

**Quality Delivery in ODeL: Research, Perception, and Prospects**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As education continues to evolve in response to technological advancements and societal needs, the quality of delivery in Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) has become a focal point for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The keynote paper titled "Quality Delivery in ODeL: Research, Perception, and Prospects" explores the multifaceted nature of ensuring high standards in ODeL environments. This exploration addresses three critical dimensions: best practices, pedagogical strategies, and technological tools that enhance and underpin effective ODeL delivery; the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the efficacy and credibility of ODeL; and the future prospects and innovations of ODeL. Through a detailed examination of these three dimensions, the paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the current state and future potential of ODeL, offering valuable insights for stakeholders committed to advancing the quality and accessibility of education in the digital age. This paper outlines a forward-looking vision for ODeL that is adaptable, inclusive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of learners worldwide.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Obafemi Awolowo University Distance Learning Centre's Open Distance Learning (ODL) Summit was conceived to address the evolving landscape of education in the digital age. As traditional educational paradigms shift towards more flexible, accessible, and technology-driven models, the summit aims to explore innovative strategies and best practices in ODL. This event is pivotal in fostering dialogue among educators, policymakers, and industry experts to enhance the quality and reach of distance learning. By focusing on current trends, challenges, and opportunities within ODL, the summit seeks to ensure that educational institutions can effectively adapt and thrive in an increasingly digital world, thereby expanding educational opportunities for learners everywhere.

The theme of the summit, "Open and Distance Learning: Paradigm Shift in the Delivery of Education," encapsulates the transformative changes occurring within the educational sector. This paradigm shift signifies a fundamental change in how education is conceptualized, delivered, and accessed, driven by advancements in technology and the increasing need for flexible learning solutions. The theme highlights the move from traditional, classroom-based instruction to more inclusive and flexible learning environments. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) breaks down geographical, financial, and temporal barriers, allowing learners from diverse backgrounds to access quality education at their convenience. This shift is crucial in promoting lifelong learning and ensuring that education is accessible to all, regardless of their circumstances.

Central to this paradigm shift is the integration of cutting-edge technologies. The proliferation of internet access, mobile devices, and digital platforms has revolutionized how educational content is created, distributed, and consumed. Technologies such as virtual classrooms, learning management systems (LMS), and interactive multimedia resources enhance the learning experience, making it more engaging and effective. The shift also involves rethinking pedagogical strategies to better suit the ODL model. Traditional lecture-based teaching is being supplemented or replaced by more interactive, student-centered approaches. Methods such as flipped classrooms,

blended learning, and gamification are gaining traction, promoting active learning and improving student outcomes.

ODL enables educational institutions to reach a global audience. This expansion is particularly beneficial for remote or underserved communities, providing them with opportunities that were previously inaccessible. By embracing ODL, institutions can contribute to reducing educational inequities and fostering a more educated and skilled global population. The theme of this summit “ Open and Distance Learning: Paradigm Shift in the Delivery of Education” also invites discussion on the challenges associated with this shift, such as ensuring digital literacy, maintaining academic integrity, and providing adequate support systems for learners. Addressing these issues is essential for the sustainable development of ODL.

Ultimately, the theme "Paradigm Shift in the Delivery of Education" reflects a forward-thinking vision for the future of education. It encourages stakeholders to envision and implement strategies that leverage the full potential of ODL, preparing both educators and learners for the demands of the 21st century and beyond. By focusing on this theme, the ODL Summit will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing changes in education, promote best practices, and inspire innovative solutions to meet the challenges of the modern educational landscape.

Haven briefly laid the context of my paper within the framework of the theme of this summit, I proceed to highlight the kernel of my keynote paper titled "Quality Delivery in ODeL: Research, Perception, and Prospects".

