

# Challenges and Contradictions in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria: A Student and Institutional Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

*Open Distance Learning has been positioned as a transformative approach to democratising access to higher education in Nigeria. However, its promise of flexibility, inclusivity, and affordability is often undermined by persistent challenges experienced by both students and institutions. From the student perspective, barriers such as limited digital literacy, prohibitive data costs, and layered institutional charges weaken accessibility and affordability. Institutions, on the other hand,*

*grapple with infrastructural deficiencies, high running costs of technology, policy resistance, and profit-driven tendencies that compromise quality. The situation is further complicated by strikes and poor incentive structures, which collectively reduce institutional credibility. This chapter critically interrogates these challenges, drawing on contemporary evidence to demonstrate how systemic gaps in policy, infrastructure, and governance erode ODL. It further highlights the need for incentive realignment, sustainable funding, and stronger student support systems to ensure inclusivity and equity.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The history of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria began with foreign correspondence colleges during the colonial era, and the first indigenous ODL programs were educational radio and television broadcasts after independence. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was first established in 1983 but suspended, then revived in 2001, becoming a major milestone for ODL in the country, alongside initiatives like the National Teachers Institute (NTI) (Adamu, 2022). These two institutions drove the distance learning platform till many conventional top ranked federal Nigerian universities such as, the University of Ibadan, the University of Nigeria, and the University of Lagos among others started a blended ODL programs in many annexes and affiliated institutions to operate the dual mode system of traditional in-person and distance learning programs. This gave popularity, parity and bridge to educational inequality particularly among older adults who for reasons of career growth, time, passion, self-development and desired need for recognized advance degrees.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) involves the employment of ICT to bridge the geographical and time distance between the instructor and the student by providing an interactive educational setting that is not restricted by age, gender or identity (University of Namibia, 2019; UNESCO, 2001). ODL provides the platform for education with minimal restrictions relative to the conventional mode of higher education that discriminates on the basis of employment, financial capabilities, regular physical presence etc. Gaining prominence in the tertiary educational landscape in Nigeria, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) presents greater access to education, flexibility and self-paced learning to match the increasing demand as well as infrastructural limitations (Ekwu & Ogu, 2025). Its emergence has impacted individuals, communities and the country as a whole (Aderinoye & Ojokheta, 2024). Thus, ODL allows for the development of national human capital by allowing its students to work and study simultaneously. It brings together students with diverse

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