UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN, NIGERIA

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING POLICY

2024

1. **PREAMBLE**

   1.1   The *connecting Strategic Plan* of the University of Ilorin (Unilorin) (between 2008 –till date) aims to become an African university serving humanity with utmost dedication.

   1.2   Unilorin commits itself to advancing social justice/equity with an emphasis on unbroken access of Nigerians and internationals to university education and empowerment, most especially the previously disadvantaged groups in Nigeria who have missed out on opportunities to access higher education due to reasons out of their controls

   1.3   The University of Ilorin has been the foremost university of choice for most applicants to the Nigerian University system for the past 10 years running. This trend is not unconnected with the experience of more than 18 years of stable academic calendars and quality academic programmes.

2. **PURPOSE**

   2.1   To position Unilorin as a leading provider of higher education opportunities through open distance learning (ODL) nationally, on the African continent and beyond.

   2.2   To commit Unilorin CODL to the guidelines for cross-border provision developed by the National University Commission (NUC).

   2.3   To commit Unilorin to an ongoing, responsive interaction with current and emerging national and global imperatives and developments relevant to quality ODL provision.

3. **DEFINITIONS**

Blended learning: is accomplished by utilising a variety of instructional techniques, a range of technological tools in conjunction with in-person communication, and the integrated and interactive use of both real and virtual resources;

Distance Education: is a collection of procedures or strategies for instructing a wide range of pupils who are dispersed geographically and physically apart from the educational setting, their tutors/teachers, and other students;

Learning: is the active building of knowledge, attitudes, and values together with developing skills through various resources such as printed and electronic materials, people, experience and work-integrated learning, practical training, research, reflection, and so on. Learning is also linked to empowerment and personal transformation, or the desire to better oneself in order to assist others;

Open Distance Learning: is a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication gap between student

and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning emphasises reducing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and creating learning programs with the hope that students may succeed;

Open Learning: is a comprehensive approach to learning that incorporates correspondence learning, resource-based learning, distance education, flexi-study, self-paced study, and learning at your speed. It provides students flexibility and choice about what, when, where, and how they learn;

Responsible Open Admission: seeks to identify students who may benefit from and require suitable support; it is a form of competency evaluation that acknowledges the educational background of students; it encourages fairness in access and the supply of suitable student support interventions meant to close the gaps in students' social and academic preparedness for postsecondary education;

Student-centeredness demands that students be encouraged to assume increasing responsibility for their learning and research and that they be viewed as the primary focus of the educational process. Nonetheless, the methodology used ought to:

- enable successful learning through rich environments for active learning,
- establish links between students' current meanings and contexts and new knowledge to be constructed, and
- encourage independent and critical thinking;

Student Support: This is a general word used to describe a number of services created by Unilorin to help students achieve their learning goals and acquire the information and abilities they need to succeed in their academic endeavours.

ODL Tutoring elements: includes a wide range of instructional strategies, coaching, mentoring, and oversight tasks that direct students through their classes, mediating the packaged learning resources and promoting learning;

Expanded Participation: initiatives that seek to increase the participation and support of under-represented groups in higher education. In doing so, it considers the various demands of individuals in various economic sectors as well as the various age, gender, and ethnic cohorts that engage in higher education.

4. **PRINCIPLES**

    4.1 Unilorin CODL is an all-inclusive open distance learning institution that will:

    4.1.1 encourage student involvement and availability of post-registration student support services

    4.1.2 broaden the student body to give historically and socially marginalised groups—such as those who live in remote or small towns or lack easy access to universities—opportunities for social growth

4.1.3 deliver quality education affordably and cost-effectively,

4.1.4 develop its capacity in open distance learning delivery through reflective practice, including staff development processes,

4.1.5 engage in research and development of open distance practices and contribute extensively to national and global debate in this area,

4.1.6 offer the full range of qualifications and provide articulation pathways to allow maximum portability and progression between qualifications as befits a comprehensive university.

4.2 The curriculum will:

4.2.1 have academic integrity and be responsive to the vision and mission of Unilorin CODL, NUC educational imperatives, and societal and employment needs,

4.2.2 be aligned with the student profiles and categories at different stages of their needs,

4.2.3 communicate clear exit-level outcomes,

4.2.4 design teaching, learning and assessment strategies to meet these outcomes.

