

56th

**DISTANCE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA (DEASA)
CONFERENCE 2022**

DEASA 2022 CONFERENCE REPORT

**Report Compiled by The Namibian Open Learning
Network Trust**

NAMIBIA

CONFERENCE THEME

*Harnessing Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL) in a
Post-Pandemic Educational Environment*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Conference Activities	1
2.1 Conference Sub-themes	1
2.2 Keynote Presentations	1
2.3 Papers Presented per Sub-Theme.....	2
2.3 Conference Attendance	3
3. Conference Resolutions.....	3
4. Conference Recommendations.....	4
5. Conclusion	5

1. Introduction

The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is a regional body for SADC Member States's educational institutions practicing Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The Association aims to promote and enhance ODL in the SADC Region. Its activities include the sharing of information, fostering of collaboration in the development and enhancement of quality distance education programmes, and organising relevant professional activities.

In pursuance of quality ODL, DEASA hosts annual conferences that provide the platform and scope for strengthening collaboration amongst the SADC countries and beyond. The annual conferences and AGM are held on a rotational basis by DEASA member institutions in the SADC Member States. The 56th DEASA Conference was successfully hosted by NOLNet in Namibia between 02nd and 04th November 2022, at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, under the theme "*Harnessing Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL) in a Post-Pandemic Educational Environment*".

2. Conference Activities

2.1 Conference Sub-themes

The Conference was guided by 8 subthemes, namely:

- a) Internet of Things (IoT) in ODeL
- b) Inclusive Lifelong Learning Opportunities for Sustainable Development in ODeL
- c) Promotion of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in ODeL
- d) Applying Learning Analytics to Enhance Learning Design in ODeL
- e) Open Practices for Supporting Rapid Online Learning Transitioning
- f) Innovations in Teaching Practice in an ODeL environment
- g) The blurring boundaries between Distance and Face-to-Face education
- h) Synchronous and Asynchronous ODeL strategies for enhancing learning

2.2 Keynote Presentations

The Conference was officially opened by the Minister of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation, Honourable Dr Itah Kandjii – Murangi. Four keynote presentations were delivered as follows:

Keynote address 1

- **Sub-theme:** The blurring boundaries between Distance and Face-to-Face education and Synchronous and Asynchronous ODeL strategies for enhancing learning
- **Keynote Speaker:** Dr Andrew Niikondo: Deputy Vice Chancellor: Teaching, Learning and Technology, NUST

Keynote address 2

- **Sub-theme:** Open Practices for Supporting Rapid Online Learning Transitioning & Promotion of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in ODeL
- **Keynote Speaker:** Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, COL

Keynote address 3

- **Sub-theme:** Applying Learning Analytics to Enhance Learning Design in ODeL
- **Keynote Speaker:** Prof Paul Prinsloo, Research Professor: Department of Business Management, UNISA

Keynote address 4

- **Sub-theme:** Internet of Things (IoT) in ODeL” and “Innovations in Teaching Practice in an ODeL environment
- **Keynote Speaker:** Dr John Sifani is the Director, Center for Innovation and Development, UNAM

2.3 Papers Presented per Sub-Theme

The number of papers presented at the Conference were distributed as follows (*themes were pared for logistical reasons*):

Sub-Theme	Number of Papers	Nationality of Presenters
1. Internet of Things (IoT) in ODeL and Innovations in Teaching Practice in an ODeL environment context	35	Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe
2. Promotion of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in ODeL and Open Practices for Supporting Rapid Online Learning Transitioning	8	Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa,
3. Applying Learning Analytics to Enhance Learning Design in ODeL and Inclusive Lifelong Learning Opportunities for Sustainable Development in ODeL	8	Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia,
4. The blurring boundaries between Distance and Face-to-Face education and Synchronous and Asynchronous ODeL strategies for enhancing learning	7	Eswatini, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia

2.3 Conference Attendance

The Conference was attended by eighty (80) delegates from a total of 12 countries,

Country	Institution
1. Botswana	Botswana Open University
2. Canada	Commonwealth of Learning
3. Eswatini	University of Eswatini, Institute of Distance Education,
4. Ghana	Kwame Nkrumah University
5. Lesotho	National University of Lesotho
6. Malawi	Malawi University of Business and Applied Studies,
7. Mozambique	Universidade Aberta ISCED (UnISCED), National Institute of Distance Education,
8. Namibia	University of Namibia, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia College of Open Learning, Department of Adult Education, , NOLNet, IOL, IUM,
9. South Africa	UNISA, University of Pretoria,
10. Tanzania	Open University of Tanzania,
11. Zambia	Chalimbana University, University of Zambia, Copperbelt Colleges of Education, Mufulira College of Education, ZIBSIP College Kitwe
12. Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Open University

3. Conference Resolutions

3.1 The Conference noted that after the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a stronger appetite for the integration of information communication technologies to support ODL. Opportunities offered by eLearning in ODL were noted to go beyond simply mediating and delivering learning.

