

## From Policies to Implementation of Open Distance Learning in Rwanda: A Genealogical and Governmentality Analysis

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyse the interplay between policy formulation and implementation in terms of the historical practices of open distance learning (ODL) in Rwanda. This paper draws on the Foucauldian genealogical and governmentality analysis. The paper examines government aspirations as depicted in policy statements starting from 2001, a year aligning with the beginning of the Government of Rwanda's Vision 2020. This vision aims at transforming the country from an agrarian to a knowledge-based and technology-led society. This study analysed discourses emerging from policy statements on ODL and scrutinised how government aspirations were translated into concrete actions. Moreover, the study examined the rationality governing ODL practice and explored governing techniques adopted in relation to ODL discourses. The findings reveal that, though policies extol ODL potential to increase access, relevance and inclusion in education, and though they highlight the need to improve quality in higher education through affordable, scalable and sustainable technologies, implementing institutions tend to adopt contentious approaches to cope with a dual mode. The study makes some concrete suggestions to close the gap between ODL policy formulation and implementation.

**Keywords:** genealogy, governmentality, higher education, open distance learning, policy analysis, Rwanda

### Introduction

The Government of Rwanda recognises that open distance learning (ODL) should be used in higher education in order to offer a second chance to those who have been unable to benefit from conventional higher education. ODL is also considered as a means to increase access to education for students from under-served remote areas (Ministry of Education, 2008). In fact, the number of students wishing to pursue their studies in higher education rose sharply over the last 20 years: student enrolment shifted from 4,100 in 1994 to 90,803 in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016c). According to statistics from the Higher Education Council (Ministry of Education, 2015b), the majority of students in higher learning institutions (HLIs) enrolled in day programmes were estimated to be 62% in 2014. During the same year, evening and weekend programmes represented 36%, while students in e-learning programmes were approximately 2%. This tremendous increase in student enrolments in higher education was mainly due to a successful implementation of a fee-free nine-year basic education in place since 2003. The demand for higher education was expected to rise even higher with the implementation of 12-year basic education that was introduced in 2012. Different government policies and strategic plans have recommended ODL as one of the strategies that can address this growing demand for higher education. This study investigates how policies and strategic plans have been translated into concrete actions by ODL-implementing agencies, and by challenges,



gaps and perspectives. In other words, this study analyses the interplay between policy formulation and implementation in terms of the historical practices of ODL in Rwanda.

## Theoretical Framework

Experience has shown that countries in the world adopt different strategies in order to increase access to higher education through ODL. Some countries create dedicated ODL institutions to offer programmes of study at a distance. Such institutions depend on economies of scale to become financially self-sustaining. The outstanding examples of such institutions are open universities and some of them stand out as mega universities and have more than 100,000 students. Some countries set up virtual universities, which vary from being strictly universities that offer programmes online to just departments offering a programme online. The African Virtual University falls under this category. Some other countries prefer a dual mode with a combination of delivery methods such as online, face-to-face and distance learning. Some universities put in place departments dedicated to ODL with their own academic staff to deliver programmes. However, some other universities establish a small unit with the main responsibility to coordinate ODL activities at the university level. Such a unit does not have its own staff to run courses through ODL, but it relies on other departments' staff already offering courses in a traditional, face-to-face mode. University of Rwanda (UR) adopted this last option. Thus, this section will reflect a theoretical ODL institutional configuration of such a unit within a university.

Mintzberg (1978; 1992; 1994) suggests considering universities as professional organisations. Accordingly, such organisations comprise five parts (Figure 1). At the base is the *operating core*, within which experts or professionals, including lecturers and researchers, perform the basic work of the organisation, namely teaching, research and community outreach activities. Mintzberg (1978) explains that the *operating core* is the key and the biggest part of a professional organisation. He asserts that the prime coordination mechanism in professional organisations is based on the standardisation of skills, whereas, emphasis is on the training of specialists, horizontal job specialisation, and vertical and horizontal decentralisation.

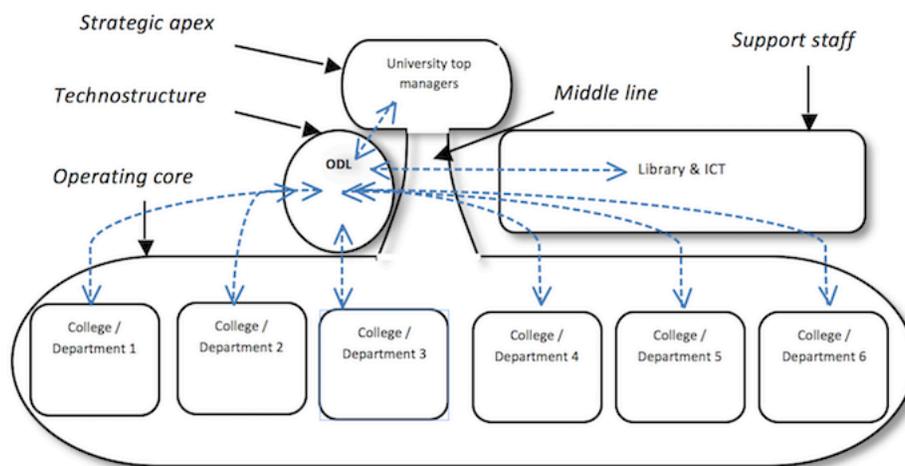


Figure 1: The five parts of a professional organisation, adapted from Mintzberg (1978).

