

REPORT FROM THE ICDE QUALITY NETWORK:

GLOBAL QUALITY PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN, FLEXIBLE AND DISTANCE LEARNING 2022

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PREFACE

The ICDE Quality Network consists of academic experts appointed as regional Focal Points on Quality among ICDE institutional members from all world regions. The quality network gives advice and collects knowledge on the latest developments of quality enhancement of open, flexible and distance education.

Prof. Emeritus Alan Tait from the Open University UK held the position as Chair for the Quality Network since its beginning in 2016, and has played a significant role in developing and supporting the network. The mandate and activity plan for the Quality Network has been decided in collaboration with the Chair and is aligned with the ICDE Strategic Plan 2021-2024, and ICDE Activity Plan 2021-2022. One new Focal Point was appointed in 2022 from the Africa region: Prof. Mercy Ogunsola-Bande, Director of Quality Assurance from the National Open University of Nigeria.

In 2022, the main task for the Quality Network was to contribute to the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference that was held in Barcelona in May. Firstly, this was done through the production of short videos, showcasing good examples of quality open, flexible and distance education from all the different regions. These videos were produced by the Focal Points and formatted and submitted as a joint ICDE contribution in the category of “open knowledge products”, all openly licensed and published under “[resources](#)” on the UNESCO WHEC2022 website.

Secondly, ICDEs proposal for a roundtable discussion: “Quality in Online, Open and Distance Higher Education across borders” was accepted as part of the main program of the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference. The backdrop for this discussion was the increased demand for quality assurance mechanisms encompassing flexible, open, distance and online education, accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a core partner of the [global Consortium for the Benchmarking Framework](#) for Online, Open, Smart, and Technology-enhanced Higher Education, initiated by Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University from the United Arab Emirates, ICDE was in a good position to facilitate this roundtable discussion, with representation from members and the Quality Network. A summary report from the panel session can be found in the [Knowledge Center](#) in ICDE’s website - icde.org.

The ICDE Focal Points on Quality have all contributed to this report that captures regional experiences felt during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to thank them for sharing their expertise, regional knowledge and practical experience, and for their unique, collaborative spirit, with which they support ICDE and the global community of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge, with my deepest appreciation, Professor Emeritus Alan Tait, who concluded his term as Chair for the ICDE Quality Network by the end of 2022. Over a period of six years, Alan has moderated the Quality Network’s internal meetings and external events, always with an inclusive approach and friendly touch that make everyone feel safe, comfortable and motivated to contribute. As in previous years, Alan has also provided a thematic introduction to this annual publication.

We hope the report will be useful and inspirational to ICDE’s members and stakeholders from all parts

of the world. We look forward to the continuation of the ICDE Quality Network in its next period.

Oslo, January 2023

Torunn Gjelsvik
ICDE Secretary General

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION

Alan Tait

Chair ICDE Quality Network

It is a pleasure and a privilege to provide for the last time an introduction to the 2022 ICDE Quality Network yearly report. I would like to begin by thanking all the Focal Point leads who have provided the world regional reports that make up this annual report, who have all worked for another year monitoring and promoting the core issue of quality in the field of open, distance and online learning. I would also like to thank ICDE Secretary General Torunn Gjelsvik, whose focus and determination has driven the Network forward for all six years of my involvement as Chairman. The report will above all, we hope, support our member institutions and international government organisations in their work in building high quality and innovative education programmes for the future.

So what themes emerge overall during the year of 2022? Firstly I would observe that one of the truisms of international work stands out clearly in this report: namely that despite all the differences deriving from history, geography and socio-political context that seem to separate us across our 6 world regions, there are commonalities that bind us even more strongly. This is what makes the global work of ICDE so powerful and worthwhile.

The continuing COVID pandemic stands out once again in all regions as the greatest challenge to established modes of campus provision, and has continued to stimulate innovation with technologies for learning and teaching, as we observed in 2021 also. It has of necessity acted as an accelerator to change in the adoption of off-campus modes for almost all educational institutions, and in the adoption of digital technologies across campus and off-campus programmes, so that hybrid modes have become the norm in many places. While there is a huge range in the pace at which this change has been able to take place around the world, there are very few countries where no change at all is underway. The outcomes are reported on in Africa as well as Europe, in Asia as much as Oceania, and so on, lowering the barriers between campus based and distance and online modes both in learning, teaching and student support strategies, and in priorities for professional development.

Developing out of this we can see a huge range of new initiatives during 2022 from the ODEL institutions and networks, from amongst which we can highlight webinars, conferences and workshops, books and articles, new networks, shared and co-operative national and international professional development, a renewed focus on employability and micro-credentials, and new types of universities.

As open, distance and online education together with blended or hybrid approaches have gained more prominence, the challenges for quality assurance have become more pressing. Specialised and focused quality assurance networks exist in the field of ODEL in all 6 world regions, and perhaps the most significant new organisational development in 2022 has been the increasing profile of the Benchmarking Framework pioneered by Hamdan bin Mohammed Smart University in 2019, and reported on at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in May 2022 in Barcelona. At the same time as this range of activities focused on the online sector, the ODEL world has to build outwards to the major mainstream sector now using hybrid approaches, and in great need of

benchmarking and professional development. This is urgent, and a number of regional reports highlight the need to align internal quality assurance systems with external demands from mainstream national systems. Open, distance and online learning is now part of the mainstream, and we too have to make sure we know how to re- articulate our priorities in recognition of that.

AFRICA REGION

Professor Mercy Ogunsola-Bande, National Open University of Nigeria

Introduction

The COVID pandemic that led most higher institutions in Africa to outrightly cancel all in-person classes and discover online learning has had great consequences on quality assurance. Greater concerns were in the STEM disciplines as regards alternatives to the usual traditional laboratory in delivering suitable laboratory components. This is coupled with the low internet connectivity especially for the disadvantaged distance learners in remote areas. Several quality assurance mechanisms were put in place to strengthen the quality practices and promote a culture of quality through an internal mechanism. This included periodic reviews of standards using monitoring instruments, organizing training workshops for staff/students to upskill and build capacity in quality assurance processes, provision of solar equipment, and use of a committee system for the implementation. Also efforts are put forward for the internal quality assurance to collaborate with the external QA monitoring system to ensure the totality of quality assurance within higher education. These efforts are visible in the various activities outlined by the African Council of Distance for Education, the Commonwealth of Learning (through the Quality Assurance Directorate in Africa Institutions) and the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance Learning (RETRIDOL).

The African Council for Distance Education (ACDE)

With its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya (East Africa), ACDE is currently the lead implementing agency for Open, Distance and eLearning in Africa. Below are some of the activities carried out in 2022 in line with the UNESCO WHEC2022 roadmap of having an open and collaborative system to ensure quality.

1. The ACDE Quality Assurance Institutional Certification Programme in line with its vision and mandate of assuring quality of ODEL was approved by the executive board of the council. This is to be achieved through the instrumentality of ACDE QA Toolkit developed by ACDE in collaboration with COL and NOUN serving as the host. Subsequently, at the 6th Triennial Conference of the ACDE, it was resolved that ACDE should promote and fast track the Quality Assurance Training and Certification Programme by working with Higher Education National Regulatory Bodies. This was followed by a visit to NOUN by ACDE delegation (led by the president) and meeting with Nigeria's higher education regulator, National Universities Commission (NUC) to explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration in rolling out implementation of the ACDE Quality Assurance (QA) toolkit. The Council is awaiting the feedback from NUC for the next course of action.

2. The Council is also collaborating with the West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning to publish the 6th ACDE Triennial Conference proceedings for information sharing.
3. During the 2nd and 3rd quarter, ACDE embarked on reviewing the ACDE quality assurance toolkit. Which will subsequently lead to workshops to train people on the use of the toolkit and have feedback for improvement.
4. The Council has established a research committee under the Technical and Collaborations Committee (TCC) to guide in collaborative research agenda.
5. The Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Early Childhood Network (AfECN). The collaboration will support a research fellow at the ACDE secretariat's office (Nairobi) for a period of nine (9) months.
6. The Council is pursuing a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Teachers Institute, Kaduna, Nigeria, focusing on hosting of the ACDE Teacher Education Development Programme.

Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL)

RETRIDOL is an academic directorate in the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) with the specific responsibility and expertise for training, development and research in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Established in 2003 under a collaborative agreement with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada as a rational response to the growing demand for training and research in the ODL System in the West Africa sub-region specifically and ultimately for the rest of Africa. Additionally, RETRIDOL responds to the training needs of institutions to deploy ODL and Technology Enabled Learning (TEL) interventions to increase access as well as strengthen educational systems against disruptions.

Workshops & MOOCs

The training activities during the period under review were aimed at consolidating the gains of the dual-mode project, with a view to extending it to the region.

Workshop on Design and Development of Course Materials for Distance, Online and Blended Learning (virtual) was a follow-up to a previous one organized by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). It was held 7th – 11th February 2022 with 358 participants. The outcome of the workshop was a blueprint template for course design and development to be used by developers.

RETRIDOL/COL Workshop on Design, Development and Adaptation of Course Materials for Distance and Blended Learning. Held 22nd – 24th February 2022, to develop

participants' knowledge and skills in designing, developing and adapting content for distance and blended learning modes of delivering education. The participants demonstrated increased understanding of the course material development process through their presentations and critiques.

MOOC: Open Educational Resources for Online Learning: A Practical Approach held 14th March – 8th April 2022, with 1,800 participants from 61 countries. The MOOC taught the participants how to plan, write, and evaluate OERs for inclusion in online learning content.

Workshop on Policy Initiatives for Digital Learning in Nigerian Universities held 28th – 29th June 2022 with 38 participants composed of Vice-Chancellors, Directors of ICT, Leaders of Africa Centres of Excellence, and Directors of Distance Learning Centres from 16 institutions in Nigeria. The Workshop Outcomes was a policy framework for digital learning, action plan for its development and implementation, networking and collaboration for the promotion of digital learning among invited institutions.

