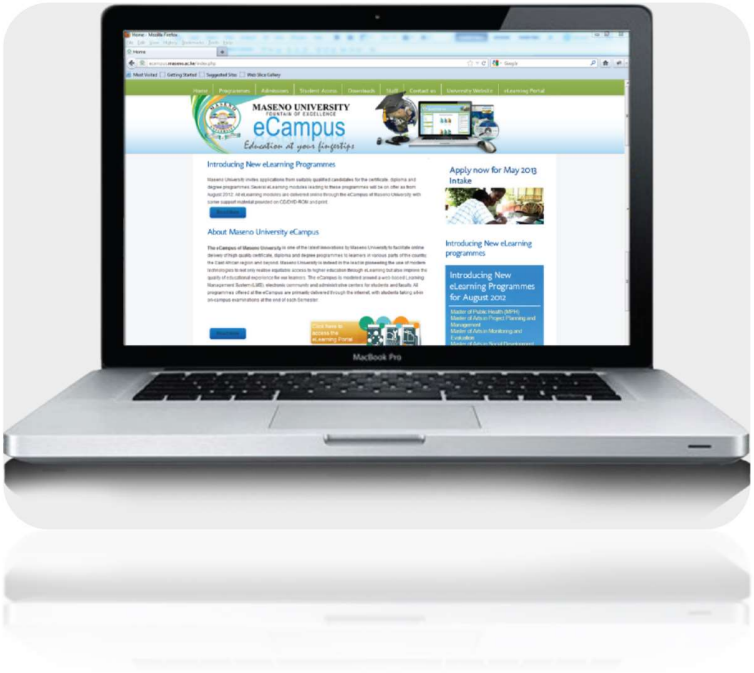
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A Benchmarking Visit to Open University of Kenya (OUK) Report

DATE: 25th March 2026 at the OUK Boardroom, Konza Technopolis.

P.O. Box 3275 - 40100, KISUMU | Tel: 057-2021013 | email: ecampus.@maseno.ac.ke |

http://ecampus.maseno.ac.ke

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Executive Summary

This benchmarking report presents findings from a benchmarking exercise conducted between the eCampus of Maseno University, and the Open University of Kenya (OUK) held on 25th March 2026 at the OUK Boardroom, Konza Technopolis. The benchmarking exercise sought to examine best practices, innovations, governance structures, and operational models supporting Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL), with particular focus on course development, learner support systems, online assessment, quality assurance, infrastructure, policy frameworks, staff capacity development, and digital transformation.

The benchmarking exercise established that OUK has developed a highly integrated and technology-driven digital learning ecosystem supported by a centralized Learning Management System (LMS), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), analytics platforms, AI-powered online proctoring systems, integrated learner support systems, and structured quality assurance mechanisms. The institution's 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous delivery model, mandatory faculty certification programmes, centralized learner support through VOIP-based systems, and strong emphasis on policy development and data-driven decision-making emerged as key strengths.

The report identified several gaps within the eCampus of Maseno University, including fragmented learner support systems, limited integration of institutional platforms, inadequate learning analytics capabilities, inconsistent online assessment security models, limited structured staff certification pathways, and underdeveloped digital governance frameworks. These findings align closely with recommendations previously raised during the Commission for University Education (CUE) audit conducted on 3rd October 2024.

Based on the benchmarking findings, the report recommends immediate implementation of strategic interventions beginning in the 2026/2027 financial year. Priority areas include deployment of an LMS analytics dashboard, establishment of a unified learner support/helpdesk system, implementation of Single Sign-On (SSO) and Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI), adoption of AI-powered proctoring systems, strengthening of digital infrastructure, and institutionalization of mandatory staff certification in online facilitation and assessment.