At the very top of a university hierarchy, vice-chancellors and their deputies form what Mintzberg (1992) calls the *strategic apex*. The duties of these top managers lie in ensuring that the organisation achieves its mission in an effective way. They address both the needs of the environment inside and outside the university. Other administrative managers who link and coordinate information from the strategic apex to the *operating core* make up the *middle line*. Then, the *support staff* at a university is also a considerably important part. *Support staff* is composed of a great number of units all specialised to provide support to the functioning of the *operating core* indirectly. These include, for example, a library, a bookshop, computer and printing facilities, student restaurants, a financial department, estate units, and a cafeteria.

To the left of the middle line stands the *technostructure*. In dual-mode institutions offering programmes in distance education and face-to-face formats, this part of a university is composed of analysts and experts, who design, plan, formalise and standardise the work of lecturers and researchers. Figure 1 illustrates the flow of information between an ODL unit and other related departments, and shows how ODL analysts and experts are empowered by the top managers to whom they report. Mintzberg (1978) argues that analysts and experts of the *technostructure* benefit from a *selective decentralisation* in order to be able to exercise their expertise and influence across all academic departments of the *operating core* by designing, planning and/or changing their work and by training academic staff who does the main work of the organisation.

In other words, the *technostructure* and the *operating core* play different roles in a professional organisation. Horizontal job specialisation within the *operating core* does not allow units located at the same horizontal level to coordinate the work of each other (Mintzberg, 1994). Lunenburg (2012, p. 5) explains why: “University professors [and] teachers perform in classroom settings in relative isolation from colleagues and superiors, while remaining in close contact with their students.” This statement can explain partly why hosting *technostructure* units within the *operating core* makes the former conflicting and ineffective vis-à-vis other parallel units of the latter.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

Drawing from the Foucauldian tool box, two concepts are central to the design of this study: *genealogy* and *governmentality*. The former emanates from a Latin term *genaea*, which means birth. From the Foucauldian perspective, genealogy reflects the history, understood as non-linear trajectories, of interruptions and irregularities (Foucault, 1977). In other words, the focus is on determining situations that shape the history of the present. Andersson and Fejes (2005, p. 599) put it as follows: “Genealogy is an analysis of ideas in the present time. These are traced back in time and the circumstances in which they emerged are analysed.” In this line of reasoning, this paper used genealogy to examine policy statements concerning ODL in Rwanda. ODL discourses emerging from these statements, namely accessibility, relevance, quality, scale, sustainability, affordability, technology, and inclusion were identified.

The second concept from the Foucauldian tool box that guided this analytical process is governmentality. It entails a “decentralised way of governing through institutions and the subjects” (Andersson & Fejes, 2005, p. 600). In other words, governmentality implies a process of exploring aspirations/rationalities on how governing is to be conducted. In this paper, what to govern are ODL

systems. The point is to understand how implementing institutions lead ODL systems or how they behave in relation to policy statements as a set of norms expressed by policymakers. The analytical process articulates, therefore, what and how to govern, depending on “a range of multiple tactics” in play (Foucault, 2003, p. 237). According to Dean (1999), the rationalities of governing involve different techniques/tactics that form people’s conduct and this is conveyed through their thoughts, aspirations, beliefs and behaviours vis-à-vis their regimes of practice and institutions.

In this paper, discourses were used as starting analytical points and at the same time, they were explored while trying to answer the following questions:

- What are the discourses emerging from policy statements on ODL?
- How were these discourses constructed in ODL practice?
- What rationality of governing is the ODL practice based on?
- What governing techniques are adopted in relation to these discourses?

## **Procedures**

The empirical material was composed of 13 policy and strategic plan documents formulated from 2001, a year corresponding to the launch of the Government of Rwanda’s *Vision 2020*. These documents were categorised in three main groups. The first group comprised five documents on different national socio-economic areas including education (Table 1, No 1-5). The second group contained five documents on education sector strategic plans, policies and procedures reflecting ODL (Table 1, No 6-10). Finally, the third group consisted of three experts’ reports, one on higher education financing and the two others on a project to set up ODL institution in Rwanda (Table 1, No 10-13).

The following steps guided the analytical process of empirical material: the process started with an extensive reading of policy documents, strategic implementation plans and reports in order to scrutinise systematically policy aspirations concerning ODL. Fejes (2005) compares genealogy to a family tree whereby someone tries to determine its branches from a retrospective perspective. Similarly, I tried to understand the past through the present context taking into consideration that, in the Foucauldian perspective, the reality is embedded in the text analysed. I have analysed political thoughts underpinning government expectations vis-à-vis ODL on the one hand, and the techniques used by ODL implementing institutions in their efforts to translate these aspirations into concrete actions on the other hand. Putting this differently, the first step in using the Foucauldian tool box consisted in identifying the ODL discourses conveyed through policy documents, then studying how these discourses shape the current practice, and, finally, examining different ways ODL was governed in the present context. By using genealogy and governmentality, I tried to trace changes in the political thoughts and the circumstances of ODL practices over a five-year period, i.e., from 2012 to 2016.

