



African Virtual University
Université Virtuelle Africaine
Universidade Virtual Africana

AVU POLICY BRIEF

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AFRICAN VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Research & Practice in Open, Distance & eLearning

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Digital publishing at the African Virtual University: Creating more opportunities for scholarly publishing for African ODeL researchers and implications for policy-making

Issue-at hand

Since the integration of Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL) into mainstream educational landscape in Africa in the 1990s, its impact on learning and teaching processes and environments is still a relatively unknown territory. This is partly due to the paucity of a strong body of research on the multiple dimensions of ODeL use to enhance access to quality and equitable educational opportunities by many on the continent. But this is not only specific to ODeL. Research and publishing in Africa have been a perennial challenge for the continent's higher education institutions. Indigenous scholarly journals in all subjects are far and in between and have been characterized as lacking in many aspects. Furthermore, and in the particular case of ODeL, this situation is also making it difficult for policy-makers and other key players and stakeholders such as schools, universities and learning institutions in general to have at their disposal a robust body of evidence that can be used for informed decision-making on the best use of ODeL for greater impact. This is why AVU's initiative to establish a scholarly journal solely dedicated to research on ODeL is a welcome development for accomplished and emerging researchers on the topic in Africa.

Policy implications of the Journal of Research in Open, Distance and eLearning (JRODeL)

JRODeL seeks to institutionalize a culture of high quality and relevant ODeL research in Africa that contributes to decision making and effective implementation of reforms and practice. It is a quarterly online publication that will only accept peer-reviewed articles in English, French and Portuguese that feature original research on theory and/or best practice in open and distance and eLearning. This rigorous quality control mechanism ensures that researchers and their institutions mobilize adequate resources and time to produce good quality research. This can be realized through institutional policies that promote a conducive environment for research and professional development for faculty. To that effect, AVU has

developed detailed guides for “**writing your research and practice papers**” and “**reviewing the submissions**” that are available for researchers and reviewers respectively. It has also developed a **Research Framework/Agenda** in order to guide researchers in terms of the most important as well as neglected areas of research. AVU is also acquiring capacity to disseminate research through its international conferences and by establishing a clearinghouse for Open Educational Resources (OERs) and production of policy briefs targeting leaders of institutions and policy-makers.

In terms of relevance of the thematic issues addressed, JRODeL will also accommodate Guest-edited special issues on a theme or topic of current interest to practitioners and policy-makers. It will feature invited articles from thought leaders on their insights on new and emerging issues and developments in ODeL and include short notes or reports of proposed and ongoing research projects or completed projects. ODeL Practitioners will be invited to contribute short notes on best practices, innovative interventions, processes and outcomes. JRODeL will also include notes reflecting opinion pieces and reviews of recently published scholarly books or software of relevance to open and distance learning as well as video presentations on research topics of interest.

Recommendations

African universities should encourage their faculty working on ODeL activities to contribute to JRODeL by:

- Creating an institutional environment conducive for research which is characterized by policies that entice faculty to develop an annual research agenda as part of their professional development and providing them with the resources and time they need to write by, for example, reducing their teaching load;
- Introducing workshops and seminars for both faculty and graduate students where they can share and analyze articles published in previous JRODeL; and
- Sponsoring the authors of best articles or innovative practices published in JRODeL to attend the International Conference of the AVU and other events/forums where they can present their work to other scholars.

With regard to African ministries of education, they should

- Accredit specific journals for reference in terms of the quality of research published in them;
- Reward researchers and their institutions by allocating funds or credits when they do research & publish in journal accredited by the ministry as it is done in South Africa;
- Capacitate AVU focal points within ministries to be proficient and informed readers of academic and practitioner journals such as JRODeL so that they can tease out relevant findings for policy use.

References

AVU (2014). AVU Submission and Assessment Guide for the Journal of Research in Open, Distance and eLearning. Research & Development. African Virtual University

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For more information, please visit AVU JRODeL Website:

<http://journal.avu.org/index.php/JRODeL>

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Working Across Africa

Beyond Technological, Language and Cultural Barriers

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