



A Mentor, a Leader, a Builder: The Legacy of Professor Olufemi A. Peters

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Introduction

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. This tribute reflects not only his professional achievements, but also the personal impact of his mentorship, character, and example on those who had the privilege to work with him.

Mentor par excellence: I first met Professor Olufemi Peters during my interview for a position at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2004, when he was Dean of the then School of Science and Technology and chaired the panel. I recall him asking about my experience in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Following my appointment in January 2005, he became both a mentor and a friend, guiding me through the unfamiliar terrain of open university education. Six months after joining NOUN, I received my first administrative assignment as Acting Dean of the then School of Arts and Social Sciences. Prof Peters became my go-to person — always available with wise counsel and unwavering support. Indeed, the story of my academic journey would be incomplete without acknowledging his mentorship. Over the years, we have shared countless engaging discussions on ODeL and higher education, each deepening my understanding and commitment to the field.



Leader par excellence: The story of NOUN's revitalisation and steady growth cannot be told without acknowledging the pivotal leadership of Professor Olufemi Peters. He interrogated the philosophy and practice of ODL with analytical rigour and applied insight, constantly seeking ways to adapt global principles to the Nigerian context. Through the leadership roles he held, he demonstrated how visionary thinking, combined with practical discipline, could transform institutional systems and cultures.

An institution builder: Professor Peters has always been a strong advocate of building enduring structures rather than elevating personalities. This principle is evident in the numerous frameworks and policies he initiated. As Director of Academic Planning (DAP), he chaired the development of the university's first Academic Plan and designed the procedures for developing Operational and Departmental Strategic Plans (OPP and DPP). As Vice-Chancellor, he oversaw the formulation and review of NOUN's comprehensive suite of institutional policies.

To enhance research coordination and streamline academic processes, he established academic complexes as functional structures for processing promotions. Acknowledging the centrality of technology in NOUN's operations, he created the office of the third Deputy Vice-Chancellor dedicated to Technology, Innovation, and Research. He also inaugurated the ICT Board, established a software development unit, and completed the Technology Building — all aimed at ensuring seamless integration of technological functions and strengthening institutional capacity.

On continental and global stages, Professor Peters made significant contributions to the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) as 2nd Vice-President and later as 1st Vice-President. He elevated the Council's profile in Nigeria, facilitating high-level engagements with the Federal Ministry of Education, the National Universities Commission (NUC), and former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

During his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, I had the privilege of serving as Director of the ACDE Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency



(QAAA), hosted at NOUN (2021–2024), and later as Director of RETRIDOL (2021–2025). Under his leadership, the Agency achieved significant milestones, including the review and digitalisation of the ACDE Quality Assurance Toolkit and the successful rollout of the continental institutional certification programme. At RETRIDOL, where he chaired both the Advisory Board and the WAJOFEL Editorial Board, Prof Peters' leadership was equally transformative. He rarely missed a meeting and always led by example. The Institute earned greater international recognition as a centre of excellence in ODL under his watch, as evidenced by the Global Smart Education Innovation Prize awarded to RETRIDOL for its exceptional contributions to the field of Smart Education through innovative practices. The indexing of WAJOFEL in DOAJ and EBSCO, together with its impactful webinar series, is another testament to his intellectual vision and mentoring excellence.

Closing

The history of the National Open University of Nigeria cannot be told without the name of Professor Olufemi A. Peters woven into every chapter. He is a trailblazer, a mentor of rare distinction, a builder of enduring systems, and an exemplar of academic integrity and vision. His legacy will continue to inspire generations of scholars and administrators committed to advancing open and distance learning in Africa and beyond.