## Findings

### ODL Discourses Emerging from Policy Statements

Looking closely into how ODL discourses are related in different policies and reports analysed (Table 1), two categories of discourses are identified. The first category is composed of accessibility, quality, relevance and technology. This category implies that ODL is considered as a technology that can contribute to the expansion of access and provision of relevant and quality education. The second category relates to the four remaining ODL discourses, namely affordability, scale, sustainability and inclusion. This category conveys a more technocratic aspect of ODL in practice.

**Table 1: ODL Discourses Across Policy Documents and Reports**

#	Policy documents and reports	Accessibility	Quality	Relevance	Affordability	Scale	Sustainability	Technology	Inclusion
1	Vision 2020	x	x	x				x	
2	EDPRS II	x						x	
3	NICI III	x	x					x	
4	SMART Rwanda Master Plan	x	x					x	
5	7YGP	x						x	
6	ESSP	x	x					x	
7	ICT in Education Policy	x	x					x	x
8	ICT in Education Master Plan	x			x			x	x
9	National ODeL Policy	x	x	x	x		x	x	
10	Code of practice for ODeL provision		x					x	
11	Task force on higher education financing	x	x				x	x	
12	Task force report on Open University	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
13	Working group report on ODL	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 1 illustrates clearly that the discourse of technology is present in the 13 policy documents and reports analysed. Accessibility and quality are mentioned in 12 and 10 documents respectively. Relevance, affordability, sustainability and inclusion are cited in four documents while scale is present in two technical documents, namely an *inception report from the taskforce on the Rwandan Open University* and a working group report on an *operational approach and costs for the College of ODL in Rwanda*. All the eight ODL discourses are referred to in these two last reports. All discourses except scale are cited in the *National ODL Policy* (Ministry of Education, 2016b).

The following first two sections will explore how the ODL discourses were shaped in different policy documents and how they were constructed in practice. This reflection is conducted in conjunction with an analysis of different techniques used to govern ODL in practice. The third section will focus on an ODL institutional framework as one of the key techniques used to implement government aspirations. Finally, the findings will be discussed.

### **ODL – An Enabling Technology to Increase Access, Quality and Relevance**

The 13 documents analysed consider ODL as a technology that will enable speeding up capacity development of Rwandan citizens to make them skilled human capital who, in their turn, can accelerate the socio-economic development of the country. For example, in 2001, Rwanda launched its *Vision 2020*, a policy that was intended to change the country from an agrarian to a knowledge-based and ICT-led, middle-income society by 2020. The policy highlights that distance learning will play a central role in increasing access to quality education tailored to the needs of the country: “To promote efficiency and continuous upgrading of skills, appropriate programs will be launched in the national institutions aimed at on-the-job training, in-service training and distant learning” (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000, p. 13). The *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2* (EDPRS 2) does not explicitly refer to ODL but it states that the country will “leverage ICTs in education in order to accelerate skills development” (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2013, p. 71).

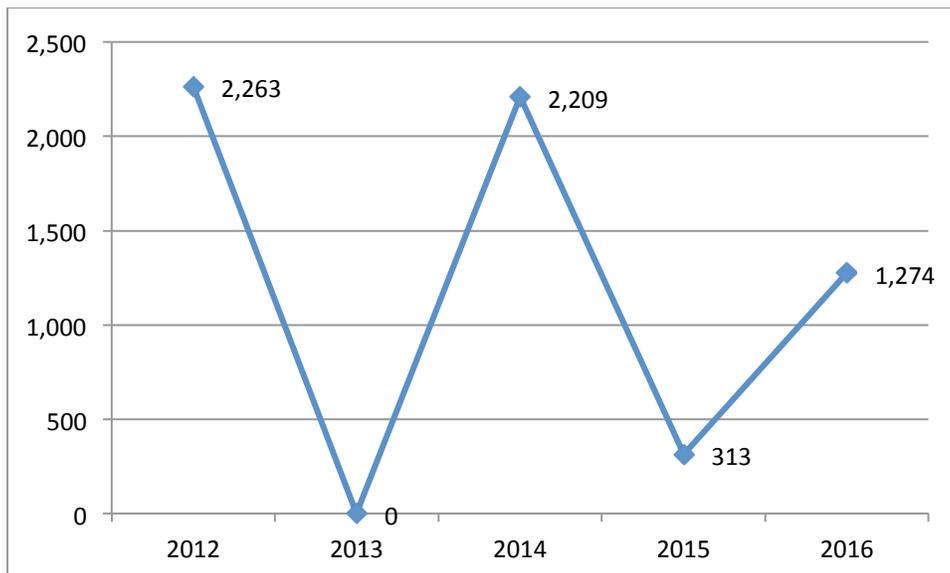
As a strategy to achieve *Vision 2020*, Rwanda set up four five-year, rolling *National Information and Communication Infrastructure* (NICI) plans starting from 2001. NICI III (NICI–2015 Plan, 2011–2016) and *SMART Rwanda Master Plan* (2016–2020) place emphasis on service delivery (Government of Rwanda, 2001; 2005; 2010; 2015). The education sector organised skills development through six main projects including ODL. The purpose of ODL in NICI III (NICI – 2015 Plan) was to provide access to lifelong learning opportunities and to increase quality education for all: “This project aims to leverage ICTs in order to provide second-chance educational opportunities to all citizens through Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) programmes that further improve the quality of education in Rwanda” (Government of Rwanda, 2010, p. 33). *SMART Rwanda Master Plan* (2016 – 2020) extended the same project for the next five years (Government of Rwanda, 2015). One of the targets of the *ICT in Education Master Plan* was to double the number of students in higher education through ODL between 2015 and 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2015a). The same document stated that the government would put in place accessible and assistive technologies to ensure students with disabilities would have access to quality education.

