



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING



**Review of Open
and Distance
Learning
for Higher
Education in the
Commonwealth**

Review of Open and Distance Learning for Higher Education in the Commonwealth



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technologies.

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Key Terms and Abbreviations

- AI: Artificial intelligence.
- ANFE: Adult and non-formal education.
- BL: Blended learning. This is an overarching term that covers any educational model that includes both in-person and online components. It includes all technologies and pedagogical methods associated with this approach (Cronje, 2020; Hrastinski, 2019).
- CEMCA: Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia.
- CILL: Centre for Innovative & Lifelong Learning.
- COL: Commonwealth of Learning.
- CoP: Community of practice. A CoP is a group of people with a shared interest who want to share their expertise and improve their practice (Nicolini et al., 2022).
- Covid-19: The term is often used to describe the period marked by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when restrictions on movement throughout the world created a need for new ways of working and learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).
- CPD: Continuing professional development.
- DEASA: Distance Education Association of Southern Africa.
- Digital divide: The term used to describe unequal access to and use of digital technologies among students, educators and institutions. It has a significant impact on equity in education environments (Soomro et al., 2020).
- Equity: This term refers to fair access, participation and outcomes for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged groups (Levinson et al., 2022).
- ERE: Emergency remote education.
- Further education: Education that occurs after the end of compulsory education but excludes traditional academic higher education (HE). It refers to a range of learning opportunities for adults and school-leavers and is often focused on vocational, technical or professional skills (Harford, 2020).

- HE: Higher education. Formal learning that takes place after secondary schooling, generally at colleges and universities (Tight, 2020).
- HEC: Higher education council. An HEC is a formal national body that oversees strategic decision-making, quality assurance and allocation of funding in HE institutions and fosters collaboration among them (Nabaho et al., 2020).
- HEI: Higher education institution.
- ICT: Information and communication technologies.
- IT: Information technology/technologies.
- IT infrastructure: The foundational set of resources and systems that support the operation, delivery and management of information technology services in an organisation (Kustov & Kovalenko, 2023).
- IUM: International University of Management
- KICD: Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.
- LL: Living Lab.
- LLM: Large language model.
- LMS: Learning management system.
- Mobile learning: Also called m-learning, this refers to educational experiences facilitated by portable electronic devices. Learners can access content, interact socially and learn in various contexts no matter where they are (Danish & Hmelo-Silver, 2020).
- MOOC: Massive open online course.
- NCTE: National Council for Tertiary Education.
- NOUN: National Open University of Nigeria.
- NREN: National Research and Education Networks.
- ODEL: Open and distance e-learning. The umbrella term used when discussing open and distance learning and technology-enhanced learning (TEL) (Van den Berg, 2022).
- ODL: Open and distance learning. This is an educational approach that combines the principles of open learning, distance education and digital technologies to provide flexible, accessible and inclusive learning opportunities (Enakrere, 2024).
- OER: Open educational resources.
- OU: Open university.
- PacREF: Pacific Regional Education Framework
- PD: Professional development. An ongoing process through which academics, teachers, instructors and educators acquire new skills, knowledge and experience to enhance their professional skills (Baporikar, 2015).
- RETRIDOL: Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning.
- TEL: Technology-enhanced learning.
- TVET: Technical and vocational education and training.
- WTO: World Trade Organization.

Foreword

The higher education sector continues to evolve in response to a rapidly changing world, shaped by technological advances, demographic shifts, and increasing demand for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), grounded in its 1987 mandate to expand access to learning through distance education and technology, remains at the forefront of this transformation. This report, *Review of Open and Distance Learning for Higher Education in the Commonwealth*, is both timely and vital as we navigate an era defined by rapid and significant digital disruption, climate instability, and socio-economic challenges. Within this context, this report explored state of open and distance learning and technology-enabled learning in higher education in the Commonwealth through exploring this under the umbrella term of open and distance e-learning (ODeL).

As Commonwealth countries pursue the aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal 4 towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education as well as the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, the role of technology and open and distance learning have never been more essential. Through this report, COL reaffirms its commitment to learning for sustainable development, underpinned by the principles of equity, inclusion, and innovation. The findings from this report may serve as a roadmap for shaping robust and resilient systems of higher education.

The report's rich insights, drawn from a rigorous literature review, a comprehensive survey of 111 stakeholders, and expert interviews from participants from the Commonwealth, underscore the urgency of reform. Key themes, such as the need for policy alignment, digital infrastructure, professional development, inclusive access, and collaborative partnerships, align directly with COL's Higher Education initiative's focus and COL's strategic priorities. These issues are also reflected in COL's commitment to supporting member states by enabling policy environments, promoting gender-responsive open educational resources (OER), authentic assessment, and employability frameworks.

This report provides a number of key findings:

- Clearly ODeL has an important role to play in terms of equity of access. 87.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ODeL provides equitable access to education in their countries. This underscores ODeL's critical function in widening participation in higher education.
- 92.3% of respondents believed that ODeL is critical for the future of higher education in the Commonwealth, highlighting strong sectoral consensus on its importance for systemic sustainability.
- 82.8% of participants expressed optimism or strong optimism regarding the future of ODeL in their countries, reflecting broad confidence in its potential despite infrastructure and funding challenges.
- 73.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that government initiatives had positively impacted the implementation of digital education policies, indicating policy effectiveness where present.
- 85.6% of respondents said that mobile learning significantly improved access to education in their communities, especially for rural and marginalised groups.

- 71.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that collaborations and partnerships have enhanced ODeL delivery, validating COL's strategy of catalytic engagement with stakeholders.
- 86.5% of respondents believed the pandemic led to lasting improvements in ODeL practices, such as blended learning, virtual labs, and increased use of OER.
- Openness is still very relevant for higher education. 79.3% agreed or strongly agreed that OER have enhanced the quality of education, showing the growing acceptance and value of open content in diverse Commonwealth contexts.
- Infrastructure is a key issue as 57.7% of respondents rated the lack of infrastructure (e.g., electricity, connectivity, devices) as a significant or extreme challenge in implementing ODeL.
- In terms of funding, 73.9% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is sufficient funding to support ODeL initiatives in their countries, pointing to a major structural barrier that hampers scale and sustainability.
- According to the participants, there is a consistent disconnect between national policy intentions and practical institutional implementation, often due to lack of tools, funding, and coordination.
- Inequity exists not only between countries but within them, especially between urban and rural areas, with a small percentage facing extreme exclusion from digital learning opportunities.
- Institutions that adopted blended and mobile learning showed greater adaptability and resilience during crises like Covid-19, especially in small island states and remote regions.
- Informal educator networks and communities of practice play a vital role in professional development, often more effectively than top-down training initiatives.
- There is growing recognition that ODeL curricula must align with job market needs, with some institutions beginning to co-develop programmes with industry partners for better graduate outcomes which aligns with COL's focus on promoting graduate employability in higher education.

Moreover, this report highlights COL's pivotal role as intergovernmental organisation that acts as an enabler, capacity builder, and catalyst. By advocating for the integration of technology and flexible learning models, COL not only addresses current educational disparities but also prepares learners for future employment and entrepreneurship in an increasingly digital world.

This report makes a significant contribution to the Commonwealth-wide and even global discourse on higher education. It calls on governments, institutions, educators and partners to work collectively to ensure that no learner is left behind. We are confident that the recommendations outlined will guide targeted interventions and stimulate innovative practice, ensuring that ODL and technology-enabled learning remain powerful drivers for educational equity and sustainable development across the Commonwealth.

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 Adviser: Higher Education
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Executive Summary

This research of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and technology-enabled learning (TEL) within the 56 Commonwealth countries aimed to explore the status, challenges, and developments in this environment, with a focus on equity of access, policy frameworks, and dual-mode learning. The research was structured into three phases: first, a systematic review of the literature; then, a survey; and finally, one-on-one interviews. The literature review, conducted in two phases, aimed to understand the current thinking about ODL and TEL, with a focus on developing countries. It identified policies, collaborations, the influence of Covid-19, and infrastructure as crucial areas.

The survey was completed by 111 respondents and divided into five sections that address topics such as ODL policies, innovations, challenges, and developments in dual-mode learning. Within a pragmatist paradigm, the researchers combined quantitative data from closed questions with qualitative insights from open-ended questions and interviews. The survey highlights issues such as lack of ICT access, internet connectivity, student participation, and the impact of Covid-19 on learning.

Five key themes emerged from the survey's open-ended questions: infrastructure needs, professional development, financial support, equity and accessibility, and collaboration and partnerships. As such, these themes align with the strategic goals of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for 2021–2027. As such, these outcomes can guide the future planning of the COL while it also emphasises the importance of pedagogical approaches to be aligned with the future employability of students by addressing digital equity through policy measures.

Introduction

The 2023 Commonwealth of Learning (COL) report *Open Universities in the Commonwealth: At a Glance* (Olivier, 2023) provides a snapshot of the status and priorities of 28 open universities (OUs) across the 56 Commonwealth countries in terms of open and distance learning (ODL) in the immediate post-Covid-19 period. (At the time of the report, there were 33 OUs in the Commonwealth.) The participating OUs identified “the role of technology in and for ODL” (p. 16) as a key institutional priority:

The role of technology in and for ODL was significant. Some OUs showed general support for digitisation and also considered it a need to shift to full online education. In some cases, there was a need to reinvigorate integrated learning environments. More specifically, for some OUs there were specific aspects that required further attention, such as optimising flexible learning pathways and creating virtual science laboratories. Interestingly, in addition to an increased focus on OER and MOOCs, the OUs were interested in moving to automated online examinations. (Olivier, 2023, p. 16)

The 2023 report is primarily quantitative and focuses specifically on teaching and learning systems and approaches, staff and student profiles, finances and research. It does not discuss technology and ODL in great detail. Earlier reports indicated the need for further investigation into the specific roles that technology and ODL play in teaching and learning, and the specific aspects that need more attention, and the 2023 report acknowledges this need (Olivier, 2023). It also fully aligned with COL’s Strategic Plan 2021–2027 (Commonwealth of Learning [COL], 2024) by referring to the three pathways of change to support COL’s efforts to make a sustainable difference throughout the 56 Commonwealth Member States. In addition, the *COL Regional Compendium 2021–24* (COL, 2024) notes that “COL’s Strategic Plan 2021–2027 focuses on promoting ‘Learning for Sustainable Development’” (p. 5) and discusses the ways in which COL is working with or supporting its partners to strengthen and use various forms of ODL to achieve this.

In the wake of these reports, COL launched a mixed-methods research project with the aim of creating a roadmap of priorities for both future higher education (HE) activities related to ODL, technology-enhanced learning (TEL) and hence open and distance e-learning (ODeL) at COL and dual-mode university research and practices within the Commonwealth.

To establish the status of ODeL and the current application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in HE in the Commonwealth, the researchers aimed to assess the currency and relevance of national ODeL policies and regulations in the 56 Commonwealth countries and the number of ODeL and dual-mode institutions in each country. They set out with the expectation that although there may not have been a significant change in the number of ODeL institutions in each country since the 2023 report was released, the status of dual-mode institutions could have changed in that time. Therefore, the objective was to establish the nature of ODeL, the key developments in ODeL in different countries and the ODeL-related development needs for institutional dual-mode learning in different countries.

To understand the background and recent history of ODeL in Commonwealth countries and the issues that have been trending over the last five years, the authors of this report read academic literature, institutional reports and institutional policies. The literature could generally be categorised thematically into discussions about policy requirements, collaborations by ODeL institutions with various parties, the current efficiency of ODeL, the implementation of technologies, and educators' and students' attitudes, training and perceptions or experiences of equity. This initial literature review helped formulate the research questions and sub-questions.

Research Question

What is the state of distance education and the application of communication technologies to higher education in the Commonwealth?

SUB-QUESTIONS

- What is the status of national ODL policies and regulations in the 56 Commonwealth countries?
- How many ODL and dual-mode institutions exist in each country, and what is their nature?
- What are the key developments in ODL and institutional dual-mode learning across different countries?
- What challenges do countries face in implementing ODL and institutional dual-mode learning systems?
- What are the developmental needs for ODL and institutional dual-mode learning in different countries?

Research Methodology

To gather insights into potential practical solutions and outcomes that COL could incorporate into its future planning, the researchers applied a pragmatist paradigm in three phases for the research: a systematic literature review; a survey to collect quantitative data (from closed questions) and qualitative insights (from open-ended questions) from 111 respondents; and one-on-one interviews with subject experts to collect qualitative data that allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the issues explored in the survey.

By gathering subjective data through closed and open-ended questions and one-on-one interviews, the researchers were able to collect examples of multiple realities and perspectives from a variety of global contexts. They approached the study axiologically, in a value-laden way.

The validity and reliability of the sources identified during the literature review were confirmed using generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms such as Inciteful (which checks the metrics of authors and journals), Research Rabbit, Elicit and Lateral (which compares academic papers to thematically similar papers). Although generative AI was used to source and verify the literature, large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT were not used to write this report. To ensure

the credibility of the qualitative data, triangulation was conducted between various sources, the literature review, interview data and answers to the open-ended questions in the online survey. The combination of survey and interview data also contributes to the transferability of the findings, and a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis speaks to the dependability of the study. Regarding the confirmability of the research, the researchers are impartial to the research context, and therefore, the risk of bias influencing the findings is minimal. The value-laden axiological approach ensured that the findings are fully grounded in the participants' perspectives.

Phase 1 of the research consisted of a literature review that covered the topics that underpin the research questions, including definitions and interpretations of ODeL and dual-mode institutions, worldwide trends in ODeL, challenges and opportunities associated with ODeL and developmental needs for ODeL. The literature was sourced through Scopus peer-reviewed journals; Google Scholar full-text articles; Academia.edu and Researchgate.net pre- and post-print articles; EBSCOhost; Academic Search Complete; and e-journals. COL's website proved to be an invaluable source of publications, reports and other relevant resources.

A corpus of 389 relevant publications was identified, and themes that emerged were used as a guide in the desktop review of existing policies and regulations related to ODeL and dual-mode learning in Commonwealth countries. These policies and regulations were publicly available, although some documents were added during subsequent searches to follow up on points that arose from the survey responses.

Although desktop research could establish the state of policies and regulations to some degree, Phase 2 of the research consisted of a survey with both closed- and open-ended questions that allowed the researchers to design an open-ended interview protocol for Phase 3.

The themes obtained from the initial literature review formed the basis of the survey that was shared with interested parties through the COL network. In total, 111 respondents from 25 countries (see Table 1) completed the survey, responding to both open-ended quantitative and qualitative questions. Ten respondents held governmental roles that were not specified in more detail; 20 worked in the Ministry of Education, 65 were affiliated with a higher education institution (HEI), three were from professional associations working directly with the aforementioned bodies, eight worked in other roles, eight were from other organisations and the remaining five did not provide any details about their professional role (see Tables 2 and 3). COL helped source respondents and provided the digital platform for the questionnaire. The online survey contained a variety of questions that fell under the following main themes: limited access to ICT resources; Internet connectivity and bandwidth issues; electricity supply and online learning; student participation in online learning; the cost of ICT equipment and online education; ICT skills among students and teachers; HEIs and labour market demands; demographic changes and student preferences; technological advancements and educational approaches; the impact of Covid-19 on learning; and general challenges in online learning.

The questionnaire data from the 111 respondents were analysed using Microsoft Excel, Taguette (an online qualitative data system) and Voyant (an online platform that analyses key terms and provides the analysis in a quantitative format); 111 respondents answered the questions.

All data were collected with the respondents' and participants' full consent, and the researchers took care to anonymise the responses. Therefore, all specific mentions of institutions and countries that could reveal the respondents' identities were generalised.

Table 1 shows the online survey respondents' countries of origin (see also Appendix A). Tables 1 and 2 describe the respondents and the organisation types to which they belong.

Table 1. Respondents' country of residence

NAME	COUNT	PERCENTAGE	NAME	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Botswana	9	6.04%	Sri Lanka	4	2.68%
Cameroon	0	0.00%	Antigua and Barbuda	0	0.00%
Eswatini	1	0.67%	The Bahamas	0	0.00%
Gabon	0	0.00%	Barbados	1	0.67%
Ghana	2	1.34%	Belize	4	2.68%
Kenya	5	3.36%	Canada	3	2.01%
Lesotho	4	2.68%	Dominica	1	0.67%
Malawi	2	1.34%	Grenada	0	0.00%
Mauritius	6	4.03%	Guyana	0	0.00%
Mozambique	4	2.68%	Jamaica	1	0.67%
Namibia	27	18.12%	St Kitts and Nevis	1	0.67%
Nigeria	2	1.34%	Saint Lucia	0	0.00%
Rwanda	3	2.01%	St Vincent and The Grenadines	3	2.01%
Seychelles	0	0.00%	Trinidad and Tobago	2	1.34%
Sierra Leone	1	0.67%	Cyprus	2	1.34%
South Africa	8	5.37%	Malta	2	1.34%
Tanzania	1	0.67%	United Kingdom	1	0.67%
Togo	1	0.67%	Australia	3	2.01%
The Gambia	1	0.67%	Fiji	2	1.34%
Uganda	4	2.68%	Kiribati	14	9.40%
Zambia	4	2.68%	Nauru	0	0.00%
Bangladesh	1	0.67%	New Zealand	2	1.34%
Brunei Darussalam	0	0.00%	Papua New Guinea	0	0.00%
India	5	3.36%	Samoa	1	0.67%
Malaysia	2	1.34%	Solomon Islands	0	0.00%
Maldives	0	0.00%	Tonga	0	0.00%
Pakistan	4	2.68%	Tuvalu	0	0.00%
Singapore	0	0.00%	Vanuatu	0	0.00%
			No answer	5	3.36%

Table 2. Types of organisations respondents belong to

ORGANISATION TYPE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Higher education institution	65	58.56%
Ministry of Education	20	18.02%
Other	8	7.21%
Government	10	9.01%
Professional organisation	3	2.70%
No answer	5	4.50%

Table 3. “Other” organisations not mentioned in the provided list

ORGANISATION TYPE	COUNT
Parastatal	2
Authority for further and higher education	3
Church school	1
Consulting company	1
Independent education adviser	1
Non-government teacher	1
Non-governmental organisation	1
NSFAF state-owned enterprise	1
Private university	1
Quality assurance regulator	1
Tertiary regulator	1
Other non-identified	3

The respondents comprised an independent consultant (1), a librarian (1), researchers (2), administrators/managers (3), HE co-ordinators (3), professors (3), student support officers (3), academic development managers (5), education officers (6), lecturers/senior lecturers (15) and institutional management staff (59). The remaining 10 respondents did not mention specific roles.

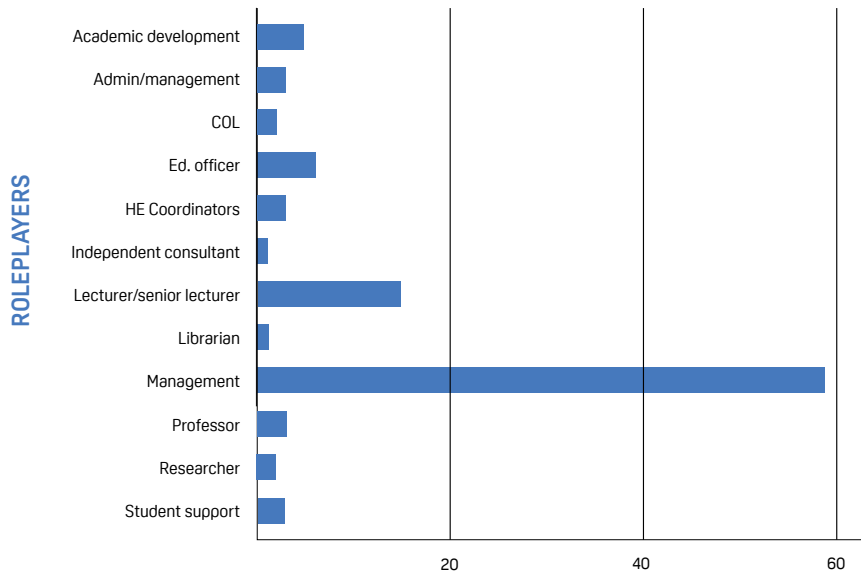


Figure 1. Respondents' job titles/areas.

The results of the questionnaire formed the basis for the interviews that were conducted in Phase 3 to collect qualitative data. With the help of COL, a convenience sample of role players that included policymakers, members of institutional management and educators in ODeL institutions was conducted. Thereafter, 11 participants who were not part of the convenience sample were contacted and subsequently volunteered to be interviewed online in one-on-one interviews with two researchers. They were asked the following five open-ended questions:

1. How optimistic are you about the future of ODL and TEL in your country and what factors contribute to your perspective?
2. How has the response to Covid-19 led to lasting improvements in ODL and TEL methodologies, and what impact do you think this has on the future of higher education?
3. To what extent does your country face challenges such as resistance to change, inadequate policy frameworks, lack of infrastructure and inadequate educator training in implementing ODL and TEL?
4. How have collaborations and partnerships strengthened ODL and TEL offerings in your area, and what role have they played in key developments?
5. What specific support or resources would be most beneficial to address the needs of ODL and TEL implementation in your context?

Their responses provided some insight into the participants' perceptions and experiences of ODeL in their respective institutional environments.