The report concludes that while Maseno University has established a strong foundation in digital learning delivery, significant opportunities exist to strengthen integration, scalability, automation, quality assurance, and learner support systems in order to achieve a more mature and sustainable ODeL ecosystem aligned with international best practices.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Benchmarking Exercise

1.2 Overview of ODeL in higher education

Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) in Kenya has emerged as a transformative approach to expanding access, equity, and flexibility in higher education. It is driven by the need to accommodate increasing student demand, limited physical infrastructure in traditional universities, and the growing influence of digital technologies in teaching and learning. ODeL enables learners to access higher education regardless of geographical location, socio-economic background, or time constraints, thereby supporting lifelong learning and national development goals.

In Kenya, public and private universities have progressively adopted ODeL models through blended learning, fully online programmes, and dual-mode delivery systems. Institutions such as Maseno University have pioneered web-based Learning Management Systems (LMS) to support course delivery, online assessments, and learner interaction. Similarly, the Open University of Kenya represents a major milestone as the country's first fully online public university, demonstrating a shift towards digital-first higher education.

The Commission for University Education (CUE) has provided regulatory frameworks and quality assurance standards to guide the implementation of ODeL programmes, ensuring academic integrity and consistency. Despite significant progress, challenges remain in areas such as infrastructure readiness, staff capacity, digital literacy, learner support systems, and assessment security. ODeL continues to play a critical role in democratizing higher education in Kenya by leveraging technology to improve access, enhance quality, and promote innovation in teaching and learning across universities.

1.3 Need for benchmarking

Benchmarking in Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) is essential for improving institutional performance, ensuring quality assurance, and aligning higher education delivery with emerging global digital learning standards. In the Kenyan context, universities are increasingly adopting blended and fully online learning models, necessitating continuous improvement of systems, processes, and competencies to remain competitive and responsive to learner needs.

The need for benchmarking arises from the rapid expansion of digital education, which has introduced complex challenges in learner support, online assessment integrity, infrastructure scalability, staff capacity development, and system integration. Institutions such as Maseno University are therefore required to compare their practices with more advanced models such as those implemented by the Open University of Kenya in order to identify gaps and adopt best practices.

Benchmarking provides a structured approach for learning from peer institutions, particularly those that have successfully implemented fully integrated digital learning ecosystems. It supports evidence-based decision-making, enhances institutional efficiency, and promotes innovation in teaching, learning, and administration.

Furthermore, benchmarking aligns institutional practices with regulatory expectations set by the Commission for University Education (CUE), especially in areas of quality assurance, digital delivery standards, and learner support systems. It also enables universities to evaluate cost-effectiveness, improve service delivery, and strengthen governance structures. Ultimately, benchmarking serves as a strategic tool for continuous improvement, enabling institutions to transform their ODeL systems into scalable, efficient, and learner-centred digital education models.

1.4 Institutional context

Higher education institutions in Kenya are undergoing significant transformation driven by rapid advancements in digital technologies, increasing demand for access to university education, and evolving policy and regulatory frameworks. Within this context, Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) has become a strategic approach for expanding access, improving flexibility, and enhancing the quality of higher education delivery.

Maseno University has positioned its eCampus as a key innovation hub for digital learning, offering certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate programmes through a web-based Learning Management System (LMS). The eCampus supports both fully online and blended learning models, enabling learners to access educational resources remotely while also participating in structured, proctored assessments. This model has attracted a diverse student population across various academic disciplines, including education, health sciences, social sciences, and applied sciences. The eCampus is currently aligning its activities towards accreditation by CUE.

In parallel, the Open University of Kenya represents a fully online public university established to provide flexible, accessible, and technology-driven higher education. Operating from Konza Technopolis, the institution is designed as a fully digital university with integrated systems supporting teaching, learning, assessment, learner support, and institutional management.

The broader institutional context is shaped by national priorities on digital transformation, equitable access to education, and the need to build capacity for technology-enhanced learning. Regulatory oversight by the Commission for University Education (CUE) further ensures quality assurance, standardization, and compliance across ODeL programmes. Within this dynamic environment, benchmarking becomes a critical mechanism for institutional learning, enabling universities to compare practices, adopt innovations, and strengthen their digital education ecosystems.