The period of the *7-Year Government Programme* (7YGP) coincided with the second term of the president Paul Kagame, 2010–2017 (Repubulika y’u Rwanda, 2014). During this period, the government planned to reform the delivery mode in the education system in terms of ODL: 30% of subjects in secondary schools and 50% of programmes in higher education were to be delivered through ODL between 2010 and 2017. Similarly, the *Education Sector Strategic Plan* (ESSP) considered ODL as an innovative strategy that could contribute to meeting increased demand in access and quality in higher education (Higher Education Council, nd; Education, 2013).

The documents mentioned above demonstrate that the Government of Rwanda is aware of the benefits of ODL in terms of increasing access, quality and relevance to education. However, some policy statements on ODL sound too ambitious. For example, while the *ICT in Education Master Plan* envisions doubling higher education student enrolments in only four years, it does not indicate the modalities or the conditions to be put in place in order to translate this aspiration into a reality. This can be interpreted as if policy statements were sometimes formulated without taking into consideration the context of the country.

Different institutions made some efforts to attend to the government aspirations vis-à-vis ODL. For example, one of the first ODL initiatives in Rwanda was called the Distance Training Programme, translated in Kinyarwanda as IYAKURE (literally meaning “offered from distance”). The Distance Training Programme was introduced in 2001 through the former Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), currently the College of Education. At the beginning, the programme aimed at upgrading in-service secondary school teachers in pedagogical skills (quality and relevance) and also at alleviating the shortage of teachers (access). When public higher learning institutions merged in 2013, Kigali Institute of Education and Rukara College of Education merged and formed the College of Education under the University of Rwanda. Thus, the School of ODL was created within the University of Rwanda-College of Education to coordinate ODL initiatives within the institution.

To date, the School of ODL offers six diplomas in education programmes through the Distance Training Programme, namely Mathematics-Physics-Education, Biology-Chemistry-Education, French-English-Education, Kinyarwanda-English-Education, History-Geography-Education, and Entrepreneurship. Since the creation of the University of Rwanda in 2013, the number of in-service teachers enrolled in the programme has oscillated over different years, as illustrated in Figure 2 taken from Mukama (2016).



**Figure 2: In-service Teacher Enrolments in the Distance Training Programme, 2012 – 2016.**

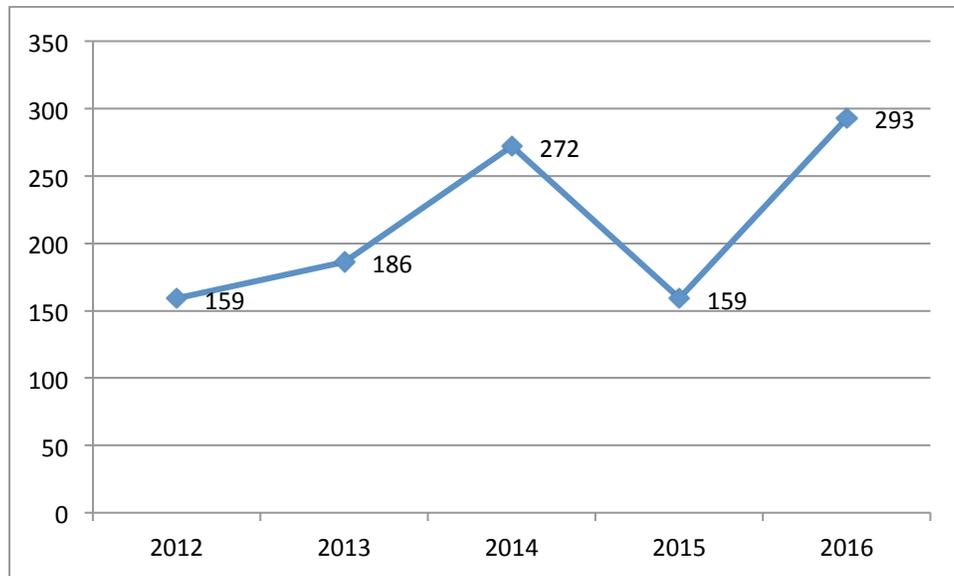
Figure 2 shows sharp variations in accessibility across different years: the highest enrolment took place in 2012 with 2,263 in-service teachers who registered in the programme. The year 2013 coincides with the launch of the University of Rwanda as one public university; it seems that there was no

intake during this year. Figure 2 shows also that in-service teacher enrolments increased again in 2014, up to 2,209, and sharply dropped to 313 in 2015 before it rose again to 1,274 in 2016. The reasons for such sudden changes in student enrolments were not clearly elucidated in the reports analysed.

