ODL frameworks to maximise their impact on learners. It also addresses key challenges associated with the adoption of micro-credentials in ODL, including issues of awareness, standardisation, recognition, and quality assurance.

‘Open, Distance, and eLearning for Continuing Professional Development: A Reflective Case Study’ is written by **Tony Mays and Betty Ogange**. This is a highly academic reflection. This case study, based on recent work in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific undertaken by the Commonwealth of Learning, outlines some of the principles of and lessons of experience from the use of open, distance, and e-learning approaches for the continuing professional development of teachers. It suggests that there is a need to offer professional development opportunities in manageable bite-sized chunks from a menu of options, enabling self-directed and just-in-time learning.

Samuel Awolumate, Aderonke Nana Agbo, Jacob Abut Alabi, and Olumola Christianah Akure write on ‘Digital Learning Resilience and Financial Access among Aquaculture Learners in Climate-Affected Communities in Southwest Nigeria’. It explores the intersection of financial inclusion and digital learning resilience among aquaculture learners engaged in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in climate-vulnerable communities of southwest Nigeria. It examines how access to formal and informal financial resources affects learners' ability to sustain educational participation amidst climate-induced livelihood disruptions.

Gregory O. Okagbare and Olusegun Adeleke Oba-Adenuga examine the enhancement of learner support at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) through the implementation of an e-ticketing system. It evaluates the effectiveness of the e-ticket platform in improving learner support services for NOUN students. Findings reveal that the e-ticketing system significantly reduced the time required to resolve student complaints and improved overall satisfaction with support services.

Iyabode O. A. Nwabueze's paper assesses the impact of instructional videos on students' learning experience in the National Open University of Nigeria through comparative analysis of student engagement, learning processes across various programmes, and lecturers' perceptions of video-based instruction. Findings reveal that while most students perceive these videos as highly beneficial to their academic success, some accessibility challenges and misconceptions were registered. This study has strong relevance for the modelling of ODL with wide ranging ramifications.

Sunday A. Reju's paper explores the optimisation of flipped learning within the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). It examines the unique challenges and opportunities associated with implementing flipped learning in ODL environments. It highlights the need for a rethinking of traditional educational practices to better suit the needs of distance learners. The paper suggests that by integrating flipped learning strategies that promote active engagement and intrinsic motivation, educators can enhance the ODL experience. It recommends that future research should focus on developing and testing specific models of flipped learning tailored to ODL environments.

'Leveraging Generative AI and Microlearning to Enhance Facial Recognition for Flexible Higher Education in Africa' is authored by **Gabriel Kabanda**. The paper explores how Generative AI (GenAI) and microlearning can enhance facial recognition systems, fostering improved efficiency, accuracy, and ethical deployment in Open, Distance, and Flexible Learning (ODFL) environments across Africa. It states that microlearning, an instructional approach that delivers

content in small, manageable units, can optimise algorithmic performance by refining model training and improving recognition accuracy.

Emeritus Professor Olugbemiro Jegede, another former Vice-Chancellor, indeed the foundation Vice-Chancellor of NOUN, discourses ‘Open Education, Open Universities, and the Future of Learning and Instruction’. It is a timely exposition that can be a useful pedagogical resource for graduate students. The paper introduces the concept of the "half-life of knowledge," which refers to the idea that knowledge has a limited shelf life and becomes outdated over time. Within such timeframes, a significant portion of what is current becomes outdated or replaced by discoveries and advancements. Thus, accordingly, while this concept highlights the importance of lifelong learning (continuous learning), staying up-to-date with the latest developments, and adapting to new information and technologies are extremely important for active and quality living. Jegede argues that to have a fulfilled future of Open Education, Nigeria’s educational institutions must have at their central focus the transformation of the ecosystem. Such transformation must aim at self (individual, institutional, values, morals, attitudes), at practice (leadership, infrastructure), at society (vision, mission, people), and the environment (social, ecological, financial, networks). Jegede’s paper raises several important issues. The critical issues that are often overlooked in such brilliant discussions are the challenges to the human person posed by accelerated changes, the strains on human biology, labour adaptation, and scarce resources in developing economies. Therefore, the issue is, when does change become disruptive and destructive?