1.5 Purpose of the Benchmark Visit

The rapid growth of Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODeL) in higher education has necessitated the adoption of effective digital learning systems, robust learner support mechanisms, quality assurance frameworks, and sustainable institutional governance structures. As universities increasingly expand access to flexible and technology-enabled learning, there is a growing need to evaluate existing institutional practices against established best practices and emerging innovations in online education.

The benchmarking exercise was undertaken to provide an opportunity for the eCampus of Maseno University to learn from the experiences, systems, policies, and operational models implemented by benchmark institutions such as Open University of Kenya. The exercise aimed at identifying strengths, gaps, opportunities, and best practices in the management and delivery of online and blended programmes, particularly in areas such as course development, learner support, online assessment, staff capacity development, governance, digital infrastructure, and quality assurance.

Additionally, the benchmarking visit sought to explore innovative technologies and institutional strategies that can enhance efficiency, improve learner experience, strengthen academic support systems, and support the scalability and sustainability of online learning programmes. The findings from the exercise are expected to inform policy improvement, strategic planning, system integration, resource mobilization, and the continuous enhancement of digital learning services within the University.

1.6 Benchmarking Objectives

The benchmark seeks to:

1. Examine the course development and delivery framework for online courses.
2. Evaluate the learner support ecosystem.
3. Assess approaches used in online assessments and examinations.
4. Examine human resource and governance systems supporting online learning.
5. Evaluate eLibrary services and online learning resources.
6. Assess policy and quality assurance mechanisms guiding ODeL programmes.
7. Examine capacity-building strategies for ODeL staff and faculty.
8. Evaluate infrastructure and technological systems supporting online learning.

1.7 Scope of the Benchmarking Exercise

The benchmarking exercise focused on key components supporting the implementation and management of Open, Distance, and eLearning programmes at Open University of Kenya. The exercise examined course development and delivery, learner support systems, online assessment and examination management, human resource and

governance structures, eLibrary services, policy and quality assurance frameworks, staff capacity building, and technological infrastructure. Particular emphasis was placed on student onboarding, integrated helpdesk systems, communication management, and digital learning platforms. The exercise aimed to identify best practices, operational gaps, and innovative approaches applicable to strengthening the eCampus of Maseno University.

1.8 1.5 Benchmark Institutions

The benchmarking exercise provided an opportunity for the eCampus of Maseno University to examine the operational model, vision, and digital learning practices of Open University of Kenya (OUK), Kenya's first fully digital public university. The institution was officially granted a Charter on 3rd August 2023 by William Ruto during a ceremony held at Konza Technopolis. The establishment of OUK marked a significant milestone in Kenya's higher education sector by expanding access to university education beyond the limitations of conventional campus-based systems.

OUK was established to address the increasing demand for higher education and the limited capacity within traditional universities. Through the adoption of online and distance learning approaches, the University leverages digital technologies and flexible learning models to provide accessible and affordable education to learners irrespective of geographical location, socio-economic status, or time constraints. This approach aligns with global trends in Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODeL), which emphasize flexibility, inclusivity, and technology-enabled learning.

The University operates under the vision, *"The innovative university for inclusive prosperity,"* and its mission focuses on providing affordable, flexible, and quality learning experiences that nurture learners into researchers, leaders, entrepreneurs, and global citizens. OUK subscribes to the philosophy that quality education should be accessible to all and uses technology to overcome geographical, economic, and social barriers to learning.

As a benchmark institution, OUK demonstrated innovative practices in learner support, digital infrastructure, online assessment, and integrated learning systems. The institution's strategic positioning within Konza Technopolis further reflects its role in supporting Kenya's transition towards a digital and knowledge-driven economy envisioned under Kenya Vision 2030.

