

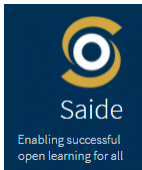
South Africa Country Report to DEASA

COUNTRY REPORT – South Africa

DEASA AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS:



1. The National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (www.nadeosa.org.za)



2. Saide (www.saide.org.za)



3. University of South Africa (www.unisa.ac.za)



4. University of Pretoria (www.up.ac.za)

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Introduction

Aside from the Department of Higher Education and Training, which is South Africa's official government link to DEASA, there are currently four institutions/organisations which are members of DEASA in good-standing. This represents a decline in numbers as one former member officially cancelled its membership during 2016 and two others have allowed their membership to lapse by not paying the due membership fees for the past three years.

The current status of the four active members is summarized below.

National Association for Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa

(www.nadeosa.org.za)

The overarching aim of Nadeosa is to provide a forum for South African organisations and individuals who are committed to increasing access to an affordable, cost-effective and quality learning environment in which learners are empowered to become self-sufficient members of society.

The objectives of the organization are as follows:

- To facilitate collaboration among distance education and open learning organisations in South Africa.
- To advocate awareness, understanding, and application of distance education and open learning amongst policy makers, practitioners, and learners.
- To promote research and evaluation of distance education and open learning in South Africa.
- To exert influence with regard to adequate policy (including financial support) for distance education.
- To advance the professional interests of distance education practitioners.
- To promote and enhance quality assurance in distance education.
- Nadeosa does not register or accredit distance education programmes.

Nadeosa was established in 1996 and it is recognized as the official voice of distance education (and increasingly open, flexible, online, mixed and dual mode provision) in South Africa and has influenced both policy and accreditation processes in the country. It draws its membership from different types of institutions from public to private to NGOs that are passionate about open and distance learning in order to bring together a range of resources to assist one another in the development of open, distance and technology-enhanced learning practices.

In the past 21 years, Nadeosa has achieved a lot and has ensured that open and distance learning remains a force to be reckoned with in the South African education landscape. In 2002, Nadeosa successfully hosted the Pan Commonwealth Forum of Open learning, one of the most prestigious conferences in distance education. In addition, Nadeosa was the first distance education association to develop a quality assurance toolkit: *Designing and Delivering Distance Education: Quality Criteria and Case Studies from South Africa* which was published in 2005. This document is essential for those of who are repositioning themselves or considering going the distance route and it will assist institutions to develop systems that support distance education provisioning.

Nadeosa was also instrumental in the development of South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-school System. The association also contributed to the development of the Guidelines for Good Practice of Distance Education in a Digital Era published by the South African national accreditation body, the Council for Higher Education.

Every year, the Nadeosa community of distance education practitioners and scholars gather to share knowledge and ideas about pertinent issues that affect the provision of distance education. Nadeosa holds an annual conference and occasional workshops, networks with other distance education bodies such as DEASA, and provides a regular information service to its members. The current President, till 2019, is Professor Daniella Coetzee of the University of the Free State, while Dr Tony Mays of the University of Pretoria is the long-standing vice-president and Ms Jenny Glennie of Saide is the Treasurer. Saide also continues to provide secretariat services to the organization.

Saide

(www.saide.org.za)

Saide is a non-profit organization which was established in 1994.

Saide explains that it is committed to the process of transformation of education and training to increase equitable and meaningful access to knowledge, skills and learning through the adoption of open learning principles, distance education methods and educational technology.

Saide explains its work as follows. It is not an implementing agency but acts as an advocate, catalyst, and facilitator to bring about change in existing educational practices. *Saide* sees itself as being in a unique position to facilitate networks and provide advice on the planning and implementation of distance education and the evaluation, development and sharing of courses and materials. Educational providers in South Africa and neighbouring countries have increasingly sought *Saide's* assistance in planning and evaluating their programmes, courses and systems and supporting them by facilitating professional development for their staff.