Christine Ofulue, Paul Prinsloo, Felix Kayode Olakulehin, Adewale Adesina, Oluwaseun Oluyide, and Segun Buhari’s paper is a case study on ‘Implementing Learning Analytics at Scale in African Open Distance Learning: A Case Study’. The study is the first large-scale implementation of LA in an African ODL institution, and the findings provide valuable insights for other (higher) education institutions in similar contexts worldwide. The study has a design approach that is amenable to replication. The article presents insights

into factors affecting LA implementation, drawing on a multimethod case-study research design. It highlights factors such as the availability and diversity of data, legacy systems in pedagogical approaches, and the balancing of flexibility and openness while ensuring the quality and impact of LA's predictive capabilities for student success and/or risk. The study also noted the influence of external factors such as the internet and electricity infrastructure, political stability, socio-economic, and socio-cultural factors.

Chinedu I. Okeke and Olugbenga Timothy Ajadi's study examines ODL's pedagogical approaches, technical tools, and policy frameworks in order to determine how it can support educational fairness for refugees and marginalised communities. Using case studies from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, it makes the case that ODL can spur global educational equity when combined with digital inclusion tactics, culturally relevant content, and active community involvement.

The papers in Volume 14, number 1A present critical discourses, case studies, expository reports, fundamental treatises, philosophical and ideological exposes that serve not only the need for hard intellection, but also for broader education of all as a resource handbook and reference materials for students of ODL. The articles are data-rich, well-illustrated with the methodological fidelity and analytical rigour expected from the quality of contributors.

Volume 14, Number 1B

Personal Reflections & Leadership Tributes

This volume is a collection of tributes and reflective pieces from colleagues of Professor Peters; leaders of ODL across the world, friends, mentees, and those who worked directly with him as Vice-Chancellor. Also included in this issue is an interesting personal interview with the subject himself. As I mentioned at the start of this editorial, it is my singular honour to edit this issue in honour of Olufemi Peters. Over the years, as I have interacted with him personally and professionally, I have come to respect his demeanour and disposition as a committed and honest leader, with great clarity in the pursuit of his vision for NOUN.

Tributes are very tricky to do in an academic journal space because of their celebratory tone; they are not subject to review in the same way as an academic paper. Of course, a tribute is a deep personal reflection, but often not less than an academic paper in the rich experience which they embody. The fact, really, is not that we are putting together tributes, but that we have chosen to do it in an academic journal space. Some may wonder why so? This is simple. It is because they are a collection of deep personal reflections about the call of duty of a profound scholar, intellectual, and administrator. The reflective pieces here are not only deep, but also highly educational. The tributes are anchored in critical studies in many cases, such as the piece on the evolution of the postgraduate school in NOUN. Thus, although all the contributions here are done within the context of the celebration of an individual, they all find convergence in knotting together essential aspects of the theory, philosophy, and practice of ODL, albeit within the leadership experience and contributions of Professor Olufemi Peters. Perhaps, one should mention too that the list of those who chose to contribute to this enterprise makes it even more important to give the reflections a serious academic imprint. Also included in this issue is a transcript of a personal interview with Professor Peters by the editorial team of WAJOFEL. We hope that it will inspire the new generations of leaders in the ODL space to do well and work with focus and integrity.

In this volume, we have a reflective piece by **Puleng LenkaBula**, Treasurer, ACDE, and Principal & Vice-Chancellor, University of South Africa. Her piece is a woven tapestry of history and interconnections, powerful and evocative of vision and resilience. The tribute by **Teresa Mwoma**, Executive Director, African Council for Distance Education (ACDE), celebrates Peters' enduring legacies and service to ACDE.

Chiedu F. Mafiana, the DVC Academic, speaks like a true sailor. He draws on rich metaphors, symbols, and characters from the classic novel, *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, to describe Peters' confident engagement with the vicissitudes of leadership through personal qualities such as humility, wisdom, and kindness. According to him, Peters exemplifies steady leadership, refined by experience and

faith. The paper by **Linus A. Onime, Folashade Oritogun, & Sonnie J. Oniye** on ‘Evolution of the School of Postgraduate Studies at the National Open University of Nigeria’ is an evidence-based chronology of growth and development. The piece is a lesson in calculated institution-building. I hope that someday, in due course, NOUN would become an institution of interest in successful institution building, strategic growth, and leadership development. **Christine I. Ofulue**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Technology, Innovation, and Research, writes eloquently about the legacy of her mentor. One cannot agree more with her assertion that “Professor Olufemi A. Peters stands as one of the foremost figures in the evolution of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria and across Africa. His visionary leadership, intellectual depth, and unwavering commitment to institutional excellence have left an indelible mark on the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and the broader ODeL community.”