Highlights from the Literature Review

The literature review was conducted in two phases. A systematic literature review was conducted for Phase 1 and produced a corpus of 389 relevant sources. The researchers aimed to use the review to understand current thinking around ODL, TEL and ODeL in terms of general theory and practice and how it plays out in developing countries and, specifically, across the 56 Commonwealth countries. The literature can be categorised thematically as follows:

- Policies and frameworks that support ODeL
- Collaborations and partnerships to further ODeL
- The influence of Covid-19 on the field
- Infrastructure to support ODeL

The insights from the Phase 1 systematic literature review formed the foundation of the survey that 111 respondents completed. The general themes are illustrated below, using some of the sources identified in the literature review.

Policies and Frameworks That Support ODeL

To support ODeL, an education institution must have effective and comprehensive e-learning policies in place (Modise, 2022) and support ICT-mediated learning. ICT tools form the backbone of collaborative, interactive and self-directed learning and optimal student engagement (Asamoah, 2021). To this end, the primary responsibility falls on governments to implement policies to support technology use in education and ensure that it is accessible to all learners, including learners with disabilities and learners who live in remote areas (Butakor et al., 2023).

For example, universities in Botswana are using various TEL platforms to improve access for a diverse range of learners. Botswana and Ghana have recorded a marked growth in access to tertiary education (Adekanmbi et al., 2021) through partnerships with Coursera and its massive open online course-based (MOOC-based) programmes, COL and some Internet providers, and both countries have extensive policies to ensure access to HEIs through technology (Adekanmbi et al., 2021). And in The Gambia, the National Higher Education Policy aims to expand ICT education to promote ODL. These examples point to a global trend in HE of governments and institutions adapting to new TEL environments (Shai et al., 2021).

According to Adarkwah (2021a), the government in Ghana has ambitious aims to transform the country's education system through ICT, despite the significant challenges it faces.

Professional Development for Educators

The types of changes described above entail an obligation to train ICT educators continuously (Irele, 2021). Policymakers must create supportive environments and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that all institutions co-operate and make progress (Ali & Georgiou, 2024).

Despite high Internet costs and uneven access to devices, Ghana addressed the need for professional development among educators. The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), with support from the Ghanaian Department of Education, established a Virtual Learning Taskforce and subsequently developed an online BEd curriculum, training 85%–90% of the country’s student teachers on virtual platforms (Henaku, 2020).

Infrastructure and Access for Students

Some trends in efforts to improve access to ICT for students in Commonwealth countries are noted below. These trends vary across countries. For example, the Government of Botswana has made efforts to ensure that distance learners can access ICT. In 2011, researchers noted that accessibility in Botswana was problematic, with a digital divide between information-rich and information-poor distance learners (Oladokun & Aina, 2011). Much changed in the next nine years, however. In terms of the number of households that have electricity and mobile phone access, Botswana rated sixth out of 36 countries in a 2020 Afrobarometer survey (Krönke, 2020).

In Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has instituted national broadcast programmes for remote learning, local telecommunication companies provided data bundles during the Covid-19 pandemic, and teacher training in technology was identified as a key issue in the Kenya Vision 2030 (Mbogo, 2020). However, the KICD’s remote learning framework still presents some barriers to equity and access (Mwebi, 2021), despite the government’s efforts to address them (Areba & George Ngwacho, 2020).

The Government of Malawi is focused on EdTech initiatives. To address inequalities in access to and the quality of education, the Malawian Ministry of Education is currently focusing on creating open, distance and e-learning policies. In their 2023 guidelines, the Ministry of Education emphasises equitable access to institutions and stipulates that students must be able “to register and study any programmes of their choice from anywhere within and beyond Malawian borders” and have access to facilities, technical support and computer and IT literacy training; and that institutions should design programmes to be more flexible, provide adequate programme information to prospective students and use open educational resources (OER) (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2023, pp. 7–11).

To improve access to HE in Zambia, the country’s institutions are focusing on improving digital delivery modes for education and training. Limited Internet access presents a notable challenge, but Zambia is motivated by several economic, academic and social factors (Masaiti & Mwale, 2020).

Gabon is one of several countries that recognises the need for it, despite acknowledging that educators require professional development. Mba (2011) argues that legislation and policy must be in place before educators can change their practices, and explains that “the way in which reforms are carried out within the ministerial department in charge of education and training in Gabon would explain the procrastination” (p. 10)

ODeL Collaborations and Partnerships

Many researchers claim in the literature that partnerships between education providers and third parties can benefit ODeL, primarily because a range of technologies must be integrated into curricula to sustain distance learning (Flam et al., 2024). For example, telecommunications providers can often provide free educational resources and be instrumental in making infrastructure improvements, which are essential in low-income countries, happen. Living Labs (LLs), for example, offer ways to address social challenges and improve education outcomes, and hands-on TEL initiatives include ICT-based research and testing of user activities in real-life settings (Tercanli & Jongbloed, 2022).

The benefits of stakeholder collaboration were confirmed during the Covid-19 pandemic when telecommunications companies and online course providers partnered with education institutions to enable content distribution (Adigun et al., 2021). For example, Coursera partnered with both Botswana and Ghana, and Vodafone and MTN collaborated with the University of Ghana (Adekanmbi et al., 2021).

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Referring to Covid-19 and its impact on humanity, Caiado (2024) argues that “in . . . moments of high uncertainty, international institutions should play an important role in fostering collaboration” (p. 116). However, he claims that in Brazil, several factors hamper collaboration. Participants in his research mentioned that several institutional structures had already been weakened before the pandemic and could not hold up under the additional strain it created, that not all institutions were designed to operate in crises and that political disputes influenced decisions made by international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Several authors suggest potential solutions to enhance international collaboration. Mulhanga et al. (2022) discuss National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) projects such as AfricaConnect3 to boost capacity to enhance the output of the science community, build global research participation channels and facilitate education events for more knowledge exchange and dissemination. The Bologna Process promotes collaboration among HEIs and is an especially effective way to share good practices, mitigate barriers to degree recognition and develop a unified qualification framework in HE (Vuban & Mekolle, 2024). Banda et al. (2022) found in their quantitative research that institutional collaboration has a significant impact on the quality of HE, and specifically, pedagogical synergies, scientific research and policy development.

It is important to build lasting collaborations, such as those between COL and the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL). Those two organisations have been collaborating successfully since 2003, with a focus on developing distance education (Eke Eya et al., 2019).

TECHNOLOGICAL COLLABORATION

Integrating ICT into education improves global collaboration among students (Mphunyane, 2021), and mobile technologies offer an efficient way to improve accessibility (Criollo-C et al., 2021). Many researchers also emphasise the importance of having affordable digital resources to promote technological collaboration (Arthur-Nyarko et al., 2020).

ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION

Several challenges to collaboration emerge in the literature. For example, limited co-operation opportunities, especially among female educators (Hurajova et al., 2022), and technological capacity limitations in private schools (Irene & Hussain, 2020). However, the literature also shows that partnerships with outside entities such as telecommunications providers are vital for success, and the benefits of collaboration appear to outweigh the challenges.

In Africa, agencies such as COL, USAID and the British Council have been involved in collaborative initiatives at various times. COL has sponsored initiatives for media training and collaborative efforts within the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), and the University of Botswana has collaborated with institutions in the USA to develop technological frameworks (Adekanmbi et al., 2021).

COL emphasises the importance of partnerships for building capacity in ODL, and its regional centres play a pivotal role in the formation and maintenance of such partnerships (Perris & McGreal, 2021). The establishment of ODL centres in Malawi, for example, involved collaboration between various local education and financial partners (Chibambo & Divala, 2020).

Partnerships with developed countries are a crucial tool for improving digital literacy in African universities, as exemplified by Rwanda's collaboration with Google (Osabwa, 2022). The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) explored partnerships with 36 sister universities in Nigeria for practical science training. It also began to collaborate with the STEM faculty of the Open University for training in practical science for ODL (Olaniyi, 2019).

COVID-19 AND IMPROVEMENTS IN ODEL METHODOLOGIES

Covid-19 stimulated online learning in Sub-Saharan Africa — and subsequently highlighted the need for the equitable distribution of ICT resources. Policymakers are encouraged to partner with international bodies to improve digital access (Adarkwah, 2021b). In some areas and countries, emergency remote education (ERE) was speedily implemented, but access to digital technology among students remained uneven. In addition, technological, pedagogical and social challenges hindered effective TEL deployment in marginalised universities (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted the need for more blended learning (BL). This approach improves student empowerment by providing various options for learning through digital platforms and resources, supports student engagement and promotes critical thinking skills. Its increased use also brought the importance of free resources to the forefront. BL empowers students to take an active role in their learning, which fosters independence and creativity. It also promotes flexibility and adaptability, which makes it a good fit for ODL and OER (Badaru & Adu, 2022).

Various initiatives, such as virtual platforms and online repositories, emerged during the pandemic. Many international associations provided free webinars on online teaching to support faculty empowerment, and universities expanded their partnerships with online providers to improve mental health support for students (Kara, 2021).

However, in Uganda, researchers established that although e-learning solutions could facilitate teaching and learning successfully, student engagement posed a significant challenge. Technology was not successfully integrated into education, and this was linked to a lack of technology use among students prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The quality of the material and the level of readiness to adapt to a new mode of delivery added to the challenge (Moyini & Habibu, 2023).

RECENT ODEL-RELATED DEVELOPMENTS AND INNOVATIONS IN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

The Covid-19 response led to positive developments in the ODeL environment, including resource distribution, constructive policies and cross-institutional collaboration. However, it also highlighted many gaps and needs — for example, a lack of support for BL, uneven availability of free resources and a need for better training.

A COL quality assurance workshop for dual-mode education led to the “promotion of personalised learning and tailoring learning experiences to meet the individual needs and preferences of learners; fostering of data-driven instructions to improve learning outcomes; possible incorporation of augmented/virtual reality to create immersive learning experiences; and promotion of microlearning” (COL, 2024, p. 14).

Between 2021 and 2024, COL helped create 60 policies and strategies in 22 Commonwealth countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Tonga and Zambia.

In general, COL also supported officials and staff who undertook various types of training in 33 countries: Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, Fiji, The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Uganda, Vanuatu and Zambia (COL, 2024).

The Survey and Its Structure

The survey opened with a series of general questions and was then divided into five sections that dealt with the following broadly defined themes: the status of ODeL policies, recent developments and innovations in ODeL, the challenges experienced in implementing ODeL, key developments in dual-mode learning, implementation challenges for ODeL and specific challenges faced by institutions. The responses to the questions in each of the five sections are described below.

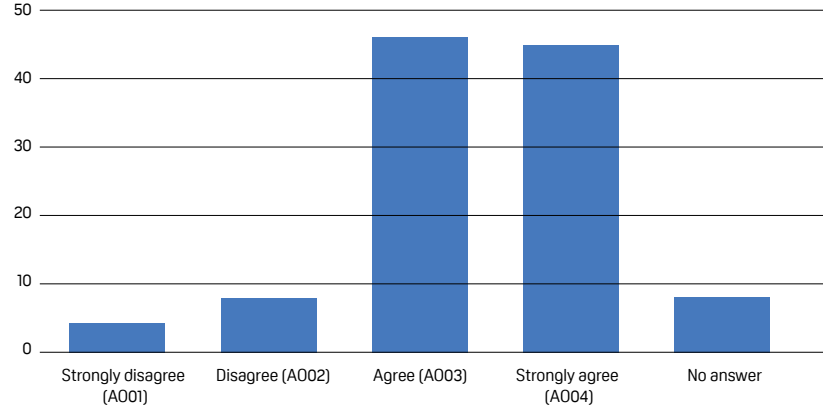
An analysis of the survey outcomes created the structure for the one-on-one interviews. These interviews are discussed in detail later in this report, but a selection of comments from some of the interview participants is also included in the sections below.

Section 1: The Status of Open and Distance E-learning in the 56 Commonwealth Countries

The first question asked about the equity of access, and respondents answered based on their own experiences and opinions. As all the respondents were experienced agents in the field, we were confident that their responses would be a robust indication of the general feeling in each country. We also asked whether their respective countries had national policies and regulatory frameworks for ODL. Not everyone was aware of the existence of such policies, although that does not mean that they do not exist. Where they exist, their impact is clearly positive.

EQUITY OF ACCESS

Respondents were asked, “How strongly do you agree that ODeL provide equitable access to education in your country?” The overall majority (87.5%) agreed or strongly agreed; 7.1% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed (see Figure 2).

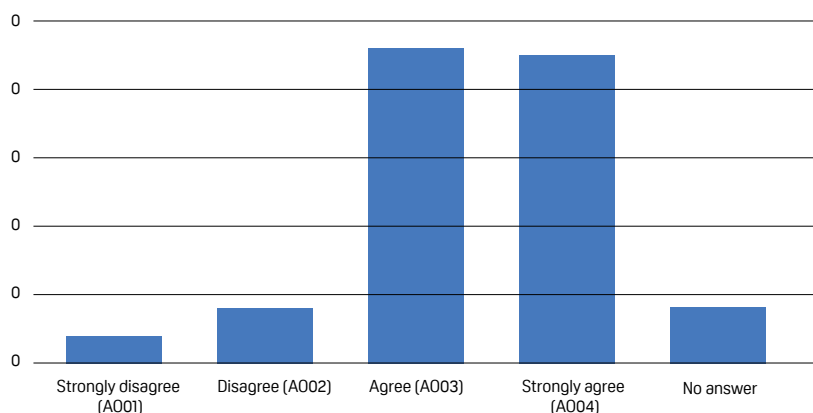


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	4	3.60%
Disagree (A002)	8	7.21%
Agree (A003)	46	41.44%
Strongly Agree (A004)	45	40.54%
No answer	8	7.21%

Figure 2. “How strongly do you agree that ODeL provide equitable access to education in your country?”

THE COMMONWEALTH NEEDS ODEL TO FUNCTION

The respondents were then asked how strongly they agreed that ODeL is critical for the future of HE in the Commonwealth. Almost all (92.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, and 7.7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 3).

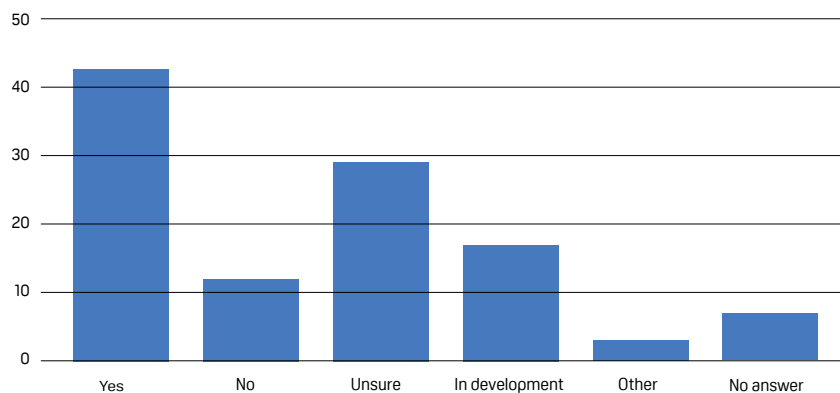


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	7	6.31%
Disagree (A002)	4	3.60%
Agree (A003)	27	24.32%
Strongly Agree (A004)	67	60.36%
No answer	6	5.41%

Figure 3. “How strongly do you agree that ODeL are critical for the future of higher education in the Commonwealth?”

AWARENESS OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS RELATING TO ODEL IN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

When asked if their country has a national policy or regulatory framework for ODeL, 22.2% of respondents said that it does. However, 33.3% were unsure or unaware of such information, 11.1% said such policies and frameworks are in development and almost 33.3% said there is no such policy in their country (see Figure 4). In response to the open-ended questions that followed, one respondent said that a policy was in place, but that they were not aware of a framework. A survey respondent from Tanzania noted that “Tanzania Education and training policy does accommodate ODL. But I’m unsure of [the] regulatory framework for Open and Distance Learning.”



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Yes	43	38.74%
No	12	10.81%
Unsure	29	26.13%
In Development	17	15.32%
Other	3	2.70%
No answer	7	6.31%

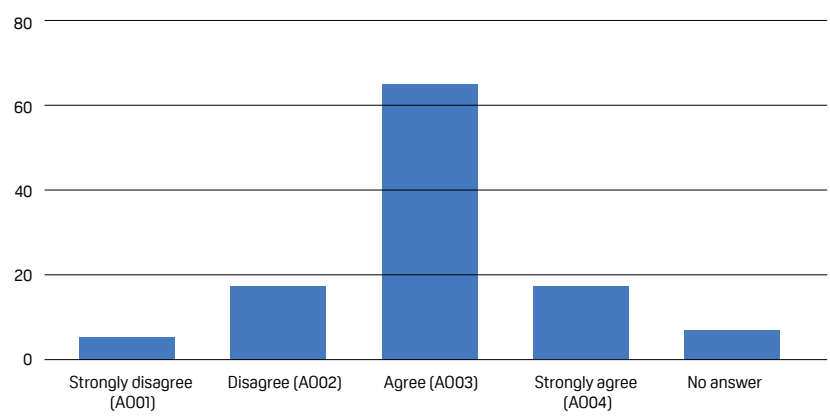
Figure 4. “Does your country have a national policy or regulatory framework for ODeL?”

Other responses to the open-ended questions were:

- ICT Policy.
- No but they make reference to ODL in the Education and Training Act.
- Policy in place but not sure of the framework.
- Somewhat, it is mostly mediated by institutions as we are self-accrediting (Uni’s that is).
- The UK doesn’t have a dedicated, stand-alone national policy specifically for Open and Distance Learning (ODL), the quality of ODL programs is overseen and regulated by the “Open and Distance Learning Quality Council (ODL QC),” which acts as the primary body for assessing and accrediting ODL quality in the UK; effectively functioning as a regulatory framework within the broader education system.

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT ODEL POLICIES

Where government initiatives exist, they appear to have an impact on the implementation of digital education policies by regulating and approving ODeL courses. The majority of respondents agreed (58.4%) or strongly agreed (13.4%) with the statement “Government initiatives have positively impacted the implementation of digital education policies.” Of the remaining participants, 4.7% strongly disagreed and 23.5% disagreed. (See Figure 5.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly disagree (A001)	5	4.50%
Disagree (A002)	17	15.32%
Agree (A003)	65	58.56%
Strongly Agree (A004)	17	15.32%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 5. “Government initiatives have positively impacted the implementation of digital education policies.”

THE NUMBER OF ODEL INSTITUTIONS PER COUNTRY

In his 2023 report for COL, Olivier noted that there were 33 open universities in the Commonwealth (2023, p. vi). They all offered distance learning options: 17 offered online learning opportunities, 13 had face-to-face programmes in addition to the distance options, and the rest offered BL options (see Table 4). At the beginning of the current study, the researchers expected that the number of OUs would not have changed significantly, but that the Covid-19 pandemic would have seen more of them transform into dual-mode institutions.

Table 4. OUs in the Commonwealth in 2023

FULL NAME	YEAR ESTABLISHED
Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan	1974
Athabasca University, Canada	1970
Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh	1992
Botswana Open University, Botswana	1998
Dr B.R. Ambedkar Open University, India	1982
Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, India	1994
Indira Gandhi National Open University, India	1985
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, India	2019
Jharkhand State Open University, India	2021

Karnataka State Open University, India	1996
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, India	2006
M.P. Bhoj Open University, India	1991
Nalanda Open University, India	1987
National Open University of Nigeria, Nigeria	2002
Netaji Subhas Open University, India	1997
Odisha State Open University, India	2015
Open University Malaysia, Malaysia	2000
Open University Mauritius, Mauritius	2012
Open University of Cyprus, Cyprus	2002
Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka	1980
Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University, India	2005
Sreenarayanaguru Open University, India	2020
Tamil Nadu Open University, India	2002
The Open University, United Kingdom	1969
The Open University of Tanzania, Tanzania	1992
UP Rajarshi Tandon Open University, India	1998
Université TÉLUQ, Canada	1972
University of South Africa, South Africa	1873
Uttarakhand Open University, India	2005
Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, India	1987
Wawasan Open University, Malaysia	2007
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, India	1989
Zambian Open University, Zambia	2002

Nearly all survey respondents provided inaccurate answers when asked about the number of ODL and dual-mode institutions in their respective countries. The answers ranged from none to more than 100. However, many respondents mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic drove a definite shift from face-to-face delivery to a dual-mode delivery approach. New ODL institutions are being developed in all regions, although there seem to be some regional disparities: They are concentrated in certain regions and are not equally distributed across the 56 countries.

All the survey questions had incomplete responses to varying degrees. To create as big a picture as possible, the researchers used various online search engines to add to the information gathered by the survey. Appendix 2, ODL and Dual-Mode Institutions, contains more details about the number of ODL institutions across the Commonwealth countries.

Section 2: Recent Developments and Innovations in ODeL and Their Impact

To explore the status of ODeL in Commonwealth countries in more depth, we assessed the respondents' knowledge of the types of programmes being run in their countries, collaborations involving education institutions and whether decisions were data-driven. We also wanted to know if and how Covid-19 improved ODeL in their context.

The respondents could provide details about the use, state and success of innovative online platforms. However, they were uncertain about the role of government, as well as that of the institutions themselves, in ensuring the successful rollout of ODeL in their environment.