Saide is a non-governmental organization conducting projects throughout South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. *Saide's* task is to contribute to the development of new models of open learning, including the use of distance education methods, educational technology and open educational resources. It believes these should accord with and take forward the values, principles, and goals of the evolving education systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

Saide is a member of both Nadeosa and DEASA.

University of South Africa (Unisa)

(www.unisa.ac.za)

Unisa is the largest provider of distance education programmes in South Africa and on the African continent and is one of the world's mega-universities.

Offering study opportunities to approximately 400 000 students from across South Africa, Africa and other parts of the world, Unisa offers a diverse choice of study fields at levels from certificate to degree. The university accounts for 12.8% of all degrees

conferred by the country's 23 public universities and universities of technology, with close to 40,000 students obtaining degrees and diplomas from Unisa annually. This, combined with the fact that Unisa has increased its student population from previously disadvantaged communities to the extent that they are now in the majority, means that Unisa is contributing significantly to the transformation of the South African higher education landscape. Unisa employs more than 6 000 full time staff members and about 10000 part time workers.

Unisa is categorized as a comprehensive university which means it offers a range of academic, professional and vocational programmes.

Unisa has established an Institute for Open and Distance Learning, currently under the leadership of Professor Mpine Makoe, which promotes and supports research into open and distance learning provision.

Unisa is a member of both Nadeosa and DEASA.

University of Pretoria

(www.up.ac.za)

The University of Pretoria is a research-intensive contact institution. In April 2002, the university established a Unit for Distance Education within the Faculty of Education. The Unit was established to manage the distance education programmes in the Faculty of Education. Over 30,000 students have graduated through distance education programmes since inception in 2002. The Unit currently supports just over 5000 students in two programmes: the internet-supported BEd Hons Education Management Law and Policy (which is being taught out) and the new internet-dependent BEd Hons in Teacher Education and Professional Development. A number of new programmes aligned with the new 2015 teacher education policy in South Africa are currently in various stages of development, approval or accreditation.

The University of Pretoria currently serves more than 50,000 students, is one of the most highly ranked universities in Africa, and in some areas among the most highly ranked in the world, and has transformed from being a mostly white, Afrikaner institution

to a multicultural, multiracial university that offers quality education to South Africans from all walks of life.

The Unit for Distance Education is the University of Pretoria's link to Nadeosa and DEASA (for which it manages both the finances and the website) and it also co-hosts a bi-ennial conference on Distance Education and Teacher's Training in Africa (DETA). The DETA conference also led to the establishment of the African Deans of Education Forum (ADEF), a voice that is now formally recognized by UNESCO.

Key Performance Areas

Unisa was a founding member of DEASA and there continues to be a strong connection and support for the regional association from within South Africa. Between the four organisations and institutions identified above, there is a rich diversity of policy, practice, research and capacity-building in support of expanded quality provision of Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL). In 2013/2014, this combined experience and influence informed both the development of South Africa's first national policy on distance education (focusing on the university sector) promulgated by the Department of Higher Education and Training, as well as guidelines for good practice of distance education in a digital era published by the national accreditation body, the Council for Higher Education. In 2016 and 2017, engagement with the wider distance education community is informing the development of open learning policy for the post-school education and training sector. This is a model of engagement which might be useful for other contexts.

Research Activities

Both the Department of Higher Education and Training and the four member institutions above are committed to open access to research outputs in education. All maintain websites with open access repositories.

Nadeosa has managed to host a national conference almost every year since its inception and the presentations made at this conference are archived on the Nadeosa

website. Nadeosa has also, from to time, initiated specific research projects, which have also been archived on the website.

Saide has an open educational resources (OER) policy and its default publication mode is a CCBY open licence. Much of Saide's work can therefore be accessed from its website as well as from its linked project websites such OER Africa and Siyaphumelela (a project which has been exploring the use of data analytics).