Workshop on Technology-Enabled Learning for Dual and Single-mode Open, Distance and eLearning Institutions in Ghana held 25th—27th April 2022 with 28 participants from 12 Institutions. One of the objectives was to implement TEL procedures for instructional delivery, student engagement and assessment in online and blended learning contexts.

RETRIDOL Monthly ODL Discourse

The RETRIDOL Monthly Discourse series is a forum for exchanging ideas based on research and expertise, as well as holding discussions about issues related to open and distance learning (ODL). This discourse with its virtual nature gave a worldwide spread of participants. In the last months, speakers from the United Kingdom, North America and other African countries had been invited to share their research and expertise. RETRIDOL has continually increased its impact and organized activities that contribute to the development of ODL in the region and subsequently spreading nationwide. Topics covered within the year and experts are as follows:

1. Fourth Industrial Revolution and its Impact on Education. Held 31/01 2022 by Prof. Mohamed Ally, Athabasca University, Canada
2. MASC: An Innovative STEM Testing and Evaluation System. Held 28/02/2022 by Prof. Omotayo Fakinlede, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
3. Mobile Learning for Development. Held 30/1/2022 by panelists: Dr Tunde Adegbola, African Languages Technology Initiative (ALT-i), Dr Ephraim Mhlanga, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), and Dr Adewale Adesina, National Open University of Nigeria
4. Technology Integration for Teaching and Learning in the COVID 19 Era. Held 29/04/2022. By Professor Mobolanle Sotunsa, Babcock University Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning,

Nigeria, Prof. Humphrey Danso, Ghana, Professor Tayo Arulogun, Nigeria and Professor Jamilu Mu'azu, Nigeria.

5. Quality Assurance for Technology Integration in Open, Distance and eLearning. Held 23/05/22 by Dr Kirk Perris, Digital Learning Strategist (Canada).
6. Assessment in Open, Distance and eLearning: Lessons from the Pandemic. Held 27/06/22 by Dr Tim Coughlan, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK
7. Learning Analytics in Open and Distance Learning. Held 25/07/22 by Prof. Paul Prinsloo, UNISA.
8. Proctoring Online Examinations: The NOUN Experience. Held 29/08/22 by Prof. Olugbenga D. Ojo, NOUN, Nigeria
9. Digital Literacy Skills for Learning and Livelihoods. Held 26/09/22 by panelists. Prof. Mpine Makoe, South Africa, Dr. Michael Nkwenti, the University of Yaoundé, Dr. Niran Oyekale, Commit Technology and consult Ltd and Mrs. Nkiru Banjoko, eLearning Consult, Nigeria.
10. The Concept and Practice of Digital Humanities: The Nigerian Pidgin Dictionary Project (NaijaSynCor). Held 24/10/22 by Prof. Francis Egbokhare, University of Ibadan.
11. The Role of E-learning Policy in Digital Transformation of ODeL Higher Education Institutions in Developing Countries. Held 28/11/22 by Dr Mphoentle Modise, University of South Africa.
12. Alternative to the Physical Science Laboratory for the Distance learners-Home lab kits held on 2/12/22 by Prof, Dietmar Kennepohl, Athabasca University, Canada and Prof. Mercy Ogunsola-Bandeke, National Open University of Nigeria.

Commonwealth of Learning Employability Workshop

With the continuous mismatch between degrees acquired and skill necessary at work, coupled with high levels of youths being unemployed and unskilled, COL ran a workshop on integrating employability skills into the curriculum in higher education institutions. The workshop was held 25th-26th October 2022 and hosted by the directorate of Quality Assurance, NOUN.

Conclusion

For Open and Flexible Distance Learning to have a shared understanding and common criteria for quality in Online, Open and distance education across borders, there is great need to look through each other's "windows". Firstly, If higher education is committed to ensure the quality of its educational provision as well as to produce graduates that meet national and international benchmarks through open and Distance learning, there is a need to look into our curriculum. The recent efforts by the Commonwealth of Learning to initiate restructuring by infusing the

employability skills into the curriculum of higher institutions will go a long way for implementation. The UNESCO WHEC2022 also emphasized the need for academic freedom and development of creative skills to address global challenges, which will aid our graduates across borders and disciplines to be skilled and gainfully employed.

Secondly, is the need for the regions to learn and share disseminated information, published procedure and research with each other. This can be enhanced by having speakers from other regions during workshops and seminars (reference to RETRIDOL activities).

Thirdly, although institutions are focused on ensuring quality in the systems through internal mechanisms of self-improvement, there is a need for alignment between the vision of the ACDE Quality Assurance Institutional Certification Programme with the external quality Assurance mechanism.

Finally, for distance education to take education to the door steps of every willing learner; in particular, those in STEM disciplines, it will be suggested to look into other alternatives to the traditional face to face practical components in the sciences (looking through Athabasca University's 'windows'). The UNESCO WHEC2022 roadmap supported this by emphasizing the need to create a more open, inclusive, equitable and collaborative system, to build bridges and promote partnerships, and to use technology in inclusive and creative ways.

MIDDLE EAST REGION

*Prof. Moustafa Hassan,
Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, Dubai, UAE*

Introduction

Before Covid-19 hit the world, universities were suffering from the growing operations costs and declining government support for higher education institutions. Government universities in some countries, such as Egypt, were requested to establish revenue-generating streams to account for increased operations costs. Furthermore, universities struggled to offer access to more learners with scarce resources. Open, Flexible and Distance Learning (OFDL) is a promising means for reaching many students in these countries. Thanks to the relatively high internet and smartphone penetration in most MENA countries (Middle East and Northern Africa), the technological obstacle is insignificant, unlike sub-Saharan countries. However, the majority of accrediting agencies in the MENA region did not approve online and distance education. There were strict rules for the percentage of programs that could be delivered over the internet, if any. Recognition of online programs or prior learning was complex in some countries and impossible in others.

When the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the education systems, OFDL was the only way to keep the system alive. The majority of universities in the MENA region adopted remote lecturing. While the method created many quality-related problems, universities and accrediting agencies realized the importance of open, distance and online education. It was clear that even after controlling the pandemic, a new norm was born, and they had to deal with it. Accrediting agencies in countries that did not approve online education before the pandemic started to accommodate online programs within their accreditation standards. An example of such change is the approval by the Supreme Council of Universities in Egypt to offer the Master of Science in Innovation and Change Management as a joint program by Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University (HBMSU) (UAE) and Alexandria University (Egypt). The program is a blended one with 50 % online delivery. The mature infrastructure of HBMSU, which emerged as an online university 20 years ago, facilitated the program's accreditation.

While Universities, mostly conventional, in the MENA region started to adopt online education even after Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted, significant challenges are facing these universities in assuring the quality of offered online programs. In their quest to offer quality open, distance and online education, universities focus on one or more components of quality OFDL, with very few building a holistic system that incorporates the different components into one system. Some universities in the MENA region are currently focusing on building technological infrastructure, others are focusing on course design and delivery, and others are establishing their content development centers.

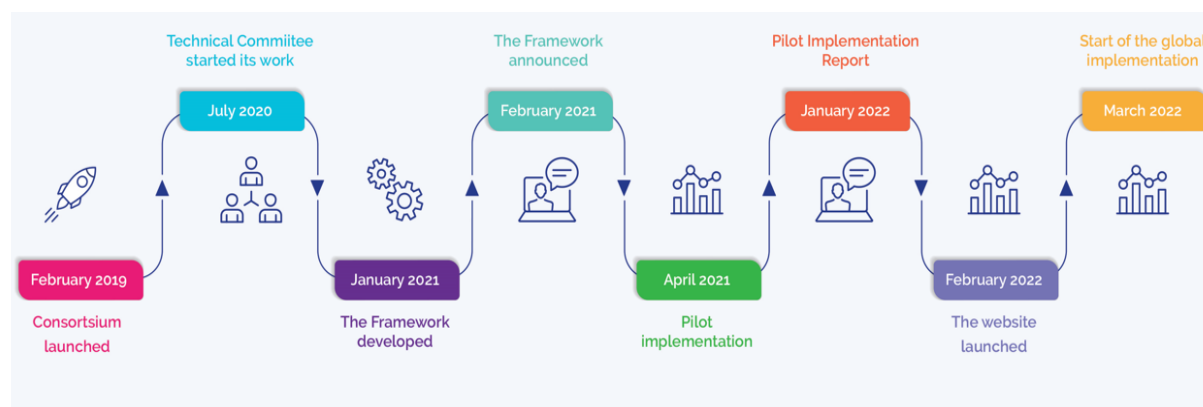
On the other hand, accrediting agencies in the MENA region are expanding their acceptance of open, distance and online education and publishing accreditation requirements for online programs. However, some of these requirements are still being driven by conventional education

requirements, such as restricting the recruitment of adjunct faculty from overseas to teach online classes.

The new norm created by the Covid-19 pandemic is here to stay, and universities and accreditation agencies are requested to work together to accommodate this new norm. It will take significant effort and time until the education system stabilizes and OFDL becomes an integral part of the higher education system in the MENA region.

Towards a shared understanding of quality

In 2019 ten universities established a consortium to develop the Benchmarking Framework and Data Set for Online, Open, Smart, and Technology-Enhanced Higher Education (the Framework). Since its inception, the Framework has received great attention with a rising number of member institutions including quality assurance agencies. In 2022, the Framework was the focus of an ICDE-led panel discussion in the main program of the UNESCO WHEC2022 in Barcelona. Furthermore, several regional webinars were conducted in 2022 to discuss the implementation of the Framework, including a webinar led by the Association of Arab Universities in April 2022, and a webinar led by the University of Philippines Open University. The graphic below outlines the journey of the Benchmarking Framework from the day of the establishment of the consortium to the global implementation. More details can be found on the dedicated [Benchmarking Framework website](#).



