National Open, Distance and eLearning Policy

Republic Of Rwanda
Ministry Of Education

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Phases of Development of the National ODeL Policy

- Phase 1: Preparatory meetings on 30 April 2015 and finalisation of the Contribution Agreement between the University of Rwanda and the Commonwealth of Learning

- Phase 2: Meeting on 2 June 2015 to organise a five-day workshop to develop the National ODeL Policy, 15–19 June 2015 (La Palme Hotel, Musanze)

- Phase 3: Meeting of the task force to discuss how to finalise implementation of a Strategic Plan and Budget, 20 July 2015

- Phase 4: Three-day workshop to develop the Policy Implementation Strategic Plan, with budgeting, 4–6 August 2015 (La Palme Hotel, Musanze)

- Phase 5: Presentation of the progress of policy development by Ministry of Education senior management, 28 September 2015

- Phase 6: Workshop to validate the National ODeL Policy, Nobleza Hotel, 3 February 2016

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Abbreviations

4G LTE: 4th Generation Long-Term Evolution

BYOD: Bring Your Own Device

EDPRS: Economic Development Policy Reduction Strategy

ESSP: Education Sector Strategic Plan

ICT: information and communication technologies

MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses

MOODLE: Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

ODeL: open, distance and eLearning

OERs: open educational resources

Foreword

To facilitate the implementation and the provision of open, distance and eLearning (ODeL) programmes and systematically address related challenges on education and training, the Ministry of Education initiated the development of the National ODeL Policy. The main purpose of this policy is to ensure the development and, harmonisation of ODeL in order to increase access to quality education, training and support in Rwanda.

It is my wish and deepest desire that the immediate impact resulting from implementation of the ODeL Policy will be increased enrolments and more strategic deployment of ODeL activities in the country. I expect the ODeL Policy to be a key instrument in harmonising the provision of ODeL across various sectors of education, thus contributing to the advancement of the national integration agenda.

The ODeL Policy will be operationalised through an ODeL Strategic Plan and Implementation Framework. The policy recognises that education plays a critical role in socio-economic development, and that education should be provided equitably — that is, among various social groups in order to address challenges of gender disparities, out-of-school youth, and adults (including those with special needs) seeking education upgrading. Above all, the policy recognises that deployment of harmonised ODeL is a viable strategy for increasing access to quality education and support for Rwanda.

Minister of Education

1. Introduction and Context

The Government of Rwanda is committed to increasing access to quality education, especially important since the aftermath of the genocide against Tutsi in 1994. Rwanda's Vision 2020 recognises the role of information and communication technology (ICT) at large, and open, distance and eLearning (ODeL) in particular, in transforming Rwandan citizens into skilled human capital for the socio-economic development of the country. Furthermore:

- The second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP, 2013–2018) acknowledge the role of ODeL in increasing access to high-quality education.
- The 7-Year Government Programme (2010–2017) recommends that at least 50% and 30% of course programmes should be delivered through ODeL mode in higher and secondary education, respectively.
- The National Information and Communication Infrastructure Plan (NICI III, 2011–2015), SMART Rwanda Master Plan (2015–2020) and ICT in Education Policy also identify ODeL as a priority in enhancing access and quality at all levels of education.
- Furthermore, the second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP, 2013–2018) acknowledge the role of ODeL in increasing access to high-quality education

Although ODeL is recommended as a mode of delivery to increase and enhance the quality of education in the policies and strategies noted above, no mechanism is in place to guide its implementation. This ODeL Policy is therefore a guiding document towards the harmonisation and coordination of ODeL initiatives at the national level.

Many stakeholders have been involved in the development of this policy through the Ministry of Education. These include the Rwanda Education Board, Workforce Development Authority, Higher Education Council, Higher Learning Institutions, Rwanda Development Board, National Commission of Science and Technology (NCST), Educational Development Partners, Commonwealth of Learning, Ministry of Youth and ICT, Ministry of Labour, Private Sector, non-governmental organisations and other educational development partners.