As education adapts to technological progress and changing societal demands, ensuring the quality of Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) has become a key concern for educators, researchers, and policymakers. In this paper, we shall explore the complex aspects of maintaining high standards in ODeL settings. The paper examines three crucial areas: effective practices, teaching strategies, and technological tools that support successful ODeL delivery; the views of different stakeholders on the effectiveness and reliability of ODeL; and the future developments and innovations in ODeL. By thoroughly exploring these areas, the paper offers a detailed overview of the current and future landscape of ODeL, providing valuable insights for those dedicated to

improving the quality and reach of digital education. The paper envisions a future for ODeL that is flexible, inclusive, and capable of addressing the varied needs of learners globally.

The foundation of quality delivery in ODeL lies in adoption of best practices, pedagogical strategies, and technological tools that enhance learning outcomes. Furthermore, perception plays a crucial role in the acceptance and success of ODeL. The paper examines the attitudes and beliefs of students, educators, and employers towards ODeL. Understanding these perceptions helps identify misconceptions, biases, and areas for improvement, ensuring that ODeL is viewed as a viable and reputable mode of education. Moreover, the paper explores the future of ODeL, considering emerging technologies, innovative pedagogies, and policy developments that promise to further enhance the quality of distance education. This paper provides a forward-looking vision for ODeL that is adaptable, inclusive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of learners worldwide.

## **THE CONCEPT OF OPEN DISTANCE AND e – LEARNING (ODeL)**

Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) is a multifaceted concept that has been defined in various ways by different organizations and scholars. UNESCO defines Open Distance and e -Learning as a way of providing learning opportunities characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place, and by the use of various media including print, audio, video, and computer technologies to bridge that gap. In other words, UNESCO emphasizes the physical and temporal separation between teacher and learner, highlighting the role of various media in facilitating communication and learning. This definition underscores the flexibility of ODeL in terms of time and place, allowing learners to access education irrespective of their location.

Another key player in ODeL, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) defines Open Distance and e - Learning (ODL) as the provision of learning opportunities that are characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time and place, and the use of a variety of media, including print, online and face-to-face. COL's definition aligns closely with UNESCO's but explicitly includes online and face-to-face components. This highlights the blended nature of ODeL, where face-to-face interactions can complement distance learning, making it a versatile educational approach. It is noteworthy that in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) approves

the blended mode as the permitted mode of ODL in Nigeria because of the various challenges in the country. (NUC Guidelines for Open Distance Learning in Nigeria)

Similarly, the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) states that Open Distance and e - Learning refers to the use of modern educational technologies to facilitate learning and teaching where the teacher and the learner are separated by distance, time, or both. EADTU focuses on modern educational technologies as the enabler for ODeL, indicating that technological advancements play a critical role in bridging the gap between teachers and learners. This definition points to the dynamic and evolving nature of ODeL as new technologies emerge.

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) affirms that Open Distance and e - Learning is the system of education that allows learners to study at their own pace, place, and time, often through the use of ICT, enabling education for all. ICDE's definition underscores the learner-centric nature of ODeL, focusing on the flexibility and accessibility it offers. The mention of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) emphasizes the pivotal role of digital tools in enabling personalized and accessible education. Similarly, United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) explains that "Distance Learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance." It is notable that USDLA's definition is broad, encompassing all forms of mediated learning. This highlights the inclusivity of distance learning methods and technologies, from traditional correspondence courses to advanced e-learning platforms.

Across these definitions, a common theme is the flexibility and accessibility of ODeL. This flexibility allows learners to balance their studies with other commitments, such as work or family, making education more inclusive. The reliance on various technologies such as print, audio, video and ICT is another consistent element used for bridging the gap between teachers and learners. The definitions by EADTU and ICDE particularly emphasize modern educational technologies and ICT, reflecting the ongoing digital transformation in education.

The Commonwealth of Learning's definition introduces the concept of blended learning by including face-to-face components. This hybrid approach combines the strengths of both traditional and distance learning, offering a more comprehensive educational experience. On the

other hand, ICDE's definition highlights the importance of a learner-centric approach in ODeL. By allowing learners to study at their own pace, place, and time, ODeL caters to individual learning styles and needs, promoting a more personalized and effective learning experience.