Our chapter in this report explores the lessons learned during the development and implementation of the Benchmarking Framework to answer the question of how institutions can develop a more shared understanding and common criteria for quality in online, open, and distance Higher Education across borders. In the following, we will outline a few lessons hoping organizations can adopt some of them in their quest to ensure the quality of OFDL. This short report focuses on ten lessons learned throughout the development and implementation phases that contribute to the success of this initiative. We try to arrange the lessons learned in chronological order, but it must be mentioned that many of them overlap:

1. Shared vision of leaders of a group of universities and associations

The Framework was established by a group of online universities and associations working in the field of Open, flexible, and distance learning (OFDL). These institutions felt the need for

common criteria for quality in online, open, and distance Higher Education because the current quality assurance criteria and processes need to reflect the unique nature of this type of learning. Furthermore, with rapidly evolving pedagogies and technologies, it becomes clear that relying on traditional external quality assurance mechanisms will be an obstacle to agile institutions.

2. **Worldwide representation of the founding members**

Founding members came from several continents, which facilitated broader representation and the Framework's inclusiveness. As the consortium continues to grow, more members are joining every month, enhancing the Framework's ability to maintain its broader representation.

3. **Proactive nature of the initiative**

The Benchmarking Framework was initiated in February 2019, almost one year before Covid-19 disrupted educational systems worldwide. The establishment of the Framework was not a reaction to the expansion of online and distance education during Covid-19. Being a proactive and futuristic approach with a clear goal facilitated the incorporation and sustainability of the Framework as a strategic initiative within the consortium member institutions.

4. **Experts led the development phase**

The founding members nominated experts in the field of OFDL from their institutions to participate in developing and piloting the Framework. Throughout the development phase, experts utilized evidence-based methods to build dimensions and criteria based on the available body of knowledge. Furthermore, experts used the group consensus technique (Delphi technique) with 3 iteration cycles to refine the developed dimensions and indicators.

5. **Investment by the founding members**

While participation in the consortium activities is voluntary, experts invested time and effort in developing and piloting the benchmarking Framework. Participating experts' dedication and commitment were the only guarantees that the Framework would follow its original development plan despite busy schedules and competing commitments.

6. **Clear development and implementation plan**

On their first meeting, nominated experts agreed on the development and implementation plan with specific milestones. The plan outlined the entire journey, as illustrated above. While Covid-19 resulted in some delays, it did not disrupt the plan as all activities were conducted virtually. Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University in Dubai (HBMSU) managed the overall project plan and kept it on track with the help of experts from the consortium's founding members.

7. **Continuous improvement of the framework**

Per the project plan, the Benchmarking Framework was regarded as a continuous improvement exercise with an improvement stage at the end of each implementation cycle. While the pilot implementation in 2021 resulted in multiple improvements, the Framework and its dedicated website are subjected to revision and updating based on the feedback received from participating member institutions during each implementation cycle.

8. **Use of self-assessment technique**

The current traditional quality assurance practices are very time-consuming as it involves submitting self-study, an audit by audit teams, and/or surveying consumers' opinions. The Framework adopts a self-assessment technique where participants rate their performance across 37 indicators on a scale of 1 to 5 using agreed-upon scoring rubrics for each indicator. During the first cycle of implementation, participating members were not requested to provide evidence supporting their assignment. Members will be asked to share examples of evidence used for each assigned score to improve the objectivity of assigned scores.

9. **Maintain confidentiality and security of the shared information**

While collaborative teamwork is at the core of the Framework development and implementation process, maintaining the confidentiality and security of shared information is of utmost importance. HBMSU took the lead in developing a dedicated website of the consortium that is designed to offer two linked interfaces; one for the general public, and the other is dedicated to members. Only those whom their member institutions authorized can access the "Members Only" area. They can enter data and view other participating members' identities and performance across the 37 indicators. To ensure the security of the used system, HBMSU's ISMS is audited internally and externally and in compliance with international best practices and standards as demonstrated by ISO 27001 certification. HBMSU has been ISO 27001 certified since 2008.

10. **Leverage on ICT capabilities**

The consortium members use a dedicated website to improve the efficiency of data collection, entry, and analysis. The members-only webpage uses checkboxes and dropdown menus to facilitate the selection of relevant data sources, evidence, and adding explanations. The website facilitated prompt communication and ongoing discussions among members on best practices. Apart from the first physical meeting of the founding members, the annual presidents' and experts' meetings are held virtually.

Conclusion

The current situation of accrediting agencies and universities necessitates the adoption of successful examples to speed up the transformation journey towards open, distance and online education.

The lessons learned from the well-planned journey of developing a global framework should not be overlooked. Universities and accrediting agencies need to adopt the core dimensions and indicators underlying the benchmarking framework and other international tools. These tools identify the main building blocks for a holistic quality OFDL system. The piece-meal approach should be avoided when dealing with the quality of OFDL as it will increase the diversion between universities and accrediting agencies and won't benefit the growing number of learners joining OFDL. We recommend that the Ministries of Education in the MENA region and their accrediting bodies join the benchmarking consortium to facilitate the transition from traditional education to quality OFDL.

ASIA REGION

*Prof. Ojat Darajat, M.Bus., Ph.D.,
Rector, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia
President, Asian Association of Open Universities*

Introduction

The fourth goal of sustainable development as stated in the United Nations 2030 agendas is ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This has also been a concern from ICDE through its strategic objectives under the supervision of the ICDE focal point on quality in Asia Region. The position of the focal point on quality for the Asian region as the President of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) has enabled support for the embodiment of objectives as stated in the ICDE Activity Plan 2021-2022, especially for some programs in relation to educational quality in Asia regions that are line with the AAOU agendas in promoting Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning (OFDL).

There have been some initiatives and activities conducted in the Asia Region to support OFDL practices. This annual report is delivered based on three focuses of attention, i.e. 1) improving the quality of OFDL through collaborative initiatives, 2) using findings and results for the benchmarking framework to engage quality assurance (QA) agencies in Asia, and 3) developing an understanding of OFDL across borders. Based on the discussion of the OFDL practices in the Asia Region, three main suggestions are provided at the end of the report on how to reach the goal of developing a shared understanding of OFDL regionally and globally.

Improving the quality of OFDL through Collaborative initiatives

ICDE focal point 2020-2022 as the President of the AAOU as well as the Rector of Universitas Terbuka (UT) as an Open and Distance Education (ODE) Institution have given more opportunities to explore the educational development in Asia. This has obtained positive responses from other ICDE members (who are AAOU members simultaneously), such as Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Pakistan, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) Thailand, University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) Philippines, Open University of China (OUC), Open University of Malaysia (OUM), UT Indonesia, and other open universities in Asia region.

Some strategies for improving the quality of OFDL through collaborative initiatives have been conducted, i.e. 1) AAOU Accreditation Taskforce, 2) collaborative writing for a book on Open and Distance Education, 3) collaborative research and projects, 4) ICDE Asia Global Advocacy Campaign (GAC) Taskforce, 5) Webinars, and 6) Benchmarking Projects. The following are the details:

AAOU Accreditation Task Force

AAOU Accreditation Task Force involves seven open universities, namely the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU), Universitas Terbuka (UT), Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), and Open University of Japan (OUJ). The last meeting was conducted on February 2, 2022, discussing the following topics.

Item 1: Brief Overview of the Development of the AAOU Accreditation System Framework and Instrument

Item 2: Presentation of the Latest Draft of the AAOU Accreditation Toolkit for the Pilot Run

Item 3: Finalization of the List of Institutions for the Pilot Run

Item 4: Plans on How to Implement the Pilot Run

It was planned to finalize the toolkit in Jakarta conducted in January 2023 and is expected to be applied in 2023.

Book of Open and Distance Education in Asia

AAOU initiated a book writing project titled **“Open and Distance Education in Asia: Good Practices from AAOU Members”** which was officially launched at the 35th AAOU Conference 2023 in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea on 2-4 November 2022.

This project involved 8 open universities in Asia with the following chapters:

1. Korea National Open University (KNOU)
2. The Open University of China (OUC)
3. The Open University of Japan (OUJ)
4. Open University Malaysia (OUM)
5. The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL)
6. Sukothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU)
7. University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU)
8. Universitas Terbuka (UT)

The structures of each chapter are written similarly in which one topic is discussing the management system directly related to the quality assurance. The ebook and its launching can be accessed online at AAOU Website <https://www.aaou.org/book-of-ode/>

Collaborative Research and Projects

AAOU secretariat provides funding for staff of its members to conduct collaborative research. There were two research groups awarded the funding in 2021 and the results were disseminated at the 35th AAOU Annual Conference 2022 on November 3, 2022, in Jeju Island. The following is the data of the AAOU Collaborative Research Program (AAOU-CRP).

Table 1. The AAOU Collaborative Research Program Disseminated in 2022

No	Title	Name of Affiliations
1.	MOOCs for Mobilising Higher Education in India: A Case Study	Khrisna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHASOU), India Gauhati University Institute of Distance and Open Learning, India Netaji Subhas Open University, India
2.	Exploring student’s learning behavior in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) using data mining approach: an analytical study of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), India, Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) India, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) Thailand, and Universitas Terbuka (UT) Indonesia.	Netaji Subhas Open University, India Uttarakhand Open University, India Universitas Terbuka (UT) Indonesia Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) Thailand

Furthermore, besides the AAOU-CRP mentioned above, another collaborative research scheme was also conducted under the open universities 5, called OU5. OU5 is a collaborative initiative from 5 open universities in ASEAN region, i.e. Open University Malaysia (OUM), Hanoi Open University (HOU), Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), University of the Philippines Open University UPOU), and Universitas Terbuka (UT).