2. Vision Statement

The National ODeL Policy aims to expand access to quality education for all learners who may be unable, for any reason, to participate in the conventional education delivery modes. The vision is to

> Make Rwanda a country with a world-class learning system where learners have equitable access to lifelong learning through the provision of quality and relevant open, distance and eLearning programmes.

This vision will be achieved by working to mitigate all factors that constitute barriers to learners' participation in learning and skills development arising from personal commitments and other reasons.

3. Mission

To provide access to educational opportunities by offering high-quality, innovative, responsive and affordable educational programmes through ODeL.

4. Strategic Goals

- To increase access to relevant, high-quality education and training at all levels in a competitive labour market.
- To integrate the provision of ODeL programmes in the education system
- To guide ODeL institutional providers in the development of their own internal ODeL policies.

5. Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives are:

- To promote the development of accessible, relevant and sustainable ODeL programmes at all levels.
- To harmonise management, standardisation and regulation of ODeL programmes among various stakeholders.
- To promote research and development, collaboration, partnerships and networking among ODeL providers.
- To guide the development of quality learning materials and learner support services in ODeL.
- To guide the application and integration of ICTs and related infrastructure in ODeL.
- To guide staff capacity-building in an ODeL system.

6. Principles Guiding the Formulation of This Policy

This policy is based on the following principles:

- **Openness and flexibility:** Reducing constraints to access to education, including geographical, temporal, academic, socio-economic and cultural barriers;
- **Learner centredness**: Ensuring that the ;earner is at the centre of all learning in terms of resource requirements and the learning environment;
- **Quality assurance and relevance**: Ensuring the quality and relevance of ODeL programmes and learner support services;
- **Collaboration and partnership:** Promoting partnership in the development of learning materials, learner support systems and credit transfers;
- **Efficiency**: Ensuring optimum use of resources to increase access and improve the quality of education through ODeL;
- **Equity and equality**: Ensuring inclusiveness in terms of gender, rural, urban and special needs education.
- **Training:** Providing professional training and reskilling of staff
- **Upgrading:** Ensuring upgrading of academic qualifications

7. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges (SWOC) analysis

Already in place are ICT-related initiatives, services and infrastructure. These include 3,000 kilometres of fibre optic cable connecting all districts in Rwanda. With the ongoing 4th Generation Long-Term Evolution (4G LTE) project of the Ministry of Youth and ICT, it is anticipated that 95% of the country will have access to high-speed broad-band connectivity by 2016. A computer assembly plant has been established in Rwanda and is expected to produce 150,000 devices per year for five years. Rwanda developed an ICT in Education Master Plan to accelerate the transformation of education in the country by using technology to drive the migration to a student-centric adaptive education environment.

All of these initiatives will contribute to enhancing access to education and to supporting teaching and learning through ODeL.

With regard to the implementation of ODeL in Rwanda, the University of Rwanda established the School of Open, Distance and eLearning, where some programmes have been offered through distance education, tele-education and eLearning. Additionally, the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery and some private higher learning institutions have been offering a limited number of blended programmes.

The experience of the University of Rwanda's College of Education, School of ODeL is that ODeL programmes are managed by staff who are also involved in conventional programmes. This creates a clash of priorities in favour of conventional programmes. However, the delivery mode of ODeL versus conventional programmes requires a different regulatory framework for management and administrative processes.