POLICIES AND GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT

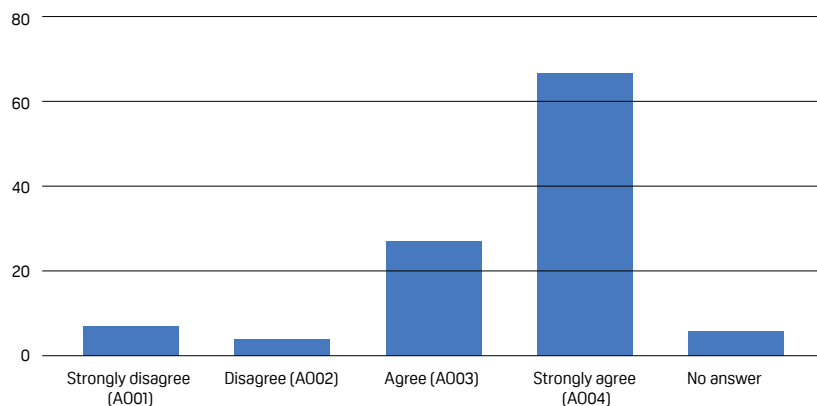
Governments in several countries have stepped up to support ODL; some have established dedicated ministries and formulated policies to improve digital education. These actions indicate that there is a concerted effort and structured approach to integrate ODeL into the education framework. A top-down approach makes it more likely that institutions' actions will align with national goals and standards.

The survey identified a path that we further explored in 11 in-depth individual interviews. It provided some detailed information about the state of institutional resources and assets. Both the survey responses and the interviews suggested a degree of optimism about some developments. However, some areas and countries are still being left behind. Physical infrastructure, funding and support for education reform using appropriate policies and other essential tools appeared to be top of mind for many survey respondents and interview participants. When asked to what extent their country faced challenges such as resistance to change, inadequate policy frameworks, lack of infrastructure and insufficient training in the implementation of ODeL, Participant 6 answered:

“And, you know, that’s a very simplistic and naive assumption given all the complexities that we know about, you know, implementing any kind of education reform, not only, you know, online education, or you know, ODL in general, but you know any kind of education reform. There is this tendency of, okay, if we tell them what to do, then they will go do it. But where are the tools? Where are the policies?”

ODEL AND THE FUTURE OF HE IN THE COMMONWEALTH

In response to the statement “ODEL are critical for the future of higher education in the Commonwealth,” nearly 85% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Slightly less than 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a little over 5% did not answer the question. (See Figure 6.)

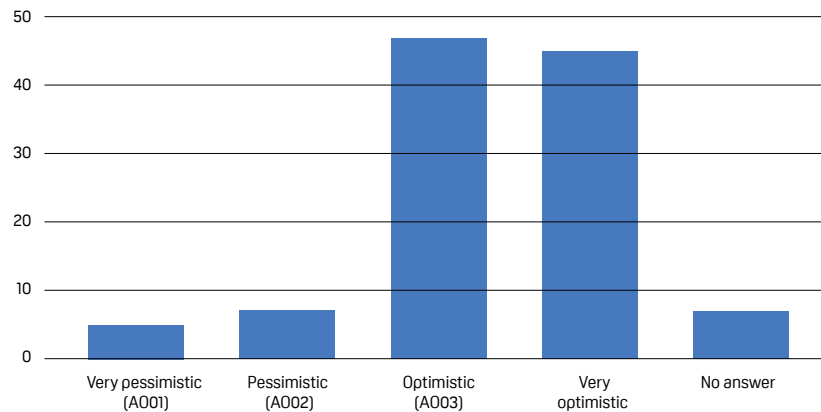


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly disagree (A001)	7	6.31%
Disagree (A002)	4	3.60%
Agree (A003)	27	24.32%
Strongly agree (A004)	67	60.36%
No answer	6	5.41%

Figure 6. ODeL are critical for the future of higher education in the Commonwealth.

OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE OF ODEL

A majority (82.84%) of the respondents reported being optimistic or very optimistic about the future of ODeL in their countries. 29% claimed to be pessimistic or very pessimistic about the issue, and seven respondents did not answer the question. (See Figure 7.)

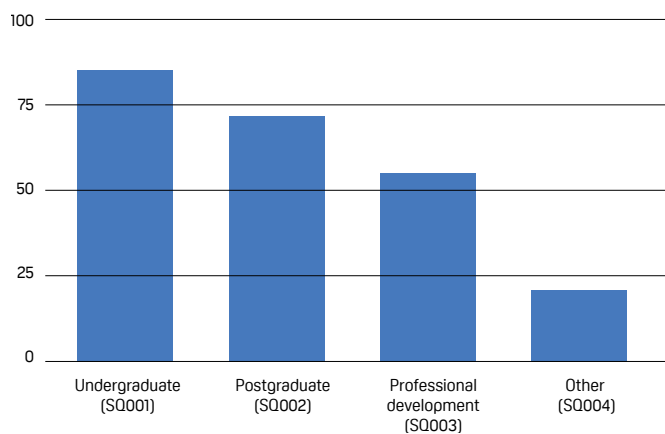


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Very Pessimistic (A001)	5	4.50%
Pessimistic (A002)	7	6.31%
Optimistic (A003)	47	42.34%
Very Optimistic (A004)	45	40.54%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 7. “How optimistic are you about the future of ODeL in your country?”

TYPES OF PROGRAMMES OFFERED

Of the institutions represented in the survey, 76.58% offer undergraduate programmes, 64.86% offer postgraduate programmes, 49.55% offer professional development programmes and 18.92% provide a variety of unidentified programmes such as certificate courses, secondary school qualifications, crafts training, diplomas, open schooling and other short courses. (See Figure 8.)

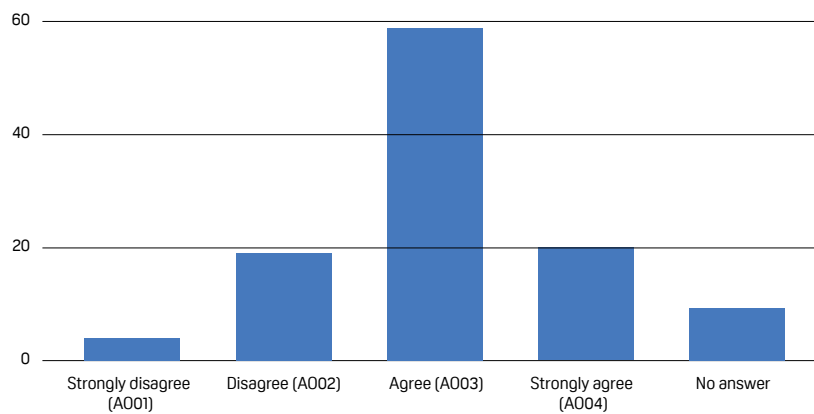


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Undergraduate (SQ001)	85	76.58%
Postgraduate (SQ002)	72	64.86%
Professional development (SQ003)	55	49.55%
Other	21	18.92%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 8. Types of programmes that institutions offer.

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS HAVE STRENGTHENED ODeL OFFERINGS

It came as little surprise that 53.15% of the respondents agreed and 18.02% strongly agreed that collaborations and partnerships have strengthened ODeL in their area. A total of 20.72% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. (See Figure 9.), while nine respondents did not answer the question.

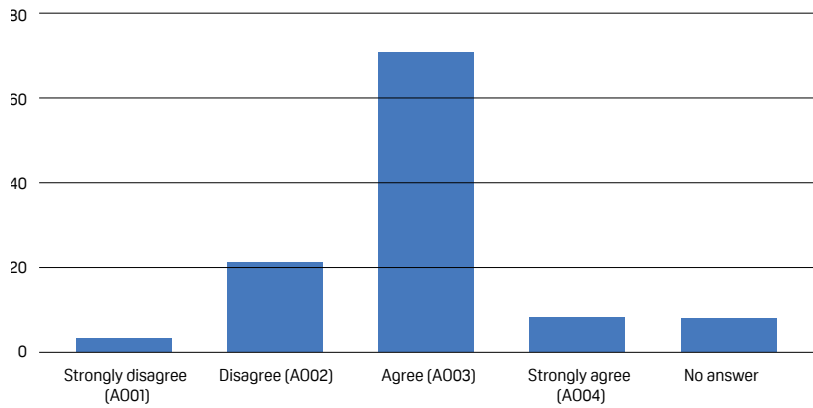


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	4	3.60%
Disagree (A002)	19	17.12%
Agree (A003)	59	53.15%
Strongly Agree (A004)	20	18.02%
No answer	9	8.11%

Figure 9. "Collaborations and partnerships have strengthened ODeL offerings in my area."

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES FOR IMPROVED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE TRACKING

Almost three quarters (71.17%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “data-driven decision-making practices have enhanced student engagement and performance tracking.” Of the remainder, 21.62% disagreed or strongly disagreed and eight respondents did not answer. (See Figure 10.)

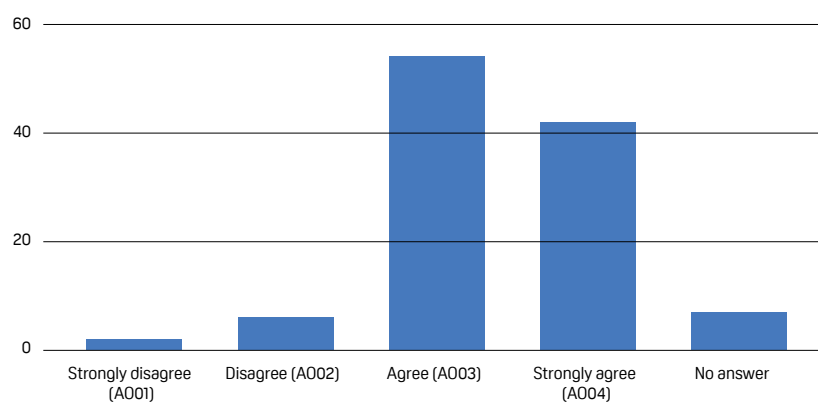


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	3	2.70%
Disagree (A002)	21	18.92%
Agree (A003)	71	63.96%
Strongly Agree (A004)	8	7.21%
No answer	8	7.21%

Figure 10. “Data-driven decision-making practices have enhanced student engagement and performance tracking.”

CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS IN ODeL METHODOLOGIES BROUGHT ABOUT BY COVID-19

At time of writing, it is unarguable that Covid-19 changed education in many ways. Some of the interview participants mentioned the need for effective quality assurance of the new approaches to education so that institutions can maintain their educational integrity. A thematic analysis and analysis of the use of certain phrases in responses to the open-ended questions to describe the changes and improvements in ODeL methodologies brought on by Covid-19 indicated a very strong consensus that the pandemic accelerated the adoption of ODeL. In addition, most participants (86.49%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The response to Covid-19 has led to lasting improvements in ODeL methodologies.” Seven respondents did not answer the question. (See Figure 11.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	2	1.80%
Disagree (A002)	6	5.41%
Agree (A003)	54	48.65%
Strongly Agree (A004)	42	37.84%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 11. “The response to Covid-19 has led to lasting improvements in ODeL methodologies.”

Section 3: Key Developments in Dual-Mode Learning

Responses to the open-ended survey question about recent key developments in ODL and TEL in institutional dual-mode learning were clustered under key themes:

1. Increased adoption of online learning platforms: 15 mentions
2. Government support and policy development: 12 mentions
3. Infrastructure improvements: 10 mentions
4. Focus on inclusivity and accessibility: 9 mentions
5. Integration of innovative technologies: 8 mentions
6. Quality assurance measures: 7 mentions
7. Blended learning models: 6 mentions
8. Challenges in engagement: 5 mentions

INNOVATIVE ONLINE PLATFORMS AND PROGRAMMES

In the survey, the respondents mentioned ODeL development trends in their own environments, with respondents from Malawi, Zambia, Namibia and Kiribati giving specific details. Some of the developments that were mentioned were the establishment of a digital education radio station and the use of educational TV channels to reach learners who live in areas where Internet services are not easily accessible. Some respondents also mentioned learning platforms, including Learning Passport in Zambia and the MUBAS ODeL Offline Digital Library, as examples of innovative education delivery methods. These solutions reflect the tailored approach that has been adopted in some areas to meet learners' diverse needs, especially in remote areas.

There seems to be some institutional commitment to the use of innovative online platforms and programmes, as indicated in responses to the open-ended questions in the survey: 50% of the answers acknowledged improvement in the quality of institutional online infrastructure, and only 30% expressed some concerns about quality assurance or lack thereof. However, the establishment of e-learning centres and the integration of OER show some commitment to improving educational access and quality. When asked about improvements in teaching resources, one survey respondent from the South Pacific commented:

“Given the limited availability of state of art and contextualized resources for teaching, these developments are highly appreciated and well received by the ministry as well as the teachers. Teachers and Curriculum Officers also appreciated the training on learning how to teach online.”

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Almost 80% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the availability of OER has improved the quality of education. Less than 13% disagreed and nine respondents did not submit an answer. Nine respondents did not answer the question. (See Figure 12.)

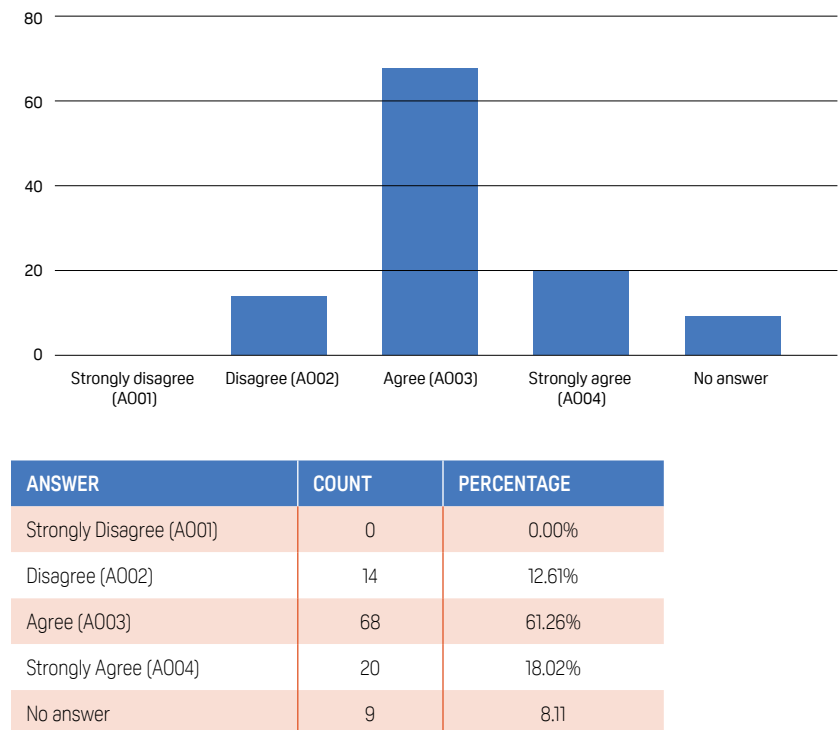


Figure 12. “The availability of Open Educational Resources (OER) has enhanced the quality of education.”

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREE RESOURCES

However, some cynicism about free resources emerged during the interviews. Participant 2 remarked that anyone who receives OER should also create awareness of the responsibility that comes with using them:

“This money that’s coming is the taxpayers’ money from that particular country don’t coming for free, yes, right? So that’s the kind of so it’s also about awareness that we create, create, I think a little bit of responsibility is on our hands too, in our hands too, that we can’t, we can’t just say, oh, this is the mentality. . . . No. I mean, there may be that mentality, but we can always create more awareness, right? Open educational resources are free, but not all of them are relevant to the context.”

Participant 2 also noted that recipients in their environment are acting responsibly by making plans to become self-sufficient in the future:

“Even if any donor company stops, people take it in a positive sense, that that’s okay, it has stopped. We have to now look for it, for our own money, yes, and then we’ll become more careful and cautious of how we spend it, so people do evaluate themselves and their practices.”

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Governments are showing greater awareness of the digital divide, and survey respondents commented on the efforts being made to enhance Internet connectivity. The digital divide is also a critical consideration in policy development. One respondent listed the areas in which government efforts to close the divide affected them:

Student engagement

Improve absenteeism

Student academic results

Interesting lessons

Teachers spent more time teaching students than preparing and writing in the classroom (More interactive time)

Some survey respondents mentioned that the visible involvement of a variety of councils and authorities shows the collaborative effort being made to ensure quality assurance and standardisation in online learning. Two of the actors mentioned were the Uganda National Council for Higher Education and the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority for Further e-Learning. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan’s partnership with the World Bank was cited as an example of the collaborative approach taken to address educational challenges in Commonwealth countries.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Some interview participants were unsure about institutional plans regarding the provision of resources and other assets. There is a general disconnect among practitioners about expectations set by institutional management and the execution of the ideals. Responding to a question about one participant’s optimism about the future of ODeL in their country and what factors contributed to this perspective, Participant 2 expressed mixed feelings:

“So, it’s one thing to be all for, you know, ODL and distance learning and online education and all that, and a completely different thing to actually invest, not only money funding, but also time and energy and thinking about it. And so, I think there is a mix of that in [the country], but I think there is still a lack of investing in the infrastructures and in the policies that will actually make these big pronouncements, actually, they will put them in practice, right?”

They added that although the government seems to be well-intentioned, that intention does not translate into infrastructure and appropriate funding.

Participant 11 mentioned that institutions face difficult choices:

“Huge buildings, big buildings that were built before we knew about technology. Yes, and these buildings, it costs money, yes, to maintain them. Okay. Are we still going to build more buildings?”

Some participants indicated that their institutions show a strong commitment to enhancing their educational infrastructure. The upgrading of institutions such as the Kiribati Teachers College and the establishment of a MOOC platform in Pakistan support this argument. The upgrading of digital content and the development of learning management systems (LMSs) were also mentioned as evidence of institutions’ commitment.

INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

There is consensus that ODeL improves access and quality for various groups. One survey respondent noted:

“The advancements in ODeL in Mauritius have improved educational access and quality by making learning more flexible and inclusive. Institutions like the Open University of Mauritius (OU) and UoM’s CILL [Centre for Innovative & Lifelong Learning] have expanded digital education, benefitting remote learners and working professionals.”

Educators are also benefiting from ODeL-based professional development:

“For example, many educators are going for ODL programmes as they are working full day. Many are using these newly developed programmes to upgrade their qualifications.”

People in remote areas are benefiting from the flexibility of the programmes and being able to learn anywhere:

“Online learning platforms have made education more accessible, particularly for individuals in remote areas or with other constraints, by offering flexible schedules and the ability to learn from anywhere. These advancements have helped create more inclusive learning environments and have enhanced the overall quality of education by providing more engaging, responsive, and efficient ways of teaching and learning.”

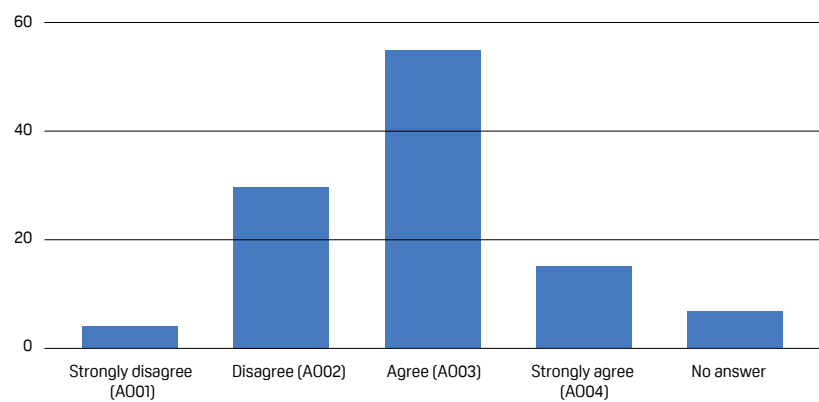
The freedom from time and space constraints also created more resilient institutions:

“Innovative technologies have enhanced teaching methods, learner engagement, and personalised learning experiences. These developments have created a more resilient education system, ensuring high standards while broadening access to education across the country.”

THE INCREASED USE OF MOBILE LEARNING IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS

When asked to rate their agreement with the statement “There is a strong focus on inclusivity in ODeL initiatives targeting marginalised groups,” 63.06% of the survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Just over 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and seven of the respondents did not answer the question. (See Figure 13.) One respondent added this comment:

“The shift to online learning during Covid-19 led to stronger quality assurance measures. Institutions are now licensed to deliver programmes through ODeL.”



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	4	3.60%
Disagree (A002)	30	27.03%
Agree (A003)	55	49.55%
Strongly Agree (A004)	15	13.51%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 13. “There is a strong focus on inclusivity in ODeL initiatives targeting marginalised groups.”

Answers to the open-ended survey question “How have these developments impacted educational access and quality?” showed, after analysis, that 70% of the survey respondents noted improved access to education, but only 60% reported an increase in ODL programme enrolments. However, open-ended comments in the survey show positive views about rural access, quality of programmes, opportunities for working people and access for other vulnerable groups:

“Indeed, particularly in the ANFE [adult and non-formal education] sub sector, many out of school youths and educators and administrators have received opportunity to access learning and advance their career growth.”

Vulnerable groups who are not able to access traditional learning of classroom environment are able to pursue education have hugely and positively impacted both access and quality of delivery and increased sources of information and content.”

The changes also empowered students with mobility challenges:

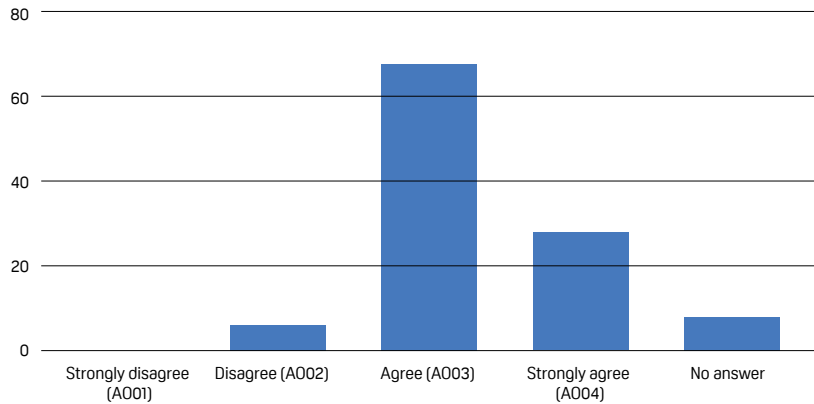
“It has also empowered students to be independent learners with less reliance on staff from the main hub. For those with mobility challenges, has to some extent addressed their challenge as they have to study within their locality.”