The President meeting and research dissemination 2022 was conducted on 25th July 2022 virtually. Furthermore, OU5 also conducted a President meeting on 28-30 November 2022 in Thailand with the main agenda “MOA Signing and Researcher Meeting.” During the meeting, the collaborative research for 2023 was discussed with the following topics:

The Institutional Research Topics:

1. Innovative Pedagogy in the 4IR Era
2. Sustainability Development and Open Universities in ASEAN (or The Role of Open Universities in ASEAN in Sustainability Development)
3. Metaverse in promoting effective learning design for practical sessions at Open Universities in ASEAN

Topics under the ASEAN Studies:

1. Indigenous People in ASEAN (including a chapter on Gender Disparities).
2. Disaster Risk and Reduction Management in ASEAN (including a chapter on ‘The Role of Civil Societies’ and another special chapter to include gender perspective”).

ICDE Global Advocacy Campaign (GAC) - Asia Task force

In March 2022, the AAOU President and all members was invited to take part in the ICDE Global Advocacy Campaign (ICDE Asia GAC Task force) for Open, Flexible, Distance learning (OFDL) that was officially launched during the ICDE Virtual Global Conference Week in October 2021. The leaders for this project are Prof. Dato' Dr. Ansary Ahmed, Founder and President of Asia eUniversity and former Board Member of ICDE, together with Prof. Melinda d.P. Bandalaria, Chancellor of the University of the Philippines Open University and current Board Member of ICDE.

In September 2022, an online meeting was conducted with the purpose of updating the progress of all working groups, i.e. policy, sharing best practices, platform development, and collaboration. A survey was developed and circulated to further understand OFDL policies in member universities as well as different countries. In terms of collaboration, the working group has initiated webinars to promote ODFL based on the collaborative projects among members. The focal point for quality from the Asia region has also fully supported the program, for example by providing an opportunity for the ICDE Asia GAC Task force members to have an onsite meeting during the 35th AAOU Annual Conference in Jeju Island.

Webinars

During 2022, three webinar series from AAOU with the focus on the revolution and evolution of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) post pandemic Covid-19 were conducted in February, April, and June 2022 focusing on the “shape”, challenges and opportunities, and the innovation of ODL Post Covid-19.

The following table includes the details of the webinar series:

Table 2. The AAOU Webinar Series 2022 “(R)evolution of ODL”

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
25 th February 2022	The “Shape” of ODL Post Covid-19	Dr. Tahira Bibi Naushahi (Lecturer at Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University)	1. Dr. James Brown (Advisory Board of USDLA) 2. Prof. Dr. Melinda dP. Bandalaria (Chancellor of University of the Philippines Open University)
19 th 2022	April Challenges and Opportunities of ODL Post-Covid19	Mr. Raveenthiran Vivekanantharasa	1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Izanee Awang (Vice Chancellor of Open University of Malaysia)

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
		(Lecturer at Faculty of Education Open University of Sri Lanka)	2. Dr. Zahid Majeed (Director Academic Planning & Course Production of Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan)
14 th June 2022	Innovations in ODL Post-Covid19	Dr. Monirosadat Hosseini (Lecturer at Payame Noor University, Iran)	1. Martin Dougiamas (Founder and CEO of Moodle) 2. Dr. Christothea Herodotou (Associate Professor of Open University, UK)

Sources:

AAOU Webinar Series 2022 #1: https://youtu.be/l_khlhcY3G8
AAOU Webinar Series 2022 #2: https://youtu.be/ChwJ_EYmtfg
AAOU Webinar Series 2022 #3: <https://youtu.be/W37Rt2AbbRk>

In the Post Covid-19 era, distance teaching universities (DTUs) have to focus on how to optimize their capabilities in integrating technology into instructional deliveries. During the pandemic that has yet to alleviate in Indonesia, it does not diminish the vigor of the higher education institutions to continue to improve their understanding and dissemination of the knowledge of the system, technology, and management of distance learning programs for all lecturers, students, and the public in general. UT, for example, conducted Knowledge Sharing Forum (KSF) done virtually in a webinar mode through Zoom meeting covering several topics regarding Open, Online, and Distance Learning and broadcasted through UT TV. Up to the middle of August 2022, UT has conducted twenty six series of KSF.

Table 3. The Knowledge Sharing Forum (KSF) Universitas Terbuka

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
20 th January 2022	The 23 rd KSF Transition Period Towards PTN-BH: Strategy and Management	Dr. Siti Aisyah, M.Si (Vice Dean of the Faculty of Law, Social, and Political Sciences)	1. Prof. Dr. Mohammad Nasih, SE., MT., Ak. (Rector of Airlangga University) 2. Dyah Ariyanti, S.H., M.H. (Ministry of State Secretariat) 3. Dr. Agus Joko Purwanto, M.Si. (Head of PTN-BH Team)

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
17 th February 2022	The 24 th KSF Upgrading Knowledge and Skills with Microcredentials	Siti Hadianti, S.Pd., M.Pd. (Lecturer at Universitas Terbuka)	1. Dr. Ethel Agnes P Valenzuela (Director of the SEAMEO Bangkok) 2. Prof. Paulina Pannen, M.Ls (Director of Indonesia Cyber Education Institute)
26 th April 2022	The 25 th KSF: Kartini Today: Role and Creation for Advanced Indonesia	Dr. Sri Sedyaningsih, M.Si. (Head of Library at Universitas Terbuka)	1. Prof. Dr. Hj. Rina Indrastuti, S.E., M.SIE (Rector of Padjajaran University) 2. Prof. Dr. Nyayu Khodijah (Rector of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang University)
18 th August 2022	The 26 th KSF: Answering the Challenges of Open and Distance Education in the Digital Transformation Era	Prof. Daryono, S.H., M.A., Ph.D (Head of Research & Innovation Centre, Universitas Terbuka)	1. Dan Lejerskar (Founder & CEO of EON Reality) 2. Prof. Dr. Richardus Eko Indrajid (Rector of Pradita University)

Sources:

The 23rd KSF: <https://youtu.be/WBpnl9uoag>

The 24th KSF: <https://youtu.be/fNg6k3I8wMc>

The 25th KSF: https://youtu.be/d_n_yCnuvmE

The 26th KSF: <https://youtu.be/Hr8eSq7DS0w>

UT has another way of promoting open, online, blended, and flexible learning through a consortium of the Indonesia Cyber Education Institute, or ICE Institute. It is a gallery of courses that can be taken and transferred by students using blockchain technology. It is an online learning center for many universities and online learning providers. The members of the consortium are actively conducting collaborative research and disseminate the results of the research through a webinar called the Cyber Education Forum or CEF up to August 2022.

Table 4. The Cyber Education Forum (CEF)

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
29 th January 2022	The 9 th CEF: Game Developer: Opportunities and Challenges	Fauzy Rahman Kosasih, S.S., M.Pd. (ICE Institute)	1. Prof. Dr. Ary Setijadi Priharmanto, S.T., M.T. (Lecturer at Bandung Institute of Technology)
24 th February 2022	The 10 th CEF: Certificate and Micro Credential Programs of Online Courses: Challenges and Opportunities for Indonesia	Haemiwan Zumar Fathony (Consultant Asian Development Bank)	1. YU Xinjie (Head of the Teaching Guidance Expert Group at Tsinghua University) 2. QIU Hanqin (Dean of School of Tourism and Service at Nankai University) 3. Ellya Herlinawati (Student of Law Department at Universitas Terbuka) 4. Muhammad Oka Ramadhan (Student of Agroindustrial Technology Education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia)
29 th March 2022	The 11 th CEF: Game for Our Future	Fauzy Rahman Kosasih, S.S., M.Pd. (ICE Institute)	1. Dr. Xiuhan Li (Central China Normal University of China) 2. Dr. Finita Dewi, S.S., M.A. (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia) 3. Dr. Nurhikmah H. S.Pd., M.Si. (Universitas Negeri Makassar)
26 th April 2022	The 12 th CEF: Automated Essay Scoring System for Online Learning	Venty Fitriany Nurunisa, S.E., M.Si., M.Sc. (Universitas Terbuka)	1. Prof. John Fischetti (Pro Vice-Chancellor at College of Human and Social Futures) 2. Prof. Dr. Ir. Anak Agung Putri Ratna, M.Eng. (University of Indonesia) 3. Dr. Retno Kusumaningrum, M.Kom (Diponegoro University)
9 th June 2022	The 13 th CEF: Pricing Strategy for Online Courses	Erika Pradana Putri, S.T., M.Sc. (Universitas Terbuka)	1. Michael L. Koenig, M.A. (Associate Dean for Innovation Initiatives & Executive Director of Executive Education Rice University)

Date	Theme/Issues	Moderator	Speakers
			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Prof. Ir. Togar M. Simatupang, M.Tech., Ph.D., IPU. (Bandung Institute of Technology) 3. Dr. Aswin Dewanto Hadisumarto, S.E., MIA. (University of Indonesia)
19 th July 2022	The 14 th CEF: Smart Chatbot for Education	Niesrina Trixie Nur Imania, S.S. (Universitas Terbuka)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abdul Harith bin Hassan, M.Ed. (Universiti Sains Malaysia) 2. Sukmawati Nur Endah, S.Si., M.Kom (Diponegoro University)
30 th August 2022	The 15 th CEF: Engaging Online Discussion Using the Community of Inquiry Framework	Fauzy Rahman Kosasih, S.S., M.Pd. (Universitas Terbuka)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lee Rubenstein (edX's Vice President of Partnership at 2U/ edX and Business Development) 2. Loh Ley Ley (Principal Consultant edX for Asia) 3. Dr. Uwes Anis Chaeruman, M.Pd. (Peneliti dan Dosen- Universitas Negeri Jakarta)

Sources:

The 9th CEF: <https://youtu.be/0my8LKK-XNg>
The 10th CEF: <https://youtu.be/d9-gKTrraCU>
The 11th CEF: https://youtu.be/6_HkcbNI4nE
The 12th CEF: <https://youtu.be/vo1NCSHNXbl>
The 13th CEF: <https://youtu.be/W-VVrQh8mcU>
The 14th CEF: <https://youtu.be/WYqsfkn2WT8>
The 15th CEF: https://youtu.be/6B_GfdrLM5g

Benchmarking Projects

According to the Balance Careers, benchmarking is a process or activity to compare companies. The focuses of benchmarking vary on some aspects such as products, process, function or approach to business. The practices of ODL have been considered important to be updated with an expectation of continually relying on to identify potential performance and operational issues.

