



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
WELCOME: OPEN LEARNING CONFERENCE 2018
UNISA, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS
5 – 7 SEPTEMBER 2018

- Co-Chairs of this opening plenary:
 - Professor Mpine Makoe, Director of Unisa’s Institute for Open Distance and eLearning (IODL) and President of DEASA
 - Professor Daniella Coetzee, NADEOSA President and Principal of the South Campus of the University of the Free State
- The Honourable Deputy Minister Buti Manamela, Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, South Africa
- Professor Asha Kanwar, CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL)

- Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria: Professor Schoole
- Our Keynote Speaker, Professor Michael Moore
- Unisa executive and extended management
- Esteemed colleagues from our co-host associations and institutions: NADEOSA, DEASA, the University of Pretoria
- Sister institutions in South and Southern Africa
- Friends and colleagues from across the continent and further afield
- Unisa staff
- And most importantly – our students from wherever you have come to join us

A very warm welcome to you all. I can't begin to tell you how delighted I am to see this fantastic representation of our Continent's ODeL institutions, Institutes, Departments and Schools at this ground-breaking joint Conference, collaboratively organised by **National Association of Distance Education Organizations of South Africa (NADEOSA)**, The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), the University of Pretoria (UP) - our next door neighbours - and of course, the University of South Africa. Colleagues, we are very pleased to be hosting this event.

Glancing through the programme I have seen representatives from (in no order of preference or rank):

- The University of Lusaka, Zambia, the Institute of Virtual and Distance learning (IVDL) – DMI at St Eugene University, Zambia, the Mufulira College of Education affiliated to the University of Zambia, TEVETA Zambia, Nkwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia - *mwauka bwanji*
- Zimbabwe Open University, the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe, Seke Teachers College, Zimbabwe - *mangwanani akanaka*
- University of Pretoria – *goeie more/ good morning*
- Catholic University of Mozambique, and the ISCED - Instituto Superior de Ciências e Educação a Distância, Moçambique – *bom dia*
- The University of South Africa
- The University of Namibia, the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), and the Namibia University of Science and Technology - *guten tag/ wa lalapo*
- Botswana Open University - *dumelang*
- University of Swaziland, including the Institute of Distance Education - *kusile sihlobo sami*
- The National University of Lesotho, and Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) at the National University of Lesotho *lumelang*

- The Lesotho College of Education
- The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), the Ignatius Ajuru Education University, Port Hacourt, and the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti - *Good Morning/Ekaaro/Ekuojomo/Ina Kwana/Ibolachi*
- University of the Free State – *Khotsong/ Goeie more/dumelang*
- The African Council on Distance Education, represented by
- Prof Abdelraouf A. Elbadawi – Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Sudan and President of the ACDE - *Sabah al khair*
- Prof Elifas Bisanda – Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)- *Jambo*
- Dr Daniel Tau – Vice Chancellor of the Botswana Open university
- Prof Father Alberto Ferreira – Vice Chancellor of the Catholic University – Mozambique
- The IQ academy – *good morning*
- The University of Kabianga, Kenya - *Habari za asubuhi.*
- Unisa – Ethiopia Centre - *inidemini āderiki.*
- SAIDE .
- The University of Malawi (The Polytechnic) School of Journalism and Media Studies - *Tazukca bwino (pronounced dazuka)*
- Regenesys Business School

Good day to all of you.

I think you will agree with me ladies and gentlemen that we have done ourselves proud! If ever we wanted evidence of the growing importance of ODeL in our region and on our Continent, it is right here, right now, and I could not be more delighted.

Open Learning is a growing trend, but it is understood differently by ODeL practitioners, both public and private, depending on their respective contexts and needs. However, it is generally acknowledged and accepted that Open Learning promotes the more flexible provision and the greater use of open teaching and learning resources like open textbooks and other open education resources in the provision of ODeL.

It is a matter of concern though, that amongst ODeL practitioners there is still confusion, conflation and outright disagreement around ODeL and its relationship with Open Learning and OERs in particular. This has not done anyone any favour, and when one adds the for-profit providers to the mix then the picture becomes even murky. It remains a mystery to me, for example, how MOOCs, which is a tool for greater flexibility and the more cost effective provision of ODeL to greater numbers of students, could ever have been equated with ODeL *per se*. Maybe I should not delve into this subject as it can be

handled comfortably by the speakers at this conference. It is therefore my sincere hope that this conference will contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of open learning and its application in our respective ODeL contexts.

In Southern Africa, open distance learning has increased significantly over the past decade, with many conventional face-to-face institutions introducing distance and variants of blended learning. The challenge, however, has been a limited understanding of these modes of provision by the majority of academics in our institutions, resulting in institutional dissonance around the variant of ODeL being implemented; a sometimes uncritical acceptance or uptake of hyped-up technologies which come to naught; a lack of appreciation of the ODeL policy contexts globally and nationally; a somewhat limited appreciation and vision of the real merit and potential of ODeL and Open Learning; and ultimately – and critically – the compromised quality of Teaching and Learning. This must be remedied if we are to flourish as a region and as a continent.