An equally outstanding contribution is the rich illumination of the NOUN journey of transformation by Emeritus Professor **Godwin Sogolo**, a foremost Philosopher and intellectual of global repute. Sogolo’s personal reflection is on sustainability in distance higher education and open universities. He highlights how NOUN expands access to higher education across Nigeria through flexible, technology-based learning. He reveals that NOUN’s open and distance learning model reduces physical infrastructure costs, supports working and disadvantaged learners, and promotes lifelong learning, making it socially and economically sustainable. However, the article also notes that NOUN’s long-term sustainability would depend on adequate funding, improved ICT infrastructure, staff capacity, and strong quality assurance, to maintain academic standards and student support.

Ibrahim Olatunde Salawu and Chukwuemeka Ogbonnaya Nwosu provide a technical reflection on the ‘Place of Course Materials in the Design and Delivery of ODL.’ Through a case study of NOUN and a review of literature, this contribution highlights how the use of quality course materials has transformed traditional teaching practices and empowered learners for success. The authors argue that there is a visceral link between course materials and pedagogy, as the former constitutes the key instrument used for instruction at NOUN.

Grace Jokthan and Johnson Opatéye's reflective piece is on 'Leadership for Innovation and Impact: the Role of NOUN's Leadership in Advancing Digital Excellence through ACETEL.' The contribution provides an account of ACETEL as a beacon for digital excellence and a catalyst for transformation, designed to meet the evolving technological needs of the African continent. The authors report that the centre has produced a new generation of tech-savvy leaders, capable of harnessing the potential of digital technologies to solve real-world challenges, through its comprehensive suite of programmes, short courses, and its focus on practical, impact-driven research.

Rotimi Ogidan and Temilola T. Apéna focus on how to use relevant technology in ODE for pedagogy and andragogy among disenfranchised populations. It foregrounds how technology can be deployed to bridge the knowledge transmission gap for such a population. The study is illuminating in the light of internal violence and other factors that disrupt education due to population displacement or sudden migration.

CRK Murthy delivers an engaging paper on the 'Management of ODL Systems: Reflections on the Indian Experience.' After analysing a variety of management principles and approaches, and different typology of ODL institutions and functional areas, he argues that each one deserves a separate paper. While acknowledging that his paper is based on personal reflections which some might disagree with, he accepts responsibilities for all factual errors, inconsistencies, and misinterpretations. However, he believes that the Indian experiences in managing ODL system and institutions will be useful to researchers, ODL experts, and distance educators across the globe.

This volume highlights key milestones achieved by RETRIDOL over the past five years. The article speaks to deep legacies, bold steps, extensive collaborations, and unyielding tenacity. **Christine Ofulue**, immediate past Director of RETRIDOL, provides a comprehensive account of the transformative achievements of the centre under the leadership of Prof. Olufemi Peters (2021 to 2025). Established through a collaboration between NOUN and the Commonwealth of Learning,

the centre transformed into a leading Centre of Excellence for ODL in West Africa. RETRIDOL expanded capacity-building initiatives through over 30 workshops and online courses that trained more than 2,500 practitioners across the sub-region. The institute strengthened ODL advocacy by contributing to national and regional policy development, supporting institutions' transition to dual-mode delivery, advancing staff development at NOUN, and enhancing technology integration through initiatives in learning analytics, micro-credentialing, and generative AI in education.

RETRIDOL also recorded major achievements in research, international collaborations, and visibility. It built a strong research ecosystem, pioneered Africa's first large-scale learning analytics implementation in an ODeL context, coordinated commissioned studies, and sustained a vibrant monthly webinar series. Strategic partnerships with organisations such as UNESCO, ECOWAS, COL, ACETEL, and ODeLAN expanded its regional and global impact, while WAJOFEL gained international indexing and prominence as a key ODL journal. Infrastructure development, regional impact aligned with the SDGs and Agenda 2063, and the 2025 Global Smart Education Innovation Prize, collectively underscore Prof. Peters' visionary leadership and RETRIDOL's role in advancing inclusive, high-quality, and sustainable open and distance learning in Africa.