Table 5. Benchmarking to Universities in Asia

No	Date	Benchmarking	Destination	Focuses
1.	1–6 August 2022	Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Pakistan	Universitas Terbuka (UT) Indonesia	Quality Assurance
2.	6-8 November 2022	AIOU and UT	Korea National Open University (KNOU) Hanyang University, South Korea Seoul Cyber University (SCU), South Korea National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE), South Korea	Online Learning
3.	8 November 2022	Open University Malaysia (OUM)	UT	Collaborative Projects

Developing understanding of the OFDL across borders

It is expected for open and distance higher institutions to take advantage of the findings and results from the Benchmarking framework in order to engage Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies in Asia. Some conferences or group discussions on OFDL have arisen topics relevant to QA. This has given the participants awareness of the importance of QA in OFDL practices. As discussed in the AAOU Accreditation Task force meeting in early 2022, the framework of benchmarking should be designed to assess the future readiness of OFDL offered by an institution. Moreover, the framework should consider the development of the guidelines for eventual accreditation application as well as focus on helping academic institutions to be future-ready. Regarding the institution's readiness for the future, the university of the future has been another agenda as well in the OU5 President meeting conducted in Thailand on 29-30 November 2022. The university of the future focuses both on the 4th and the 17th sustainable development goals (SDGs), i.e., quality education and partnerships for the goals.

Based on the discussion above, developing a more shared understanding and common criteria for quality in online, open, and distance Higher Education across borders should therefore be designed to shape the direction of the future industrial revolutions as well as produce graduates and train the manpower who oversee the planning and implementing the concepts of industries. Consequently, there are three main suggestions to reach the goals of developing an understanding of OFDL across borders regionally and globally. First, open and distance higher institutions focus on strategies to reach goals through collaborative research and society engagement. Second, the purpose of accreditation in open and distance higher institutions focuses on developing the education system

to a need of reviewing indicators of quality in higher education rather than remaining focused only on improving academic quality and public accountability. Third, open and distance higher institutions are not only producing graduates who are knowledgeable and skillful, but also able to theorize and contribute to building knowledge in the discipline that would shape future innovations and industries.

EUROPE REGION

George Ubachs, Managing Director, EADTU

Higher education and quality assurance agencies in anticipation of the changing pedagogical landscape

Introduction

European universities are rethinking their teaching and learning model and are now considering continuing education and professional development as well as open education to be fully-fledged parts of their mission. Throughout the European higher education offerings, internationalization has become an important dimension in curricula and essential in European University alliances, which have been established at the initiative of the European Commission (European Commission, 2022a).

Digital transformation is an indispensable condition for the success of this new teaching and learning model, continuing and open education at scale, internationalization and the European University alliances.

Due to the COVID crisis, all universities are part of this transformation, whether they are prepared or not (Brouns et al., 2022, Wahls et al., 2022). They are facing new challenges in providing synchronous hybrid, blended and online distance education, being the main approaches gaining mass in the mainstream. The professional development of teaching staff in new digital pedagogies and quality in digital education are now paramount, especially in countries where the government is pursuing a structural policy in this regard by using the European Recovery Fund to combat the COVID crisis (which is not everywhere the case).

A second major change that brings several challenges in this regard is the introduction of digital micro-credentials in continuing education and professional development, in collaboration with external stakeholders, such as private and public companies, regions and cities (European Commission, 2021a, 2021b; European Council, 2022).

Thirdly, the European University alliances work together on joint courses and curricula with physical, blended and virtual mobility. Without digitalization of curricula and mobility, they will never be able to reach the 50% target on student mobility.

The European Commission and national governments continue to develop visions and approaches that guide the transformation of European universities. Naturally, these also have implications for the internal and external quality assurance of education.

Three emerging challenges for universities and quality assurance agencies

University-level Developments

The COVID crisis has shifted universities European-wide in adopting digital modes of teaching and learning. Three main approaches were observed and appear to be continuing:

- Synchronous hybrid learning: based on institutions that have in common that both on-site or 'here' students and remote or 'there' students are included simultaneously (synchronous hybrid learning (Raes, 2019, 2022; Raes et al., 2020).
- Blended learning: based on a course design with a deliberate combination of online and offline learning activities (Goeman et al. 2018; van Valkenburg et al., 2020; Laurillard, 2012, 2015, 2022; Daniel, 2016).
- Online distance learning: based on a course design with a continuous physical separation between teacher and student, synchronous and asynchronous (Sangra et al., 2022).

All three approaches are currently offered in three course programmes by EADTU's DigiTel Pro Strategic Partnership ([Professional Development for Digital Teaching and Learning](#)). It brings together excellent groups of experts from universities, well-known for research and innovation in digital education and having developed good practices in digital solutions during the Corona crisis (DigiTel Pro, 2022).

Also, various related challenges will be encountered with regard to methods of e-assessment as mapped by EADTU's Special Interest Group on E-assesment (<https://online-assessment.eadtu.eu>) and future applications of artificial intelligence, impacting on all three approaches (Rossade et al., 2022).

The development of micro-credentials

Adult learners are looking for small units of study that meet their goals and develop higher education-level skills recognised by academia and the labor market. They want to be awarded with qualifications recognising the depth and level of learning based on a trusted assessment.

(International) micro-credentials are already awarded to MOOC-based programmes worldwide (Micro-Masters, nano-degrees), organized by universities and MOOC platforms. Also, short learning programmes for continuing education deliver a variety of awards (certificates, diplomas,), many times irrespective of the level and size of the programme. As a consequence, it is almost impossible for academics and employers to estimate the value of these awards and learners can't valorise them appropriately (Melai, 2020; Cirlan & Loukkola, 2020; Soenen, 2022; Brown, 2021).

This demand for new forms of learning has led to a corresponding increase in interest in 'micro-credentials' that certify the outcomes of these small learning experiences. This demand is expected to continue during the recovery from the pandemic and in the years to come. On 16 June

2022, the Council of Ministers of the European Union (EU) adopted the [Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#). The Recommendation seeks to support the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions, businesses, sectors and borders.

According to the Recommendation, a micro-credential provides a qualification, which must refer to:

- learning outcomes
- workload in European credits (ECTS)
- educational qualification level/cycle (European/national qualification framework)
- form of participation in the learning activity
- type of assessment and
- type of quality assurance

This will lead to more transparency and a real qualification that adds value to students' continuing education efforts (European Council,2022).

The adoption of the Council Recommendation triggers discussions at national level on how to integrate micro-credentials into national education and training systems. At the European level, projects such as MCE (Modularisation of Continuing Education by Micro-Credentials, EADTU 2022) guide related discussions towards a more European vision and related coordinated actions by universities. On behalf of the quality assurance agencies, ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) encourages its members to engage in a dialogue with the competent national authorities to ensure that the implications for quality assurance frameworks and bodies are fully considered (ENQA, 2022).

A comprehensive mapping conducted by ENQA has found that micro-credentials are on the radar of quality assurance agencies, but arrangements are highly dependent on the spread of the phenomenon in national contexts and the regulatory requirements that are evolving. Due to the specific features of micro-credentials, there is also some resistance to claims that internal quality assurance arrangements cover, by default, micro-credentials and can be relied on heavily (ENQA online event: External quality assurance of micro-credentials, September 27, 2022).

On the other hand, the external quality assurance of micro-credentials would be a burden for quality assurance agencies and may also jeopardize the flexibility needed for just-in-time provision of micro-credentials for the labor market. The ex post adoption of micro-credentials in institutional accreditation schemes would be most likely, in conjunction with internal quality assurance (Haywood et al., 2015).

The European Universities Initiative (EUI)

Universities are now involved in the European University Initiative (EUI) alliances in which they work together to develop joint programmes and organize mobility of staff and students. This requires new collaborative formats of education and mobility, accessible to all students in a joint or networked

programme. Universities in the alliances were already aware that this was impossible without digital course delivery and mobility. The COVID crisis has urged them to accelerate these developments, sometimes improvising or benefiting from each other's experience and expertise.

Together with the growth of blended and online education, innovative forms of mobility are being created to complement physical mobility, improving the learning experience and opening up new opportunities for intensive collaboration between universities. These developments in internationalization also require more expertise in the field of digital education at all levels of university institutions.

Implications for Quality Assurance

These new developments in the field of extended formats of online education, micro-credentials and internationalization have implications for the internal and external quality assurance. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2015) and the associated Considerations for E-learning (Huertas et al., 2018), remain essential in European higher education. However, these developments most likely require additional frames of reference.

EADTU is at the forefront of several of these developments in digital education and shares related expertise in various communities and publications (Ubachs & Henderikx, 2022). The main results will also be captured in the next edition of the benchmark tool for quality in online education "E-xcellence" (Ubachs et al., 2015). ENQA's work on micro-credentials further emphasizes the role of quality assurance agencies in anticipating new developments and supports this by mapping the implications for quality assurance frameworks and agencies.

Mature decision making

The concept of maturity refers to a deliberate and sustained process of decision-making for the improvement of digital education. Maturity levels relate to the degree of regular deliberate optimization of the design of digital education, based on evidence such as sound theories, scientific results and continuous quality assessment. The extent to which iterative quality improvement processes are embedded in an institution determines the maturity level of digital education policies and leadership (van Valkenburg et al., 2020).

The *European Maturity Model for Blended Education* (EMBED) (EADTU, 2021; Dijkstra and Goeman, 2021) can be used to assess the maturity level of courses, programmes and institution-wide provisions for blended education. Plans are made to extend this model to synchronous hybrid and online distance education.