Ndayambaje (2016) conducted a study on the relationship between learner support and internal efficiency in the Distance Training Programme. He analysed student statistics from 2009 to 2015. He noted some worrying repetition and dropout rates in the Distance Training Programme especially in science stream combinations. For example, Ndayambaje (2016, p. 187) revealed that in the combination of Mathematics-Physics-Education, the repetition rate was around 59% in 2010; 24% in 2012; 61% in 2014 and 43% in 2015. The dropout rate in the same diploma programme oscillated over different years and reached approximately 25% in 2015. According to Ndayambaje (2016), the combinations of French-English-Education and History-Geography-Education recorded the lowest repetition rate of approximately 17% in 2015 while, in the same year, the lowest dropout rate was 8% in the combination of Kinyarwanda-English-Education.

Drawing from the variation of student enrolments, the repetition and dropout rates in the Distance Training Programme, it can be inferred that this programme does not seem to be a reliable technology in terms of access, quality and relevance to education. In their study on the Distance Training Programme, Ndayambaje, Bimenyimana, & Ndahayo (2013) revealed the weaknesses of the programme with the following points: failure to use innovative technologies, limited resources such as library access and textbooks, poor record and learner support systems, inadequate number of staff and facilities, and high student dropout and failure rates. The Distance Training Programme experienced other operational challenges as discussed in the next sections.

The second initiative introduced in the attempt to implement the government's ODL aspirations was a Pan-African e-Network project known as Tele-Education. This project was formally launched in 2009 with the purpose to build capacity of the people of Africa through Tele-Education and Tele-Medicine using facilities and expertise from Indian universities and hospitals. In Rwanda, Tele-Education was hosted at the former Kigali Institute of Education, and later, in 2013, it was handed over to the University of Rwanda. The leading and coordinating country of the Pan-African e-Network project was the Government of India. For example, students in Rwanda could register in a limited number of certificate, diploma, or master's course programmes offered from Indian universities, namely Indira Gandhi National Open University (Bachelor of Tourism Studies), Amity University (Post Graduate Diploma in Information Technology, Post Graduate Diploma in French Language, Diploma in Business Management, and Diploma in Information Technology), University of Madras (Master of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Business Administration), and Birla Institute of Science and Technology (Certificate of Database and Information Systems, Certificate of Electronics and Instrumentation). Figure 3, taken from the *Baseline study on the status of ODL in Rwanda* (Mukama, 2016), shows that the highest student enrolments registered in Tele-Education from 2012 to 2016 was 293 students. The lowest enrolment was recorded in 2012 and 2015, with 159 students for each year.



**Figure 3: Student Enrolment in the Department of Tele-Education, 2012 – 2016.**

Given the Government of Rwanda’s aspiration to deliver at least 50% of programmes through ODL by 2017 in higher education and to double higher education student enrolments by 2018, Figure 2 and 3 demonstrate that a lot needs to be done to increase access, improve quality and relevance to education. The *Baseline study on the status of ODL in Rwanda* (Mukama, 2016) indicates some constraints of Tele-Education in the country, including low-bandwidth Internet connectivity and limited capacity of the learning space in terms of seats, rooms, and ICT infrastructure. Due to a small local Internet bandwidth, the system was not able to accommodate teaching and learning materials for many students at the same time.

The third initiative that was introduced in order to increase access, quality and relevance to education was a blended learning programme for nurses. In 2012, the Ministry of Health initiated a blended learning programme for upgrading associate nurses working in the national health system (A2 nurses) to registered nurses with a university diploma (A1 Level). The programme started in five schools of nursing and midwifery (Kabgayi, Rwamagana, Nyagatare, Byumba and Kibungo) that were then reporting to the Ministry of Health. The formation of the University of Rwanda as a single public university in 2013 coincided with the transfer of these five schools from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Education. These schools then became part of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Rwanda. The five schools followed a blended learning mode: 60% of programmes were offered through a Moodle-based Learning Management System; 40% were dedicated to face-to-face sessions. Students had to meet at the above-mentioned schools for seminars and supervised practice. The *Baseline study on the status of ODL in Rwanda* (Mukama, 2016) reports that student enrolment in the blended learning programme at the schools of nursing and midwifery increased gradually from 168 in 2012 to 490 in 2014. The figures then decreased to 319 in 2015 and to 96 in 2016.

The fourth initiative introduced in Rwanda as a strategy to increase access to quality and relevant higher education and training was the African Virtual University (AVU). Phase 1 of the AVU (2005–2010) set up two learning ODL centres, one in the former National University of Rwanda, the other in

the former Kigali Institute of Science and Technology. Although four ICT-integrated Bachelors of Education in mathematics and science degrees, and 73 modules of mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, ICT basic skills, and ICT integration in education and professional courses were created in Phase 1, the *Baseline study on the status of ODL in Rwanda* (Mukama, 2016) could not find out the statistics for students in AVU programmes. In the AVU multinational Phase 2 Project, the ODL centre of the University of Rwanda–College of Science and Technology was renovated and rehabilitated. A diploma/bachelor's degree in applied computer science was validated by this college. At the time of writing this paper, I was not able to identify the outcome of this programme.