Overall, these definitions collectively underline the inclusive nature of ODeL. By removing barriers related to geography and time, and by utilizing a variety of media and technologies, ODeL provides educational opportunities to a diverse and widespread audience. The definitions of Open, Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) provided by various authoritative sources highlight its flexibility, reliance on technology, potential for blended learning, learner-centric approach, inclusivity. Each definition, while unique in its emphasis, collectively paints a comprehensive picture of ODeL as a transformative and accessible educational model suited to the needs of today's diverse learners.

## **STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF OPEN DISTANCE AND e - LEARNING (ODeL)**

Stakeholders of ODeL include students, educators, and employers, among others. Understanding the perspectives of the various groups of stakeholders is crucial for improving the delivery and acceptance of ODeL programmes. This section of the lecture provides a detailed analysis of how these stakeholders perceive ODeL. The perceptions of the various groups include both positive and negative views. Our focus in this lecture will highlight both positive and negative perceptions of students, educators and employers.

### **Positive Perceptions of Students**

Students often appreciate the flexibility and convenience that ODeL provides, allowing them to balance their studies with work, family, and other commitments. The ability to access course materials and complete assignments at their own pace is a significant advantage. Studies such as those by Stone and Springer (2019) emphasise that flexibility is a primary motivator for students choosing ODeL, especially for adult learners and those with full-time jobs.

Another positive perception of ODeL is its accessibility. ODeL makes education accessible to students in remote or inaccessible areas, providing opportunities that may not be available locally. Research by the World Bank (2020) indicates that ODeL has expanded educational opportunities for students in rural and low-income regions, contributing to increased enrollment rates.

Additionally, a positive perception prevalent among students is the possibilities of a variety of programmes. The wide range of programmes and courses available through ODeL platforms allows students to pursue specialized fields of interest that might not be offered at nearby institutions. A survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018) found that the diversity of programmes is a key factor in students opting for distance learning.

### **Negative Perceptions of Students**

Some students worry about the perceived quality and credibility of ODeL compared to traditional, in-person education. Similarly, concerns about the recognition of online degrees by employers and other institutions persist. A study by Gaskell and Mills (2015) indicates that despite improvements in ODeL quality, perceptions of its credibility still lag behind traditional education among some student groups. Oftentimes in Nigerian institutions, young students are often concerned about being allowed to partake in the National Youth Service (NYSC). The perceived exclusion from NYSC is the greatest limiting factor for the uptake of distance learning programmes by the Nigerian youths.

Another negative perception prevalent among students is the perceived isolation and lack of community which students assume is a characteristic of ODeL. Students often fear that they will miss the social aspects of on-campus education. A study by Alt (2018) found that students in fully online courses reported lower levels of engagement and satisfaction compared to those in hybrid or in-person courses.

Technical challenge is another widespread negative perception for ODeL. Technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity and lack of access to necessary devices, can hinder the learning experience. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2021), digital divides remain a significant barrier for some students, particularly in developing countries. Oftentimes, learners are unsure of how to navigate their learning experiences of the Learning

Management System (LMS) as digital literacy is limited in addition to being hampered by technical difficulties including poor internet connectivity and low power supply.

### **Positive Perceptions of Educators**

Educators have the opportunity to use innovative teaching methods and tools that can enhance the learning experience. The use of multimedia, interactive simulations, and virtual labs can make teaching more dynamic. A study by Anderson and Dron (2011) highlighted that educators who embrace technology in ODeL often find it enriches their teaching methods and student engagement.

More so, just as students benefit from flexibility, educators also appreciate the ability to manage their schedules and teach from anywhere. Research by Baz, F. Ç. (2019) suggests that educators value the work-life balance that ODeL can provide, allowing them to pursue research and professional development alongside teaching.

Beyond flexibility in schedule, another positive perception among educators is the broader reach. Educators can reach a global audience, sharing their expertise with students from diverse backgrounds and locations. Data from Coursera (2021) shows that many instructors find it rewarding to teach students from different parts of the world, bringing diverse perspectives into the learning environment.

