

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 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, and 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 specialities, 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 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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