One educator commented on changes in programme development:

“We are able to develop modules with ease, we have more multimedia content for online teaching and are able to train our staff with ease.”

MOBILE LEARNING IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN GENERAL

85.59% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The increased use of mobile learning has significantly improved access to education in my community,” and less than 8% disagreed (see Figure 14). Only eight respondents did not provide an answer to the question.



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	2	1.80%
Disagree (A002)	6	5.41%
Agree (A003)	67	60.36%
Strongly Agree (A004)	28	25.23%
No answer	8	7.21%

Figure 14. *“The increased use of mobile learning has significantly improved access to education in my community.”*

However, some survey respondents also mentioned discrepancies and disparities in access across the board, and the data also suggest some discrepancy in actual participation. Some potential barriers to participation have yet to be addressed, as one survey respondent noted:

“In Pakistan, more than 70% population has mobile phones and access to the internet. However, educational resources need to be increased, which could include all segments of society (comprehensive inclusiveness).”

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES IN BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The use of community radio stations and television for educational purposes indicates community engagement in reaching learners in underserved areas. There are also efforts to establish dedicated e-learning centres in various places — for example, the Centre for Distance and e-Learning at the International University of Management (IUM) in Namibia. In Asia, the Community Media Focus, led by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), actively supports community radio and other appropriate platforms that enable access to education and development (COL, 2024; Vemraju, 2021).

Only 62.16% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “Community learning centres have been crucial in bridging the digital divide in my region”, and 28.83% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. (See Figure 15.) Ten respondents did not answer the question.

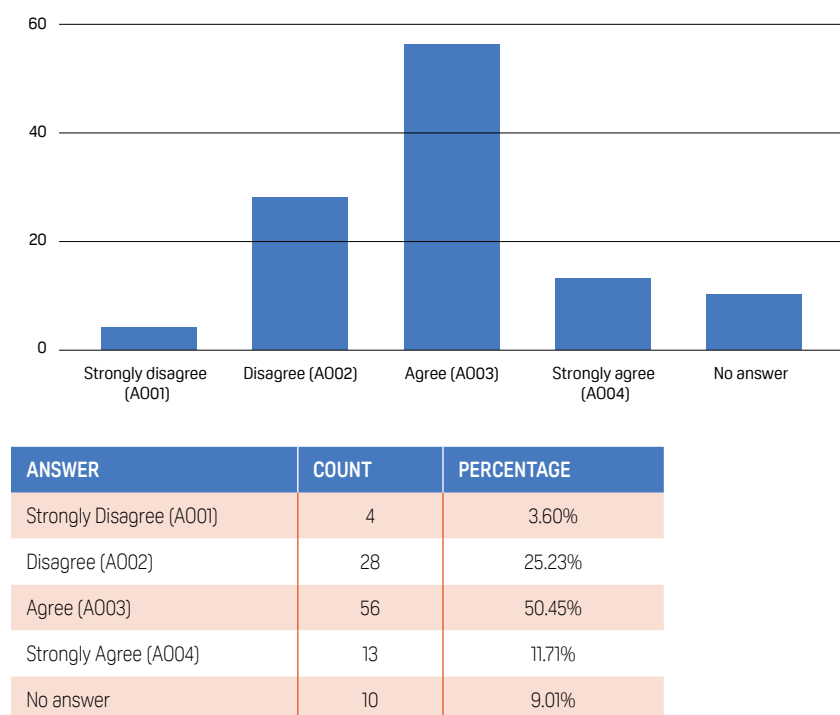
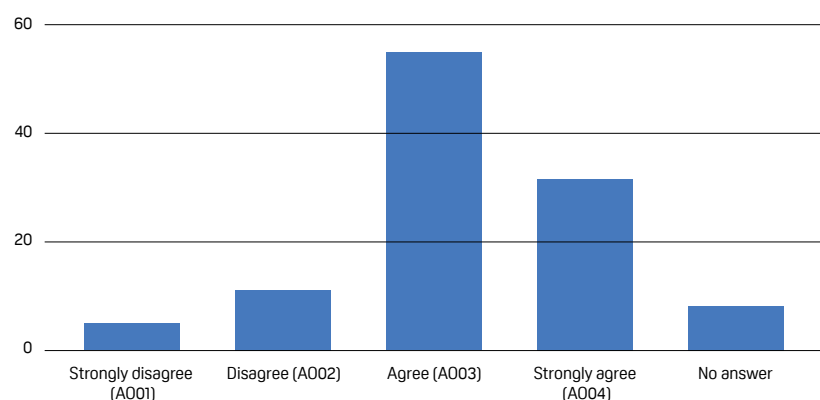


Figure 15. “Community learning centres have been crucial in bridging the digital divide in my region.”

ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS FACILITATE ODeL AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Of the 111 survey respondents, 78.38% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Online learning platforms have effectively facilitated ODeL at educational institutions.” Of the remainder, 14.41% disagreed with the statement and eight respondents did not give an answer. (See Figure 16.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	5	4.50%
Disagree (A002)	11	9.91%
Agree (A003)	55	49.55%
Strongly Agree (A004)	32	28.83%
No answer	8	7.21%

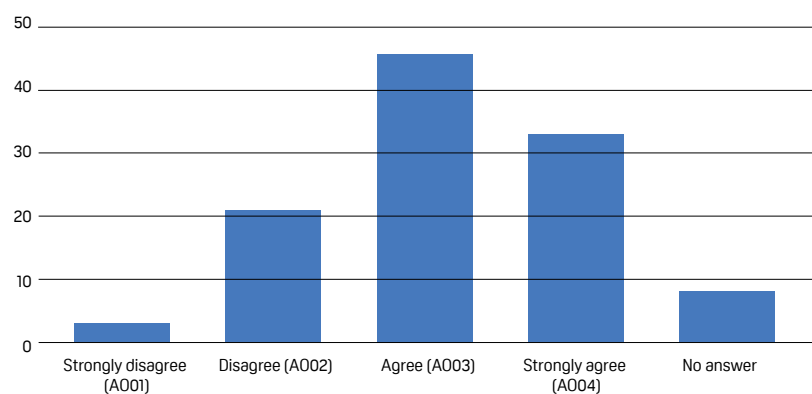
Figure 16. “Online learning platforms have effectively facilitated ODeL at educational institutions.”

The transition from fully distance education to blended and hybrid models required a significant change in pedagogical strategies. Online components are now being incorporated into many institutions’ curricula. These developments promise to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. One survey respondent commented:

“The techno-pedagogy has helped to reach the last mile learners and has increased the access. Since the ODLs are imparting the courses through their LMS and by own faculties, it may be ensured that quality education is being provided by these ODLs.”

BLENDED LEARNING MODELS IN RURAL AREAS

When presented with the statement “Blended learning models are beneficial for students in rural areas,” 71.17% of participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed and 21.62% disagreed (see Figure 17.). Eight participants did not respond.



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly disagree (A001)	3	2.70%
Disagree (A002)	21	18.92%
Agree (A003)	46	41.44%
Strongly Agree (A004)	33	29.73%
No answer	8	7.21%

Figure 17. “Blended learning models are beneficial for students in rural areas.”

The survey respondents provided more details about improvements in their open-ended responses. For example:

“The Open University of Mauritius (OU) being the main dedicated ODL institution in Mauritius, offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields through online and blended learning modes.”

Among the improvements the respondents listed were the development of LMSs, e-content development, building the capacity of teachers in BL, leadership change training in ODL, adoption of virtual labs for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, expansion of digital resources, improvement of student services, implementation of BL and improved access for students from Africa and nearby islands.

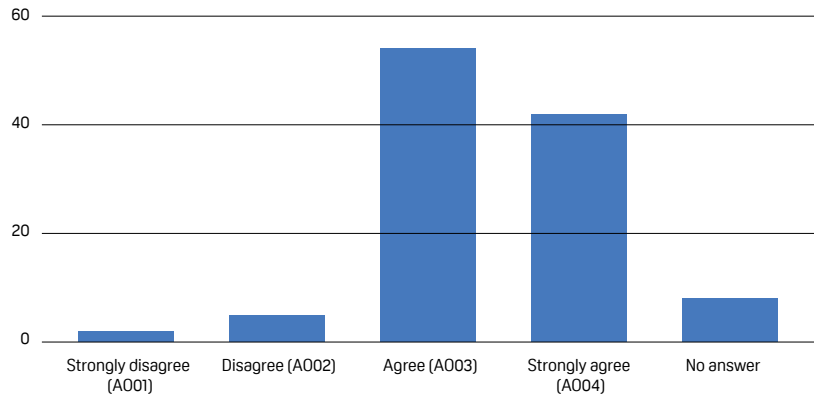
“These developments have enhanced educational access by providing flexible learning opportunities for distance and part-time students, especially in remote areas. Digital platforms and blended learning models improved learning quality through engaging content, interactive tools, and comprehensive support services, promoting inclusive education, higher student engagement, and better academic outcomes.”

However, things are not perfect. One survey respondent expressed their needs as follows:

“Resources needed for blended learning, absence of policy for education through blended mode and learners and educators mindset. Design of instructions and curriculum to incorporate blended mode.”

BLENDED LEARNING MODELS IN URBAN AREAS

More than 86.49% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Blended learning models are beneficial for students in urban areas.” Only 6.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. (See Figure 18.) Eight respondents did not answer the question.



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	2	1.80%
Disagree (A002)	5	4.50%
Agree (A003)	54	48.65%
Strongly Agree (A004)	42	37.84%
No answer	8	7.21%

Figure 18. “Blended learning models are beneficial for students in urban areas.”

ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY

The survey shows a trend towards the integration of technology into education. Institutions use a variety of digital platforms for education delivery, including multimedia studios, smart classrooms and offline digital libraries. Covid-19 also fast-tracked the adoption of online learning solutions. Internet services and laptops were provided to students in some instances. Several respondents mentioned that educators and students appreciated the flexibility of learning that technology made possible.

The pandemic also brought to the fore the need to expand IT infrastructure in rural areas and Internet connectivity in public places. These needs highlight the fact that technology became a lifeline for students, particularly in remote areas. Interview Participant 4 reflected on whether this represented a challenge or an opportunity:

“Of course, there are still challenges in terms of technology. Is, you know, trying to bring lecturers, who we call as born before computers, to use computers, training the student, training the faculties. But then it’s to me as a technologies, it’s, it’s an opportunity. Um, technology is not in the area, but an enabler to help solve our social problems.”

Although there seems to be evidence of some resistance to change among educators, only 18.92% of respondents rated resistance to change in terms of implementing ODeL as extreme. Almost 60% of the responses indicated that resistance was relatively moderate (rated 2 or 3 on scale of 0–4, where 0 = not at all and 4 = extremely), 10.81% indicated there was little resistance and 3.6% claimed there was no resistance in their environment. Eight of the respondents did not answer this question. (See Figure 19.)

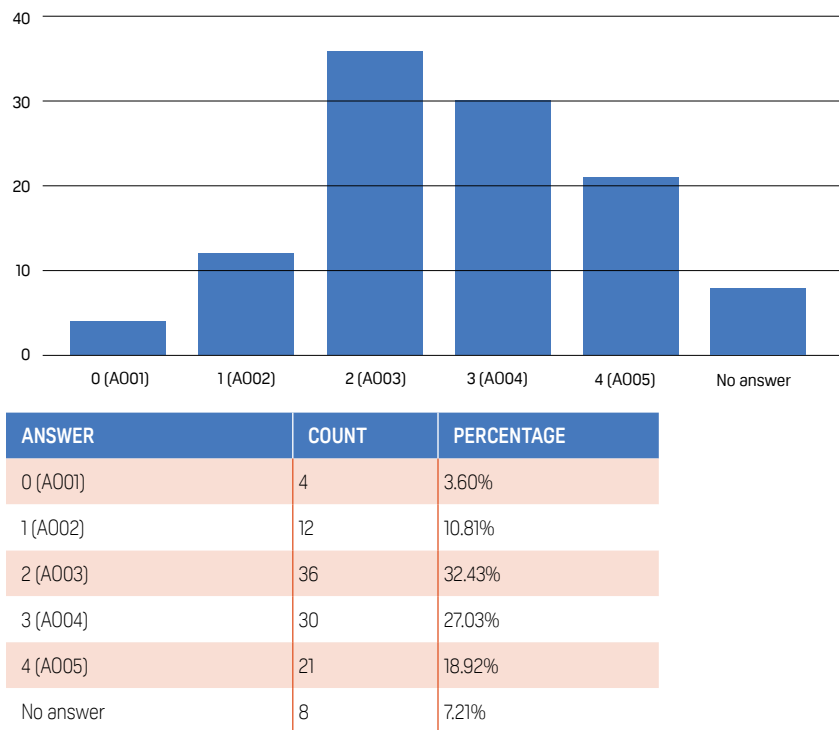


Figure 19. “To what extent does your country experience resistance to change about implementing ODeL among educators?” (0 = not at all, 4 = extremely)

QUALITY ASSURANCE MEASURES

Both the survey and the interview data show a definite proactive approach to adapting to new pedagogical paradigms. Many institutions are improving their infrastructure and developing policies to support the development of ODeL.

Some respondents also mentioned that the involvement of government agencies — for example, the Higher Education Council’s (HEC’s) role in approving ODL courses — suggests a structured approach to education reform. Regulatory oversight of the relevant systems and activities indicates that institutions are likely to be held responsible for ensuring that ODL programmes meet the

accepted standards. Respondents also referred to the need to update guidelines to incorporate generative AI technology as evidence of institutions' responsiveness to emerging trends. The prevailing opinion was that government support is crucial:

"I also think that we need much more government support, in the sense that people in government need to acknowledge the contributions of ODeL, need to value what ODeL is doing, and need to take qualifications that come from that environment seriously."

Interview Participant 2 underscored the importance of credit transfer in the field of HE:

"So, to me, the same certificate that I'm now co-ordinating was the one that led me to education. So, I always saw it as not just for the sake of technology, but as a course that was useful to help people understand, especially since you know the when this, what do you call it credit transfer thing, the OE, the whole of that OECD thing, the credit transfer thing came, came about."

The ongoing review and development of national ODeL and institutional e-learning policies indicate an acknowledgement of the rapidly evolving landscape and a responsiveness to local and global educational needs. This oversight allows for qualifications to be treated as comparable and equal, as one survey respondent noted:

"At Pungue University there is no distinction between a graduate of EAD and a graduate of the in-person model. Example: if 02 students (one distance and one in-person) are studying for a degree in Chemistry, their diploma or certificate will only show a degree in Chemistry from Pungue University."

However, not all institutions have reached this stage. Another survey respondent identified a possible way to promote this system.

"One of the things that would be most helpful in terms of open materials is how to help institutions in a country, whether it be Australia, whether it be South Africa, whether it be America, materials that would help a university internationalise its curriculum."

It appears that there is still more work to be done to create high-quality online learning materials. One of the survey respondents commented:

"Access is improved; however, quality is not yet ascertained as there is lack of qualified online material development. Efforts still needed to equip educators with necessary skills to teach and develop materials online."

CONCLUSION

The survey answers discussed in this section illustrate a variety of views and experiences and point to the inequalities that exist across the Commonwealth. Some respondents mentioned that their countries have dedicated ministries and various policies that are effectively implemented. However, other respondents were unaware of any policies that had been created or implemented. The overall majority of the respondents are convinced that ODeL is critical to the future of HE in the Commonwealth and are optimistic about its future. Collaborations and partnerships are generally considered to strengthen ODeL offerings, and respondents believe that data-driven decisions are having a positive impact on student engagement and performance and that the Covid-19 response positively affected ODeL.

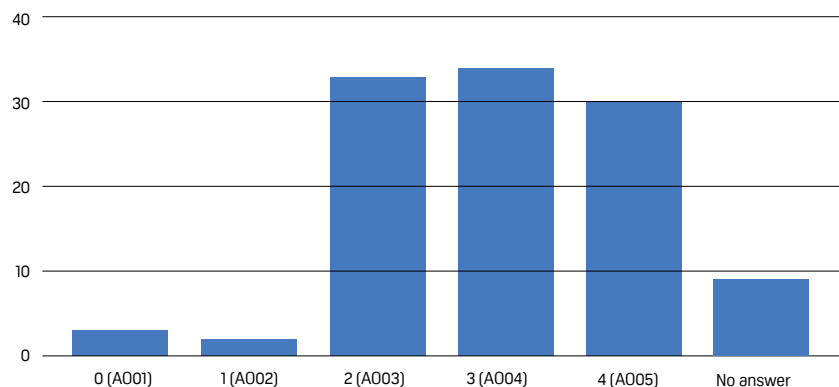
The key developments that survey respondents mentioned in their open-ended responses included the need for innovative online platforms and programmes, OER, effective mobile learning, government support and policy development. Inclusivity and accessibility are top of mind, with mentions of better ICT infrastructure, better mobile learning opportunities and online learning platforms that facilitate ODeL. The provision of platforms and infrastructure is seen as important, but the adoption of technology and quality assurance measures has also opened some conversations.

Section 4: Implementation Challenges for ODeL

Research sub-question four addressed the challenges that countries encounter when implementing ODeL in institutional dual-mode learning systems.

LACK OF SUFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Respondents were asked to answer the question “To what extent does your country face the challenge of lack of infrastructure in implementing ODeL?” using a five-point Likert-type scale, where 0 = not at all and 4 = extremely. Most (57.66%) selected 3 or 4 on the scale, which indicates that lack of infrastructure is a problem; 29.73% selected 2 on the scale, and 4.5% selected 0 or 1. The remaining 111 respondents did not answer this question. (See Figure 20.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
0 (A001)	3	2.70%
1 (A002)	2	1.80%
2 (A003)	33	29.73%
3 (A004)	34	30.63%
4 (A005)	30	27.03%
No answer	10	9.01%

Figure 20. “To what extent does your country face the challenge of lack of infrastructure in implementing ODeL?” (0 = not at all, 4 = extremely)

In open-ended survey comments on infrastructure challenges, 70% of the respondents highlighted the need for improved Internet connectivity, 60% mentioned a need for a stable electricity supply, and 50% called for more ICT equipment and digital devices. Internet access was high on the list of priorities, as one respondent noted:

“The developments have had a limited impact on overall access and equity due to low penetration of the Internet in rural communities as well as a lack of access to devices.”

Although there was a clear trend of a need to improve connectivity in both rural and urban areas to support ODeL, the lack of infrastructure was also a recurring theme in the interviews and survey responses. It is obvious that development is not going to happen fast enough to meet the current needs. Participant 2, who is in a management position, noted how Internet connectivity affects his workday:

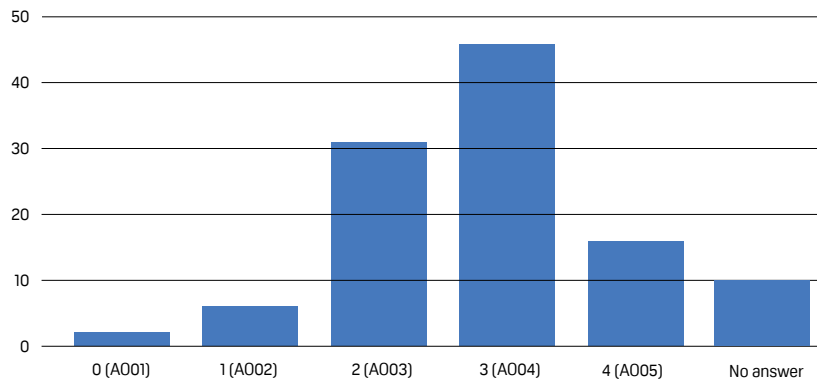
“I prefer my home connection over my office connection. So, if I have a very important meeting, I would sit at home and do it rather than because all my things are mostly online.”

INSUFFICIENT EDUCATOR TRAINING

Several key initiatives are underway to meet the great and growing need for more training. There is a general emphasis on training lecturers in online learning design, which suggests that there is recognition that educators need professional training to ensure that the education sector stays up-to-date with technological advancements. Educators also need effective training in how to maximise the use of tools and stay ahead of the technological curve.

“As for me, these ODLs provided me with knowledge and understanding of how distance learning can be done, which had improved my skills in teaching and learning remotely.” (Survey respondent)

When asked about educator training in their country, 55.85% of respondents rated it as insufficient or extremely insufficient, 27.93% were relatively neutral, and 7.21% rated it as sufficient. Ten respondents (9.01%) did not answer this question. (See Figure 21.)