### **Negative Perceptions**

One predominant negative perception among educators is the heavy workload and preparation time that ODeL requires. Developing and delivering ODeL courses can be time-consuming, requiring significant preparation, especially in creating multimedia content and managing online interactions. Wingo, N., Ivankova, N., & Moss, J. (2017), found that faculty members often report increased workloads when transitioning to or maintaining online courses. Related to the heavy work load and preparation time is the concern that educational content put out on the internet and made accessible to anyone must be of global standards and be original. To achieve this, much effort and quality measures must be undertaken in the preparation of the contents.

Concern about engagement is another negative perception expressed by educators. Educators often struggle with engaging students effectively in an online environment. The lack of face-to-face interaction can make it harder to gauge student understanding and involvement. Studies such as those by Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) have identified maintaining student engagement as a major challenge in ODeL, necessitating the development of new strategies and tools. This concern was validated by many Nigerian educators during the Emergency Remote Learning experienced during the Covid 19 era.

Technical Proficiency is another rate limiting factor for the uptake of ODeL among educators. Not all educators are equally comfortable with the technology required for ODeL, leading to a steep learning curve and potential resistance. A study by Kopcha (2012) indicates that professional development, continuous training and ongoing technical support are critical for educators to effectively utilize ODeL technologies.

### **Positive Perceptions of Employers**

Employers recognize that ODeL can develop essential skills such as self-discipline, time management, and digital literacy, which are valuable in the modern workplace. Research by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2020) suggests that employers value the self-motivation and technical skills that ODeL graduates often possess. Similarly, ODeL provides opportunities for employees to engage in continuous professional development without disrupting their work schedules. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) affirms that many employers support ODeL for upskilling and reskilling their workforce, given its flexibility and accessibility.

### **Negative Perceptions of Employers**

Despite the positive perceptions about ODeL among employers, there are prevalent negative perceptions bordering on credibility and quality concerns. Some employers still harbour doubts

about the credibility and rigour of ODeL programmes, particularly those from lesser-known institutions. A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2018) found that while acceptance of online degrees is increasing, some employers remain skeptical about their quality compared to traditional degrees.

Perceived lack of standardization in ODeL programmes can make it difficult for employers to assess the quality and relevance of the education received. Research by Chaney (2002) and Linardopoulos (2012), indicates that employers often struggle with evaluating the consistency and reliability of ODeL credentials due to varying standards and accreditation processes. It is noteworthy that in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) places heavy emphases on the accreditation of ODeL programmes to ensure standards and parity of esteem. It can be argued that NUC applies greater rigorous accreditation procedures and standards to ODeL programmes compared to the face-to-face programmes. For instance, it is required that at least three years of the course content of any four year programme must be available in various formats: print, audio/video, PowerPoint. Each of the course content must have been reviewed, edited and undergone instructional design to make it compatible with ODeL and to be of global standards.

Perceptions of Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) among students, educators, and employers are mixed, with each group recognizing both benefits and challenges. Students appreciate the flexibility and accessibility but are concerned about the quality and isolation. Educators value the innovative teaching methods and broader reach but face challenges with workload and engagement. Employers see the potential for skill development and continuous learning but remain cautious about credibility and standardization.

## **EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY DELIVERY IN OPEN DISTANCE AND e - LEARNING (ODeL)**

Delivering high-quality Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) requires a multifaceted approach that integrates effective pedagogical strategies, advanced technological tools, and robust supportive infrastructure. These components contribute immensely to the successful delivery of ODeL. Effective pedagogical strategies include a learner-centred approach, collaborative learning, interactive content as well as regular assessment and feedback.

## **Pedagogical Strategies**

A learner-centred approach focuses on the needs, preferences, and experiences of the learner, making education more personalized and engaging. This can be achieved through personalized learning paths, adaptive learning technologies, and competency-based education. A learner-centred approach enhances student motivation and engagement, caters to diverse learning styles, and improves learning outcomes.

