NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

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Jabi, Abuja FCT

Open Distance and eLearning Policy

Approved by

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The Vice Chancellor

Table of Contents

1.1 NOUN Mandate and Objectives

The mandate of the National Open University of Nigeria as espoused in the University Act (as amended 2018) is to widen access to University education; encourage and promote scholarship and conduct research in all fields of learning and human endevours; relate its activities to the social, cultural and economic needs of the people of Nigeria and other activities appropriate for a university of the highest standard.

The specific objectives are to:

- Widen access to ensure equity and equality of opportunities to university education for all.
- Promote Education for all and Lifelong learning.
- Ensure the entrenchment of global digital learning culture
- Provide infrastructure for the development and delivery of instructional resources through efficient use of appropriate information and communication technologies.
- Provide flexible, cost effective and quality education.
- Provide access to and delivery of quality education (Strategic plan 2018-2023).

1.2 Institutional Vision and Mission

Vision

To be regarded as the foremost University providing highly accessible and enhanced quality education anchored by social justice, equity, equality, and national cohesion through a comprehensive reach that transcends all barriers.

Mission

To provide functional, cost-effective, flexible learning which adds lifelong value to quality education for all who seek knowledge.

1.3 Core Values

The following key core values guide the practice of ODeL at NOUN and distinguish the University as a specialised higher education institution with a unique niche and clientele, different from all other universities in Nigeria:

1. **Equity and Equality:** We value the need to ensure that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities for all and therefore maintain an open-door admission policy and flexible delivery of instruction. We strive to ensure as much as possible the institution achieves equality in the facilities and services to facilitate and support learning in all locations, communities, and for all individuals.

2. **Access and Inclusion:** We are committed to providing access to education to all segments, communities, and individuals in our society and beyond, equipping them with skills to improve their circumstances. In particular, we seek to reach disadvantaged and marginalised, populations, including those living with

disabilities, and open access to university education to all Nigerians and in the sub-region. **Learner-centered support and engagement:** We adopt a learner-driven and student-centred approach to the

3. provision of instruction and use all facilities put in place by the University to support self-learning. Open universities globally deploy extensive learner support services to mitigate the isolation learners usually experience studying at a distance away from any form of interaction with the institution, staff, and other students. A directorate of Learner Support Services oversees the institution's 114 study Centres across the nation, and the institution leverages the affordances of technology to continuously improve its support services.

4. **Flexibility:** We are committed to flexible approaches to instructional delivery and study while offering the opportunity to learn at a distance using blended learning modes appropriate to the learning situation, content, and context. The provision of access programmes for those who wish to enhance their academic readiness for degree programmes is an example of flexible routes provided by the University.

5. **Partnership:** We promote collaboration and partnership with local, regional, and foreign institutions, organisations, and agencies to foster teamwork, sharing of ideas and resources, and develop professionalism.

6. **Human Capacity Development:** We recognise that well-trained, motivated, and committed staff are our key assets and are therefore committed to their continuous professional development.

7. **Multi-Modal Instructional Delivery System**: Our instructional delivery system takes into cognizance the different technologies available to learners to ensure maximum inclusion. To this end, NOUN adopts a multimodal instructional system, which considers the limitations of the local environment and utilizes a variety of such media and technologies as print, audio-visual, radio, television, and Internet (web-based instruction).

8. **Quality Enhancement**: We are committed to the continuous improvement of our programmes, teaching, learning, research, and graduates. We strive to achieve and maintain excellence through the appropriate use of technology to support and improve the quality of the learning experience.

1.4 Institutional Journey (From Traditional Open and Distance Learning to Open Distance and eLearning)

The journey of eLearning and digital transformation at the institution began in 2005 with the development of its first eLearning strategy and policy. Over the years, significant milestones were achieved. In 2005 open source ATutor LMS was introduced in 2007, the institution experimented with Moodle LMS, in 2009 an integrated LMS was commissioned, in 2011 iLMS was deployed and in 2016, the institution approved the use of Moodle as its LMS. In 2010, the institution became the first in Nigeria to deploy

2

electronic examinations, revolutionizing the examination process. In 2012, instructional videos known as iLearn were introduced and improved upon in 2018 to enhance the learning experience.

In 2018, the institution further embraced technology by deploying GST courses and TMAs through Learning Management Systems (LMS). Online facilitation and virtual examinations also made their debut in the same year, bringing greater flexibility to the learning process.

As the institution continued to embrace technological advancements, in 2022, it reached another significant milestone by developing a comprehensive digital transformation strategy. This strategy outlines the institution's commitment to leveraging technology to further enhance the learning experience, accessibility, and overall efficiency in education delivery. These initiatives demonstrate the institution's continuous dedication to embracing responsible openness in embracing technology and innovation to empower learners and educators alike.