1.9 1.6 Methodology

The benchmarking exercise employed a qualitative and participatory methodology to facilitate knowledge exchange between the eCampus of Maseno University and Open University of Kenya. Data was collected through structured meetings, formal presentations, guided discussions, and question-and-answer sessions with key institutional stakeholders involved in Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL). The sessions covered thematic areas including course development, learner support systems, online assessment, governance, and digital infrastructure. Interactive discussions enabled clarification of processes and identification of best practices. Observations during presentations

further enriched understanding of operational models, enabling comparative analysis and extraction of actionable insights for institutional improvement.

CHAPTER TWO: INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW OF THE BENCHMARK INSTITUTION

2.0 Institutional Background

The university was founded on the principles of inclusivity, flexibility, affordability, accessibility, and quality assurance. Its mission is to provide affordable, flexible, and quality learning experiences that nurture innovative researchers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and global citizens. OUK leverages technology-driven learning approaches to provide education beyond geographical and socio-economic barriers.

Since its inception, the institution has experienced rapid growth, increasing from an initial enrolment of approximately 800 students to over 24,000 learners from Kenya and beyond. The university offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional development programmes delivered entirely through digital platforms. Operating from Konza Technopolis, Kenya's "Silicon Savannah," OUK continues to position itself as a regional leader in technology-enabled higher education and digital innovation.

2.1 The ODeL / eLearning Structure

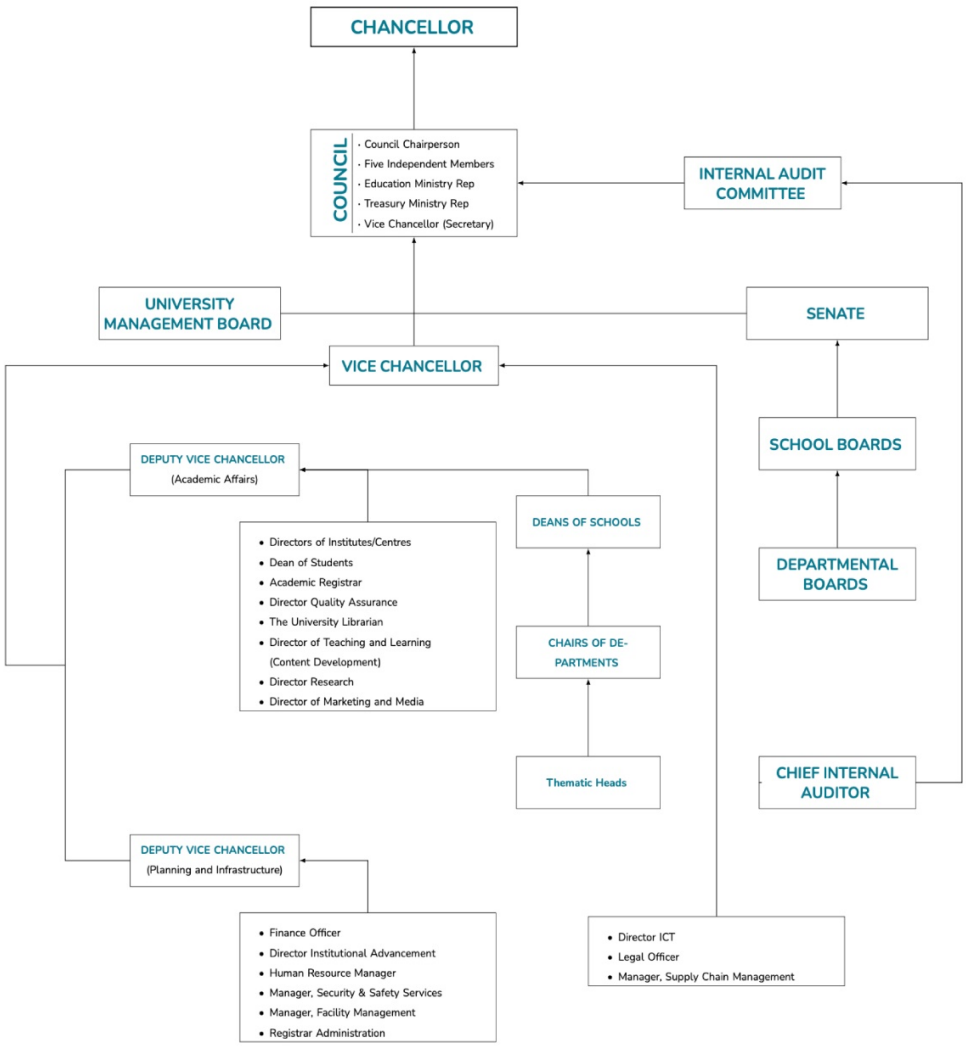
At Open University of Kenya, the Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL/eLearning) structure is designed around a fully digital and integrated institutional model that supports online teaching, learning, assessment, and student support services. The university operates through interconnected academic, technical, administrative, and learner support units that collectively facilitate delivery of programmes in a fully online environment.