A major strategy for achieving quality delivery in ODeL is interactive learning content and resources. Interactive content includes multimedia elements such as videos, simulations, quizzes, and gamified learning activities. This can be achieved by incorporating interactive elements into course materials and assessments. Interactive content enhances engagement, aids in the retention of information, and makes learning more dynamic and enjoyable.

Interactive and engaging content is imperative for high quality delivery in ODeL. A study by Anderson and Dron (2011) found that interactive content significantly improves student engagement and learning outcomes in distance education. They emphasized the importance of incorporating multimedia elements such as videos, simulations, and interactive quizzes to make learning more engaging. Top tier universities in the world adopt ODeL and employ a range of multimedia tools and interactive platforms to deliver their courses. They use discussion boards, video lectures, and real-time virtual classrooms to facilitate interaction and engagement, resulting in higher student satisfaction and retention rates. These universities leverage various online learning platforms such as edX, Coursera, and their own proprietary systems to deliver high-quality educational content globally. Their involvement in ODeL demonstrates a commitment to making education more accessible and flexible, catering to diverse learner needs.

Such universities include Harvard University, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge University, University of London and Imperial College, London. In Nigeria, leading universities in ODeL that have developed interactive content and adopt multimedia tools and interactive platforms include Babcock University, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Ahmadu Bello University, University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos.,

among others. Interactive content and adoption of multimedia tools to advance engagement must be continuous and dynamic.

In a similar vein, collaborative learning is a pedagogical strategy to ensure better learning outcomes in ODeL. Collaborative learning involves students working together to solve problems, complete projects, and understand complex concepts. This is achieved in ODeL using discussion forums, group projects, peer review activities, and collaborative tools like wikis and shared documents. The learners can be trained in the use of collaborative tools. Collaborative learning develops critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills and creates a sense of community among learners.

For quality delivery in ODeL, regular assessment and feedback is compulsory. This is because continuous assessment and timely feedback help learners stay on track and understand their progress. In order to implement this, there must be use of formative assessments, regular quizzes, automated feedback systems, and detailed instructor feedback on assignments. Regular assessment and feedback provide immediate insights into learner performance, identifies areas for improvement, and support ongoing learning.

### **Advanced Technological Tools**

Aside pedagogical strategies adopted in delivering quality ODeL, advanced technological tools are critical to ensuring ODeL is fit for purpose. There are various technological tools existing and still evolving for the exchange of knowledge in an ODeL setting. One of such tools is the Learning Management Systems (LMS). An LMS is a software platform that manages all aspects of the learning process, from content delivery to assessment. Examples include Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard. An LMS centralizes course materials, facilitates communication, tracks student progress, and supports various types of learning activities.

The effective use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) enhances the learning experience by providing a centralized platform for course materials, assignments, assessments, and communication. It is important that the LMS be robust and flexible. It should provide for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. The LMS must give learners access to resources and forums where they can interact with peers and instructors. It should also include assessment and

feedback features. The LMS should be able to have content in various formats including print, audio and video, among others. It is advisable in Nigeria that most content on the LMS be downloadable or available offline to mitigate challenges of poor power and internet accessibility.

To complement the LMS, virtual classroom is important. Virtual classrooms are online spaces where live, synchronous instruction can take place. Examples of virtual spaces are Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet. A virtual classroom can be incorporated into the LMS to achieve a seamless learning experience such that learners do not need to leave the LMS to another classroom before they can achieve a video conferencing session. Virtual classrooms provide real-time interaction between instructors and students; it supports collaborative learning and mimics the experience of traditional classrooms.

It is critical that the LMS and virtual classroom should be accessible on Mobile Learning platforms that allow learners to access course materials and activities via mobile devices. This provides flexibility for learners to study anytime, anywhere, and supports on-the-go learning. It is this flexibility that distinguishes ODeL from part time programmes. Learners can dedicate ample time required for full time studies while combining this with other engagements.

In addition to the LMS and virtual classrooms, provision must be made for multimedia and interactive tools that support the creation and integration of multimedia content and interactive elements. Examples of these include Adobe Captivate, Articulate Storyline, H5P. Multimedia and interactive tools make content more engaging, support various learning styles, and enhance the overall learning experience.