2.0   Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

2.1   position NOUN as the leading provider of flexible and quality education through open, distance, and eLearning in Nigeria, the West African sub-region and beyond.

2.2   provide guidelines for providing higher education through open, distance and eLearning processes, practices and systems

2.3   provide a common understanding of ODeL and guide its implementation using a blended approach to teaching and learning.

2.4   commit NOUN to responsive interactions with current and emerging national and international priorities and developments to positively impact its provision of quality ODeL

3.0   Scope

This policy covers the core areas of NOUN's ODeL system and sub-systems namely, Admission, Assessment, Learning Contents, Digital Infrastructure, Research, Innovation and Community Engagement, Collaboration and Partnership, Human Resource and Development, and Quality Assurance and Improvement.

4.0   Definitions

4.1   Openness -   The concept of *openness* or *open* refers to open entry, access to learning opportunities, and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities. It may also refer to aspects of methods and organization that by consequence of open learning make for flexible learning.

4.1.1 Open Admission- promotes equity and equality of access and provides support intervention for learners to improve digital learning readiness and gaps in learning. At NOUN, cognate experience, maturity status, and exemption from national qualifying examination are examples of barriers to learning opportunities that do not apply to applicants.

4.1.1.1 Recognition of prior learning: process by which cognate knowledge, skills, or competencies acquired through formal or informal education outside the traditional classroom contexts are evaluated and considered against a given set of standards, competencies, or learning outcomes for the purpose of admission (see NOUN Policy on Credit Transfer).

4.1.1.2 Concessional admission- process by which applicants are considered on a case-by-case basis on account of maturity (see NOUN policy on Credit Transfer).

4.1.1.3 National Qualifying examination: NOUN Applicants are exempted from the National Joint Admissions Matriculation Board examinations.

4.1.2 Learning autonomy: Also known as independent learning, is when learners take control of, and manage their own learning. Learners develop skills for learning outside of the classroom and without the physical presence of a teacher.

4.1.3 Open education: refers to a movement and philosophy that promote the sharing of educational resources, technologies, pedagogy, for widening access and promoting lifelong learning through facilitating flexible and collaborative learning and provides educators with quality content and best practices (see NOUN OER policy) (https://www.yearofopen.org/open-edu cation-definitions/).

4.1.4 Access and Inclusivity (persons with special needs, use of multimedia in teaching and learning) refers to the presence and participation in online and offline activities that will allow learners regardless of their status to access teaching and learning through the provision of learning design and devices that caters for all learners so they can realise their full potential in every sphere of their own life. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/access-and-inclusion#:~:text=Access%20and%20inclusion%20relate%20to,sphere%20of%20their%20own%20life

4.2 Flexibility

Indicates enrollment options and rolling admissions that allow learners to start their studies at least twice a year. Learners can progress at their own pace, providing them with the freedom to accelerate or slow down their learning journey based on their capabilities and commitments. Grant credits or exemptions for relevant prior learning, acknowledging their expertise and shortening the time to complete a programme

4.3 Access

Ensures equal and inclusive opportunities for all, free from discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status. It involves promoting diversity and social equity, creating a supportive environment that values individual identities. Furthermore, it includes efforts to make education affordable and accessible bridge financial gaps and leveraging technology to enable learners in remote or underserved areas to access quality education, overcoming geographical barriers.

4.4 Accessibility

Refers to creating inclusive learning environments that cater for individuals with diverse learning needs. It involves providing physically accessible facilities, offering appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies, and ensuring that digital resources are compatible with assistive tools. Moreover, diverse learning options are offered to accommodate different circumstances and preferences. The goal is to break down barriers and empower every learner to participate fully in the educational journey.

4.5 Open Learning

Is a flexible and inclusive approach to education that enables individuals to access learning opportunities without formal entry requirements. It allows learners to study at their own pace, choosing from a wide range of courses and subjects, and often involves the use of open educational resources, online platforms, and distance learning methods. The focus is on providing accessible and personalised learning experiences that cater to diverse needs and preferences.

4.6 Distance Education

Refers to the mode of learning that allows individuals to study remotely, without the need for regular face-to-face interactions with tutors or attending traditional on-campus classes. Distance education makes use of various technologies and methods, including online platforms, printed materials, multimedia resources, and interactive tools, to deliver educational content to learners.

4.7   Open Distance Learning

Refers to a flexible and inclusive approach to learning that allows individuals to access education without traditional entry requirements and study remotely from any location. It combines the principles of openness, which provide inclusive access to educational opportunities for all learners, and distance education, which enables students to study at their own pace and convenience through various remote learning methods and technologies.

