



RETRIDOL's Achievements under the Leadership of Professor Olufemi Peters (2021 to 2025)

Prof. Christine Ofulue

Immediate past Director, RETRIDOL (2021-2025)

National Open University of Nigeria

cofulue@noun.edu.ng

The Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL) is West Africa's Centre of Excellence in Open and Distance Learning, hosted by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Established in August 2023 through a collaboration between NOUN and the Commonwealth of Learning, the institute has achieved several milestones since its inception. Its achievements from 2021 to 2025 are a testament to the visionary leadership of Prof Olufemi Peters, the Vice-Chancellor of NOUN. His commitment to advancing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has elevated RETRIDOL's profile, enabling it to fulfil its mandate of capacity building, research, advocacy, and innovation in ODL across West Africa and beyond. This chapter highlights the institute's key milestones during this period.

Key Milestones Achieved by RETRIDOL

1. Capacity Building for ODL Institutions and Practitioners

RETRIDOL has significantly expanded its training programmes, equipping educators, administrators, and policymakers with essential skills for ODL delivery. Notable achievements include:

- **Workshops and Training:** Between 2021 and 2025, RETRIDOL organised over 30 workshops, training more than 2,500 practitioners from over 60 institutions across West Africa. Themes included transitioning to dual-mode delivery, technology-enabled learning, open educational resources (OER), ODL, graduate employability, and authentic assessment frameworks. The regional reach of several



workshops brought together participants from across Africa, fostering cross-border collaboration in ODL practices.

- **Institutional Transition to Dual-Mode Delivery:** RETRIDOL supported several higher education institutions in Nigeria in transitioning to dual-mode delivery, enabling them to offer both face-to-face and distance-learning programmes.
- **Specialised Training for NOUN Staff:** Under Prof Peter's watch, training of NOUN staff in various aspects of ODL received a significant boost through the organisation of several key workshops, such as induction in ODL, micro-credentialing, leadership in ODL, as well as the participation of more NOUN academic staff in all training workshops organised by RETRIDOL.

The institute also leveraged technology to make training more accessible by developing online courses, such as the *Mastering Digital Learning Series: Facilitating Learning in Online Context*, to enhance staff capacity in digital pedagogy, and an *Induction Course in ODL* for new staff.

These initiatives have strengthened the human resource base for ODL in NOUN and in the sub-region.

2. ODL Advocacy

RETRIDOL worked with the National Universities Commission (NUC) to organise national workshops on OER for Nigerian universities, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the policy environment for ODL implementation in the region. RETRIDOL, as a technical partner representing NOUN, has made significant contributions to national and sub-regional policy development. These include active participation in Federal Ministry of Education technical meetings to formulate a comprehensive national ODL policy, and contributions to the ECOWAS Commission's review of its regional eLearning policy, further demonstrating its commitment to advancing ODL frameworks, both nationally and regionally.



3. Research Excellence

Passionate about research, especially ODL research, Prof Peters' leadership has provided an enabling environment for RETRIDOL to increase its research activities and output. Some of the research activities and outputs are listed below:

- **Strengthening Research Capacity:** The operationalisation of a Research Fellow cadre at NOUN enabled RETRIDOL to expand its pool of dedicated research staff, which currently comprises a Visiting Professor, two sabbatical fellows, four research fellows, and two early career research fellows.
- **Learning Analytics Project:** Led by RETRIDOL's Visiting Professor, Paul Prinsloo, RETRIDOL coordinates NOUN's Learning Analytics project to improve student engagement and support in digital learning environments. Over the past two years, the LA team has carried out a data audit and analysed departmental data needs, storage, and use. The project is the first institutional adoption and implementation of Learning Analytics at scale in an Open, Distance, and eLearning (ODEL) context on the African continent.
- **Commissioned Research and Grants:** RETRIDOL coordinated studies on learner support services at NOUN in 2023 and developed a directory of ODL institutions in West Africa in 2024. The faculty presented at several international conferences, published over 12 papers, and received a Senate Research Grant (SRG) in 2023.
- **Webinar Series:** The monthly ODL Discourse webinar series provides a platform for sharing ideas on ODL and technology integration in higher education, attracting participants from across Africa and beyond. About 35 webinars were organised, with research project ideas on issues such as learning analytics, micro-credentialling, and research capacity building emerging from them.

