



MAURITIUS

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This report summarizes the status of Open and Distance Learning in Mauritius, the major challenges and the way forward.

Education has been very high on the agenda of Government since independence. There have been sustained efforts to expand primary and secondary education with Government financing, construction of infrastructure, primary school textbooks, free transport and support to students from low income families. Government expenditure on education was estimated at 13% of total expenditure in 2013. Gross enrolment ratio in primary education was 98%, in secondary education, it was 71% and in tertiary education, it reached 46.6% in 2012.

With such a strong commitment to education, distance education was seen as being instrumental in opening up access to education. In fact, only three years after independence, in 1971, the Mauritius College of the Air was set up under the Ministry of Education. The Mauritius College of the Air Act has been involved in the production of educational audio and video programmes for formal and non-formal programmes. A Division of Distance Education was set up in 1994 to develop institutional capacity for delivery of distance education programmes. Distance learning has therefore a history of over 40 years and is well grounded in Mauritius.

In 2010, Government set up a separate Ministry for tertiary education, in line with its commitment to widen access to quality tertiary education. A national strategy for tertiary education was approved by the Government, spelling out the long-term vision is to transform the country into a knowledge-based economy. Five strategic objectives have been identified by stakeholders in the higher education sector:

- Strategic Goal 1 – Widening access and ensuring equity.
- Strategic Goal 2 – Improving Quality and Relevance.
- Strategic Goal 3 – Internationalisation of Tertiary Education.
- Strategic Goal 4 – Enhance Research and Innovation
- Strategic Goal 5 – Strengthen Governance and Financial Sustainability.

The long term objective is to provide equitable access to higher education and reach the target of 68,000 students by 2025, including secondary school leavers, students enrolled in continuous professional development, lifelong learning and upgrading of qualifications. Some of the strategies relevant to Open and Distance Learning proposed in the document are:

- Increase distance and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Set up an Open Education resources platform.
- Develop a national open and distance learning policy.

- Develop a quality assurance framework for open and distance learning.
- Encourage tertiary education institutions to participate in an Open Education Resources platform to increase access to teaching and learning resources.
- Develop specialised e-library facilities/Open Education Resources ICT platforms to facilitate access to educational materials and research publications.

In its 2012-2015 programme, Government stated its intention to set up a multimedia centre with a view to coordinating all technology-related projects in education within the framework of the forthcoming Open University and rationalize libraries and increase access to academic materials through ICT Platforms.

An ICT platform has been developed, allowing access to e-materials and libraries of the public tertiary education institutions and will be launched in the weeks to come. The Open University has already set up a multimedia centre and is now looking into coordinating mechanisms with other public tertiary education centres.

In 2010, the Open University Act was enacted to set up a tertiary education institution with the mandate to promote distance education. This Act was proclaimed in 2012 and the Open University was set up in July of the same year. The main objectives of the Open University as spelt out in its legislation are to:

- Advance and disseminate learning and knowledge through a diversity of means and emphasis on information technology.
- Provide wider opportunities for education and training to the population through open and distance learning and promote lifelong learning.
- Encourage the use of open and distance learning at all levels of education and training through collaboration, optimal use of existing resources and good practices.
- Be the focal point for the provision of open and distance learning in Mauritius through the establishment of active partnerships with local public and private institutions, as well as overseas institutions engaged in providing education and training.

The Open University is currently offering 70 courses/programmes including short employability skills through to Foundation Courses, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes up to PhDs and DBAs in various fields.

The enrolment has reached 1851 with a majority of female students as follows:

2012/2013			2013/2014		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
226	565	791	732	1119	1851

The University is operating from two campuses located in different parts of the island and has established partnership with Stockholm University, UNISA, Imperial College (UK) and is participating in Contribution in Pan African E Network Project.

It is carrying out negotiations with the University of Hertfordshire (UK), Charles Sturt University (Australia), Birmingham City University and Radio and TV University of China. It has secured membership of the:

- International Council for Distance Education (ICDE).
- African Council for Distance Education (ACDE).
- Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

The Open University is expected to expand its activities in the years to come, especially to reach out to students in Africa, by setting up study centres in selected African countries.

The Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies (VCILT) of the University of Mauritius is responsible for providing and developing online web-based education and tele-learning at the University and throughout the country. The VCILT was awarded the Commonwealth of Learning Award for Excellence in Distance and Online Learning in 2010.

The Centre for Professional development at the University of Mauritius (UoM) has evolved to design training, in consultation with stakeholders for 'lifelong learners'. The mode of delivery ranges from face-to-face sessions to online learning.

A few private tertiary education institutions are offering distance education programmes.

Mauritius has benefitted from the support and guidance of the Commonwealth of Learning for more than two decades as follows:

- In 1989, a first consultancy report entitled *Distance Education for Human Resource Development in Mauritius: The Way Forward* was produced through COL by Sir John Daniel, then President of Laurentian University.
- In September 2007, COL provided the services of a Programme Specialist and Team Leader, Professor Mohan Menon, whose report helped to define the structure of the Open University.
- As a part of an initiative to strengthen the capacity of open schools, COL provided support to Mauritius to contextualize materials from Indira Gandhi National Open University, India.
- Mauritian officials and academics have participated in various training and capacity building workshops of COL.
- COL is supporting livelihood programmes with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Protection and Family Welfare.
- Training and capacity building workshops were held last year for Open University staff.

In higher education, Open and Distance Learning brings a number of challenges, in particular with the unprecedented developments of technology, the fast expansion of tertiary education and diversity of institutional models. The major challenges that have to be addressed in higher education are:

1. Assuring quality in Open and Distance Learning – it is imperative to develop a quality assurance framework for open and distance learning in Mauritius.
2. Capacity building to facilitate effective integration of ICT-pedagogy in higher education.
3. Training to increase understanding of the use of ICT to improve contents of curriculum.
4. Development of an ICT Policy and strategy for the higher education sector.
5. Develop strategies to use Open and Distance Learning to promote science and technology by using ICT technologies for formal and non-formal education.
6. Developing indicators to assess the use of ICT in higher education.
7. Train all members of staff in the development of pedagogical materials; training to conduct research and publish in impact factor journals; instructional design; design of e-learning platform; quality assurance; student support and student motivation; and assessment and evaluation.

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