4.8   eLearning

eLearning refers to a mode of education that utilizes digital technologies to deliver and enhance learning experiences. eLearning encompasses a wide range of online tools, platforms, and resources. These include online courses, multimedia content, virtual classrooms, interactive assessments, and discussion forums that enable students to access educational content, interact with course materials, and engage with tutors and fellow learners via digital means.

4.9   Student centredness

Demands that the students are made to be the focus in educational processes and procedures with adequate support that will make them take responsibilities for their learning and research. Learning materials are structured to allow personalised learning such that a student can learn at any place, at any time, at their own pace, and receive individual guidance.

4.10   Learner support

Is the academic, social, psychological, and technical assistance given to students to make their learning achievable within a desired period and to meet specific goal.

4.11   Quality assurance and improvement

Policies, processes, procedures, and improvement of the required educational standards for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of academic standards in NOUN.

4.12   Facilitation

The action of providing guidance to students on their learning by a facilitator using synchronous and asynchronous learning techniques.

4.13   Employability

It incorporates individual's ability and preparedness to secure and retain employment by possessing a diverse set of skills, knowledge, competencies, and

attitudes highly regarded by employers. These attributes empower individuals to excel in their job roles, adapt to dynamic work environments, and make meaningful contributions to organizational achievements. It encompasses a wide range of technical and soft skills, such as effective communication, problem-solving, collaborative teamwork, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning, all of which are essential for a rewarding and prosperous career journey.

4.14 Lifelong learning

Inculcated skills that help individuals to cope in their environment socially, psychologically, and economically throughout their lifetime.

5.0 Principles

5.1 NOUN operates an ODeL model that will:

5.1.1 provide degrees that are in line with the requirements of the national regulatory body and benchmarked against international standards.

5.1.2 ensure education provisions that improve learner experience and performance.

5.1.3 offer a wide variety of programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with a flexibility that allows learners to learn any place and at their pace.

5.1.4 promotes lifelong learning through a variety of formal and non-formal programmes.

5.1.5 provide quality education that is cost-effective and affordable.

5.1.6 provide programmes and short courses that transcends geographical borders.

5.1.7 micro credential courses that can be taken alone and accumulated towards a formal qualification.

5.1.7 establish main study centres, community study centres, and special study centres. The community and special study centres shall serve as support to the main study centres in providing services to support the students who wish to interact with the university in-person.

5.2 Management, Administration, and Digital Systems

NOUN will:

5.2.1 ensure the provisions of well-articulated processes, procedures and effective and efficient organisational systems support by appropriate digital technologies.

5.2.2 develop and review its governance, management, and technology infrastructure in accordance with the strategic objectives of the institution.

5.2.3 ensure an enabling environment for the implementation of policy, planning, management, and allocation of resources for teaching, learning and support services in an integrated and systemic manner.

5.3 Curriculum

Curriculum design and development at NOUN will:

5.3.1 be determined by students', employers', and economic needs.

5.3.2 give deliberate attention to general and specific employability skills.

5.3.3 incorporate digital and physical learning infrastructure to support the delivery of the curriculum.

5.3.4 maintain and improve on the national curriculum standard provided by the regulatory body - National Universities Commission.

5.3.4 embark on regular review to meet the changing needs of the society and profession/academic disciplines. Review shall be between a year and five years depending on the changing needs.

5.4 Course Design and Development

NOUN will:

5.4.1 use team approach in course design and development. The team shall comprise Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), Instructional Designers, Learning Technologists, and representatives from relevant industries/professional.

5.4.2 use the learner centred principles in course design and development.

5.4.3 use Open Educational Resources (OER) to beef up contents where need be and in accordance with the university OER policy.

5.4.4 collaborate with similar universities to acquire or share resources if need be and in accordance with the university policy on partnership and collaboration.

5.4.5 pay attention to multiculturalism, language issues, social justice and cohesion, ethical values, environmental sustainability, required programme competencies, and objectives.

5.4.6 involve students' representative(s) during the beta testing of learning materials before the final deployment for use.

5.5 Learner Support and Progression

5.5.1 NOUN will provide academic, administrative, and technical support to the students.

5.5.2 Learner support shall be a critical path for teaching, learning and research in open distance and eLearning.

5.5.3 The learning progression of students shall be carried out periodically to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of learning.

5.6 Admission

NOUN will:

5.6.1 implement its unique admission policy that exempts degree-seeking students from the traditional Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) exams. Applicants will be required to meet the National Universities Commission's (NUC) minimum requirement of FIVE credits at the Ordinary level in the relevant subjects.

5.6.2 conduct outreach and awareness programs to inform potential students and educational institutions about its special admission policy.

5.6.3 follow the admission process outlined in its admission policy.