The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) and the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (Nadeosa) are regional and South African bodies that support quality enhancement of distance and e-learning in the

region and in South Africa respectively. There is a lot of good, solid, work being done on Quality Assurance in the SADC region. Likewise, just these past two days, our colleagues in the ACDE have been sharing with us, progress on quality initiatives being driven by ACDE members. It is incredibly exciting and very encouraging to see manifest progress on what is arguably the stumbling block to the accreditation of ODeL qualifications in parts of our continent – and indeed the world. I speak here of course, of Quality. Colleagues, all of these associations support policy development, the development of quality guidelines and the creation of opportunities for sharing and collaboration within the member networks. This is something that we are building on in a very deliberate manner and it is something which we all genuinely want to foster.

Every year, DEASA and NADEOSA each holds an annual conference which normally is based on a carefully chosen theme pertinent to distance or e-learning provision. However, this year we decided to do things a little bit differently in the spirit of collaboration and the mutual leveraging of our joint capacities. And here we are – gathered together to interrogate the theme: *Exploring open learning: Theory, policy and practise in different modes of provision*. This is a first to my knowledge, and it offers an unparalleled opportunity for ODeL practitioners to get together and share their knowledge and their

understanding and experiences of Open Learning, through presentations, but also through networking, making new friends and renewing old acquaintances.

What I find so exciting about this conference colleagues, is that we will be exposed to a host of regional and discipline-based perspectives – all of which have a specific African focus. This is another first, so well done to all of us! Papers will be presented on the following sub-themes, which depict issues that are at the fore, both in South Africa and in the Southern African region, in so far as the expansion of distance and e-learning is concerned:

- Exploring open learning for higher education and teacher development
- Exploring open learning for TVET, Adult Education and Training and Schooling
- Exploring open learning for inclusive access and success
- Exploring OER, MOOCs and the use of technologies in education
- Exploring open scholarship of teaching and learning.

I am immensely excited about the knowledge that will be shared and the opportunities that will avail themselves over the next few days.

In that context, for those colleagues who may not be fully aware of just what this mega University of South Africa comprises, let me just tell you briefly that Unisa is the largest, quality assured and accredited university on the Continent and certainly one of the largest in the world. We are the only dedicated distance education university in South Africa, and while you may have been hearing and seeing Unisa speaking about being an Open Distance and e-Learning University, that simply means that like any innovative and forward looking institution of higher learning, we are moving with the times and ensuring that our business and teaching models make full use of the affordances of technology, so that our students reap the benefits of being appropriately equipped 21st Century graduates. Unisa is a key pillar of South Africa's higher education sector and is state subsidised and accredited in like manner (including in terms of quality) to our full-time public universities. We produce more than one-third of South Africa's graduates and we contribute significantly to the graduate pools of a number of our countries on the Continent and, to a lesser extent, abroad. This is what makes us so unique. We are a well recognised African brand.

In hosting this conference, Unisa wants to offer a concrete demonstration of its willingness to share and collaborate with its peers and friends on the Continent, for three reasons: Firstly, the

global higher education sector is undoubtedly fragmenting and giving rise to divergent views on the nature and value of the role of the university, and of education itself. Secondly, it is evident that developing nations are increasingly faced with a resurgence of nationalist sentiment as young people in particular, are turning away from what is perceived to be identity and cultural impositions, which are increasingly dissonant with a collective sense of “self,” and proving (in their view) to be of negligible benefit to them or their communities and countries. Thirdly, it is a fact that in the global review of higher education that is currently underway, the focus has, of necessity, turned inward. Growing nationalism, declining socio-economic conditions and volatile politics are making it increasingly evident that older, more traditional dependencies and collaborations are not certain or relevant and that, all things considered, the time has perhaps come to forge new relationships and collaborations with neighbours and friends, whose education strategies and strivings are more closely aligned with our own.

It is within this context, and our own institutional strategy 2030, which is already aligned to our Constitution, the National Development Plan, the SADC Protocol, the SDGs, and AU education imperatives, that Unisa feels that the time is right to invite all of you, to consider collaborating with Unisa in learning about our respective

education needs, and seeing what we have to offer one another in terms of support and developmental assistance. Unisa is committed to being *the African University, shaping futures in the service of humanity*, and it is in this spirit that we have opened our doors, our arms and our hearts to you. We look forward to establishing fruitful collaborations and long lasting relationships whose end goal is to grow quality higher education as a public good, bearing in mind that the future does not belong to us. It belongs to those whom we are educating and shaping right now.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, the ODeL community is a very special one. It is a caring community that understands at the most fundamental level, the importance of education and the concomitant need to ensure greater access and inclusivity for all of Africa's students - especially those whose opportunities are limited by personal circumstance. It is therefore imperative that we harness all means at our disposal to further that agenda. This conference is a very significant and deliberate step on that journey to enlightenment.

It remains for me to welcome you all once more, to wish you well for this conference and to declare this conference - open.

I thank you