4.3 The curriculum development process will be conducted by a team involving academics, curriculum and course designers, student support specialists, student counselors, language specialists / editorial team, tutors, and relevant external stakeholders,

4.4 The student is placed at the centre of the entire learning process from the moment the student intends to register to graduation and continuing through to its alumni, who play a vital role in evaluating impact and as worthy ambassadors for the institution.

4.5 Evaluation strategies will ensure the quality of the learning process and will suggest improvements. Particular emphasis will be placed on student feedback. UNILORIN CODL will ensure that it supports the student throughout his/her study.

4.6 Effective counseling and guidance

4.6.1 A decentralized, technology-supported, guidance and counselling service will be provided to assist students in making appropriate career decisions and in choosing study programmes that will help them realize their career goals.

4.6.2 Students will be assisted during their studies and on their exit from the university to prepare for entry into the world of work.

4.6.3 Decentralized academic development services will be provided to assist students in acquiring a range of academic literacies.

4.7 Responsible open admission procedures

4.7.1 Unilorin CODL will adhere to responsible open admission policy.

4.7.2 This process assesses students' levels of academic preparedness and aims to design appropriate support systems for students who need help addressing academic skills gaps. Social preconditions for successful study will also receive attention. These will be provided through actions such as foundation courses, extended programmes, academic literacy skills facilitation, and orientation to studying at a distance.

4.7.3 The support systems for students will balance issues of openness with statutory accreditation requirements and governmental enrolment targets.

4.8 Teaching and learning methods

The ODL teaching and learning methods for a particular programme or course:

4.8.1 will be determined by the nature of the programme, the profile of the students, students' access to resources and the level of the programme.

4.8.2 will include independent study of learning materials, completion of various activities, formative assessment tasks, tutorials, practical work and opportunities to interact with others as well as research activities.

4.8.3 will include work-integrated learning as a planned curriculum component when outcomes can only be achieved through work-based experience.

4.9 Learning material
Learning materials:

4.9.1 will be systematically designed as outlined in the Tuition Policy and Framework for a Team Approach to Curriculum and Learning Development,

4.9.2 will be accessible to target students,

4.9.3 will require the active engagement of the student,

4.9.4 will build on the students' experience and knowledge, enabling the students to construct new knowledge.

Unilorin will effectively use educational and social technologies in learning programmes in appropriate and innovative ways that improve the quality of teaching and learning.

4.10 Delivery channels

The key components of our students' success include cutting edge teaching and learning approaches, thoughtfully created course materials, efficient and effective administration, and prompt student support through a variety of delivery channels. In order to support these essential activities, Unilorin CODL will use the optimal combination of media, which consists of:

4.10.1 Print media

- Print media remains the practical choice because it is inexpensive, reliable and accepted as a medium for studying.

- Courseware should be well-designed to facilitate access to information.

- Courseware material should prepare the student for learning, develop the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge that the student needs, guide the student through the learning process and include sufficient and appropriate learning activities to enhance knowledge.

- Unilorin will invest in good-quality course design and study material and provide effective in-text student support services.

4.10.2 Technologies with limited interaction

- Other resources, such as digital media (audio and video cassettes, CDs, DVDs), satellite broadcasting, online distribution of content and information via unilorin CODL websites, audio and video podcasting and streaming, and possibly radio and television, will also be used to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

- Some asynchronous technologies, such as wikis, blogs, social networking facilities, and e-portfolios, can effectively support teaching and learning.

4.10.3 Multimedia with interactive possibilities

- The courseware delivery will include diverse and current technologies that will serve UNILORIN CODL's sustainable educational mission. Technologies such as telephony, multimedia CDs and DVDs, video and audio conferencing, SMSs and MMSs via cell phones, e-mail and discussion forums/chat facilities via Unilorin CODL website offer new possibilities for supporting innovative learning in distance education and must be integrated from the design phase of courseware. These

various options are used to facilitate interaction in support of the courseware. Highly interactive multi-party engagement can use:

(a) well equipped facilities for face-to-face contact sessions, and

(b) many of the above technologies in combination with rich media and multi-directional, multi-user, collaborative toolsets in a distributed web-based environment.

- Unilorin uses advanced synchronous technologies which range from web-based document and application sharing, online whiteboards combined with audio/video and texting facilities, and interactive assessment to simulations and virtual reality. Most of the latter functionalities are already available on the Unilorin CODL website. The appropriate use of technology is essential to the institution's survival as a global role player. Technology allows employees, students and other stakeholders to interact with Unilorin anytime and anywhere. Therefore, it forms an essential part of the skills base of our students who have to compete in a knowledge-driven globalized society.