### **ODL – Catalysing Affordability, Scale, Sustainability, and Inclusion**

The more policies and related documents are narrowed to ODL practice, the more ODL discourses are disclosed. In addition to the four discourses mentioned in the previous section, sustainability is also cited in other documents: the *ICT in Education Policy* highlights the need to build capacity and competency in the production of appropriate content, and the training of instructors in ODL (Ministry of Education, 2016a). The NICI III had planned to train 100 ODL instructors and the target was to produce an annual output of at least 10,000 graduates through ODL between 2011 and 2015 (Government of Rwanda, 2010). However, this document did not determine any mechanisms that could serve to achieve such an output. Hence, not only was this annual output not produced, but also it was difficult to identify and follow-up institutional related responsibility, accountability, and ownership.

The task force on higher education financing established in January 2012 by the Ministry of Education recommended the creation of an Open University of Rwanda (Ministry of Education, 2012). This proposal was formulated as one of the mechanisms that could contribute to addressing high demand, equity and quality in higher education while responding to government financial constraints. As far as ODL is concerned, the *ICT in Education Master Plan* acknowledges that ICT will help Rwanda to build an ODL system that will allow increasing access to higher education at a cost that is within the means of students and parents (Ministry of Education, 2015a). In this connection, the Distance Training Programme was initiated in the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi that was perpetrated in 1994. Until 2006, this programme was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). Afterwards, it became one of the regular programmes offered by the Kigali Institute of Education. This programme was then sponsored by the Government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education. It was free of charge but distance learners were requested to pay a registration fee of Rwf 35,000 and to buy learning materials equivalent to Rwf 120,000 per year.

The *Baseline study on the status of ODL in Rwanda* reveals that the four ODL modes of delivery embraced by the University of Rwanda were inherited and initially funded from outside (Mukama, 2016): the Distance Training Programme initiated and funded through DfID; Tele-Education funded through a Pan-African e-Network project; blended learning for nurses initiated and funded through the Ministry of Health; and the AVU, a Pan-African intergovernmental organisation funded by different sponsors including the African Development Bank. This configuration raises some questions. Once the initial funding was phased out, the university kept running the same systems in the same way, while the context had changed. For example, these four modes of delivery continued to be managed as standalone initiatives and the university did not make out of them one unified and

integrated ODL system. So far, the Distance Training Programme has continued to focus exclusively on upgrading the educational level of under-qualified, in-service, secondary school teachers, and has not yet been scaled up to other potential students from other streams of study. This programme continued as a print-based, distance learning model, while new technologies have emerged. Thus, the Distance Training Programme seems to be very expensive and suffers, therefore, from the high costs of textbook production, printing, and updating old texts. Tele-Education continued to be a project that depended on the expertise of Indian universities in terms of capacity building, ICT infrastructure, programme delivery, technology competencies and awarding power. The blended learning programme in the schools of nursing was not under the supervision of the School of ODL, though, the latter was supposed to coordinate all ODL initiatives within the University of Rwanda. It seems that there is more compliance with ODL systems inherited from outside than ownership and proactive action to create an affordable, scalable, sustainable, inclusive and responsive ODL system.

The configuration of ODL modes at the University of Rwanda raises another problem, lack of flexibility. For example, across all the four ODL modes of delivery mentioned above, distance learners were required to register per year and per programme, rather than per module. All learners had to undertake the same six modules each semester without any possibility to choose elective modules. Any cohort of distance learners had to start and finish the programme at the same time. Lack of flexibility may explain partly the high repetition and dropout rates in the Distance Training Programme as referred to above.

In March 2012, the Ministry of Education set up a task force to assess the feasibility of creating a College of ODL within UR. In 2013, a working group on ODL was established and produced an ODL operational framework and a related business plan. The reports of these two committees indicate that ODL would be implemented gradually from a pilot project to a larger-scale one in order to ensure the lasting impact of the programme. These reports proposed ODL transformative solutions that would allow cost-effective and affordable programmes. These are the only two documents that advocate for scale (Mukama, et al., 2012; 2013). Though the *ICT in Education Master Plan* indicated that the Government would avail itself of assistive technologies to support learners with disabilities, there was no indication that these technologies have been used in ODL so far.

### **Institutional Framework as a Technique to Govern ODL**

The *ICT in Education Policy* approved by the Cabinet on 27 February 2016 highlights that an “Open Distance Education University will be up and running” in the second phase of the implementation of this policy, i.e., from 2016 – 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2016a, p. 9). At the time of writing this paper this target has remained just an aspiration. However, such a statement raises a question: What is the relationship between ODL policy aspirations and the implementing authority? In fact, the *Baseline study on ODL in Rwanda* identifies three main levels of intervention in ODL in Rwanda, ranging from policy development to regulation and implementation (Mukama, 2016).