The following table summarises the key points of the SWOC analysis of the status of ODeL in Rwanda:

Strengths	Weaknesses
- High demand at all levels of education - Flexibility of ODeL delivery mode demonstrated by the existing ODeL programmes - Existence of a school of Open, Distance and eLearning - Existence of ODeL centres across the country - Engagement of education development partners in developing ODeL - Existence of MOODLE platform as an open-source Learning Management System	- Governance and management in institutions still in dual mode - Limited number of trained academic, technical and support staff in ODeL practices - Inadequate availability and access to required technology for teaching and learning in ODeL - Low ICT literacy of teachers and students - Limited awareness of ODeL as a viable mode of delivery - Lack of an ODeL institution to coordinate ODeL programmes at the national level - Lack of a master plan to inform the implementation of ODeL programmes
Opportunities	**Challenges**
- Existence of policies, strategies and programmes supporting ODeL - The Government of Rwanda's commitment to	- Lack of infrastructure in rural areas - Limited collaboration/partnership and networking among stakeholders

develop ODeL delivery mode • Computer assembly plant established in Rwanda • 4G LTE network to cover 95% of the country by 2016 • National backbone of fibre optic cable • High demand for higher education through ODeL delivery modes	• Lack of research and development to inform practice in ODeL

8. The Purpose of the Policy Document

The National ODeL Policy is designed to guide the implementation, harmonisation and standardisation of ODeL programmes. The main purpose of this document is to:

- Develop a shared understanding and vision among ODeL stakeholders.
- Promote the use of the ODeL system at all levels of education system.
- Increase awareness of the benefits of ODeL among stakeholders.

9. ODeL Policy Areas

9.1. ODeL staff training and capacity-building

Staff training and development will be mounted in ODeL skills and practices to enhance eLearning and blended learning. To keep up-to-date with technological and pedagogical developments in ODeL, subject experts, administrators, key stakeholders and tutors will be trained in skills required for the development and production of materials, selection and use of media, and tutoring and assessment of ODeL learners. The focus will be on:

- Ensuring that ODeL practitioners are able to:
  - Design, develop, deliver, assess and provide access to high-quality teaching, learning materials within the available resources
  - Analyse learners' progress and take appropriate responsive actions as needed
- Providing effective ODeL training to promote change and ensure quality;
- Training curricula developers on creating and developing digital learning materials;
- Training ODeL administrators/managers and technical and support staff in planning, management, budgeting, resource mobilisation, and monitoring and evaluation;
- Developing a cadre of technical expertise to manage and maintain ODeL systems at all levels; and
- Training ODeL staff in providing career guidance and orientation to learners.

9.2. Application of ICTs and related infrastructure in ODeL

Efforts will be made to provide appropriate ICTs and related ODeL infrastructure at all levels. The focus will be on:

- Initiating and facilitating access to ICT tools for ODeL learners;
- Promoting a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative;
- Developing and maintaining ICTs and related ODeL infrastructure; and
- Developing and adopting assistive technologies in ODeL for persons with disabilities.

9.3. Curriculum design, development and assessment

To implement ODeL programmes successfully, new curricula will be developed and, where necessary, existing ones adopted and adapted to ODeL mode. The focus will be on:

- Analysing the characteristics of distance learners to inform curriculum development and delivery;
- Designing and developing curricula to be offered through the ODeL delivery mode;
- Adopting and adapting curriculum into ODeL delivery mode;
- Promoting different ODeL modes of delivery, including blended, face-to-face, distance learning and e-learning;
- Exploring options for obtaining copyrights for developed learning materials and digital content;
- Developing appropriate assessment strategies for ODeL programmes and learning achievements; and
- Adapting general academic regulations to suit the special circumstances of distance learners.

9.4. Learning materials, digital content and delivery

This policy will ensure the development of quality teaching and learning materials that are accessible to ODeL learners through appropriate media. The focus will be on:

- Creating and developing electronic content in required subjects;
- Enabling ODeL learners and teachers to use Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs);
- Sharing ODeL experiences and practices among practitioners;
- Promoting the use of a digital library or repository for access to digital learning materials;
- Promoting the inter-library loan of electronic resources;
- Creating a national repository for electronic resources;
- Developing content and training manuals for ODeL learners and practitioners;
- Ensuring that learners and educators are empowered to address Internet-related risks on privacy and quality of content; and
- Drawing up course development and delivery guidelines to reduce the risk of plagiarism and other liabilities.

