

ODL is used mainly in two sectors of our education system, namely secondary schooling and tertiary education. ODL in the secondary sector is mainly driven by a semi-autonomous institution, Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). The College has strategically located regional centres that operate a network of 92 learning centres. The network of such centres is meant to deliver ODL programmes right up to the door step of the learners in all parts of Botswana.

Given the nature of our conventional secondary schooling and its challenges, we have currently a 65.73% transition rate from Junior secondary schools to senior secondary schools. The pass rate at Senior School whilst satisfactory, we still have many learners at that level who are usually not happy with their grades and others who have inadequate points for tertiary level courses of their choice and end up enrolling for ODL programmes for up grading purposes. The limited number of public senior secondary schools make most learners who are not successful in getting places opt for ODL as a first choice instead of going to private schools or evening schools that operate throughout the country.

The political will in the country and the advocacy carried out by the semi-autonomous ODL lead institution (BOCODOL) has seen a major paradigm shift amongst the population. ODL is now a highly respected and much sought after mode of delivery by those who can not access conventional schooling. The current challenge is to meet the demand for the secondary education given the limited resources. The demand tends to outstrip the supply in terms of study materials due to limited financial resources.

ODL has equally become popular when it comes to the tertiary education needs of our citizens. The level of continuous learning far surpasses the capacity of both ODL and conventional institutions in the country. Management, vocational and professional programmes are much sought after just like Diplomas and Degree programmes. Whilst efforts have been made to address the tertiary needs through ODL programmes the demand has not been met yet.

ODL provides a learning opportunity for all classes of our society. The less privileged who are unable to access conventional institutions due to location and financial challenges benefit from the same quality education programmes the government provides. The curriculum for secondary school courses delivered through ODL is exactly the same curriculum that is delivered in conventional schools and so is the curriculum at the tertiary level. For example at the University of Botswana, the programmes delivered through ODL are the same programmes delivered through full time study using face to face lectures and learners from the two modes of delivery sit for the same semester examinations and get the same awards once they have fulfilled the programme requirements. The quality of assessment is not compromised, hence recognition and certification does not discriminate, as no indication is

made whether one studied through ODL or conventional. ODL in this case has created a cadre of scholars that are self driven, confident and able to compete with other graduates from other educational systems of delivery and are able to engage in lifelong learning.

Top priorities

1. Technical and vocational programmes that are blended with entrepreneurship skills are critical in increasing the capacity of people in the rural areas and in special circumstances to meet their livelihoods.
2. Transforming current ODL programmes to meet the needs of those in special circumstances (e.g. those with visual impairment).
3. Consolidation of Open Schooling and becoming a regional leading centre of excellence in the same.
4. Developing and producing alternative systems through the use of multi media technologies and deliver ODL programmes and attempt to close the digital gap and bring on board those in special circumstances and disadvantaged.
5. Capacity building in the delivery of diverse Tertiary education programmes in order to build a strong national human resource base.

What can COL do to further our agenda?

In order to further our agenda, we believe a partner like COL could assist with capacity building in special skills that empower ODL role players including policy developers and ODL facilitators/practitioners. The range of areas for further training include special needs education, development of capacity and expertise in the delivery of technical and vocational ODL programmes, deployment of e-learning/on-line learning, online-support, ODL research capacity building/knowledge creation and management, Audio and video material production skills training and development, capacity building in the delivery of Tertiary Level programmes and in Quality assurance at the same level, etc.