## **Learner Support Infrastructure**

To attain quality delivery in ODeL, robust supportive infrastructure otherwise known as learner support mechanisms must be put in place. The range of support should include technical/ICT support, academic support in form of e tutoring, Information Advice and Counselling (IA&G) and library and learning resources. There must also be social support in terms of counselling as well as administrative support.

Comprehensive technical support to help students and instructors navigate the technological aspects of ODeL must be in place. There should be 24/7 help desks, online tutorials, and troubleshooting guides. Artificial intelligence tools can be incorporated into implementing 24/7 help desk. Technical /ICT support ensures smooth operation of technical tools, reduces frustration, and minimizes downtime. Digital literacy and training should be continuous for learners and potential learners as part of the technical support. Videos and audio instructions can be prepared to aid the navigation of the LMS and use of other ICT related tools

Academic Support Services are very critical for quality delivery in ODeL. These are services that provide academic assistance to students including online tutoring, writing centers, and study groups. Academic Support Services help students overcome academic challenges, enhance learning, and improve academic performance. A part of Academic Support is access to digital libraries and online resources that support learning and research. This is achieved by subscription to online journals, e-books, and databases; giving learners access to the e libraries and supporting them in their searches. Support through e - libraries provides extensive resources for research and learning, supports academic work, and fosters independent study.

Furthermore, as part of the academic support, regular and constructive feedback is essential for student progress in ODeL. Feedback helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement, guiding their learning process. Babcock University Centre for Open Distance and e – Learning (BUCODEL) implements a structured feedback system where e - Tutors provide regular (daily and weekly), detailed feedback on assignments and assessments. This practice has been associated with improved student performance and satisfaction.

Aside Academic Support, there is need for efficient Administrative Support for the logistics of ODeL. Such administrative support includes support for online registration, digital submission of assignments, and virtual advising. Simplifying administrative tasks to support learners enhances the learner's experience and ensures smooth course management. Similarly, peer learning and community engagements help in creating a sense of community among learners through social interaction and peer support. The Learner Support Services should create online discussion forums, social media groups, and peer mentoring programmes. This reduces feelings of isolation, encourages peer learning, and enhances overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

The quality delivery of Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) depends on the integration of effective pedagogical strategies, advanced technological tools, and robust supportive infrastructure. By focusing on learner-centered approaches, leveraging interactive content and collaborative learning, utilizing powerful LMS and virtual classrooms, and providing comprehensive support services, educational institutions can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that meets the diverse needs of modern learners. These strategies enhance the quality and effectiveness of ODeL programmes, leading to better student outcomes and higher satisfaction.

### **TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS IN OPEN DISTANCE and e - LEARNING (ODeL)**

The future of Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) is being shaped by technological advancements, innovative teaching methodologies, and evolving educational policies. By staying abreast of these trends and incorporating these innovations, educational institutions can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their ODeL programmes, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of modern learners and remain competitive in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. We will evaluate highlight developments in emerging technologies, innovative teaching methods and evolving educational policies.

Emerging Technologies: Emerging technologies include Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML); Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR); and Learning Analytics among others. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)** AI and ML are being increasingly integrated into ODeL platforms to personalize learning experiences and provide

intelligent tutoring. Examples include AI-powered chatbots for student support, adaptive learning systems like Smart Sparrow, and predictive analytics to identify at-risk students. The use of AI enhances personalized learning, provides tailored support, and improves student retention and outcomes.

Similarly, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies create immersive learning experiences by simulating real-world environments and scenarios. Examples include Virtual labs for science courses, AR-based historical site tours, and VR simulations for medical training. Increases engagement, allows hands-on practice, and enhances understanding of complex concepts.

Learning analytics involves the collection and analysis of data on student performance and engagement to inform instructional decisions. Examples include Dashboards that track student progress, analytics tools that identify patterns in learning behavior, and intervention systems based on data insights. Provides insights into student learning patterns, enables early intervention for at-risk students, and informs curriculum design.