1. *The Ministry of Education* has jurisdiction in primary, secondary, professional, technical education, and higher education. It has oversight responsibility for policy development, and monitoring and evaluation. It also has the power to delegate responsibility, and to review the roles and responsibilities of supporting institutions or organisations that have a stake in ODL initiatives in Rwanda.

2. *The Rwanda Education Board (REB)* has the Department of ICT in Education and ODL, responsible for the overall implementation and supervision of ICT in education and ODL activities, including provision of infrastructure and technical support, capacity development, teacher training relating to ICT in education and ODL. REB jurisdiction is limited to 12-Year Basic Education (pre-primary, primary and secondary education). In the REB structure, the Department of ICT in Education and ODL is located at the same horizontal level as the other five departments of the institution, namely, Education Quality and Standard; Examination and Accreditation; Higher Education Student Loans; Curriculum and Pedagogical Materials; and Teacher Development and Management.
3. *The University of Rwanda* created the School of ODL under the College of Education. This School has an oversight responsibility for ODL provision at the University of Rwanda. It has the mandate to provide an administrative and academic expertise to colleges, schools and departments offering academic programmes through ODL or just through a dual mode. At the time of writing this paper, the University of Rwanda was composed of six colleges: the College of Agriculture, Animal Sciences and Veterinary Medicine; the College of Arts and Social Sciences; the College of Business and Economics; College of Medicine and Health Sciences; the College of Science and Technology; and the College of Education. Within the College of Education, the School of ODL was located at the same horizontal level as the three other ones, namely, the School of Education; the School of Lower Secondary Education; and the School of Inclusive and Special Needs Education. As referred to earlier, the mandate of the School of ODL was to design, plan, formalise and standardise the work of academic staff and researchers from all colleges, schools and departments across the university. Conversely, the mandate of other schools, such as the School of Lower Secondary Education, was to attend to the key mission of the institution, that is, teaching, research and community service. Taking into consideration their mandates, the School of ODL falls under *technostructure*, while the School of Lower Secondary Education and other similar schools and centres are units under the *operating core*.

Drawing from the configuration of a professional organisation as proposed by Mintzberg (1994), the dynamics of an ODL institutional framework are determined by its mandate. Accordingly, if the mandate is mainly based on planning, formalising or standardising the work of other departments in terms of ODL, then this institution could be more effective if it was managed as a *technostructure*. This implies that an ODL unit, according to the institutional framework adopted in Rwanda, needs to be endowed with a *selective decentralisation*, i.e., delegation of decision-making power to operate across all colleges, schools and departments. In practice, this selective decentralisation of ODL units has been impossible since the latter are located in the *operating core* either at the same horizontal level (e.g., Rwanda Education Board's departments) or just under the level of other units (e.g., the School of ODL vis-à-vis the University of Rwanda's colleges) for which they have the mandate to plan and formalise ODL initiatives. In other words, setting up a strong coordination mechanism of ODL initiatives in Rwanda seems to be one of the priorities to attend to in order to meet the government aspirations in this area.

Mukamusoni (2006) and Mukama, et al. (2013) point out another organisation-related concern about clash of priorities between ODL and face-to-face programmes. The School of ODL does not have its

own academic staff working within the School to develop programmes and learning material and to teach them. The School relies on other academic staff from other schools and departments to deliver Distance Training Programme courses in relation to their expertise. However, these courses are mostly extra and represent unpaid workload for academic staff. The ODL working environment is consequently set in such a way that academic staff give priority to conventional programmes to the detriment of the Distance Training Programme.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to analyse the interplay between policy formulation and implementation in terms of the historical practices of ODL in Rwanda. To this end, discourses emerging from policy statements on ODL were analysed and the way they shaped the implementation was explored. Finally, the rationality governing ODL practice and governing techniques adopted in relation to ODL discourses were examined.

From the policy documents, ODL in Rwanda is considered as one of the technologies that can contribute to the development of skilled human capital able to boost the socio-economic development of the country. Some best practices were learnt from this study: the policy documents analysed were, not only elaborated to inform the development of ODL practice and create a common understanding between stakeholders, but also they were consistent in considering ODL as an innovative strategy that can help address high demand in education while improving quality and relevance to education. Moreover, the Government of Rwanda was aware of the potential of ODL to reduce the cost of education, and offer scalable, sustainable, and inclusive programmes.

The question is how ODL policies and strategic plans have been implemented. A number of initiatives have been introduced. The Department of ICT in Education and ODL and the School of ODL have been created to coordinate ODL initiatives within their respective zone of intervention. However, some gaps between the formulation of policies and their implementation were identified and can be summarised in the following points:

- Some policy aspirations for ODL seem to be too ambitious and the policy documents analysed do not indicate conditions that need to be established in order to translate these aspirations into concrete actions. This mismatch between some government expectations and the reality on the ground can be interpreted as if policy statements were sometimes formulated without taking into consideration the context of the country. Additionally, the lack of specification of enabling mechanisms in policy formulation did not help identify and follow-up on institutional related responsibility, accountability, and ownership in terms of ODL implementation.
- Some ODL initiatives, especially at the University of Rwanda, have been inherited from outsiders and were implemented as a blueprint. This situation may have led this institution to adopt more compliance with ODL systems inherited from outside than cultivating ownership and a proactive action to create one unified and integrated ODL system that is affordable, scalable, sustainable, inclusive, flexible and responsive.
- The current institutional framework does not seem to match the governance of ODL as expressed in different policy documents. It seems that setting up a strong coordination

mechanism of ODL initiatives in Rwanda would be one of the priorities to attend to in order to meet the government aspirations in this area.