EMBED embraces a multilevel framework. It distinguishes maturity at the course, programme and institutional level. Consensus was achieved regarding a set of dimensions and indicators for

maturity on each of these levels (Goeman et al., 2021). Various key actors play a role in mature decision-making processes, including teaching staff and course teams, programme coordinators, teaching and to learning and ICT support services, deans and all involved in the institutional leadership.

Implementation guidelines were developed and specified for each dimension of the model. They provide background information, examples, models, tips and tricks, as well as recent references to resources. A number of these guidelines were integrated in the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) 'Making Blended Education Work' (Futurelearn, 2021).

Maturity can vary from explorative/intuitive to design based and iterative embedment in a quality assurance and improvement cycle.

Maturity levels and implementation guidelines for each of these dimensions are published on the [EMBED website](#) (EADTU, 2021).

Need for continuing professional development

One of the prerequisites for quality education is the continuous professional development of teaching and support staff as well as leadership of higher education institutions. This is especially true after the COVID pandemic as digital education is now breaking through on a massive scale. In many institutions, staff and leadership are not familiar with the design, development and implementation of digital education, including all institutional conditions (Brouns, 2022). Several initiatives have recently been taken for this purpose: the professionalization in teaching and learning in DigiTeL Pro, the provision of a broad pedagogical framework for digital higher education on the BLOOM hub, and a broad range of activities on the official European Digital Education Hub of the European Commission.

In response to a call from the European Commission, EADTU launched DigiTeL Pro (EADTU, 2022b) with three online trajectories of six sessions each on synchronous hybrid, blended and online distance education and learning, in collaboration with high-level research and innovation centers. The course materials used in these sessions jointly with guidelines will be openly available on the website for reuse by any institution and integration into local CPD initiatives.

On the BLOOM hub (BLOOM, 2022), supported by the European Commission, EADTU has published a series of five e-books on models and guidelines for designing and developing teaching and learning in higher education, international digital course and programme collaboration and mobility, joint masters programmes, joint micro-credential programmes, and joint microcredential courses and microlearning units (Henderikx, Ubachs, 2022a; 2022b, 2022c; Henderikx, Ubachs & Antonaci, 2022a, 2022b). Together, they form the educational framework of BLOOM.

Finally, the European Commission launched the European Digital Education Hub (European Commission, 2022b) managed by a consortium of eleven organizations. EADTU actively contributes to this Hub. It organizes two-hour "clinic" sessions and six-hour "mentorships" for a digital education

issue upon request from individuals and peers from individual institutions. In addition, EADTU organizes six-hour peer learning courses on specific digital education topics that are open to large numbers of participants. All this is organized with selected experts.

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LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN REGION

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Introduction - institutional and academic diversity

Regarding the role of Higher Education Institutions, one of the most marked regional aspects in the processes of differentiation (new institutions) and diversity (new typologies) refers to the growing incorporation of digital technologies and the creation of virtual and hybrid universities. This process - which is occurring in the different educational markets (technical, teaching, military, religious, health, physical education, etc.) - is driving the need to introduce new typologies or classifications within the various university levels. In addition to the growing virtualization of all organizations and the provision of all services, as well as educational services, new university institutional typologies are taking shape that are characterized by their virtual and/or hybrid operation. In the latter case, given the breadth of possible situations, as well as its recent character, this is an institutional categorization still under construction.

In this sense, according to Rama (2022), we are facing a new institutional and academic diversity in which we can highlight technological, polytechnic, pedagogical, distance, military and police, multicultural, specialized, professional, research, virtual, world-class, graduate, international, cross-border, mega-universities, global universities, local, network, corporate, municipal, state, religious, non-profit, for-profit, technical, etc. universities. In this scenario we can also refer to the growing transformation of some face-to-face universities into hybrid institutions. This has been an accelerated process with the pandemic and the irruption of digital synchronous education.

It is worth noting that the new scenario of institutional diversity drives the conceptualization of diverse typologies and classifications, associated with public regulation and quality assurance systems. Beyond posing problems regarding the establishment of common minimum standards for the various university institutional typologies, there are undoubtedly new complexities in relation to the quality criteria that must be adjusted to the new university typologies so far, as they allow covering institutional and academic varieties, and market demands and fields of knowledge.

The emergence of hybrid education is a new dynamic that impacts all educational functions, especially those of universities, impacting teaching, research, extension, as well as management, curricular structure and internationalization.

This forms a specific institutional typology, derived from the entry into a new phase of higher education systems as "university 4.0", as an expression of the digital society. In general, the university - and currently higher education systems - has gone through four historical phases in its development: a first phase as University 1.0 supported by face-to-face teaching and based exclusively on the teacher-learner relationship. A second phase of "University 2.0", with face-to-face teaching supported by books and other analogical didactic objects such as maps, plans, posters,

graphs, etc., in the teaching-learning process. A later "University 3.0", in which a Taylorist management and electricity allowed a larger scale, the intense use of the book and even the support of radio, television and videos; this phase was also of greater institutional differentiation by promoting the creation of distance education. And finally, the current "University 4.0", articulated to digitalization through digital networks with multiple virtual educational modalities, with at least two institutional typologies. Namely as a virtual university and as a hybrid university.

This new scenario constitutes a radical educational transformation towards digital logics that impacts all its dynamics; since we start from environments based on chalkboards, frontal classrooms, face-to-face classes and lectured classes with homogeneous student groups, to reach the new reality of digital synchronous classes supported by digital platforms (Moodle), with standardized evaluations, virtual interactions and diversity of multimedia learning resources, and with a complex hybrid articulation of these dynamics. From exclusively classroom teachers to networked tutors with synchronous and asynchronous virtual teaching activities, this forms an education supported by digital platforms, digital learning resources, virtual tutoring, networked management systems and a digital technology infrastructure. MOOCs as packaged education and the Zoom model as synchronous educational interaction are just some of the components of this hybrid education that imposes a hybrid curriculum and where each technological mediation is articulated to each learning objective with differentiated roles and functions.

Diversity of pedagogies and tools

In addition, it is necessary to point out that it is also seen as a broad transformation that facilitates curricular flexibility and the individualization of teaching, forcing the definition of optimal pedagogies for the various contents and modalities. It also includes new forms of evaluation and new possibilities of cross-border teaching internationalization with complex teaching competencies. Thus, a new curricular design is emerging, characterized by face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous activities to achieve the teaching objectives, facilitating active pedagogies and the inverted classroom.

The competency-based approach also derives from this diversity of pedagogies and digital tools. It allows both a hybrid education mediated entirely virtually that combines and differentiates between synchronous and asynchronous forms of learning, with diversity of use according to learning objectives and students, and a hybrid education that includes face-to-face components. This hybrid education in turn imposes differentiated forms of management, less hierarchical and horizontal, based on managing a diversity of environments and therefore high educational flexibility. This dynamic makes it possible to articulate the implementation of complementary face-to-face activities, while there are limitations of virtual education, such as homogeneous educational paradigms, absence of a student-centered approach, inflexibility of management structures to operate under multimodalities or rigid structures of the curriculum and teaching processes, among others. This goes beyond the lack of competencies of teachers and students, the limitations of connectivity and equipment of institutions, countries, teachers or students, or the legal frameworks that create difficulties in shifting supply and demand between modalities or that impose certain face-to-face

components. In this sense, multiple situations also recommend the use of face-to-face components in teaching, such as the students' own demands for social interaction, the control of evaluations or especially the performance of practical activities with their own collaborative work requirements. In this education 4.0. the digital becomes a determining component, imposing that the face-to-face activities are made up of support, coaching, tutoring or mentoring to facilitate and enable the best learning and the acquisition of competencies. This is the axis of the new dynamics under construction, and no longer the large educational factories of yesteryear.

Quality assurance in the region

The consolidation of the academic offer of distance and online courses and programs is increasing every day, even more so after the disruption of the education system worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the determination of common criteria for the evaluation of this type of programs in these study modalities is scarce. Until now, the evaluation is done by the agencies that regulate higher education in each of the countries, and this is done only for specific courses.

The absence of regulation of distance Higher Education in most Latin American and Caribbean countries are characterized by:

- the lack of models and instruments for the evaluation of distance and online Higher Education
- the lack of teams of evaluators in the different disciplines
- evaluation practices tending to magnify achievements and hide weaknesses
- quality assurance models in some Latin American environments dependent on the political and/or personal environment of the agency
- accreditation models conceived and designed for use in the face-to-face modality that do not allow the incorporation of particular elements of virtuality
- obsolete technological infrastructure and limited digital processes to support accreditation and the generation of management indicators
- high number of indicators and standards in the existing evaluation models
- multiplicity of fragmented information where planning and quality assurance follow different paths, and mainly with little training in distance and online education, constitute the factors behind the evaluation

In this sense, it is worth highlighting the significant efforts in the region presented by the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance (RIACES). In 2020, they established a series of common evaluation criteria and indicators for the entire region and provided relevant information to Ibero-American universities on quality standards for distance education through the Ibero-American Guide for the Evaluation of Distance Education. In this same context, RIACES and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) created a seal of quality to accredit the degrees of Ibero-American higher education institutions taught online, called the Kalos Virtual Iberoamerica Seal (KVI), which has its own evaluation procedure and criteria.

Similarly, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education (CALED), since its creation in 2005, and in accordance with its mission "to contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education in the region" has contributed through studies of the regulations applied in the region for the offer and evaluation of Distance Higher Education, with the development of guidelines and instruments for the evaluation, accreditation and certification of Distance Higher Education programs.

From this point of view, the work developed by the agencies constitutes a benchmark for quality assurance, since they seek to ensure that the provision of education meets minimum quality standards, for which it is essential to develop actions aimed at:

- Rethink the Public Policy on Higher Education in terms of quality assurance.
- Promote the establishment of laws, norms or regulations that regulate the supply of Higher Education.
- Promote mechanisms focused on quality assurance of HEIs and HE systems.
- Establish models and instruments for institutional, career and program evaluation on a permanent basis.
- Promote public recognition of the fulfillment of HEI quality conditions.
- Establish a common framework of quality criteria in the region: recognition of degrees, teacher and student mobility.