- The multimedia approach with interactivity between students and lecturer(s), students and tutors, students and students, and students and institution is much more effective than a single medium. Criteria for the selection of media include:
  o access and availability
  o pedagogical appropriateness
  o integration of the media into a coherent experience.

4.11 Student support

Student support:

4.11.1 takes into consideration the diverse needs of students as well as the level of study,

4.11.2 is a critical factor for teaching, learning and research in open distance learning,

4.11.3 encompasses tuition, peer, in-text and administrative support and the orientation to work-integrated learning. Tuition support includes detailed, formative and timely feedback on students' assignments via the decentralized distribution of assignments and opportunities to argue and debate with their peers and tutors through various accessible and appropriate media, such as face-to-face, telematics and online. The regions will play a crucial role in providing facilities for tuition and peer support as well as access to library materials,

4.11.4 includes mechanisms designed to bridge the gap between student's learning experience from high school and the demands of higher education or between undergraduate and postgraduate studies,

4.11.5 enhances communication between the student and the lecturer(s), student and peers, student and courseware, student and administrative support and student and institution.

4.12 Tutors

4.12.1 The tutor will be central to both student support and assessment. The role of the tutor at the undergraduate level is to:

- facilitate and guide the students' learning so that they gain knowledge, understanding of the content and acquire the necessary skills and competencies to cope with their studies. In at least all high-volume first-year modules, students will be assigned a tutor responsible for liaising with students and motivating them to complete.

- prepare students to become self-directed learners, attending to difficulties, conducting tutorials as prescribed in the course design, and marking and providing feedback on assignments. This will be done through face-to-face, telephone and online tutoring.

4.12.2 Tutors will be appointed by the academic departments with the support of the Directorate: Tutorial Services, Discussion Classes and Work-Integrated Learning (TSDL).

4.13 Assessment

Assessment is central to student learning and fundamentally influences how students respond to courses and behave as students.

4.13.1 The assessment strategy:

- will ensure that students develop effective cognitive, reflective, self-management and practical skills,

- will include formative assessment, which is designed to support the teaching and learning processes or support research skills,

- will include formative and summative assessment aspects that will be used for making a judgment about the achievement of the learning outcomes,

- will assist students and tutors in monitoring their learning about formative assessment tasks and feedback.

4.13.2 The turnaround time for assessed work is a crucial element.

4.13.3 Integrated assessment strategies will be implemented as outlined in the Assessment Policy.

4.14 Unilorin CODL infrastructure and decentralized services

4.14.1 The Unilorin CODL infrastructure will provide the platform for providing a range of student support and administrative structures.

4.14.2 The decentralized structure bridges the gap between the University and its students.

4.14.3 Regional networks will provide an expanding range of services to students such as access to facilities for both independent and group-based study and discussion, materials collection, library facilities, computer facilities, counsellors, tutors and literacy development.

4.14.4 CODL centres will also arrange facilities for limited contact classes and manage decentralized tutoring.

4.14.5 Unilorin will constantly review and develop these regional and decentralized services, including access to and support in using emerging technologies.

4.14.6 CODL offices will assist with the placement of students for work-integrated learning.

4.15 Appropriate management, administration and ICT systems

4.15.1 Unilorin CODL will rely on well-defined processes, procedures and robust organizational systems supported by ICT.

4.15.2 It will review and develop its governance, management and technology infrastructure on an ongoing basis in order to give effect to its institutional vision and ODL mission.

4.15.3 It will implement business processes that, through integrated, systemic planning processes, will enable teaching, learning, and support services to be offered optimally.

4.15.4 It will implement activity-based costing and management, as well as strategic resource allocation which will be underpinned by a realisation of the need to find an appropriate balance between the actual costs of academic offerings and services with the earned state subsidy and income from affordable student fees. This requires three-year planning cycles in line with programme development cycles, responsive annual operational planning and budgeting, and quarterly reviews.

4.16 Human resource provisioning and development

4.16.1 Staff complement

The University employs sufficient academic, administrative and professional employees to ensure that the ODL business model and systems operate optimally and provide continuous, consistent and quality service to the students.

4.16.2 Capacity building

The purpose of capacity development in the Unilorin CODL environment has short-term and long-term dimensions.

In the short term:

- to raise awareness of ODL, its underpinning philosophy and how it fits into the wider scheme of Unilorin as an ODL institution.