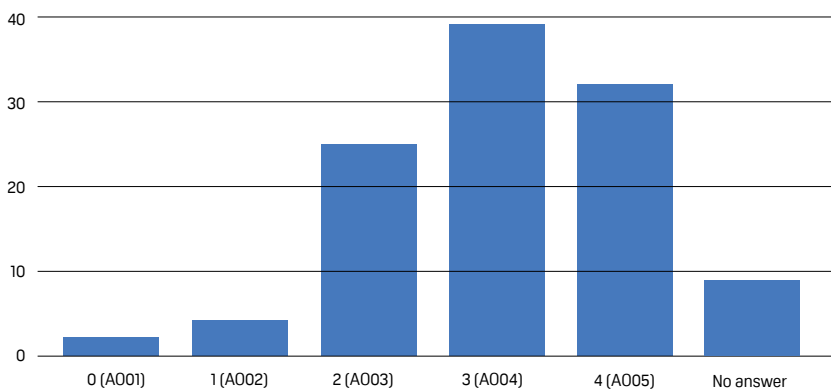


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
0 (A001)	2	1.80%
1 (A002)	6	5.41%
2 (A003)	31	27.93%
3 (A004)	46	41.44%
4 (A005)	16	14.41%
No answer	10	9.01%

Figure 21. “To what extent does your country face insufficient educator training challenges in implementing ODeL?” (0 = not at all, 4 = extremely)

DIGITAL INEQUITY

More than 63% of the respondents considered digital inequity to be significant (rated 3 or 4 on the scale); 22.52% rated it as neither significant nor insignificant, and approximately 5% rated it as either 1 or 0 on the scale — that is, not significant. The remainder of the participants did not answer the question. (See Figure 22.)

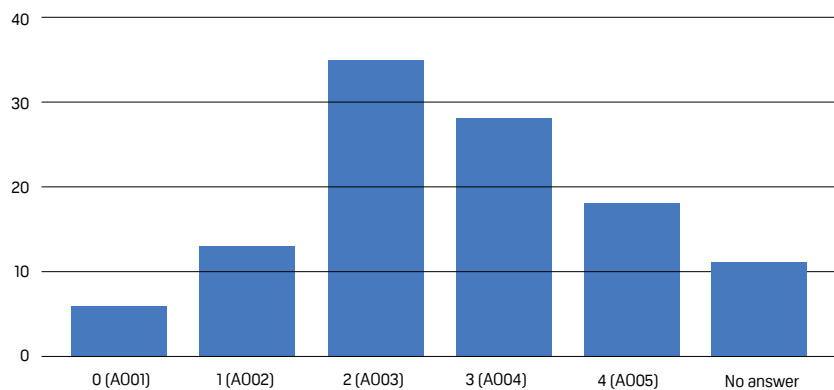


ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
0 (A001)	2	1.80%
1 (A002)	4	3.60%
2 (A003)	25	22.52%
3 (A004)	39	35.14%
4 (A005)	32	28.83%
No answer	9	8.11%

Figure 22. “To what extent does your country face digital inequality challenges in implementing ODL and TEL?” (0 = not at all, 4 = extremely).

INADEQUATE POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Respondents were asked to use a five-point Likert-type scale, where 0 = not at all and 4 = extremely, to answer the question “To what extent does your country face inadequate policy frameworks regarding the implementation of ODeL?” More than 40% of the respondents selected 3 or 4 on the scale, indicating that they rated existing policy frameworks as inadequate or highly inadequate and 31.53% rated them as average. Approximately 17% assessed the policy frameworks as adequate and almost 10% did not answer the question. (See Figure 23.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
0 (AO01)	6	5.41%
1 (AO02)	13	11.71%
2 (AO03)	35	31.53%
3 (AO04)	28	25.23%
4 (AO05)	18	16.22%
No answer	11	9.91%

Figure 23. “To what extent does your country face inadequate policy frameworks regarding the implementation of ODeL?” (0 = not at all, 4 = extremely)

The interview participants recognised that policymaking must be a priority if we are to close the digital divide. Participant 6, from Cyprus, elaborated on this need:

“Any kind of education reform, there is this tendency of, okay, if we tell them what to do, then they will go do it. But where are the tools? Where are the policies? So there, there is a bit of that in Cyprus, as well.”

They noted that appropriate training goes hand in hand with policymaking:

“There is plenty of training you look at, you know, there is plenty of provision of training, but not enough of the rest of the of the equation that mismatches and creates misbalances between, you know, all the different parts of this complexity of implementing ODL.”

Policies should be directed at the most effective areas:

“Inadequate policy frameworks. So, when we do not have policy frameworks in place, and this is one of the things that I would like to see happen in all the countries, because it would make our task easier at USP, we would know that the infrastructure is in place in Solomon Islands, or in Vanuatu, or in Tonga or in Covid.” (Participant 6)

Participant 6 also commented that the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) is effective in helping implement complicated policies:

“So PacREF is a regional framework, and now all the countries are aligning their own plans . . . whether it is the their educational framework or it is their IC so educational framework must align with the Pacific Regional Education framework, and their ICT plan must align with the education their own education framework, so that they make spaces too for that technology challenge that we may have, you know, the infrastructure, for example, right then I’m looking at, I’m looking at your other parts of the insufficient educator training, yes, and that’s why we are in business, and that’s why we are going to Tonga.

So when we do not have policy frameworks in place, we know that, you know the will to get something done is not there so and this is where, and this is one of the thing[s] that I would like to see happen in all the countries, because it would make our task easier at USP, we would know that the infrastructure is in place in Solomon Islands, or in Vanuatu, or in Tonga or in Covid.”

Section 5: Specific Challenges Faced by Institutions in Dual-Mode Learning Systems

This section deals with the specific challenges that dual-mode learning institutions face and two themes that emerged from both the open-ended survey questions and the interviews. The responses to the open-ended questions in the survey indicated that there is a need for both continuing professional development (CPD) for educators (80%) and capacity-building programmes (70%). Seventy-five per cent of survey respondents mentioned the need for increased funding for ODeL, and 65% mentioned students' financial challenges. The interview participants offered similar perspectives. Participant 6, for example, described the disconnect between government rhetoric and actions. Although government policies support the promotion of ODeL, the support does not always translate into practice.

"[It is] a completely different thing to actually invest, not only money funding, but also time and energy and thinking about it. And so, I think there is a mix of that in Cyprus, but I think there is still a lack of investing in the infrastructures and in the policies that will actually make these big pronouncements, actually, they will put them in practice, right?" (Participant 6).

EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The following quotes from the interviews show how complicated the situation is. Inequity exists not only between countries but also among areas and institutions within a country:

"So, the most important thing happened here, we have lot of private universities side by side with the government universities. So, at public universities, I mean government funded universities, they are little bit slow . . . University got the platform, but other universities, they don't have the platforms. They didn't use the platform." (Participant 5)

In Australia, for example, geographical differences are creating inequities:

"You, you will be amazed, though, that you get about 400, 500 k's from Sydney, and I mean, you're nowhere near the middle of Australia, you are just over the first mountains, and some people have serious issues just getting the internet." (Participant 10)

However, this is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon:

"There's that factor where the geographical isolation of the islands within the island countries, like which is made up of so many tiny islands. So our students are all over those tiny, remote islands, but with a Starlink, you know, it's catching up." (Participant 2)

Although 85% of the survey respondents mentioned the importance of bridging the digital divide, 75% specifically voiced the need for equitable access to resources. Participant 3 expanded on this:

“I think I find equity is quite a big issue. It’s an issue that’s often ignored because there is such a small group of people who have no access, or very poor, inadequate access to digital devices for learning.” (Participant 3)

They also pondered government input and what form meaningful assistance could take:

“Yes. And I think the thing about sorting them out, I think our digital equity coalition, and there are quite a few sort of non-profitable groups trying to work on the issue of digital equity. Was like, if the government gave a like, they have a cost-of-living allowance. If they gave a digital infrastructure allowance to every family that didn’t have access, it would amount to almost nothing in the budget.” (Participant 3)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Participant 2 addressed some factors relating to climate change:

“Now, I don’t know whether we can talk about climate change, since the world is, you know, moving in a very different direction, really strange, isn’t it? Yeah, but still, for the Pacific, climate change is a big issue . . . So, less printing, less paper. It’s helpful. Having technology helps.”

Needs for Institutional Dual-Mode Learning Support

Five themes emerged from the survey’s open-ended questions. They are listed below in order of how frequently they were mentioned.

1. Infrastructure needs: 35 mentions
2. Professional development: 30 mentions
3. Financial support: 28 mentions
4. Equity and accessibility: 25 mentions
5. Collaboration and partnerships: 22 mentions

An overarching theme, policy frameworks, is tightly interwoven with these five themes. Therefore, it is not discussed as a separate theme in the section below, where some of the interview participants’ responses are used to elaborate on the themes that emerged from the survey.

Table 5 shows how the five themes and the overarching theme of policy frameworks align with COL’s objectives as laid out in its 2021–2027 strategic plan.

Table 5. How the survey themes align with COL's 2021–2027 strategic planning goals

THEME FROM SURVEY	THEMES CONNECTING WITH COL OBJECTIVES
Infrastructure needs	<p>“Building national resilience: COL works with Pacific governments to drive the quality open learning agenda through Policy and Strategy development” (COL, 2024, p. 45).</p> <p>This is a cross-cutting initiative in COL's work (COL, 2021, p. 11), as seen in its efforts to support institutions in developing effective ODeL systems (2021, p. 19).</p>
Professional development	To strengthen institutional capacity (e.g., to provide quality education, co-create courses) in alignment with COL's Teacher Education goal (COL, 2021, p. 12).
Financial support	COL aims to diversify its funding base (2021, p. 27), as it relies on voluntary contributions.
Equity and accessibility	<p>Gender-responsive ODeL policies for enhancing equitable access (gender-responsive policies; access to women and girls).</p> <p>COL strategic goal in COL Strategic Planning document (2021:12) specifically on HE, also to enhance employability and entrepreneurship (2021:19).</p>
Collaboration and partnerships	<p>High-level engagement and recognition (with high-level panels and forums; address educational challenges; promote sustainable development; youth skill development; Covid-19 recovery of education; teacher capacity building; climate change).</p> <p>Regional collaboration and capacity building (connect with regional centres for local initiatives; facilitate training, policy development, community engagement).</p>
Policy frameworks	Strategic impact (staff and officials training; policy development support).

DEVELOPMENT NEED 1: INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

The interview participants noted a need to improve the ICT infrastructure if they are to improve ODeL in their institutions:

“Technology hungry in the sense that we want to use technology to solve social problems as part of the national development agenda. So, whatever little comes, whatever low hanging fruit we can get. We are ready to move. The impact is great. Now you can lecture students in large groups. We don't have big university campuses we are in. You can do maybe 50-100 students in a face-to-face classroom. Nowadays, you can use Zoom to lecture them, and some are living very far away the cost of travelling to campuses.” (Participant 4)

Participant 3 mentioned the gap between the haves and have-nots in the context of infrastructure:

“Yeah, yep, the lack of infrastructure is quite interesting here. New Zealand is a country that has, I mean, I can never pull the stats off, you know, the top of my head. But the majority, like 90%. So young people in education will have sufficient access to devices and infrastructure for their learning. But the 10% that don't, the gap between the ones that do and those that don't, is huge. The digital divide is, is really large. It's not a gradual divide. It's really back to a sort of a small percentage of extreme haves and have-nots. I think so. People in rural areas have incredibly poor bandwidth. To my absolute horror, our large cell phone company has signed with Starlink, and that's seen as being the saviour [...] of rural connectivity.”

DEVELOPMENT NEED 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is a growing emphasis on the quality of teaching with technology. The survey respondents frequently referred to a need for comprehensive training programmes in digital pedagogy for educators.

Training and capacity building for educators have improved the quality of teaching with technology.

Where educators have received training, respondents overwhelmingly agreed (79.28%) that it has improved the quality of teaching with technology. (See Figure 24.) Nine respondents did not answer the question.

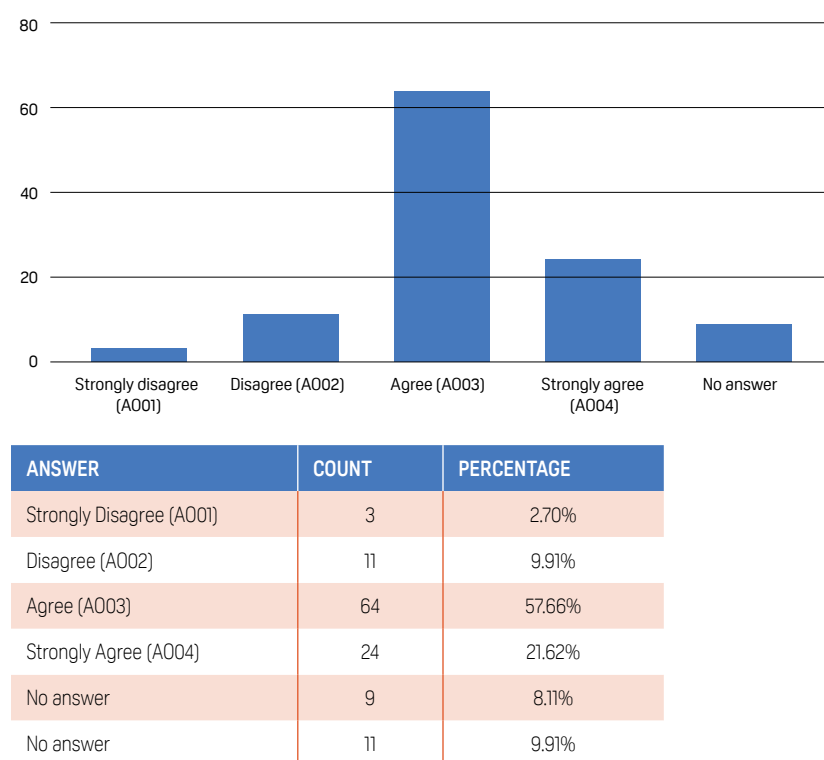


Figure 24. “Training and capacity building for educators has improved the quality of teaching with technology.”

Adequate professional development opportunities in ODeL for educators.

CPD for educators is important for several reasons. Interview participants touched on a few of them — for example, educators may have a professional specialisation that they teach but no education expertise; new knowledge about generative AI and AI-related policy is lacking; CPD can help address resistance to change and empower educators to fulfil roles that third-space workers and support staff would have taken on in the past. Some responses to the question about what support and resources are needed are quoted below:

“But in doing all this technology is key, they are now also matching qualifications and positions. While it was expected that the once you are a professor, you’re supposed to know everything, now they’re coming to realise that no, these people specialise in particular areas, and they need to work together. Yes, you know, synergize, synergy.” (Participant 11)

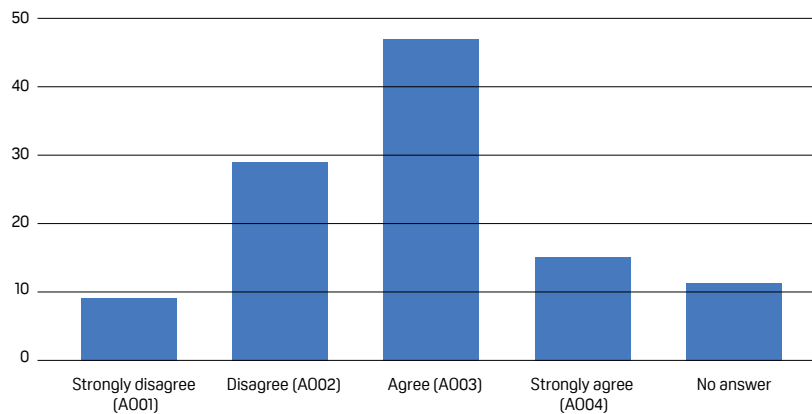
“So, we will have an AI policy, but the majority of the colleagues don’t know what AI all is about. Don’t know what the challenges are. You know, just don’t know what to do with this thing.” (Participant 9)

“The resistance to change is an important one. We have at the university a large contingent of colleagues who are getting closer to retirement, and then we have extremely new, novice lecturers and researchers. So, there’s a gap in between, and I have the impression that there is very little communication between those two large groups.” (Participant 9)

“There’s been a decline in what we call the third space worker within universities in Australia. That is the third space workers are those educational designers and developers, instructional designers that would work with academics to help them create their materials, their teaching, their teaching content and their assessments and things like that. . . . So, we’re seeing a lot of those support staff who were, by and large, the ones that really promoted the open agenda, because they saw the logic in it. They saw that there’s, you know, you can reuse, and you don’t have to create new every time, and if you can reuse, then that saves money.” (Participant 7)

“You can pay for Web CT, or you can have Moodle for free, but no, you can’t because of the level of technical expertise and human capacity that’s needed.” (Participant 8)

In the context of the abovementioned reasons why CPD for educators is important, the survey respondents were asked, “How strongly do you agree that there are sufficient professional development opportunities for educators in ODeL?” Just over half (55.85%) agreed or strongly agreed that their country or region offered sufficient professional development opportunities; 34.24% disagreed or strongly disagreed. (See Figure 25.) Eleven respondents did not answer the question.



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	9	8.11%
Disagree (A002)	29	26.13%
Agree (A003)	47	42.34%
Strongly Agree (A004)	15	13.51%
No answer	11	9.91%
No answer	11	9.91%

Figure 25. “How strongly do you agree that there are sufficient professional development opportunities for educators in ODeL?”

Communities of practice

Another way to support educators is to introduce communities of practice (CoPs) throughout an institution:

“The community of practice, it must be strengthened enough, and some platforms can be there so that everybody can share their resources, whichever which are, whichever they are creating, and also the information about the OER, but because people don’t know where we are, reside.” (Participant 5)

“I haven’t ventured into that at all. No, the, I think, I think the earlier question about training and education, I think, is really central, if there’s about 41 universities in Australia. So, for each of them, you can send 40 educational designers, yes, that I think could make a change. And I mean it, and I’ve been asked, I developed a little model about the components of any educational system. And so, somebody asked me, but which one is the most important? Like, is it teachers or students, or governance or technologies? And I really had to think, and I thought it’s the teachers, you know, if we get them, they work directly with the students. They can always, you know, bring change there, if you just, if you do the students and not the teachers, then you get frustrated students.” (Participant 10)

“So, my role, basically, is to train the tertiary teachers. So, I run a programme which is called Post Graduate Certificate in tertiary teaching. So, it’s more applied. So, we teach educational theories, but, you know, helping them understand you are applying it. So, we have three courses, and they are accredited by Staff Educational and Development Association in UK. So, our programme basically focuses on skilling the tertiary teachers with, and without technology of the need basis, so and, and some of the observations come from my experience, my time in this programme.” (Participant 2)

“Coconut wire works very well in the Pacific, word of mouth it goes, and people learn about it. And so, we have people now coming the in fact, the universities are telling their staff, you need to do a programme, maybe you could enrol in at USP. So even the universities would tell their staff, and sometimes the staff would tell the staff, so, so and that they do because they realise that it’s a service, they owe to their students who are sitting in those tiny islands.” (Participant 2)

Research support

Academics must produce research. However, given the additional stress of creating new material and adapting to online methods, some interviewees highlighted support in this area as crucial to their success:

“And we formed a collaboration of five female colleagues across five universities, and we worked on thinking about students’ experiences of online learning and Covid as a project completely unfunded, just all of us with the care and the need to solve a problem in our institutions. And we shared, you know, proctoring policies and strategies universities were using to deal with equity issues”. (Participant 3)

“Okay, so it is a UPM, Malaysia, right? Malaysia and Singa. There are some other. Tamil Nadu Open University. So, in this case, collaboration, since it was not kind of institutionalised by the university as a whole, so it was a kind of, what I said, that informal arrangement, and lot of teachers were being connected. . . . So, this can be you have some initiatives taken, and also some research initiatives. It is very much important, because we from the developing countries.” (Participant 5)

“So, I think, and I mean that happens in Australia as well, that people publish about what they are doing. They try to be honest about that. And so, I think around ODL, there is that kind of collaboration as well. There is a group called Open Learning Australia, OLA, and they offer courses most, I think, predominantly, online, of a number of the other universities, and they believe that better support systems and they can create a better online product and so forth.” (Participant 10).

“And the one I can think about, really for me, somebody coming from Türkiye and research background, yes, ODL, OER and now AI, innovative teaching, digital learning, as we call them. All these names to them, we need to do some monitoring and

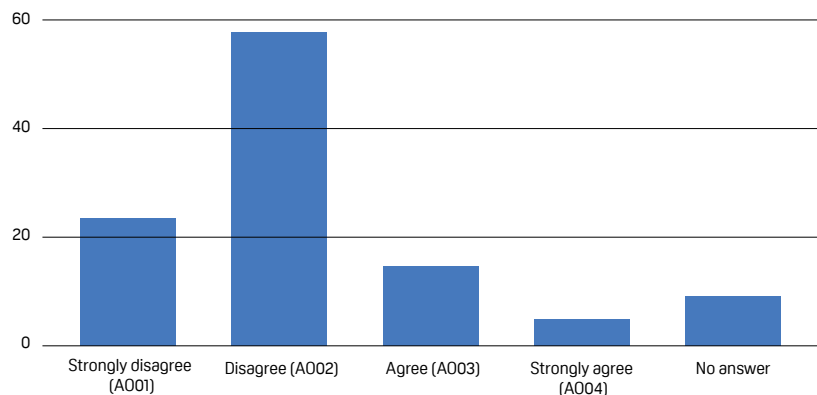
evaluation to come up with evidence based, say, for instance, in Sierra Leone, policies are there, from a regulatory perspective, well done to institutions. Do we have any evidence-based data to show how well it is doing, what impact it's adding to the teaching learning ecosystem in our countries?" (Participant 4)

"This is something I would like to see people like Commonwealth of Learning, when I go to this meeting, I'll be looking for funding, yes, to actually come up with statistics to show that it's, I know for sure. From a technology perspective, I know individually, I know it's working, but then how can I showcase how had that added to [the] improve the teaching, learning environment in our country, and to the society as a whole that we need further investigation on? Absolutely, that's what I can really bring today." (Participant 4)

DEVELOPMENT NEED 3: FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Survey respondents and interview participants all emphasised the need for more government and private sector funding to support ODeL initiatives.