Towards a shared understanding of quality improvement

Developing a shared understanding and common criteria aimed at quality improvement entails the collaborative and permanent action of the higher education institutions themselves, the agencies in charge of quality assurance and the State control bodies. This can be done through networking with all higher education institutions and the Higher Education system of each country in the improvement, assurance and strengthening of the culture of educational quality.

- Development and application of effective policies that promote the permanent development of the quality of careers and academic programs, in coordination with the actors of the educational system.
- Definition of policies, regulations and/or procedures within the institutions of higher education that allow continuous control of the quality management system.
- Establishment of common models and instruments for evaluation, accreditation and certification of higher education in all regions.
- Strengthen the training of peer evaluators; in this perspective, the preparation of peers should be improved to avoid self-serving, vindictive or defensive attitudes, as well as corporate behaviors, which lead to ethical problems in the evaluation and accreditation processes.
- Promote new management models for higher education institutions that include quality assurance as a permanent component of development.

Suggestions for the way forward

The suggestions we can make are aimed at the materialization of cooperation programs or projects between the different organizations and institutions of higher education.

Certification of the quality of distance and online higher education.

Through the strategic alliance between the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance (RIACES) and the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education (CALED), we intend to contribute to a progressive harmonization of quality assurance in higher education in Ibero-America, through the certification of degree programs and/or careers.

Execution and participation in collaboration, cooperation and research projects related to quality assurance in distance higher education.

Quality should be an integral element at the Latin American level. Through participation in the PERMANENT LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN-EUROPEAN UNION ACADEMIC FORUM (FAP ALC-UE) within the framework of the IV ALC-EU ACADEMIC SUMMIT, higher education is established as a fundamental pillar for the construction of a new secure, peaceful, economic, social and environmentally sustainable international order, within the framework of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. In the area of Higher Education and Higher Technical and Vocational Training, the mobility of students, academics and administrative staff at the tri-regional level will be promoted in order to strengthen the integration of higher education institutions. In the area of quality assurance, progress will be made towards a common accreditation system with quality parameters and indicators that allow for the recognition of transferable credits and professional titles and academic degrees.

Training of experts in distance education, evaluation and quality assurance of higher education in Ibero-America.

We recommend generating courses, seminars and meetings with accrediting agencies in the region to reach agreements that make the quality assurance of our institutions viable. Manage the certification of courses, careers and programs of higher education institutions in the region, aimed at achieving quality assurance, recognition of degrees and mobility of students and teachers.

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NORTH AMERICA REGION

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Introduction

As noted in the 2021 North American report to ICDE, the curtailment of campus-based higher education over the previous two years exposed the great majority of postsecondary students and faculty to online teaching and learning. Only now are we beginning to see the longer-term implication of this exposure. It appears not just to have accelerated the adoption of online learning, but to have been transformational. Whereas online learning and campus-based learning had existed largely in separate silos in the period before covid, appealing to different types of learners, we are now seeing evidence of a growing majority of learners, regardless of age, field of study, or level of study, choosing to incorporate online learning into their academic program through a combination of online and face-to-face courses. Many of these recent converts to online learning are seeking new and creative ways to combine online and in-person components in their programs, and expecting institutions to facilitate seamless movement among them.

Dimensions of the Benchmarking Framework

The scope and limits of each [Dimension of the Benchmarking Framework](#) is being tested by the pedagogical, logistical, staffing, and resource problems posed by this unprecedented expansion of the role of online learning. Quality Assurance organizations are being tasked with assessing the effectiveness of varied approaches to meet these challenges and establish benchmarks on such matters as:

- addressing the online needs and expectations of younger and more traditional learners now drawn into the online sphere (Learner Services; Organizational Aspects)
- combining synchronous and asynchronous learning (Teaching and Learning; Technology Environment)
- facilitating movement among a variety of learning modes in an academic program, and even within a single course at the learner's choice – sometimes on a lesson-by-lesson basis, as in a HyFlex course (Teaching and Learning; Technology Environment)
- developing strategies and tools to create a greater sense of belonging to a community among online learners (Outcome and Impact on Society; Learner Services)
- bridging the digital divide for a growing population of learners from economically and socially disadvantaged communities (Diversity and Inclusiveness; Technology Environment; Outcome and Impact on Society)
- addressing newly raised concerns about learners' stress levels and mental health when faced with unfamiliar technology, an environment that depends more heavily on their

- ability to work independently, and new ways of related to one another academically and socially (Learner Services; Diversity and Inclusiveness)
- testing the effectiveness of advising and mentoring practices for learners to successfully navigate this more complex landscape (Learner Services)

As research-based insights and new models for success emerge from this widened QA agenda, the updated skills and heightened sensitivities required of online faculty to work effectively with a larger and more diverse population of learners will come into sharper focus. Likewise, Institutional policies will need to be re-examined and revised, and support staff will be tasked with serving faculty and students in new ways.

If such a QA-driven process is successful in the coming years, our institutions have the potential to deploy a wider array of modes of instruction and a more efficient use of staff and resources to achieve higher retention and graduation rates, and provide each learner with access to course content and experiences best suited to their preferred learning style and personal circumstances.

Securing international standards

Contribution from Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Tec de Monterrey), Mexico, member of the Benchmarking Framework

“There are approximately 30 million students studying 60,000 programs at 10,000 Higher Education (HE) institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean” (Lustosa, 2021). Notable differences among institutions and countries were exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, which reveal the magnitude of the challenges faced by HE institutions in Latin America, in terms of technological, pedagogical and process transformation, among others.

Regardless of the challenges that HE institutions face in Latin America, the offer of distance education programs has increased considerably since the pandemic began, without the certainty that this academic offer ensures minimum standards of academic quality. There is an increased demand for accreditation agencies and Ministries of Higher Education to include quality standards in distance education that universities must accomplish.

Securing international quality standards in distance education, such as those defined by the Online Learning Consortium, Quality Matters, and the Benchmarking Framework, among others, allows HE institutions to set a common language between universities at a national and international level and to establish a base for criteria that can serve as a:

1. Guide for educational institutions so that they can have clarity on the elements to provide quality online education
2. Self-assessment mechanism
3. Reference so that accrediting institutions possess international parameters for evaluating quality in distance education

In particular, the value of the Benchmarking Framework lies in that it facilitates a holistic evaluation of the educational institution, which includes indicators that range from teaching-learning processes, student services, enablers, to organizational aspects.

Results from the Benchmarking framework

The results obtained in the Benchmarking Framework show that it is possible to establish a series of common criteria at the international level to ensure the quality of online programs, which benefits HEI and quality assurance agencies in the following way:

Higher education institutions

- a) To provide a tool that allow institutions to self-assessment to determine strengths and areas of opportunity
- b) To compare the institution with other national, regional, and international institutions

Quality assurance agencies

- a) To obtain an instrument to assess the quality of educational institutions and make recommendations based on it
- b) To certify the quality of distance programs
- c) To be acquainted with the advances in the academic quality of online and distance programs in the country and compared with other countries

Additionally, the use of this Framework can be aspirational. It could be utilized to determine the institution's current situation and to define an action plan. For institutions with fewer resources, the Framework will support them in knowing areas to improve. For those with more experience in online education, it will allow them to obtain information to become benchmarks regarding the quality of their online educational offer.

Towards a shared understanding of quality across borders

The criteria established in the Framework form a common base for evaluating the quality of distance education. However, it is relevant to consider the following needs:

1. Establish universal or standard definitions for distance, online, flexible, open education, among others. There are differences between universities around the world about what these terms mean.
2. Define the scope of the Framework, that is, if it is applicable only to complete programs, or which criteria are valid for evaluating courses.
3. Incorporate universities from regions that have not yet been considered so that they can use the Framework and make a self-assessment, compare themselves with others, and evaluate the relevance of the instrument for their region.

4. Allow the Framework, which is currently on a closed platform, to be accessed by any university that wants to use it to make a self-assessment, to compare itself with universities in its region, as well as see their ranking at the international level. All this as a means of self-assessment and internal improvement of each university.
5. Incorporate quality accrediting agencies from different regions so that they can evaluate the instrument and use it
6. Conduct more collaborative work between HE institutions to share lessons learned from past errors, as well as best practices to improve digital learning and student experience in distance education programs.

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OCEANIA REGION

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Introduction

The University of the South Pacific (USP) began establishing university centres from 1972 and established its USPNet by using the American ATS-1 satellite. It was the first university in the world to use satellites to reach such remote communities. Over time, it developed an international reputation for global leadership in promoting access to remote communities for tertiary courses and programmes. Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) courses are emerging widely in the USP region due to the following: access to quality learning materials, low-cost involvement on the learner's end (Daniel; 2022), and use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) for the design and development. Recent COVID-19 pandemic has drawn extraordinary interest and exponential growth in ODFL in the USP region.

COVID-19 lockdowns gave the region a chance to explore the possibilities of ODFL. The adoption and expansion became a lot easier for the institution. However, the quality assurance of the content became a challenge. Contextualizing the OERs was possible, but the importance of quality assurance work to maintain high standards is critical now because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many regional institutions to quickly transition to facilitate online learning.

The quality assurance agencies in the region are also finding it difficult to identify the best-suited framework to use for the courses that they deliver. There are different frameworks for different levels of study, such as Higher Education, TVET, Secondary and Primary Schools. The following report provides details of some of the efforts by USP in ensuring quality assurance for all the courses being designed and offered for all levels at academic and non-academic institutions around the Oceania region. These include providing opportunities for teachers, trainers and those in other sectors of the community to understand and gain confidence in designing as well as ensuring quality of the ODFL content they deliver to all in the community.