- to engage with academics and support employees in implementing ODL at UNISA.

In the longer term, a programme of continuous renewal is supported to:

- develop ODL capacities of academics and support employees,

- promote convergence with institutional strategy, purpose and identity, and

- provide courses for ongoing employee development including support for research, scholarship and publication in ODL in order to inform teaching and learning strategies, practices and outputs..

4.16.3 Role definitions

- In the ODL system, all the relevant roles will be redefined to ensure high-quality ODL inputs, processes, and outputs.

- The role definitions aim to significantly impact our social mandate, which is to provide access to a wide range of students with the correct support to ensure that access becomes a meaningful opportunity for success. Work that supports this endeavour will be recognized and rewarded.

Staffing Structure

The CODL staff is categorized into three: (i) academic, (ii) technical, and (iii) administrative.

While the career structure already in use within the university shall apply to technical and administrative staff, the Centre shall adopt the structure herein stated, which is also equivalent to what obtains in the university's academic units and departments for its academic staff as in the University condition of service:

S/N	Regular Nomenclature	CODL Nomenclature
1	Graduate Assistant	Graduate Assistant
2	Assistant Lecturer	Assistant Research Fellow/Assistant E-Tutor
3	Lecturer II	Research Fellow/E-Tutor II
4	Lecturer I	Research Fellow/E-Tutor I
5	Senior Lecturer / Research Fellow	Senior Research Fellow/Senior E-Tutor/Senior ID
6	Reader	Reader
7	Professor	Professor

4.17 Research

- Unilorin CODL is committed to scholarly teaching in ODL as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning.

- Reflective research is an extremely important component of ODL research.

- Through research Unilorin CODL will constantly reflect on teaching and support services in order to improve practice.

4.18 Academic collaborations

Linkage and Collaboration

Linkage, cooperation, and collaboration shall be obtained from three sources:
  i.   Internal: with all Faculties, Departments and Units that shares facilities with the Centre
  ii. External: with sister institutions, agencies and departments in Nigeria
  iii. International Collaboration: with foreign institutions and agencies, memoranda of understanding, student and staff exchange.

- Unilorin CODL collaborates with distance education institutions in Nigeria, Africa, and internationally to provide opportunities for employees and students.

- Collaboration is an important strategy for renewal and development in ODL.

- Academic collaborations are a common strategy for capacity building in the following areas:

    o Student support strategies in ODL
    o Academic strategies in ODL

- Other aspects of ODL, such as the development of courseware and the use of multimedia
- The integration of technology to support teaching, learning and assessment at a distance
- The integration of technology to support communication at a distance
- The training and development of university employees
- Joint development of formal or non-formal courses or instructional material or the licensing of material
- Sharing experience on standard policy issues
- The sourcing of tutors for face-to-face or e-tutoring.

4.19 Quality assurance

Policies underpin excellence in ODL. Self and peer evaluation are practices for academic, administrative and professional units within the context of ODL at programme and institutional levels.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The implementation strategy is outlined as follows:

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. Clear implementation procedures, monitoring, evaluation and cyclical review (internal and external) every five years will be compiled.

2. An ODL Management Committee, presiding by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics), will be constituted.

3. The ODL Management Committee will monitor, evaluate and review the implementation procedures.

4. The ODL Management Committee will report to the Management Committee and the joint Senate and Council Committee on ODL.

5. The ODL approach will be implemented on a project management basis in respect of selected courses (the so-called power courses). Essential student support interventions, such as tutor-marked assignments and tutorials, will be linked to these courses.

6. In the interim, the ODL processes and procedures will be funded from the budget on special projects.

7. New processes and procedures must be introduced to operationalize ODL through the annual portfolio budgets.

8. An ODL training plan will indicate the short-, medium--, and long-term goals related to upgrading the competence of UNISA employees in the delivery of ODL.

9.   A communication plan will be prepared to ensure that the new approach to ODL is communicated to the university's employees in a way that enables each employee to understand the approach and his/her role.

10.   Tutorial Letter will be used to communicate the new ODL approach to students.

11.   To ensure that ODL is integrated into the university, a change management plan, including the ICT strategy, will be prepared.

12.   Action research practices in ODL will inform essential and continuous processes to ensure appropriate ODL provision.

13.   The implementation of this policy depends on systems and subsystems consolidated around the teaching and learning process.

6.   IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

Related policies of the former institutions that were in force before the commencement of this Policy are replaced with effect from the date the Governing Council approves this Policy.