These initiatives have positioned RETRIDOL as a thought leader in ODL research.



4. Advancing Technology Integration

Recognising the transformative potential of technology, Prof Peter's commitment to advancing ODL through technology-driven solutions led RETRIDOL to spearhead efforts to prepare educators for the future of education. These efforts include the learning analytics project to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in NOUN; workshop series on understanding and implementing Gen AI in Education and Research; and a workshop on creating Micro-Credentials for ODL Praxis to address specific skills gaps in ODL practice.

These advancements have improved the quality of distance learning programmes offered by NOUN and other participating institutions.

5. Strengthened International Collaboration

Under Prof Peters' leadership, RETRIDOL has forged strategic partnerships with national, regional, and global organisations. Notable collaborations include NOUN's support for the Open, Distance, and eLearning Association of Nigeria (ODELAN) through RETRIDOL, which facilitated the association's pre-conference workshops and hosted its secretariat at NOUN. RETRIDOL's collaboration with UNESCO on the Understanding and Implementing GenAI for Education and Research workshop series attracted nearly 2,000 registrations, thereby improving knowledge of AI in education and research. RETRIDOL partnered with the Africa Centre of Excellence on Technology Enhanced Learning (ACETEL) in 2022 for a workshop on developing digital transformation policy initiatives and in 2023 for a two-day event commemorating its 20th anniversary, featuring guest lectures and roundtable discussions on the future of education at the intersection of technology, design, and lifelong learning policies. The institute also collaborated with regional bodies such as ECOWAS and international organisations such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to strengthen its impact on ODL across West Africa.

These collaborations have enhanced RETRIDOL's international visibility and impact, highlighting Prof Peter's vision of positioning RETRIDOL as a leader in the African ODL space.



6. Recognition Through WAJOFEL

The *West African Journal of Open, Flexible, and eLearning (WAJOFEL)*, the only open-access journal dedicated to open, distance, and flexible learning research in the sub-region, achieved significant milestones under Prof Peters as its Editor-in-Chief. It was indexed in DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) in 2022 and by EBSCO in 2025, increasing its global reach. Over twelve (12) editions of the journal were published, including two special issues focused on key themes like digital transformation, and it expanded accessibility by providing abstracts in French and distributing print copies across West African universities. WAJOFEL remains a leading platform for disseminating research on ODL in Africa.

7. Infrastructure Development

With Prof Peters' efforts, funding was approved for a dedicated RETRIDOL building at NOUN. This facility will enhance the institute's capacity to deliver training, research, and academic programmes.



3D image of the proposed RETRIDOL Building

8. Regional Impact

RETRIDOL's initiatives align strongly with both Agenda 2063 and the SDGs by addressing key priorities, including quality education,



technological innovation, gender equality, continental integration, and sustainable development. Its activities not only advance Africa's socio-economic transformation, but also position it as a leader in leveraging ODL for inclusive growth across the continent.

Conclusion

Prof Olufemi Peters' visionary leadership has been instrumental in transforming RETRIDOL into a premier centre of excellence for open and distance learning in Africa. By focusing on capacity building, research and innovation, technology integration, ODL advocacy, and international collaboration, RETRIDOL has significantly improved access to quality education across West Africa. These milestones reflect a sustained commitment to addressing regional challenges, including limited infrastructure and policy gaps, while leveraging Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a transformative tool for sustainable development. As a testament to these efforts, RETRIDOL won the 2025 Global Smart Education Innovation Prize, organised by the GSENetwork, for its leadership in transforming ODL policy, research and practice in West Africa.