Blockchain is used for secure and transparent record-keeping, particularly in verifying educational credentials. Digital diplomas and certificates stored on blockchain, ensuring tamper-proof and easily verifiable credentials. Increases trust and transparency in educational records, simplifies credential verification for employers and institutions.

New Teaching Methodologies include micro learning, gamification, flipped classrooms and Competency based Education. Microlearning delivers content in small, easily digestible segments, focusing on specific learning objectives. Examples include short video tutorials, interactive quizzes, and bite-sized readings. This improves retention and comprehension, caters to learners' limited attention spans, and allows for flexible learning schedules.

Similarly, gamification incorporates game design elements into learning activities to increase motivation and engagement. Examples are introducing points, badges, leaderboards, and gamified assessments. This enhances student motivation, makes learning fun and interactive, and encourages active participation.

In a flipped classroom, traditional lecture content is delivered online, while interactive activities and discussions occur during synchronous sessions. Examples are Pre-recorded video lectures, online quizzes, and in-class problem-solving sessions. Promotes active learning, maximizes classroom interaction, and allows for personalized instruction. Most ODeL institutions in Nigeria already practice flipped classroom.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) focuses on students demonstrating mastery of specific skills or competencies rather than completing a set number of credit hours. **Examples:** Personalized learning paths, assessments based on skill mastery, and flexible pacing. This ensures that learning is outcome-based, accommodates individual learning speeds, and aligns education with real-world skills.

### **Evolving Educational Policies**

Educational policies are evolving both locally and globally. There is increasing acceptance and recognition of online degrees and certificates by educational institutions and employers. Policy changes that allow for credit transfer between online and traditional programmes, are already in place in some climes. This is predicated on accreditation standards for online programmes and parity of esteem.

Moreover, there are evolving policies promoting inclusivity and accessibility to ensure that ODeL is available to all learners, including those with disabilities. Mandates for accessible course design, use of assistive technologies, and inclusive instructional strategies ensure equal access to education, supports diverse learning needs, and complies with legal requirements for accessibility.

Additionally, both in the global space and nationally, there is increased investment and support from governments and educational institutions to enhance ODeL infrastructure and resources. Funding for technological upgrades, professional development for educators, and initiatives to expand broadband access is more robust than in the past. This improves the quality and reach of ODeL, supports innovation, and addresses digital divides. No institution should lag behind in these developments.

## CONCLUSION

The ODL Summit organised by the Obafemi Awolowo University Distance Learning Centre serves as a platform for fostering meaningful connections, driving innovation, and facilitating continuous improvement in ODeL practices. The future of ODeL is promising, driven by technological advancements, increased accessibility, and a growing acceptance of online education as a viable alternative to traditional learning methods. The continued evolution of ODeL will result in a more flexible, inclusive, and high-quality educational landscape. There will be a cultural shift towards the acceptance and normalization of online and distance learning as valid and effective modes of education. Traditional educational institutions will increasingly adopt ODeL methodologies and integrate them into their offerings, leading to a blended learning approach and there will be greater recognition and acceptance of ODeL qualifications by employers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve quality delivery in ODeL, institutions must offer professional development programmes and workshops focused on best practices in online teaching and the use of educational technologies. The Management and staff of ODeL as well as facilitators, content writers and e tutors should receive continuous training on the latest technological tools and platforms used in ODeL. This will enhance their skills and confidence in delivering high-quality ODeL, leading to better student outcomes and keeping them up to date with technological advancements, enabling them to use tools effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

More so, the university must recognize the dynamic nature of ODeL and ensure policies and strategies are flexible and adaptable to evolving technologies, pedagogies, and learner needs. The University Management should encourage experimentation and innovation while maintaining a focus on quality and efficacy. By adopting these actionable recommendations, The Obafemi Awolowo

University and other educational institutions can significantly improve the quality of their Open Distance and e - Learning (ODeL) programmes.

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