5.7 Assessment and Evaluation

5.7.1 Assessment will be a metric for measuring students' learning progress and shall be given major attention.

5.7.2 NOUN assessment and evaluation policies shall guide the management of students' assessments.

5.7.3 Students performance shall be evaluated to improve on assessment and teaching processes.

5.8 Learning Contents

5.8.1 Ensure that Learning content is relevant to the educational goals and objectives, aligned with the curriculum, and responsive to the needs of learners and stakeholders.

5.8.2 Design content to facilitate the achievement of specific learning outcomes, clearly defining the knowledge, skills, and competencies that learners are expected to acquire.

5.8.3 Incorporate interactive elements, multimedia, and engaging activities in learning content to enhance learner engagement and motivation.

5.8.4 Ensure that learning content adheres to ethical guidelines, respects copyright laws and promotes academic integrity.

5.9 Digital Infrastructure

5.9.1 Promote a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging ongoing research and evaluation of ODeL practices. Regular assessment of the effectiveness of ODeL programs will inform necessary updates and enhancements.

5.9.2 Ensure that digital infrastructure in ODeL is designed to be accessible to all learners, accommodating diverse needs, and fostering inclusivity

5.9.2 Embrace cloud-based solutions to enhance the scalability, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness of digital infrastructure.

5.9.3 Provide a user-friendly and seamless experience across digital platforms, ensuring easy navigation, clear instructions, and intuitive interfaces.

5.9.4 Engage in collaborations and partnerships with relevant stakeholders to leverage expertise and resources for enhancing digital infrastructure.

5.9.5 Design digital infrastructure with the capacity to scale up or down as per demand and to accommodate technological advancements.

5.9.6 Promote interoperability among different digital tools and platforms to facilitate smooth integration and data exchange.

5.9.7 Ensure the reliability of digital infrastructure by implementing backup and redundancy mechanisms to prevent service disruptions.

5.9.8 Advocate for universal access to high-speed broadband connectivity to facilitate seamless online learning experiences.

5.10 Research, Innovation and Community Engagement

5.10.1 Emphasize the use of evidence-based research in the design and implementation of ODeL initiatives. Research should inform the development of effective pedagogical strategies, technology integration, and assessment methods.

5.10.2 Foster a culture of research and innovation to explore emerging technologies and best practices that can improve ODeL digital infrastructure.

5.10.3 Engage with local communities and stakeholders to assess their unique educational needs and preferences. Collaborate with community members to co-create relevant and contextually appropriate ODeL programmes.

5.10.4 Promote the dissemination of research findings to the wider academic and educational community through conferences, publications, and online repositories.

5.11 Collaboration and Partnership

5.11.1 Fosters academic collaborations and partnerships with distance education institutions, both in Africa and globally.

5.11.2 Provides enriching opportunities for employees and students alike, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, expanding access to education, and cultivating a diverse and inclusive environment that encourages cross-cultural learning experience.

5.11.3 Commit to collaboration and partnership principles and practices in alignment with the policy on establishing new institutional and maintaining existing academic linkages and cooperatives.

5.12 Human Resource and Development

5.12.1 Staff recruitments procedures in NOUN will be clearly defined to meet ODL requirements.

5.12.2 Staff development and training mechanisms will be well defined to promote teaching and learning in the university.

5.12.3 NOUN will define the process of staff recruitment, retention, dismissal, welfare, development, and training to meet the conditions in working in an ODL environment.

5.12.4 Define staff Job descriptions, job enrichment, and job enhancements as it is required to promote teaching and learning in the university.

5.12.5 NOUN will provide structure for human resources management that would help enhance job performance.

5.13   In NOUN, Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) will:

5.13.1   be an integral part of every academic programme in the university.

5.13.2   provide guidance through the Directorate of Learner Support Services using counseling techniques which shall be both in digital and non-digital form.

5.13.3   provide digital tool to receive and give feedback within a limited time.

5.13.4   integrate complaint, feedbacks, and guidance mechanisms in the student portal and LMS.

5.13.5   carryout periodic evaluation of IAG to determine its effect on students' attrition.

5.14   Quality Assurance and Improvement

5.14.1   All processes and procedures for teaching and learning will undergo regular monitoring and evaluation based on international standards for ensuring quality in open distance and eLearning.

5.14.2   The outcomes from monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning shall be used for continuous improvement.

5.14.3   There shall be a robust database for monitoring and evaluation in the university.

6.0   Implementation of Policy

This policy is in effect from the date of approval by the University Senate/Council.

Team Members

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2. Prof. Obhajajie Juliet Inegbedion
3. Prof. Christine Ofulue
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Resources Used
1. NOUN Blueprint
2. NOUN Regional Strategy
3. NOUN Digital Transformation Strategy
4. Unisa Open Distance eLearning Policy
5. NOUN Learning Analytics Framework
6. NOUN Act