Unisa hosts the Institute for Open and Distance Learning whose primary aim is to undertake, promote and share research into open and distance learning. Unisa also publishes the journal *Progressio* which focuses on open, distance and e-learning research and practice.

One member of the Unit for Distance Education at the University of Pretoria is specifically employed to link quality assurance and research outputs and publishes annually. Presentations made at the biennial DETA conference are archived on the DETA website as is a set of double-blind peer-reviewed conference proceedings. In 2017, the decision was made to transform the biennial conference proceedings into an online journal.

Most higher education institutions in South Africa provide open access to completed Masters dissertations and Doctoral theses.

Capacity Building

For the past few years, the annual Nadeosa conference has included a number of pre-conference capacity-building workshops on various issues such as OER, policy development and assessment. The biennial DETA conference has followed a similar pattern. It has proved easier to link such workshops to a conference rather than to expect participants to travel separately. However, with growing connectivity, it becomes possible to consider making use of online webinars. The Nadeosa conference in 2017 was preceded by an online webinar and this proved a very successful innovation which is likely to be repeated.

Partnership and Collaboration

NADEOSA, DETA and ADEF have proven to be valuable forums to support and develop partnerships and collaborations both intra- and internationally.

Policy Development and Facilitation

As noted previously, South Africa recently promulgated its first national policy related to distance education in higher education and is in the process of developing an open learning policy for the entire post-school education and training sector. The distance education community in South Africa has been actively engaged in these processes.

Quality Promotion

Nadeosa used to link a courseware awards process and ceremony to its annual conference. However, it proved quite onerous to maintain and with courses increasingly being offered online or in blended mode, it became increasingly difficult to access and review the courses being offered, so the practice has been discontinued in recent years. However, in South Africa, institutions need to have new programmes approved by the DHET, accredited by the CHE and registered on the NQF by SAQA before they can be offered. The mode of delivery and the arrangements to ensure quality are central to the approval and accreditation process. Institutions which wish to offer the same programme through both contact and distance modes must make separate accreditation applications.

In relation to quality assurance of research in ODL or ODeL, both *Progressio* and *DETA* employ blind peer review processes while dissertations and theses completed in and through ODL or ODeL require the same ethical clearance and external examination processes as in contact mode.

New Innovations

In 2013, the DHET in South Africa promulgated a new policy document that set out the vision for an integrated post-schooling sector which embraces higher education, technical and vocational education and training, as well as adult education and training, and saw

a significant role for open and distance learning in this sector. Supporting the expansion of the role of open and distance learning has been a concerted effort to improve access to connectivity and digital devices, to drive down data costs and to embrace open educational resources (OER). South Africa has also developed a robust higher education management information system, and it is now possible to track student progress and success, sometimes across multiple institutions, and to conduct cohort analyses at a systemic level. It is therefore increasingly possible to make data-informed decisions.

Challenges

Traditionally, distance learning has been associated with mature students studying while working. However, various factors have resulted in an increasing number of school-leavers seeking to access further and higher education through distance learning. These younger students often have different expectations, motivations and learning needs which need to be understood and addressed. Increasingly, there is also an expectation among these younger learners in particular of a multi-media learning experience facilitated through a range of ICTs, although there remains a digital divide between urban and rural areas in terms of access; and data costs, while beginning to come down, remain relatively high. Distance learning providers are therefore needing to cope with changes in who, what and how they teach.

Conclusion

Open and distance learning has a long history in South Africa and is established as a core component of the education landscape. Nonetheless, the context is changing. More formerly single mode contact institutions are offering blended, mixed mode and dual mode forms of provision, while the needs and expectations of students are also changing. Meanwhile ICTs provide us both with more information and more possibilities to open access while offering a reasonable chance of success. The challenge is for us to learn and adapt.

Report prepared by:

Dr Tony Mays, UP UDE, Nadeosa Vice President, DEASA Honorary Treasurer

Prof Mpine Makoe, Unisa IODL, Nadeosa exec member and former President, DEASA Exec member

26 October, 2017.