To put these highlights in context, one for the targets, for example, of the *ICT in Education Master Plan* was to double student enrolments in higher education through ODL in four years only, i.e., between 2015 and 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2015a). The *7-Year Government Programme* had projected that 50% of higher education programmes were to be delivered through ODL between 2010 and 2017 (Repubulika y'u Rwanda, 2014). The *ICT in Education Policy* planned to establish an "Open Distance Education University" in the second phase of the implementation of this policy, i.e., from 2016 – 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2016a, p. 9). Such policy statements sound innovative but they would require a high level of readiness, and creative and unconventional governing techniques would have to be achieved within the timeline determined. This study highlights the need to establish dynamic interaction between policymakers and ODL implementing institutions in formulating realistic ODL policies and implantation strategic plans, taking into account the context, institutional readiness, enabling mechanisms, responsibilities, accountability and ownership.

The findings of this study have demonstrated that the University of Rwanda, as the single public university and as one of the key ODL implementing institutions in Rwanda, tried to cope with four modes of ODL delivery inherited from outside: the Distance Training Programme initiated and funded through DfID; Tele-Education as a Pan-African e-Network project; a blended learning system for nurses, a project that was started by the Ministry of Health; and the AVU programme funded through this Pan-African intergovernmental organisation. As mentioned earlier, this configuration was marked by compliance with ODL systems inherited from other institutions and by the lack of flexibility. To close the gap, this study suggests a shift towards a proactive action consisting in creating an affordable, scalable, sustainable, inclusive, responsive and flexible ODL system. Thus, mastering the technology could be one of the key components an institution needs to meet in order to implement ODL successfully. Bush and Middlewood explain the conditions of success in a technology-rich environment: "Even in an era increasingly dominated by technology, what differentiates effective and ineffective organisations are the quality and commitment of the people who work there" (Bush & Middlewood, 1997, p. viii). This proposed integrated system would, therefore, require appropriate expertise to make it work effectively. The system may take into consideration flexibility in terms of entry – to accommodate catch-up programmes that can allow students below the degree level to qualify for entry requirements; flexibility in terms of timing and rate of progress – to deal with fluctuating finances, and fluctuating demands on time; flexibility in study patterns – to allow students to fit their studies within their normal lives with the least possible disruption; flexibility in progression through study areas – to allow students to choose elective modules and take advantage of new knowledge and skills as they emerge and become important in the labour market; and flexibility in exit awards and re-entry possibilities – to allow students to gain an advantage from their partial studies and return to take them further or complete them whenever appropriate.

Finally, according to the theoretical framework developed in this paper and based on their mandates, both the Department of ICT in Education and ODL at REB and the School of ODL at the University of Rwanda are *technostructure* units located within institutional *operating core*. In a professional organisation such as the University of Rwanda, it would be very difficult for the School of ODL,

which is located under the College of Education, to coordinate ODL initiatives located at a higher level (other colleges) or at the same horizontal level (other schools or centres). It is more likely that without a strong ODL institution, most initiatives will remain sporadic despite a number of interventions. ODL requires different regulatory frameworks, management and administrative processes. For example, ODL students may register by module throughout the year, rather than annually as in conventional programmes. Furthermore, ODL requires different student support systems and the students work to a different timetable. This is why this study highlights the need to set up an appropriate ODL institutional framework and a strong coordination mechanism for ODL initiatives, in order to match ODL governing techniques and implementing strategies with the government's aspirations.

## Conclusion

Based on policy aspirations for ODL in Rwanda, three points can be stated as a conclusion to this paper: firstly, ODL is regarded as an innovative solution and a technology to expand access to lifelong learning while improving quality of education. Secondly, explored at a more technical level, ODL seems to be interpreted as a system that requires affordable, scalable, sustainable and inclusive solutions. Finally, ODL is understood as a mode of distance learning delivery, which involves an appropriate institutional framework.

ODL is not just a technology or a mode of delivery. It needs some expertise and determination to translate policy aspirations into concrete actions. Implementing accessibility, quality, relevance, affordability, scale, sustainability, technology and inclusion in terms of ODL entails some professionalism to deal with, notably, ODL change management, course design and development, learner support, online interaction, open education, learning assessment in ODL, and assistive technologies to support students with disabilities, and other learning technologies and innovations. Capacity building needs, therefore, to identify roles and responsibilities, and the know-how expected of management, academic and technical staff, and students. The findings of this study can be used by policymakers and ODL implementing institutions in their effort to formulate realistic policies and strategic implementation plans. In other words, this study can help reconcile policy formulation and concrete actions.

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