When asked “How strongly do you agree that there is sufficient funding to support ODeL initiatives in your country?” 73.87% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed; only 18.01% agreed or strongly agreed. Nine respondents did not answer the question.



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree (A001)	24	21.62%
Disagree (A002)	58	52.25%
Agree (A003)	15	13.51%
Strongly Agree (A004)	5	4.50%
No answer	9	8.11%

Figure 26. “How strongly do you agree that there is sufficient funding to support ODeL initiatives in your country?”

When public institutions need to cut funding because of financial constraints, the perception is that management's first step is to close down initiatives they are not familiar with or whose value they do not recognise:

“Because the first issue they have with respect to funding, they try to close things where they don't, they don't really, they don't really believe into, okay, yes, they think somebody did it just to be fashionable at the time. And then the first thing they sacrifice is that element.” (Participant 1)

Another area of concern was the practice of increasing student numbers without allocating additional funding to accommodate them:

“One is we've had; I think in some we've had a growth in student numbers and teacher education, but no increase in funding.” (Participant 3)

“So, it's one thing to be all for, you know, ODL and distance learning and online education and all that, and a completely different thing to actually invest, not only money funding, but also time and energy and thinking about it.” (Participant 6)

“But of course, the resistance around, you know, restrictions on funding. You know, technology is not cheap. Incrementing most of these digital platforms, tools, it's, there is that aspect of initial outlay.” (Participant 4)

Institutions must understand the potential return on investment:

“Then as we move along, university can know that there is some element of return on investment, you know, because it makes easier life easier, and also the image of the institution is great.” (Participant 4)

“There's a bifurcation between management and academics, and the management are pedagogically naive, conservative, traditional or whatever. . . . I suppose I've been banging a different drum for 10 years at least, and that was the idea that there's a kind of conflict, or tension between what what's called open and what's called free.” (Participant 8)

The government can help alleviate funding challenges. One participant suggested that a general repository would help bridge the gap that data costs and Internet access create:

“So that's actually in terms of internet access, so, which means if materials are stored on our repository, students can have access to it even using the mobile phone, without the use of their data.” (Participant 4)

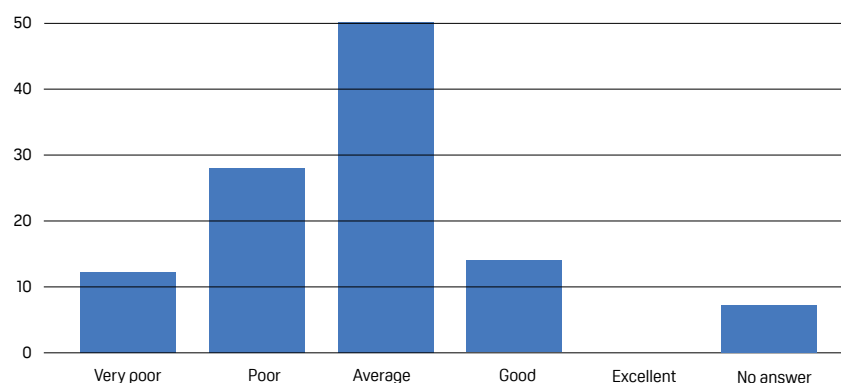
DEVELOPMENT NEED 4: EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Across the board, there is a need for strategies to provide marginalised communities with access to digital resources:

“Connectivity is still a major problem [. . .] I mean, we don’t give or borrow our students any devices.” (Participant 9)

Support mechanisms available for ODeL

When asked how they would rate the current support mechanisms available for ODeL in their country, 45.05% rated them as average, and 36.04% as poor or very poor. Only 12.61% claimed they were good, and none described them as excellent. (See Figure 27.) Seven respondents did not answer this question. (The figure does not include percentages for non-responses.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Very Poor	12	10.81%
Poor	28	25.23%
Average	50	45.05%
Good	14	12.61%
Excellent	0	0%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 27. “How would you rate the current support mechanisms available for ODeL in your country?”

Institutions and individual educators participate in various partnerships and collaborations with entities that may not belong to the formal education sector to boost their support network:

“So, if you want to make changes, you don’t work in silos and let policy drive you forward.” (Participant 11)

“We had a different partnership with one institution in Kenya, not an academic institution, called the African Leadership in ICT, Alice Jesse, GESCI Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative funded by the UN under an EU project and by the government of Finland.” (Participant 1)

“They provide hosting and services, and for most of the digital platforms we are using. So that connection has been very much good detail of course, our partnership with the science granting council that gives funding in the research ecosystem, we collaborate with our, I’m just from Uganda, from peer to peer learning to see how they are doing some of these things in other African countries. Next week, I will be in in Senegal at the workman conference map of stroke to see how it’s been done in other parts of Africa and the global research world.” (Participant 4)

STUDENT SUPPORT

One survey respondent stated that support services in general were needed:

To enhance its dual-mode learning system, the University of Mauritius would benefit from improved digital infrastructure, faculty training in online pedagogy and stronger student support services to bridge digital literacy gaps.

Interview Participant 4 touched on access to materials and the applicability of training:

“Learner centric, the student can have access to the materials at the time they want. They can engage, interact with their lecturers through chat rooms etc. And we are even the assessment model is now changing before it was more or less go and study assimilation, come a ride. You know, we are now diversifying our assessment metros through what we call day to day things, the real-life situation, scenario based, projects, group works and things like that, which is what modern technology can really handle.”

Interview Participant 5 elaborated on the applicability of training, and how students should be able to use their skills for societal good:

“So, they just think that the knowledge sharing is important. We are sharing the knowledge what the students will do after having this knowledge, they are not that’s a thinking about the achievements they have, the knowledge and some skills, but how they will accomplish these things for the change in the society. What their livelihoods [will be], they are not caring about that. So that’s why digital products, things are not being changed yet.”

Student employability

Developing an effective pedagogy to improve student employability was mentioned as an important goal:

“So, we are very much optimistic. So now let’s see how we can feed the pedagogy, and we can ensure the quality in education. So how we can make the learning actually employability. That is very key point.” (Participant 5)

The same participant mentioned:

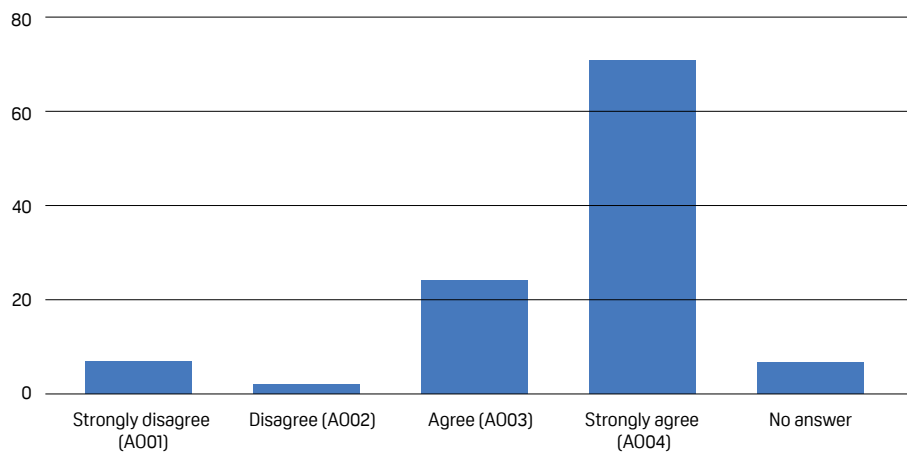
“And another thing is, I said, okay, how we can ensure the employability of the learners when we go for the Bachelor of Business administrative students and Master of Business Administration students. So, for these two programmes, particularly, we try to see what pedagogical changes works. We aligned our programmes more in terms of assessment and assignments. The focus on assignments were very high, and the design of the assignments were not like what and when question, so it was kind of why questions, and we tried to articulate it in a different way.”

And Participant 4 noted:

“You know, traditionally, you see students graduating in mining engineering, and when they go to the mining sector, basically they cannot fit within the market. You see student graduating as computer science student, they cannot even write a simple code. So, we also collaborate with the private sector in terms of curricular review and realignment to make sure that it’s more focused on employability. I mean, I did some work with the Commonwealth of Learning, supported us to do some policies around employability. There is no need to come to university, spend four years or five years or what. Maybe when you don’t have job, you graduate and then you cannot fit in the job market.”

DEVELOPMENT NEED 5: COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

When asked “How strongly do you agree that stakeholder collaboration is essential for the future development of ODeL in your country,” more than 85.58% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 8.11% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 6.31% did not answer. (See Figure 28.)



ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Strongly disagree (A001)	7	6.31%
Disagree (A002)	2	1.80%
Agree (A003)	24	21.62%
Strongly Agree (A004)	71	63.96%
No answer	7	6.31%
No answer	7	6.31%

Figure 28. “How strongly do you agree that stakeholder collaboration is essential for the future development of ODeL in your country?”

Curriculum internationalisation

Standardising curricula across institutions can help an individual institution achieve its own goals. OER-based collaborations among institutions could be a useful approach to achieving this:

“One of the things that would be most helpful in terms of open materials is how to help institutions in a country, whether it be Australia, whether it be South Africa, whether it be America, materials that would help a university internationalise its curriculum . . . So, we’re very good at understanding what happens in Australia, but we don’t really know what’s happening in Taiwan or Indonesia or places like that. And so, materials that can be drawn on, that can provide the extra, the value add to what we see in our own content. So, it’s, I think it’s around the open materials are really about the value add, rather than the core materials . . . But if I’m going to do my job now and provide a multinational curriculum, I have to be able to draw on content from other places to be able to do that, and most universities in other countries don’t want to give their stuff away. So that’s where the open becomes really valuable. (Participant 7)

Diversity, I'm the victim of everything that is not open, you know, of top-down management or command driven institutions or whatever, you know. So, I do see the, and I suppose there's the assumption that actually, it might be divisive. Might be divisive in the sense of, okay, if we had Open Universities, great, but most of the world is not in a university. And even if they were, they'll graduate from one, and then they won't be so it needs something different. I mean, that may be just the idea that formal education is broken."

Shared platforms

One of the recurring comments from survey respondents and interview participants was that a shared platform for collaboration could be very useful:

"So, if we can put all these links, everything in a platform, common platform, and we can access our students can access so and also other technology, like AI based, for example, AI tutor in Canada, you know, open Ontario, they created AI tutor . . . Maybe COL can use their platform to connect with all these networks. Goal is overseas is just they are sharing their resources they are producing. So, they should keep kind of space so that people can enter there, and they can access to all the OER repositories of the world as a whole." (Participant 5)

Participant 4 described a collaboration that works well in their environment:

"I think it was a collaboration agreement wherein the institutions can come away, can pay 50/50 of their, the cost of training lecturers in developing course content, deployment of instructional repositories in this page, deployment of planning management platforms, maybe model. So that has become a norm. So, this is where we are. It's exciting."

Governments should be involved in collaborations. One idea was to have the relevant governments provide a link to institutions' OER on their websites to reduce data costs for students:

"We have to talk to government to make sure that they work listed our website URL, so that any materials on the University website, people can have access to it without [. . .] too much data. So that's actually in terms of internet access, so which means if materials are stored on our repository, student can have access to it even using the mobile phone, without the use of their data." (Participant 4)

One participant argued that a collaborative platform should not be overly regulated:

"Yes, what I said that the Open Business Talk, that platform, it is not a formal platform. So, formal is not like the university authority endorsing but they support it. They provide funds, sometimes, if we just like to arrange more, but it is not kind of approved body. We are not that much interested to make it approved body, because if you have a body, you will find some bureaucracy there. So that's

why we kept it open. So, what happens it is led by anyone? The structure is like it is open. Open means anybody comes with their idea, they can share, and we discuss together.” (Participant 5)

A general repository may not be suitable in all contexts. Another participant referred to online tools that are so closed and interlocked that it is difficult to customise a system to meet the specific needs of a particular environment.

“Most universities are so locked into, I mean, the system, the systems are so integrated and interoperable that you can’t change any part of them, you know, so, so the LMS, I mean, the University has Canvas now, I think, but it’s locked into the library system, the student enrolment system, the finance system, the plagiarism system, and unpicking that, you know, with the best standards in the world, unpicking that it’s, you know, people have got better things to do, I imagine.” (Participant 8)

Funding collaborations

Collaboration could be the answer to funding constraints in developing countries:

“Collaboration is very much important in general. For my university. It is important because, you know, since you have, because we are a developing country, so we have the resource constraint, so why [do] we just produce the same thing? . . . If we have the collaboration, you can produce something, and I can produce something else. I can use your resources and customise, customise it for my students, and you can take my resources. So, without discussion, without collaboration, you cannot actually develop something, create something and celebrate it.” (Participant 5)

A participant from Mauritius called for collaboration between institutions within a country. However, such an arrangement could create issues for the collaborating institutions:

“So, there is a kind of depreciation of effort, maybe for a country like Mauritius, there could be one Apex body and then pooling resources from others to make the ODL or and TEL-based learning become a more national initiative. . . . On the other hand, the University of Mauritius wants to do courses, online ODL to respond to our challenges. The University of Technology wants to do the same thing. All universities want to do the same thing. So, then the government, the funding body, has a problem, so that type of support is mostly needed because we have done such a long journey that we have managed to secure the support at different levels, even from the unions and the academic[s].” (Participant 1)

Summary of the Challenges



Figure 29. A cirrus word cloud created by Voyant visualises the most prominent keywords that emerged from the interview data.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Survey respondents identified the lack of infrastructure as the most pressing ODeL-related issue in their countries. Only about 4% rated their environment as lacking infrastructure, and nearly 90% rated it as a significant challenge. Infrastructure issues — including Internet connectivity, stable electricity supply, ICT equipment and digital devices — were a recurring theme in both the survey and the interviews.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS

With only 7% of respondents rating educator training as adequate in their institutions, the need for more training initiatives is significant, and several are already underway. Furthermore, nearly 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the training and capacity building they have received improved the quality of teaching with technology, which points to the positive impact of such training initiatives. There is a growing emphasis on maintaining high education standards to ensure the credibility of ODL programmes.

The interview participants touched on various reasons why professional development (PD) is important, including that educators might be specialists in the field they teach but do not have basic teaching qualifications. They noted that educators should stay current with technological advancements and become knowledgeable about generative AI and its impact on education. They also pointed out that a reluctance to adopt technology could be overcome by providing educators with more information. Although the positive impact of PD is well known, nearly 35% of survey respondents felt that their institutions offer insufficient PD opportunities.

CoPs were mentioned as a useful PD tool, and research support was described as very important. Academics are the driving force behind collaborative research projects with colleagues from different institutions. This type of collaboration is considered very important, “because we [are] from developing countries.”

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The importance of financial support was also emphasised, with 73% of the survey respondents saying that ODeL initiatives in their context are not adequately funded. Funding is perceived to be constantly at risk. When management does not recognise the value of ODL and distance learning, they are likely to allocate funds to what they perceive as more pressing needs. Additionally, there has been an increase in student numbers, but no parallel increase in funding. Technology is expensive, so it is crucial to raise awareness of its return-on-investment value among institutional management. One participant also mentioned that the government could contribute more.

EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Digital inequity was another significant topic, with 63% of survey respondents agreeing that it poses a substantial challenge. The interview participants recognised that policy could play a role in solving this issue. To increase the accessibility of tools and move closer to digital equality, governments and institutional policies should lead the way. Participant 11 described one valid reason why governments should lead these policies:

“Because we have given our politicians a mandate to run our education system. Yes, politicians are not educators. They are not doctors, yeah, but they are running our health system. They are running our education system.”

In addition, most survey respondents rated the current available support mechanisms as either very poor, poor or average (85.09%), with only 12.61% describing it as good in their environment. (See Figure 27.)

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

To make meaningful changes, one participant said, “You don’t work in silos and let policy drive you forward.” This comment neatly sums up the need for collaboration. Various partnerships and collaborations between institutions, with industry and between disciplines within institutions were mentioned as examples of how such collaborations could work.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND EMPLOYABILITY

Seventy per cent of the survey respondents mentioned the need for 24/7 online support services. Student employability was highlighted in the context of applicable pedagogies, aligning assessments and assignments with labour market-appropriate skills and preparing students to enter the workforce.

SHARED PLATFORMS FOR COLLABORATION

This topic elicited some lively comments from participants. Several wished that COL would create a repository that could enhance collaboration among educators and facilitate the sharing of OER. This type of platform could also serve as both a CoP and an informal training platform. The interview participants emphasised that such a platform should not be overly regulated so as not to stifle spontaneous engagement.

Key Considerations for Governments and Educational Institutions

The research findings show that although much has been done to improve ODeL in the Commonwealth, much also remains to be done. The main areas in which support is needed concern infrastructure — for example, digital connectivity, electricity supply and access to/availability of devices in most countries. PD is also a key concern in all environments because of the fast-moving nature of technology. One suggestion was to create a repository for training material and support that was run in a sensitive way to stimulate enthusiasm and creativity in educators.

Funding and financial support are another prominent need, particularly in developing Commonwealth countries. Interview participants identified a need to place more emphasis on equity and accessibility of resources and to encourage collaborations across all partnerships. Finally, given that ODeL allows trainers and learners to learn where and when it suits them, there is a need for more round-the-clock online student support.

The following recommendations can be made for Commonwealth governments based on this report as they could:

- Establish clear, comprehensive national policies and regulatory frameworks to support the integration and quality assurance of ODeL across all higher education institutions.
- Prioritise equitable access to reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and digital devices, especially in rural and underserved communities.
- Allocate dedicated public funding to support the development, delivery, and expansion of ODeL programmes, and explore public-private partnerships for infrastructure and content development.
- Implement targeted strategies to support marginalised learners, including women, persons with disabilities, and learners in remote areas, through subsidies, assistive technologies and inclusive design.
- Collaborate with higher education councils to define and enforce quality standards for ODeL, including standards for digital pedagogy, assessment, and learner support.
- Fund and mandate continuous capacity building for educators in digital literacy, instructional design, and the use of learning management systems and OER.

- Encourage institutions to design ODeL curricula that address local labour market needs, entrepreneurship, and future skills (e.g., AI, data literacy).
- Create national frameworks that recognise micro-credentials, blended learning, and informal learning achievements to widen access and relevance.
- Facilitate collaboration between higher education institutions, industry, civil society, and international bodies to expand access, pool resources, and co-develop learning solutions.
- Promote and fund the creation and curation of localised, context-relevant OER repositories accessible to all educators and learners without data costs.
- Support the development of community learning centres equipped with digital tools and internet access to bridge the digital divide.
- Create national mechanisms to track the effectiveness, equity, and quality of ODeL systems, and use data for evidence-based policy and planning.

In terms of COL, the following recommendations are made for further consideration as the intergovernmental organisation could:

- Provide technical assistance to member states in drafting, reviewing and implementing robust ODeL and dual-mode learning policies aligned with regional needs and global trends.
- Facilitate dialogue and alignment of ODeL policies across countries to support learner and credit mobility, especially in regions such as the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.
- Strengthen advocacy at ministerial and policy forums to elevate the strategic importance of ODeL in achieving national development goals and SDG 4.
- Scale up offerings for educators and administrators in instructional design, digital teaching methods and use of emerging technologies (e.g. generative AI, AR/VR, LMSs).
- Create adaptable frameworks and toolkits for CPD in ODeL across Commonwealth contexts, with a focus on competency-based progression.
- Foster CoPs across regions to promote peer learning, local innovation, and shared solutions among educators and institutional leaders.
- Promote and fund the co-creation of inclusive and gender-responsive OER relevant to various Commonwealth contexts and disciplines.
- Support institutions in developing and aligning curricula with employability frameworks and future skills through co-designed interventions with industry stakeholders.
- Provide models and resources to help institutions contextualise and adapt international content, facilitating regional and global learning exchanges.
- Identify, validate and scale technologies that are effective in low-resource settings, such as mobile-first learning tools and offline learning platforms.

- Facilitate the creation of interoperable digital platforms for hosting OER, delivering courses, and supporting institutional collaboration without duplicating national efforts.
- Help institutions and national bodies develop quality assurance tools tailored to ODeL, including assessment frameworks, audit guidelines and accreditation standards.
- Commission and disseminate region-specific research that provides evidence on the impact of ODeL on access, quality, employability, and learner outcomes.
- Track participation data across gender, geography and socio-economic status to inform more inclusive programming and identify underserved populations.
- Enable collaborative ventures among developing Commonwealth countries to share innovations, tools and practices in ODeL.
- Coordinate funding and resource mobilisation efforts with development partners, philanthropic organisations, and national governments to support scale-up of successful models.

Recommendations for Future Actions and Research

The findings from this research on the status of ODeL in Commonwealth institutions suggest that further research on potential practical solutions on a global scale is warranted. The sizable corpus of literature collected for the current study can serve as a starting point for follow-up research.

Conclusion

The impetus for this research report was a desire to establish the current state of ODeL in Commonwealth countries. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods exploratory study by conducting a literature review and then creating an online survey based on the findings of the review. A total of 111 respondents completed the survey, which consisted of closed and open-ended questions. After thematically analysing the data, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with 11 key stakeholders in the Commonwealth ODeL environment. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and explored the following overarching aspects in Commonwealth countries:

- recent developments or innovations in ODeL and their impact
- the implementation challenges associated with ODeL
- the developmental needs for institutional dual-mode learning, based on the themes that emerged from the online survey

Five development needs emerged from the data. They are concerned with infrastructure, improving PD for educators, securing financial resources, addressing equity issues and fostering more collaboration between various entities. These needs align with COL's ODeL strategic planning goals for 2021–2027, as described in Table 5. The summary of identified challenges echoes these needs and mentions some suggestions made by respondents and participants as to how COL could help improve certain situations. Several survey respondents and interview participants addressed the possibility of creating an open access repository for the benefit of all Commonwealth institutions. This resonates with one of the suggestions the researchers have for future research: to investigate more practical solutions for COL institutions and educators to improve ODeL in HE throughout the Commonwealth.