ODFL at USP and PACFOLD

Commonwealth of Learning's Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) is hosted and managed by USP's Centre for Flexible Learning (CFL). As such, most of the regional ODFL related activities are conducted at USP through CFL and PACFOLD. COL in collaboration with CFL is currently implementing a five-year project called Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand MFAT NZ. The goals of this project are to contribute to enhanced capacity and efficiency of Pacific education sectors through greater use of innovative delivery mechanisms and technology. The project supports enhancing capacity and efficiency of education sectors in the Pacific through greater use of innovative delivery mechanisms and technology by focusing on the following four areas: (1) Immediate response to COVID-19. (2) Supporting Youth Employment. (3) Building Resilience in Pacific

Education Systems. (4) Building education lessons and insights. The following are some of the activities CFL/PACFOLD has been involved in:

MOOCS for Professional Development of Teachers offered by COL

The major activity which was supported as part of the above project was training the teachers in ODFL. As the lockdown continued in countries in the Pacific, school closures meant that classes had to be offered in distance mode and this meant that there was a stronger need to train teachers on teaching using the distance and flexible mode. Under the above work streams with promotional and marketing support from PACFOLD, COL offered the following MOOCs between 2021 and 2022:

1. Assessment Skills for ODFL
2. The Empowered Digital Learner
3. Communication Skills for Open, Distance and, Flexible Learning
4. Using OER for Online Learning was offered twice in March and July 2021 and again in November 2021. This course was re-offered in March, July and November in 2022. A staff from PACFOLD provided regional mentoring support for the offering in March 2022.
5. The Empowered Digital Teacher for Online Learning course was offered in June-July 2022

MOOCs Offered by PACFOLD in 2022

PACFOLD has adapted and re-offered two existing COL courses, 'Digital Skills for OER Sharing' and 'Communication Skills for ODFL', which was offered to 501 teachers in the Pacific in July 2022.

Both these courses helped improve teachers' communication skills in ODFL contexts.

Marketing and Advocacy for COL activities and courses/Promotion of COL activities

Besides the management role, PACFOLD has made a huge contribution to promoting activities in the region using its wide campus network. Every quarterly newsletter and course/event announcement were shared with USP, which was then further circulated via the USP email and Facebook page.

PACFOLD, designed the flyers for the courses and actively marketed them on all USP communication channels as well as the PACFOLD website.

Online TVET Toolkit

Two consultants from PACFOLD were provided training by COL in the management of the Toolkit. The staff provided technical assistance to COL in terms of system update, validation of online

resources, system optimization, and user data analytics. This toolkit is expected to support the professional development in a TVET institution using ODFL methods.

Regional Workshop on skills and leadership training for youth, women, and persons with disabilities in the Pacific

PACFOLD in collaboration with COL organised a regional workshop on Skills and Leadership Training for Youth, Women, and Persons with Disabilities in the Pacific. Held at the Suva Peninsula Hotel, Fiji Islands on August 10, 2022, this workshop brought together 14 participants from four different countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) across the Pacific. More details can be found at the following site:

<https://pacfold-learn.org/news/skills-and-leadership-training-for-youth-women-and-persons-with-disabilities-in-the-pacific/>

Regional Meeting on Technology Enabled Learning (TEL)

At request of MFAT, COL in collaboration with PACFOLD organized a regional meeting, which brought together organisations that are currently delivering projects on technology-enabled learning in the Pacific. This was an initial meeting with regional leaders in TEL to share information about initiatives and projects taking place and to explore opportunities to strengthen coordination and collaboration in TEL. 26 leaders in TEL attended this meeting from the Asian Development Bank, Catalpa, COL, MFAT NZ, the United National Regional Coordination office for the Pacific, UNESCO, UNICEF and USP. Some of the findings from the meeting were as follows:

ADB Project

- The partnership involves aggregation of a selected number of e-Learning resources, OER for secondary school STEM subjects; develop capacity-building programmes for teachers on the use of OER and to supply ICT devices to 20 schools to access OER.

UNDP and UNESCO

- Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative (SKSI) – is a rights-based initiative that guarantees access to information.
- Lifelong Learning Lab curated with OER for Samoa
- ICT in Education Samoa Project. This project started in 2021 and will end in 2023. It is aligned with SKSI and other projects on education in Samoa

USP-UNESCO

- Waka Moana Learning Hub – provides resources to teachers up to Year 8 in Math, Science and English.

UNICEF

- Develop materials from preschool to secondary in Kiribati, FSM, Samoa and Solomon Islands helping them create digital learning platforms and uploading teaching and learning materials.

Searchable directory/repository of ODFL programmes in the Pacific mapped

PACFOLD played a major role in gathering feedback from primary and secondary school teachers in the Pacific, on how the searchable directory/repository could be improved and useful for teachers. Apart from this, a consultation workshop on the Online ODL Course Catalogue was organised between August and September 2021 by PACFOLD and a consultant engaged to gain a perspective from teachers on how the prototype catalogue could be modified or re-designed to be suitable for their use. 278 teachers from nine countries participated in a survey, and 52 attended a workshop organised by PACFOLD to provide feedback on how the prototype catalogue could be modified or re-designed to be suitable for their use. Based on this information, a guide for service providers has been created.

OER in the context of USP and the Islands

The Pacific Partnership for ODFL has led to the development of the following as well:

Pacific OER Collections

1. "Provides technology to support the hosting of national Open Educational Resource (OER) collections for Commonwealth Pacific member states. Resources submitted to individual national collections will be syndicated through a Pacific Regional Collection website for reuse in the region."
2. One of the open courses, Digital Skills for OER Sharing, provides Teachers with guidance on how to create digital resources that are openly licensed. These resources are then catalogued in the Pacific OER Collection.

Digital skills for the Pacific

1. In order for our Pacific teachers to confidently use technology we must empower them with the necessary skills for OER creations, use of relevant technologies and consequently teach ODFL courses.
2. PACFOLD through the re-offering of courses for ODFL aims at doing this and will look at future collaborations with national institutions to further drive the need for upskilling our Teachers for ODFL.

Increasing Knowledge and Skills in Using OER in the Pacific

1. In the past, COL in collaboration with PACFOLD has hosted, facilitated and provided regional mentorship support for MOOCs on “Using Open Education Resources for Online Learning: An Introduction (OER4OL)”. Four iterations of these courses were particularly designed for teachers in developing country contexts to find and adapt open resources for teaching online due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.
2. A longitudinal Study conducted by PACFOLD after six months of offering the MOOC OER4OL in November 2021, showed that participants were generally aware of OER and were positively disposed towards the use of OER in education.

Pacific Open Courses

These Open courses are initially offered through partnership with OERu. PACFOLD as development partner has taken these open courses and adapted them and offered them to the region.

The adaptation enabled PACFOLD to:

1. Distribute a backup of the Moodle course to other institutions in the region to further adapt it to their context.
2. Provide advice to users in the region on how they can adapt such open courses.
3. Provide adaptable versions of learning materials that are OER if users only want certain components of the course.

Re-establish the community on PACFOLD

PACFOLD has been involved with promoting the use of OER and open licensing within the USP community especially during the Open Education (OE) week celebrations and specifically upon request from sections within USP. Awareness workshops on OER have been held at USP.

PACFOLD has been instrumental in promoting all COL supported MOOCs since 2019. While MOOCs are not technically considered OER, all the resources used in these MOOCs are OER.

As part of the Partnership for ODFL Project in the Pacific, PACFOLD will be supporting COL in the development and management of a regional tool for hosting OER. All the resources and assets that will be developed under this project will eventually sit with USP under a regional repository that will be managed by PACFOLD.

USP’s OER Policy

USP’s OER Policy has been designed keeping all USP’s member countries’ needs in mind. The key points include the following:

- As educational resources that are freely available, OER are to be preferred in the design and development of teaching, learning and reference material at the University.
- In recognition of the potentials of OER to widen access to, and improve the quality of learning and teaching at all levels, the production and use of OER will be a matter of priority at the University.
- The University will set up a mechanism for the creation of OER with open source software.
- The University will set up an open repository for the sharing of OER developed in the University. This repository shall be developed using an appropriate open source software and it will be managed by the University Library. An appropriate workflow mechanism as well as metadata structure shall be developed for this purpose.

The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF10)

The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF10) on Open Learning, co-hosted by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Athabasca University (AU), was held in Calgary in Canada between 14 and 16 September, 2022. The theme for this year's conference was Innovations for Educational Resilience. The University of the South Pacific (USP) was represented at this forum through the Centre for Flexible (CFL) Learning which hosts the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD); COL's regional centre in the Pacific. A team of five staff based at CFL attended the conference and presented papers based on the above theme. More details can be found at the following site: [INNOVATIONS-FOR-EDUCATIONAL-RESILIENCE.pdf \(usp.ac.fj\)](https://usp.ac.fj/innovations-for-educational-resilience.pdf)

Conclusion

The Oceania region has come a long way in terms of ensuring designing of quality ODF teaching material in recent times. Actually, the COVID-19 pandemic made the educationists in the region realize the challenges the region faced in terms of the gap and quality of what they delivered. With the closure of schools, universities and other training centres, no F2F teaching could be conducted. The option of offering courses by other modes was seen as options. However, the lack of confidence in designing such quality material for these modes was seen. USP with its partnership with CFL, COL through its regional centre; Pacfold and MFAT are putting in all the efforts to ensure that the quality of what is delivered meets international standards. Much still needs to be done in terms of supporting the efforts in the Oceania region due to its geographical, linguistic, infrastructural, and connectivity diversity. Support for training, researching and capacity building of teachers and institutions both local and regional are still necessary in terms of ensuring better quality of what is delivered to the various stakeholders in education and non-education sectors in the region. Measuring quality in online, open and distance Higher Education requires sound planning and commitment at an institutional level. There is a need to develop or adopt a universal quality assurance framework which responds to advanced emerging technologies and techniques which sits within the requirements of the particular country context. This means that any quality model for

benchmarking online education should be flexible and responsive to the local context and be globally recognized and there should be more emphasis placed on learning, engagement, analysis and outcomes.

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