3.2 The Conference noted the value proposition of learning analytics that offers a better understanding of students' learning and potential to facilitate more responsive and effective pedagogies and assessment strategies in ODeL institutions. The Conference also noted the value of data generated to inform planning, decision making and enhancing student learning experiences. The gap in knowledge and skills in data and learning analytics within the ODeL fraternity was acknowledged and recommendations on enhancing such capacity were proposed.

3.3 The Conference noted that Covid-19 pushed ODeL institutions to adopt online learning delivery methods that apply both synchronous and asynchronous methods, with synchronous online teaching approaches found to be preferred by both students and educators due to their mimicry of the traditional teaching methods, albeit being inflexible.

- 3.4 The Conference noted that the higher education landscape and the student profile are changing rapidly, and education providers should adapt and flexibly provide education services to non-traditional students. There is a need to critically appraise the melting boundaries between traditional classroom or lecture-hall and distance/ online learning. Conventional educational institutions are urged to adopt ODeL methods to enhance student access to learning as well as to benefit face-to-face students by enhancing choice and flexibility.
- 3.5 The Conference deliberated on the concept of openness of ODL mode of education, recognizing how some dual-mode institutions, and even open universities, the principles of flexibility and openness require critical introspection. The Conference has noted that leadership of ODeL institutions require special qualities and qualifications with experience and empathetical relation with and understanding of the ODL mode's inherent value, in order to avoid costly institutional decisions that do not benefit students. The Conference further noted that there were implementation shortcomings regarding Open practices such as OER due to lack of political will, ineffective information-sharing strategies, and lack of technology, all of which hamper the execution of the international Open Practices agenda.
- 3.6 The Conference noted the challenges in the field of ODeL regarding the inclusion of students with special needs. The Conference was made aware of challenges such as lack of learning materials for students with special needs, limited expertise in educators serving these students and the challenges of monitoring effective learning of students with special needs using conventional teaching and education delivery methods. The idea that strategies that enable the inclusion of students with special needs benefit all students was promoted. The Conference noted the need for ODeL institution to strengthen their awareness of the needs of students with special needs and students from deprived environments to ensure that the ODL mode of delivery does not replicate the weaknesses of the conventional mode of teaching that has neglected the most vulnerable in society.

4 Conference Recommendations

Informed by the observations above, the 56th DEASA Conference recommends the following resolutions:

- 4.1 The gains in progress made in the use of technology enhanced learning during Covid-19 should be solidified through deliberate and thoughtful planning and implementation of eLearning in ODL institutions.
- 4.2 Institutions should take full advantage of the benefits of ICTs such as the value proposition of learning analytics, to enhance their understanding of ODL students in order to facilitate

the development of more responsive and student supportive structures and processes, including improving pedagogies and assessment strategies.

- 4.3 ODL institutions should strengthen their capacities in fields of data and learning analytics as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to take full advantage of their promise and value to enhance the quality their services and that of student learning.
- 4.4 Both ODL and conventional institutions should recognise the changing profile of students and their access to educational services beyond borders, and should adopt flexible methods that best meet the needs of students.
- 4.5 Educational institutions must reimagine learning in view of the use of online and blended learning approaches, and implement educational delivery methods designed to enhance students' flexible access to education.
- 4.6 The quality of leadership of ODL institutions or that of ODL units within conventional institutions should take into consideration experience and qualifications relevant to ODeL to ensure that policy and practice decisions are responsive to the unique needs of ODL students.
- 4.7 ODL institutions must reclaim their openness and implement open practices to avoid replicating the restraints and exclusion of non-traditional students already practiced by conventional educational institutions.
- 4.8 ODL institutions must implement policies and strategies supportive of the inclusion of students with special needs and students from deprived environments.

5 Conclusion

The 56th DEASA Conference was highly anticipated due to the disruptions in DEASA activities by the Covid pandemic in the previous 2 years. The Conference successfully delivered on its mandate guided by its theme *Harnessing Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL) in a Post-Pandemic Educational Environment*. The successful holding of this Conference demonstrated the resilience and innovation capabilities of the ODL fraternity in the SADC Region and beyond. The quality of presentations, engagements and networks forged at the Conference enhanced the confidence in the leadership of ODL institutions in general and that of DEASA in particular. The Conference further showed the sometimes overlooked value of social relationship and community building, while recognizing the benefits of virtual technologies in hosting hybrid events and conferences of the magnitude of DEASA. It is expected that the ODL fraternity would use the Conference resolutions and recommendations to enhance the practices.