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Appendix 1: Respondents' Countries

The survey respondents came from 25 countries.

COUNTRY	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	% OF RESPONSES	COUNTRY	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	% OF RESPONSES
Bangladesh (A020)	1	0.90%	Belize (A031)	3	2.70%
Jamaica (A036)	1	0.90%	Mozambique (A009)	3	2.70%
Sierra Leone (A014)	1	0.90%	Kenya (A005)	4	3.60%
Tanzania (A016)	1	0.90%	Lesotho (A006)	4	3.60%
The Gambia (A017)	1	0.90%	Pakistan (A025)	4	3.60%
Togo (A055)	1	0.90%	Sri Lanka (A027)	4	3.60%
Fiji (A045)	2	1.80%	Uganda (A018)	4	3.60%
Ghana (A004)	2	1.80%	Zambia (A019)	4	3.60%
Malawi (A007)	2	1.80%	India (A022)	5	4.50%
Malaysia (A023)	2	1.80%	Mauritius (A008)	5	4.50%
Malta (A042)	2	1.80%	Botswana (A001)	9	8.11%
			Kiribati (A046)	14	12.61%
			Namibia (A010)	27	24.32%
			No country specified	5	4.50%

Appendix 2: ODeL and Dual-Mode Institutions

The following table lists some of the institutions that either specialise in ODeL delivery or are dual-mode providers that offer both face-to-face delivery and ODeL. The programmes range from certification level up to master's level. Given the evolving nature of the field, it is not a comprehensive list.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Antigua and Barbuda		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIT): Primarily a traditional institution, but offers some online courses. University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: Offers online and distance education programmes across the Caribbean.
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Universities Australia (OUA): A consortium of universities offering fully online degrees. University of Southern Queensland (USQ): Although not exclusively ODeL, it has a strong focus on distance education. Charles Sturt University (CSU): Known for its extensive online and distance programmes. Torrens University Australia: Offers many fully online degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of New England (UNE): One of Australia's pioneers in distance education. Deakin University: Strong online and blended learning options. Australian Catholic University (ACU): Offers select online programmes alongside campus-based courses. RMIT University: Offers a mix of on-campus and online degrees. University of Tasmania (UTAS): Offers distance learning in various disciplines. Griffith University, Monash University, University of Queensland (UQ) and others: Most major Australian universities now have dual-mode options.
The Bahamas	<p>The Bahamas does not have a fully dedicated ODeL university, but some regional and international ODeL institutions serve Bahamian students. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: Offers online and distance education across the Caribbean, including The Bahamas. The Bahamas Open Learning Association (BOLA): Promotes ODeL but is not a degree-granting institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of The Bahamas (UB): Offers some online and hybrid courses, although it is primarily a traditional institution. The Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute (BTVI): Provides some vocational training via blended formats. Liberty University Online: Has a range of online programmes in which they enrol students from The Bahamas.
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bangladesh Open University (BOU): The only government-run, dedicated ODeL university. It offers programmes from secondary to postgraduate levels. Open University of Bangladesh (proposed): Under discussion, but no fully operational second ODeL university yet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Dhaka (DU): Institute of Education and Research (IER) offers some ODeL courses. University of Rajshahi (RU): Provides limited distance learning options. Jahangirnagar University (JU): Offers some blended learning initiatives. National University (NU): Primarily a federated university for affiliated colleges but has some ODeL components. Islamic Arabic University (IAU): Offers hybrid learning for Islamic Studies. Bangabandhu Digital University (BDU): A newer institution that focuses on digital education (blended mode). Private universities (e.g., BRAC University, Daffodil International University, North South University): Many now offer online degrees, although not all are officially recognised as ODeL by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

COUNTRY	ODeL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Barbados	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The main ODeL provider in Barbados (and the wider Caribbean). It offers fully online degrees, certificates and professional courses. Barbados Open Campus (BOC): Previously part of UWI's outreach and now integrated into the UWI Open Campus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Cave Hill Campus: Offers some hybrid/online courses alongside in-person programmes. Barbados Community College (BCC): Provides select blended learning options (e.g., evening/weekly classes with online components). Samuel Jackman Prescod Institute of Technology (SJPIT): Vocational training with some flexible delivery modes. Regional/international universities (e.g., University of Leicester, University of London External Programme): Have partnerships with local institutions or enrol Barbadian students online.
Belize	<p>Belize does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The primary regional ODeL provider. It offers online degrees to Belizean students. University of Belize (UB) Distance Education: Although UB is mainly face-to-face, it offers some distance education initiatives (not fully ODeL). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Belize (UB): The national university. It provides select online/blended courses (e.g., teacher training, Business programmes). Galen University: A private university with some online components (e.g., MBA, professional courses). Belize Technical College (BTEC): Offers vocational training with flexible delivery modes. Regional/international partners (e.g., UWI, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala): Collaborate with Belizean institutions or enrol Belizean students online.
Botswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Botswana Open University (BOU) (formerly Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning, BOCODOL): The only fully ODeL institution in the country. It offers certificates, diplomas and degrees via distance learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Botswana (UB): Offers select programmes through distance education (e.g., postgraduate diploma in Education, some master's programmes). Botho University: A private university with online degree options (e.g., Business, IT). Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN): Offers blended learning agricultural programmes. Botswana Accountancy College (BAC): Offers hybrid professional courses (e.g., ACCA, CIMA). Regional/international institutions (e.g., University of South Africa [UNISA], Zimbabwe Open University [ZOU]): Enrol Botswana students in ODeL programmes.
Brunei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) Centre for Lifelong Learning (C3L): Offers some distance learning courses but is not a fully ODeL institution. Foreign ODeL providers (e.g., Open University Malaysia [OUM] and University of London [International Programmes]): Enrol Bruneian students in online degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD): Provides select online/blended courses (e.g., professional development programmes). Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB): Offers some flexible learning options for engineering and business programmes. Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB): Islamic teacher training college with blended components. Laksamana College of Business (LCB): Partners with foreign universities (e.g., University of Chester, UK) to offer hybrid degrees. International institutions (e.g., Taylor's University, Malaysia,) and Curtin University, Australia: Offer online courses to Bruneian students.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Cameroon	<p>Cameroon has no fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Virtual University (AVU) Network: Partners with Cameroonian institutions to offer online STEM and teacher training programmes. Foreign ODeL providers (e.g., University of South Africa [UNISA] and Open University of Tanzania [OUT]): Enrol Cameroonian students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Yaoundé I: Pilot ODeL programmes (e.g., teacher training via the National Distance Education Programme [PEN@D]). University of Dschang: Offers blended courses in Agriculture and ICT. Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC): Provides hybrid programmes in Theology and Business. Private universities (e.g., Université des Montagnes, Bamenda University of Science & Technology): Some offer online components. Professional schools (e.g., ENSET Douala, SUPDECO Cameroon): Provide blended vocational training. Foreign collaborations: Partnerships with French (e.g., CNED) and African (e.g., AUF) ODeL providers.
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Athabasca University (AU): Canada's largest and only fully accredited online university. It offers over 850 courses and 60+ degrees. TÉLUQ University: A French-language ODeL institution affiliated with the Université du Québec. Thompson Rivers University Open Learning Division (TRU-OL): Offers open, flexible learning with full degree programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of British Columbia (UBC): Extensive choice of online courses and degrees. School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto (UofT): Offers professional and certificate programmes online. Yorkville University: Focuses on flexible Business and Tech programmes. University of Waterloo: Renowned for co-op programmes with online options. McGill University: Select graduate programmes (e.g., Education, Management) available online. Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University, TMU): Strong digital learning infrastructure. Memorial University (MUN) Distance Education, Learning & Teaching Support (DELTS): Offers 100+ online courses. Community colleges (e.g., George Brown): Many provide hybrid vocational and diploma programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Cyprus	<p>Cyprus does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hellenic Open University (HOU), Cyprus Branch: A Greek institution that offers fully online degrees (e.g., Humanities, Social Sciences) to Cypriot students. International ODeL providers (e.g., Open University, UK, and University of Nicosia [UNIC] Global): Offer fully online programmes to Cypriots. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Cyprus (UCY): Limited online courses (e.g., some master's programmes). Cyprus University of Technology (CUT): Offers blended learning in Engineering and Health Sciences. University of Nicosia (UNIC): The largest dual-mode provider. It offers an extensive range of online degrees (e.g., MBA, undergraduate degree in Computer Science) alongside on-campus programmes. European University Cyprus (EUC): Offers hybrid options in Business and Medicine. Frederick University: Offers select online courses (e.g., Education, Engineering). Private colleges (e.g., Cyprus College, Intercollege): Some offer blended vocational programmes.
Dominica	<p>Dominica does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The primary regional ODeL provider. It offers online degrees to Dominican students. Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and University of London (International Programmes) enrol Dominican students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominica State College (DSC): Provides some blended courses (e.g., teacher training, associate degrees). All Saints University School of Medicine: Offers hybrid components for medical programmes. Ross University School of Medicine (now relocated to Barbados): Previously provided flexible learning options. Regional/international collaborations: Partnerships with Caribbean (e.g., UWI) and U.S. universities (e.g., Florida International University) for online programmes.
Eswatini	<p>Eswatini does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of South Africa (UNISA): The primary regional ODeL provider. It offers degrees to Swazi students. African Virtual University (AVU) Network: Partners with local institutions to provide STEM programmes. Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Open University of Tanzania (OUT) enrol Swazi students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Eswatini (UNESWA): The national university provides limited distance education (e.g., postgraduate diploma in Education). Eswatini Christian Medical University (ECMU): Offers blended Health Sciences programmes. Southern African Nazarene University (SANU): Provides some online Theology and Business courses. Vocational colleges (e.g., Eswatini College of Technology): Provide hybrid technical training. Regional collaborations: Partnerships with South African universities (e.g., UNISA, University of Pretoria) for ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Fiji	<p>Fiji does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the South Pacific (USP) FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider in the Pacific. It offers online and print-based distance education to Fijian students. Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and University of New England (Australia) enrol Fijian students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Fiji (UniFiji): Provides some online/blended programmes (e.g., Law, Business). Fiji National University (FNU): Offers flexible vocational and degree programmes (e.g., Nursing, IT). Pacific Theological College (PTC): Provides hybrid theology programmes. Regional/international collaborations: Partnerships with Australian (e.g., University of Queensland) and New Zealand (e.g., Massey University) institutions for online degrees.
Gabon	<p>Gabon does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Virtual University (AVU) Network: Partners with Gabonese institutions for STEM and teacher training programmes. Francophone ODeL providers: Institutions such as the Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance (CNED, France) and Université Numérique Francophone Mondiale (UNFM) offer online courses to Gabonese students. Foreign ODeL providers: Universities such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Open University of Tanzania (OUT) enrol Gabonese students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Université Omar Bongo (UOB): The largest public university. It offers some blended learning initiatives (e.g., professional development courses). Université des Sciences et Techniques de Masuku (USTM): Offers limited distance learning components in science programmes. Private institutions (e.g., Université Libre de Libreville, Institut Africain d'Informatique, Gabon): Offer some hybrid Business and IT programmes. Vocational/professional schools: Flexible technical training (e.g., Nursing, Agriculture). Francophone collaborations: Partnerships with French universities (e.g., Université Paris-Saclay) for online degrees.
The Gambia	<p>The Gambia does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the Gambia (UTG), Directorate of Continuing and Distance Education: Offers limited ODeL programmes. African Virtual University (AVU) Network: Partners with Gambian institutions for STEM and teacher training. Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as the University of South Africa (UNISA), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Open University (UK) enrol Gambian students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the Gambia (UTG): The primary dual-mode provider. It offers blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business). Gambia College: Provides hybrid teacher training and agriculture programmes. International Open University (IOU, formerly Islamic Online University): A private institution that offers online Islamic and secular degrees. Private institutions (e.g., American International University West Africa, MDI): Offers some blended Business/IT programmes. Vocational centres (e.g., Gambia Technical Training Institute, GTTI): Provides flexible technical training. Regional collaborations: Partnerships with West African universities (e.g., the University of Ghana) for ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ghana has one major dedicated ODeL institution: Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Distance Learning Division offers fully online/ distance programmes (e.g., MBA, Public Administration). Regional/international ODeL providers: Institutions such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) and African Virtual University (AVU) enrol Ghanaian students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Ghana (UG), Distance Education Programme: Offers diplomas/degrees in Arts, Business and Education. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Institute of Distance Learning: Focuses on STEM and professional programmes. University of Cape Coast (UCC), Centre for Continuing Education: Specialises in teaching Education and Humanities via blended learning. University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Institute for Distance and e-Learning (IDeL): Provides teacher training and Arts programmes. Valley View University (VVU) Distance Learning: Offers online Theology, Business and IT programmes. Private universities (e.g., Ghana Technology University College [GTUC]; Regent University): Provide online MBA, IT and Communication courses. Technical universities (e.g., Kumasi Technical University): Offer hybrid vocational programmes.
Grenada	<p>Grenada does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The primary ODeL provider for Grenadian students. It offers online degrees. Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as the University of London (International Programmes) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) enrol Grenadian students. University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus — Grenada: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields, using a combination of online and face-to-face learning. St. George's University (SGU): Offers graduate programmes with online components, such as the Master of Public Health (MPH) and Master of Science in Medical Education (MSME), which can be pursued part-time and online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T.A. Marryshow Community College (TAMCC): Offers blended vocational and associate degree programmes. Regional collaborations: Partnerships with Caribbean (e.g., UWI) and U.S. universities (e.g., Florida International University) for online courses. St. George's University (SGU): A private medical university. It operates in a dual-mode format, offering both on-campus and online programmes. It provides primarily in-person education, but certain graduate programmes incorporate online learning components. University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus, Grenada: Offers dual-mode education, combining online learning with occasional face-to-face sessions, depending on the programme.
Guyana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL): Launched in 2021 by the Government of Guyana, GOAL aims to provide 20,000 scholarships for online tertiary education by 2026. It partners with 15 international institutions, including the University of the West Indies (Open Campus), University of the Southern Caribbean, Texila American University and UNICAF partners, to offer more than 180 programmes ranging from certificates to doctorates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Guyana (UG): Offers both on-campus and distance education programmes through its Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE). The IDCE provides opportunities for students to pursue higher education through flexible learning formats, accommodating those who cannot attend traditional on-campus classes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): The world's largest open university, with over 3 million students enrolled in 333 programmes across various disciplines. › State open universities: Each state in India typically has its own open university. For example, the Tamil Nadu Open University, based in Chennai, offers over 100 programmes and has more than 600 learner support centres. 	<p>Over 200 universities in India offer both traditional on-campus and distance education programmes. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna University: Provides regular degrees and distance education programmes through its Directorate of Distance Education. • Annamalai University: Offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering and Agriculture. • Banaras Hindu University (BHU): Offers traditional on-campus education along with distance education programmes through its Faculty of Arts. • Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU): Primarily focused on distance education but also has some on-campus programmes. • Dr. C.V. Raman University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Primarily known for its distance education programmes, but also conducts various on-campus programmes through its regional centres. • Jaipur National University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Business, Computer Science, Education and Law. • Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU): Primarily known for its on-campus programmes, but also offers some distance learning courses through its School of Open Learning. • Karnataka State Open University (KSOU): Offers distance education programmes along with some options for on-campus learning. • Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • University of Allahabad: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • Mahatma Gandhi University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • Nalanda Open University: Offers undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational courses in Arts, Science and Commerce. • Netaji Subhas Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
India		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Netaji Subhas Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • Punjab Technical University (PTU): Offers traditional programmes through its affiliated colleges and has a distance education wing. • Sikkim Manipal University (SMU): Offers various on-campus programmes and a wide range of distance learning options. • Sree Narayanaguru Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Humanities, Science, Law and Vocational Education. • Tamil Nadu Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • University of Allahabad: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • University of Calcutta: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • University of Delhi: Offers both regular courses through its colleges and distance education programmes through the School of Open Learning (SOL). • University of Jammu: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • University of Kashmir: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • University of Kerala: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses. • University of Madras: Offers various distance education programmes through its Institute of Distance Education. • University of Mumbai: Offers traditional courses through its affiliated colleges and distance education programmes through the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL). • University of Rajasthan: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • Uttarakhand Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science, Commerce and Education. • Vidyasagar University: Offers postgraduate programmes in Arts and Science. • Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University: Offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Science and Commerce and vocational courses.

COUNTRY	ODeL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Jamaica	<p>Jamaica has several institutions that offer ODeL programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech): Offers distance learning courses and online modules through its Office of Distance Learning. • University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC), Global Campus: Provides a variety of distance learning programmes, including bachelor's degrees in public health, IT and Electrical and Computer Engineering. • University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: Provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through blended learning in various Caribbean territories, including Jamaica. • Colbourne College: Offers UK-accredited diplomas and degrees through distance learning, with options for online study or blended learning involving face-to-face tutorials in various Jamaican locations. • International University of the Caribbean (IUC): Offers accredited programmes in Theology, Education and Business Administration, with some courses available through distance learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona campus: Offers dual-mode programmes, including a postgraduate diploma in Education. • University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech): Provides both on-campus and distance learning programmes. Its dedicated Office of Distance Learning co-ordinates and integrates support services for distance education. • University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC), Global Campus: Offers in-person and distance education programmes, including bachelor's degrees in various disciplines. • Colbourne College: Provides both on-campus and distance learning options for its UK-accredited diplomas and degrees. Face-to-face tutorials are offered in several Jamaican locations.
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kenya Methodist University (KeMU), Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) Campus: Offers fully online programmes. • Mount Kenya University (MKU), Open Distance and Electronic Learning (ODeL): Provides fully online degrees. • Africa Nazarene University (ANU), e-Learning Campus: Focuses on fully online education. • Kenyatta University, Open Learning Campus: Specialises in distance education. • University of Nairobi, School of Open, Distance and e-Learning (SODEL): Offers fully online programmes. • Open University of Kenya: Established in 2023. It is dedicated exclusively to ODeL, marking a significant step in expanding access to higher education through distance learning in the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Nairobi. • Kenyatta University. • Moi University. • Maseno University. • Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). • Egerton University. • Technical University of Kenya. • Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. • Maasai Mara University. • Private universities (e.g., Strathmore, Daystar, Catholic University of Eastern Africa). • Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology: Offers blended learning opportunities. • Mount Kenya University: Operates an ODeL centre, facilitating flexible learning options.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Kiribati	<p>Kiribati does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. It relies on USP and foreign providers. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP) FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider for Kiribati. It offers online and print-based distance education. • Pacific Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Australia: Provides vocational ODeL courses. • Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as the University of New England (Australia) and Open Polytechnic (New Zealand) enrol I-Kiribati students. • Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT): Offers vocational education and training programmes, including full-time, part-time and short courses. It has been working on expanding access to education through flexible delivery methods, particularly to reach students in remote areas. • Kiribati Teachers College (KTC): Provides pre-service teacher training and has been involved in initiatives to enhance teacher education through distance learning modalities. • Marine Training Centre (MTC): Engaged in discussions about incorporating flexible learning strategies to improve access to its programmes, especially for students from outer islands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT): Provides some flexible vocational training. • Kiribati Teachers College (KTC): Offers blended Teacher Education programmes. • USP Kiribati Campus: Offers both face-to-face and distance courses. • Regional collaborations: Partnerships with Australian and New Zealand institutions for Nursing and maritime training.
Lesotho	<p>Lesotho does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. It relies on UNISA and foreign providers. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National University of Lesotho (NUL) — Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS): Offers some ODeL programmes but is not fully single-mode. • University of South Africa (UNISA): The primary regional ODeL provider for Basotho students. • African Virtual University (AVU) Network: Partners with local institutions for STEM programmes. • Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Open University (UK) enrol Basotho students. 	<p>These institutions offer hybrid learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National University of Lesotho (NUL): The main dual-mode provider. Offers blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business). • Botho University (Lesotho Campus): A private institution with online components for IT and business degrees. • Lerotholi Polytechnic: Provides flexible technical and vocational training. • Lesotho College of Education (LCE): Hybrid teacher training programmes. • Regional collaborations: Partnerships with South African universities (e.g., University of Pretoria) for ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Malawi	<p>Malawi does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mzuzu University (MZUNI), Open and Distance Learning Centre: Provides ODeL programmes. It also has satellite centres in Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Balaka, Mulanje and Karonga. It focuses on providing teacher training and teaching Environmental Science. • Unicaf University (Malawi): Provides a wide array of online degree programmes, including bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in fields such as Education, Business and Health Management. • ShareWORLD Open University: Provides ODeL programmes aimed at increasing access to higher education, particularly for students in remote areas. • Central Christian University: Offers ODeL programmes with a focus on integrating Christian values into higher education, catering to students seeking faith-based learning options. • Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR): Offers some ODeL options. • Foreign ODeL providers: Institutions such as the University of South Africa (UNISA), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and African Virtual University (AVU) enrol Malawian students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Malawi (UNIMA), eCampus: Offers dual-mode teaching for a range of accredited online undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in a range of subjects, including Business and Education. • Malawi Institute of Management (MIM): Offers blended learning programmes that combine online and face-to-face instruction, with a focus on management and leadership training for professionals. • Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR): Blended programmes in Agriculture. • Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST): Offers hybrid STEM courses.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Malaysia	<p>Malaysia has dedicated open universities that offer ODeL. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open University Malaysia (OUM): Malaysia’s first open university. It offers a wide range of programmes through distance learning. • Wawasan Open University (WOU): Provides working adults with access to higher education via ODeL. • Asia e University (AeU): AeU is known for its digital approach to education, providing programmes that are delivered exclusively through ODeL. This university focuses on creating a global learning environment that is accessible to students from various backgrounds. • Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM): Has a dedicated ODeL programme that is tailored to meet the needs of working adults. • Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). 	<p>Numerous universities in Malaysia offer both traditional face-to-face and distance learning programmes. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM): One of the earliest adopters of distance learning in Malaysia. It has integrated ODeL into its programme offerings. • Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM): Offers a range of programmes through its Institute of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (iCEPS), using ODeL methods. • Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM): Provides distance learning opportunities through its Centre for Extension, Entrepreneurship and Professional Advancement (CEEPA). • Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM): Offers various programmes via its School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), incorporating ODeL approaches. • UNITAR International University: One of the first virtual universities in Southeast Asia. It offers programmes in both physical and ODeL formats. • Private universities (e.g., Taylor’s University, Sunway University, UTAR): Offer extensive online MBA and IT programmes. • Polytechnics and community colleges: Offer vocational ODeL programmes (e.g., Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation courses). • Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU): Offers programmes based on Islamic principles through both online and on-campus modes.
Maldives	<p>Maldives does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access foreign ODeL providers, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Popular for degrees in Business, Education and IT. • University of London (International Programmes): Offers Law, Economics and Management degrees. • Open University (UK): Enrols Maldivian students in various disciplines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maldives National University (MNU): The primary dual-mode provider. Offers blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business, IT). • Villa College: Provides flexible learning options for teacher training and management training. • Cyryx College: Offers hybrid IT and Business programmes. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of the South Pacific (USP) — FlexiSchool: Serves Maldivian students via online platforms. › Asian International University (AIU, proposed): A planned institution to expand ODeL access.