A very significant part of number 1B is the **interview session** between the editorial team of WAJOFEL and Professor Peters. The interview documents the lived experiences, reflections, and leadership practices of Peters during his tenure as Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). It covers such areas as academic journey and leadership path; journey into Open and Distance Learning (ODL); challenges he faced as Vice-Chancellor; legacies and contributions to ODL; advice to his successor; and reflections about the future. The interview captures the human and contextual dimensions of leadership often absent from policy documents. It situates ODL leadership within Nigeria's broader challenges, such as public perception, regulation, funding, quality assurance, and social justice, while offering insights valuable to scholars, policymakers, and practitioners across Africa.

Professor Femi Peters is a Vice-Chancellor who did not have to train on the job. He had held all the significant offices in NOUN before being appointed to the esteemed position. He had also previously headed another federal agency as chief executive. Thus, he had a robust understanding of the Nigerian context of leadership. I have known Peters for a few decades, as the Director of Academic Planning of NOUN and later as DVC. It is important to state clearly that although I had many interactions with NOUN prior to his visibility, I did not give much thought to the institution due to some fundamental philosophical and ideological leadership deficits that I encountered in relating with the institution. Significantly, Professor Peters changed not only the perception of the NOUN in Nigeria and world space, but he also elevated the institution in the NUS to an enviable leadership position.

Every leader brings an institution to the level of their reputation, or lack of it. More than this, transformational leadership goes beyond the rhetoric and performance of office, the privileges, and lifestyle opportunities. Deep understanding of the nature of the job and the call of duty requires awareness of responsibility and clarity. Peters, though an accidental Vice-Chancellor, given the facts of the politics of the selection process that brought him to office, was primed and prepared for the job. He leaves the office with a significantly accomplished resume of legacies. NOUN today is no longer the orphan of the NUS, but a fully established leader, with highly effective and accomplished academics and administrators. We cannot forget that NOUN was largely an assemblage of King David's *Ragtag Army*, which Peters has turned into valiant leaders in the ODL space. Ultimately, it will need to be seen if his legacy will endure in a system where leaders are more focused on the construction of edifices, the propagation of power and privilege, and primitive acquisition. We hope that his successor will build on his work.

Peters did not become VC to warm the bench and bench his competitors. One very important virtue in Peters, a weakness in the Nigerian space, is that he worked very well with those who contested with him for the office of Vice-Chancellor. In Nigeria, you destroy them. In the same vein, he instituted a system which involved former

Vice-Chancellors, essentially all his predecessors, in all landmark events and activities of the University. He managed difficult and often problematic Councils. He survived them. In a system where integrity is in short supply, he did not project himself larger than NOUN, nor did he leverage his position to engage in primitive accumulation. He put the country before self and NOUN before his own convenience. I join the eminent contributors to this volume to celebrate him and pray that his legacies will live on.

As I bring this short intervention to a close, it is perhaps essential that I offer some more insights of my own about the subject of these tribute essays. I begin with his contributions to the formation and grounding of the Open Distance and eLearning Association of Nigeria (ODELAN), of which I have been President since its inception in 2020. For those who have paid attention, it would be very obvious that the unquantifiable personal support of Professor Peters and his unqualified contributions as the Vice-Chancellor of NOUN have made ODeLAN an enviable association. The NOUN under his leadership has become the mothership of ODeLAN, and he, the unofficial sailor steering us in the right direction. Many may not know that I contested for the office of VC of NOUN with Peters. I have contested for similar positions elsewhere, and I know what the winners do to their fellow contestants; they either crush them if they can or have nothing to do with them. Peters is a noble man and a good person. He works with all those who are willing and able. His dedication to work leaves him wide margins for extensive mobilisation of the abundant human capacity in Nigeria. I have interacted with many interlopers in the ODL space. I have seen those who are vacuous philosophically and others whose understanding of the ideology is questionable. I have seen quite a number for whom ODL is a business enterprise, and students are regarded as potential money making ventures. Peters represents for me, a person with the right combination of character, competence, and qualifications. He has left legacies for which history will be kind to him.

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