9.5. Learner support services

To enhance quality and success in ODeL delivery, the Ministry of Education and institutional providers will ensure that ODeL learners have efficient and effective learner support services. The focus will be on:

- Establishing appropriate structures for providing learner support services;
- Adopting innovative approaches to learner support provision;
- Ensuring that study centres are equipped with adequate and accessible learner support services;
- Ensuring that learners have access to tutors/counsellors and mentors; and
- Providing ODeL learners with orientation, guidance and other services in ODeL.

9.6. Quality assurance

Efforts will be made to ensure that quality assurance standards are in place to promote delivery of quality of ODeL programmes and related learner support services. The focus will be on:

- Ensuring that ODeL policies, rules and procedures are aligned with national educational policies and strategies;
- Ensuring that guidelines to facilitate harmonisation, development, validation and delivery of ODeL programmes are available and in use;
- Ensuring that ODeL programmes are of appropriate quality and consistent with national and international standards;
- Ensuring that standards and guidelines for ODeL quality control are developed and in use;
- Ensuring that standards for governing the establishment of ODeL institutions and related programmes are adhered to;
- Establishing appropriate mechanisms and guidelines for regulating the development and use of electronic content;
- Validating programmes; and
- Ensuring that ODeL programmes are developed and delivered in accordance with the relevant laws of Rwanda.

9.7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms will be developed to inform and guide ODeL practice. The focus will be on:

- Establishing criteria, indicators and benchmarks for M&E in an ODeL system;
- Supporting efforts of different stakeholders in M&E development and implementation; and
- Creating M&E mechanisms that will enable ODeL practitioners to share best practices.

9.8. Framework for regulating of ODeL programmes

A framework to coordinate ODeL initiatives at all education levels will be established, and ODeL governance and management structures will be established. The focus will be on:

- Creating a framework and associated structures for the management of ODeL programmes;

- Setting up responsive learner support systems; and
- Developing laws, rules and regulations governing the ODeL framework.

9.9. Collaboration, networking and partnership

Mechanisms to promote and support collaboration, networking and partnerships in ODeL will be set up. The focus will be on:

- Sharing best practices and expertise in ODeL development, delivery and related research findings;
- Encouraging Public Private Partnership in ODeL; and
- Promoting ODeL student and staff exchange programmes.

9.10. Funding, budgeting and resource mobilisation

Funding, budgeting and resource mobilisation strategies will be put in place to facilitate the implementation of the ODeL system. The focus will be on:

- Allocating budget for the capital and operational ODeL costs in line with national targets;
- Developing a resource mobilisation strategy to support the implementation of ODeL programmes;
- Promoting public-private partnerships to fund ODeL initiatives; and
- Developing innovative mechanisms to make ODeL institutions financially self-sustaining.

10. Communication Strategy

Key commitments of the communication strategy for the ODeL Policy:

- The policy will be made public to all stakeholders.
- Institutions providing ODeL will:

  – Implement and revise, as needed, the policy.
  – Develop and oversee a detailed costed strategic implementation plan.
  – Conduct monitoring and evaluation.
  – Harmonise and streamline implementation efforts among all stakeholders and implementers.
  – Develop and execute plans that target stakeholders, implementers and beneficiaries at all levels.

- ODeL-providing institutions will be adequately staffed with qualified professionals and managers to coordinate ODeL initiatives.
- Implementation of this policy will be conducted through a partnership approach involving public and private organisations and educational development partners.
- Implementation of this policy will be aligned with relevant educational policies.

11. Conclusion

The National ODeL Policy is designed to achieve the following:
- Increase access to cost-effective education at all levels for both formal and non-formal education, using the ODeL delivery mode for teaching, learning and information sharing.

- Improve the quality of education and promote independent and lifelong learning, especially at secondary, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and tertiary levels.
- Contribute to the development of the workforce using the ODeL delivery mode.
- Promote sharing of learning materials, infrastructure and other resources among various institutions.
- Enhance training and capacity-building in ODeL practice.