COUNTRY	ODeL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Malta	<p>Malta does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access foreign ODeL providers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open University (UK): Popular for degrees in Business, Humanities and IT. • University of London (International Programmes): Offers degrees in Law, Economics and Social Sciences. • European ODeL Institutions (e.g., Fern Universität in Hagen, Germany). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Malta (UM): The primary dual-mode provider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Offers diplomas and degrees in Education, IT and Social Sciences. › Blended master's programmes (e.g., MBA, Public Health). • Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST): Offers flexible vocational programmes (e.g., Engineering, Hospitality). • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Global College Malta: Offers hybrid business degrees (partnered with UK universities). › London School of Commerce (LSC) Malta: Has online components for management courses.
Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mauritius has one dedicated ODeL institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Open University of Mauritius (OUM): Established in 2012, it is the country's only fully ODeL university. It offers programmes in Business, IT, Education and Law. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of South Africa (UNISA): Popular among Mauritian students. › Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Offers affordable degrees. › University of London (International Programmes): Enrols students in Law and Economics degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Mauritius (UoM): Offers ODeL programmes through its Centre for Distance Education (CDE) (e.g., MBA, Education). • University of Technology, Mauritius (UTM): Provides blended IT, Engineering and Management courses. • Middlesex University Mauritius: UK-affiliated, with online components for Business degrees. • Charles Telfair Institute: Hybrid programmes in Nursing and Creative Arts. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with African Virtual University (AVU) and Sorbonne Université à Maurice for joint ODeL programmes.
Mozambique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mozambique has one dedicated ODeL institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Universidade Aberta de Moçambique (Open University of Mozambique, UAM): Established in 2022, it is the country's first fully ODeL public university, offering programmes in Education, Management and IT. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of South Africa (UNISA): Enrols Mozambican students in ODeL programmes. › African Virtual University (AVU): Partners with local institutions for STEM courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These institutions offer hybrid learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM): Offers select ODeL programmes (e.g., teacher training, Public Health) through its Distance Education Department. › Universidade Pedagógica (UP): Provides blended learning for Education degrees. › Universidade São Tomás de Moçambique (USTM): Private university with online components in Business and Law. › Instituto Superior de Ciências e Tecnologia de Moçambique (ISCTEM): Hybrid IT and Engineering courses. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with Universidade Aberta (Portugal) and UNISA for joint ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Namibia	<p>Namibia does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) — Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning (COLL): Offers ODeL programmes but operates as part of a dual-mode institution. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of South Africa (UNISA): The primary ODeL provider for Namibian students. > Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Popular for affordable degrees. > Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU): Enrols students in Education and Management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Namibia (UNAM) — Centre for External Studies (CES): The largest dual-mode provider. It offers diplomas and degrees in Education, Business and Humanities. • Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) — COLL: Focuses on IT, Engineering and Management ODeL programmes. • International University of Management (IUM): Private university with blended Business and Health Sciences programmes. • Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL): Provides secondary and vocational ODeL programmes (pre-tertiary level). • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Partnerships with Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) for cross-border ODeL initiatives.
Nauru	<p>Nauru has no domestic ODeL institutions. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP) — FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider. It offers online and print-based distance education to Nauruan students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Vocational training via blended delivery. > Open Universities Australia (OUA): Limited enrolments in online degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nauru has one quasi-dual-mode institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Nauru Campus of USP: Offers limited face-to-face classes with USP's ODeL resources, but no stand-alone hybrid programmes. • No other institutions in Nauru offer structured dual-mode education.
New Zealand	<p>New Zealand has one fully dedicated ODeL institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Polytechnic — Te Pūkenga: The country's only fully ODeL institution. It offers over 100 qualifications (certificates to degrees) in Business, IT, Education and Health. 	<p>All eight New Zealand universities and most polytechnics offer hybrid learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massey University: Leader in dual-mode education, with 50+ years of distance offerings (e.g., extramural programmes). • University of Auckland: Online postgraduate programmes (e.g., Public Health, Education). • Victoria University of Wellington: Flexible Law and Business degrees. • University of Otago: Hybrid health sciences and MBA programmes. • Lincoln University, University of Waikato, AUT, Canterbury: All offer selected ODeL courses. • Te Pūkenga: Unified network of vocational institutions providing blended trades and diploma programmes. • Wānanga (Māori tertiary institutions): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Offer blended Māori and Indigenous Studies programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
<p>Nigeria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN): Established in 1983 (re-launched in 2002). It is Nigeria's only federally recognised single-mode ODeL university and in 2023 had over 500,000 active students. It offers 50+ programmes from certificates to PhDs. • Some state governments have established ODeL centres (e.g., Lagos State Open University, proposed but not yet fully operational). • Foreign ODeL providers: • University of South Africa (UNISA) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) enrol Nigerian students. 	<p>Over 100 Nigerian universities offer hybrid learning, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of Ibadan (UI) — Distance Learning Centre. > University of Lagos (UNILAG) — Distance Learning Institute (DLI). > Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) — Centre for Distance Learning. • State universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Lagos State University (LASU) — Open and Distance Learning Centre. > Adekunle Ajasin University ODeL Centre. • Private universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of Abuja — Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education. > Covenant University: Offers hybrid MBA programmes. > Babcock University: Offers online degrees in Nursing and Business. • Polytechnics and colleges of education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Yaba College of Technology — Open & Distance Learning Centre. > Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo: Offers ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU): Established in 1974. It is Pakistan's largest ODeL institution with 1.4 million+ enrolments in 2023. It offers programmes from secondary to PhD levels. • Virtual University of Pakistan (VU): Established in 2002. It is a fully online university with 200,000+ students. It focuses on IT, Business and Media. 	<p>Over 50 Pakistani universities offer hybrid learning, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of the Punjab (PU) — Directorate of Distance Education. › University of Karachi (KU) — Distance Learning Centre. › Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) — Directorate of Distance Education. › Islamia University Bahawalpur (IUB) — Directorate of Online/Distance Learning. • Private sector universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS): Offers an online MBA. › COMSATS University — Virtual Campus. › Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST): Offers online programmes. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and UK Open University for joint programmes.
Papua New Guinea	<p>PNG does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP) — FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider for PNG. It offers online and print-based programmes. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) — Open College: Functions as a dual-mode institution. › Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). Offers vocational ODeL courses. › Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Offers limited enrolments. 	<p>These institutions offer hybrid learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) — Open College: The main dual-mode provider. It offers certificates and diplomas in Education, Business and Agriculture via ODeL. • Papua New Guinea University of Technology (UniTech): Offers limited blended Engineering programmes. • Divine Word University (DWU): Offers hybrid theology and health science programmes. • Pacific Adventist University (PAU): Offer blended Education and Business courses. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with USP and Australian universities (e.g., James Cook University) for joint ODeL programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Rwanda	<p>Rwanda does not yet have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Virtual University (AVU) — Rwanda Campus: Offers STEM and teacher training programmes via ODeL. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of South Africa (UNISA): Popular for Business and Law degrees. › Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Enrols Rwandan students in IT and Management programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These institutions offer hybrid learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of Rwanda (UR) — College of Education (CE): Leads ODeL initiatives and offers blended teacher training programmes. › Kigali Independent University (ULK): Provides hybrid Law and Business degrees. › Catholic Institute of Kabgayi (ICK): Offers blended programmes in Theology and Development Studies. • Regional/international collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with Carnegie Mellon University Africa (hybrid IT programmes). › University of the People (UoPeople): Offers tuition-free online degrees for Rwandan students.
St Kitts and Nevis	<p>St Kitts and Nevis does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The primary ODeL provider for Kittitian/Nevisian students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of London (International Programmes). › U.S. universities (e.g., Liberty University Online). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College (CFBC): The sole tertiary institution. It offers limited blended programmes (e.g., teacher training, Nursing). • International University of the Health Sciences (IUHS): A medical school with some hybrid components. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with UWI Cave Hill (Barbados) for online Law and Business courses.
Saint Lucia	<p>Saint Lucia does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The main ODeL provider. It offers online and blended programmes to Saint Lucian students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of London (International Programmes). › U.S. universities (e.g., Liberty University Online). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC): The sole local tertiary institution. It offers limited blended programmes (e.g., teacher training, Nursing). • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with UWI Cave Hill (Barbados) for hybrid Law and Business courses.
St Vincent and The Grenadines	<p>SVG does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus: The primary ODeL provider. It offers online and blended programmes to Vincentian students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of London (International Programmes) › American universities (e.g., Liberty University Online). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College (SVGCC): The main local institution. It offers limited blended programmes (e.g., teacher training, Nursing). • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with UWI Cave Hill (Barbados) for hybrid Law and Business courses.

COUNTRY	ODeL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Samoa	<p>Samoa does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the South Pacific (USP), FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider. It offers online and print-based distance education to Samoan students. Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Polytechnic New Zealand: Offers vocational courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National University of Samoa (NUS): Offers limited blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business) through its Centre for Samoan Studies. Samoa Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Centre: Provides hybrid trades training. Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Offers blended vocational training. Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with USP Alafua Campus (Apia) for Agriculture and Science programmes.
Seychelles	<p>Seychelles does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Seychelles (UniSey), Open Learning Centre: Offers some ODeL programmes but operates as part of a dual-mode institution (see next column). Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of London (International Programmes): Popular for Law and Business degrees. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Limited enrolments in management programmes. African Virtual University (AVU): Partners with UniSey for STEM courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Seychelles (UniSey): The only local tertiary institution to offer blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business, Tourism) through its Open Learning Centre. Seychelles Institute of Technology (SIT): Provides hybrid vocational training (e.g., Hospitality, IT). Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with the University of Mauritius and University of the South Pacific (USP) for joint ODeL programmes.
Sierra Leone	<p>Sierra Leone does not currently have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access courses offered by the following regional/international ODeL providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of South Africa (UNISA): Popular for Business and Law degrees. African Virtual University (AVU): Partners with local institutions for STEM programmes. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): Offers management and IT courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Sierra Leone (USL): Offers blended programmes in Business and Public Administration through its Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM). Njala University: Offers limited ODeL options in Agriculture and Education. Fourah Bay College (FBC): Piloting hybrid courses in Humanities and Social Sciences. Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limkokwing University of Creative Technology: Offers hybrid IT and Media programmes. Milton Margai Technical University (MMTU): Offers blended vocational training.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS): Originally established as the Open University of Singapore (UniSIM) in 2005, it was rebranded in 2017 and focuses on part-time and fully online degrees for working adults. It offers programmes in Business, Law, Social Sciences and IT. • Foreign ODeL Providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Open University (UK): Enrols Singaporean students. › University of London (International Programmes): Popular for Law and Economics degrees. 	<p>All major universities in Singapore offer hybrid learning options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National University of Singapore (NUS): Provides online courses and degrees (e.g., Master of Technology in Software Engineering). • Nanyang Technological University (NTU): Offers blended programmes (e.g., MBA, Continuing Education). • Singapore Management University (SMU): Offers hybrid Executive Education and Professional Certificates. • Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT): Focuses on applied degrees with flexible learning options. • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Kaplan Singapore: Partners with foreign universities for online degrees. › James Cook University (JCU) in Singapore: Offers hybrid Australian-accredited programmes.
Solomon Islands	<p>Solomon Islands does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP) — FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider. It offers online and print-based distance education to Solomon Islands students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Offers vocational training via blended delivery. › Open Polytechnic New Zealand: Offers limited enrolments in trades and Business programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solomon Islands National University (SINU): The only local tertiary institution to offer limited blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business, and Agriculture) through its Distance and Flexible Learning Centre. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with USP's Honiara Campus for joint programmes. › APTC: Provides hybrid vocational training in trades and hospitality.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
South Africa	<p>South Africa has one fully dedicated ODeL institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of South Africa (UNISA): Africa's largest ODeL university. It was established in 1873 and had over 400,000 students in 2023. It offers certificates to PhDs across disciplines such as Law, Business and Education. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Some South African students enrol in institutions such as Open University (UK) or Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), but UNISA dominates the market. • Several private institutions offer programmes predominantly or significantly through distance learning. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › STADIO Holdings: Has acquired several other higher education institutions. › IIE Rosebank College. › Richfield Graduate Institute of Technology. › MANCOSA. › Regenesys Business School. › Helderberg College: Has indicated dual-mode for certain faculties. 	<p>All 26 public universities in South Africa offer some form of hybrid learning. Key players include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Pretoria (UP): Offers extensive online postgraduate programmes (e.g., MBA, Public Health). • University of Johannesburg (UJ): Offers blended Engineering and IT degrees. • Stellenbosch University (SU): Offers hybrid Education and AgriSciences programmes. • North-West University (NWU) — Distance Education Unit: Offers flexible learning. • Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges: Over 50 public TVETs offer hybrid vocational programmes.
Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL): Established in 1980. It operates through 9 regional centres and 19 study centres across the country. It is the premier and dedicated ODL institution in Sri Lanka. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following traditional universities have incorporated distance learning programmes alongside their conventional on-campus offerings to increase accessibility and flexibility, serve a broader student base, accommodate working students and cater to those unable to attend regular classes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of Colombo. › University of Peradeniya. › University of Sri Jayewardenepura. › University of Kelaniya. › University of Jaffna.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tanzania has one fully dedicated ODeL institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Open University of Tanzania (OUT): Established in 1992. It offers a range of qualifications from certificates to PhDs in fields such as Education, Law and Business. It enrolls over 50,000 students annually. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Some students enrol in University of South Africa (UNISA) or Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) — Centre for Virtual Learning: Offers ODeL programmes in Social Sciences, Education and Business. • Mzumbe University (MU) — Institute of Continuing Education: Focuses on Public Administration and Law. • Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) — Distance Education Department: Offers programmes in Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. • Ardhi University (ARU) — Open and Distance Learning Centre: Focuses on Urban Planning and Architecture. • Other public universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Dodoma University (UDOM) (Education and Humanities). › Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST) (STEM fields). • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mount Meru University (MMU) (Blended Theology and Business programmes). › St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) (Education and Social Sciences).
Togo	<p>Togo does not currently have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL university. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire (UVCI): Offers francophone programmes in IT and Management. › African Virtual University (AVU): Offers STEM and teacher training courses. › Université Numérique Francophone Mondiale (UNFM): Offers online degrees in Business and Social Sciences. 	<p>These institutions offer limited hybrid learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Université de Lomé (UL): The largest public university. It is piloting ODeL programmes in Education and Law through its Centre de Formation à Distance (CFAD). • Université de Kara (UK): Offers blended Agriculture and Health Sciences programmes. • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Université Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (UCAO-Togo): Offers hybrid Theology and Business programmes. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Partnerships with Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and UVCI for joint ODeL initiatives.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Tonga	<p>Tonga does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP), FlexiSchool: The primary ODeL provider. It offers online and print-based distance education to Tongan students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Open Polytechnic New Zealand: Offers vocational courses. > Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Offers blended trades training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Tonga (UT): Offers limited blended programmes (e.g., Education, Business) through partnerships with USP. • Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE): Provides hybrid vocational training (e.g., Hospitality, IT). • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > USP's Tonga Campus delivers both face-to-face and ODeL courses.
Trinidad and Tobago	<p>Trinidad and Tobago does not have a fully dedicated domestic ODeL institution. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI), Open Campus: The primary ODeL provider. It offers fully online and blended programmes to Trinidadian and Tobagonian students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of London (International Programmes): Popular for Law and Business degrees. > Liberty University Online (USA): Christian-based programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine Campus: Offers select online programmes (e.g., MSc in Management Information Systems) alongside degrees taught in a traditional way. • University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT): Provides blended vocational and technical programmes (e.g., Engineering, Aviation). • College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT): Offers hybrid associate degrees in nursing and business. • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of the Southern Caribbean (USC): Offers online Theology and Business programmes. > SBCS Global Learning Institute: Partners with foreign universities for hybrid IT and Management degrees.
Tuvalu	<p>Tuvalu has no domestic ODeL institutions. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP), FlexiSchool: Primary provider via online/print-based courses). • Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Offers vocational ODeL. 	N/A

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uganda has one fully dedicated ODeL institution: Uganda Management Institute (UMI). Although it is primarily a management training institute, it operates as a de facto ODeL provider with fully distance-based programmes in Public Administration, Business and Development Studies. • Other options are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Makerere University: Offers distance learning programmes through its distance education centre. › Uganda Christian University (UCU): Provides ODeL options for various programmes. › The Open University of Uganda: Specifically focused on distance education. › Mbarara University of Science and Technology: Engages in distance learning initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makerere University: Offers ODeL programmes through its Institute of Open, Distance and e-Learning (IODeL) (e.g., Education, Business, Health Sciences). • Kyambogo University: Provides blended programmes in Teacher Education and Vocational Studies. • Uganda Christian University (UCU): Offers hybrid Theology, Business and IT degrees. • Uganda Martyrs University (UMU): Offers distance learning in Development Studies and Education. • Other public universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST): Offers hybrid Medical and Nursing programmes. › Gulu University: Provides ODeL in Agriculture and Education. • Private universities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Kampala International University (KIU): Offers online Law and Business programmes. › Nkumba University: Offers blended Arts and Social Sciences programmes.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
<p>United Kingdom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK has one fully dedicated ODeL institution: The Open University (OU). Established in 1969, it is the UK's only fully ODeL university and offers over 200 qualifications from certificates to PhDs to 200,000+ students annually. 	<p>All 130+ UK universities offer some form of hybrid learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key players include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of London (UoL) Worldwide: Offers distance degrees (e.g., Law, Economics) alongside its campus programmes. › University of Edinburgh: Offers online master's programmes (e.g., Data Science, Public Health). › University of Manchester: Offers blended MBA and Engineering courses. › University of Birmingham: Offers hybrid Education and Business degrees. • Other notable institutions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › University of Leeds (Digital Education Hub). › University of Warwick: Offers online MBA and STEM programmes). › Goldsmiths, University of London: Offers Creative Arts ODeL). › The Open University. • Some specialised providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › FutureLearn: Owned by OU and partners with UK universities for MOOCs. › Coursera UK: Hosts UK university courses.
<p>Vanuatu</p>	<p>Vanuatu has no domestic ODeL institutions. Students can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of the South Pacific (USP), FlexiSchool: The primary provider. It offers online/print-based programmes to Ni-Vanuatu students. • Foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC): Offers vocational courses. › Open Polytechnic New Zealand: Offers limited enrolments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vanuatu has one quasi-dual-mode institution: University of Vanuatu (UniVanuatu). Launched in 2020, it blends limited face-to-face classes with USP's ODeL resources but does not have a full hybrid infrastructure.

COUNTRY	ODEL INSTITUTIONS	DUAL-MODE INSTITUTIONS
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zambia has one fully dedicated ODeL institution: Zambia Open University (ZAOU). Established in 2005, it offers qualifications ranging from certificates to master's degrees in education, business and social sciences. • Students in Zambia can also access courses offered by the following foreign ODeL providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > University of South Africa (UNISA). > Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Zambia (UNZA), Directorate of Distance Education (DDE): Offers diplomas and degrees in Education, Humanities and Law. • Copperbelt University (CBU), Centre for Lifelong Learning: Focuses on Engineering, Business and Health Sciences from diplomas to master's degrees. • Mulungushi University (MU), Distance Education Unit: Offers programmes in Agriculture and Public Administration. • Private institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Zambian Catholic University (ZCU): Offers hybrid Theology and Development Studies. > Rusangu University: Offers blended Education and IT programmes. • Regional collaborations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Partnerships between African Virtual University (AVU) and the Zambian Open University (ZAOU) for STEM courses.

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