The institutional structure integrates academic schools, ICT services, instructional design teams, digitization units, quality assurance offices, learner support services, and administrative departments within a unified digital ecosystem. The Learning Management System (LMS), locally referred to as SAS, serves as the core platform for course delivery, communication, assessment, and learner engagement.

Academic departments are supported by specialized personnel including instructional designers, LMS administrators, digitization experts, curators, and ICT officers who work collaboratively to develop and maintain digital learning content. The university also operates integrated systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), analytics platforms, eLibrary systems, and virtual communication tools to support institutional operations.

The ODeL structure emphasizes flexibility, scalability, and continuous quality improvement, enabling the institution to support large student populations while maintaining accessibility, learner engagement, and academic quality in a fully online learning environment.

2.2 Organizational and Governance Structure



2.3 Overview of Digital Learning Systems

Open University of Kenya operates a comprehensive and integrated digital learning ecosystem designed to support all aspects of teaching, learning, assessment, administration, and learner support within a fully online university

environment. The institution's digital infrastructure is anchored on the Learning Management System (LMS), referred to as SAS, which serves as the central platform for course delivery, communication, assessment, and learner engagement.

The LMS supports both asynchronous and synchronous learning through interactive learning modules, multimedia resources, discussion forums, virtual sessions, and continuous assessments. The university applies an 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous delivery model to promote flexibility while maintaining real-time academic interaction.

The digital ecosystem is integrated with other institutional systems, including the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, analytics platforms, eLibrary services, and learner support tools. Technologies such as Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) and Single Sign-On (SSO) are implemented to enhance seamless access and system integration.

Additional digital systems include AI-powered online examination and proctoring tools such as AutoProctor, Digiproctor, Mercer AI, and Quilgo, as well as communication technologies including the 3CX Voice over IP (VOIP) helpdesk system. The university also utilizes virtual laboratories, multilingual transcription tools, assistive technologies, and analytics dashboards to support accessibility, innovation, and data-driven decision-making within its digital learning environment.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.0 Course Development and Delivery

3.1 Course Development Framework

Instructional Design Processes

Open University of Kenya Course development follows a structured instructional design approach that emphasizes transformation of traditional content into interactive digital learning modules. Subject matter experts collaborate with instructional designers and digitization teams to develop learner-centred materials that integrate multimedia, self-paced activities, and competency-based learning outcomes. The process prioritizes “learning modules” rather than static reading content, ensuring alignment with online pedagogy and the 80/20 asynchronous–synchronous delivery model.

Quality Review Mechanisms

Course content undergoes rigorous multi-level quality assurance before deployment. This includes internal peer review by academic experts, technical validation by ICT and digitization teams, and compliance checks aligned with regulatory standards such as those from the Commission for University Education (CUE). Courses are also tested on the Learning Management System (LMS) to ensure functionality, accessibility, and instructional effectiveness before full rollout. Continuous review is embedded to allow updates of content, links, and learning resources.

Stakeholder Involvement

Course development is a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders, including academic staff, instructional designers, ICT specialists, curriculum experts, and quality assurance teams. External stakeholders such as industry experts and regulatory bodies also contribute to curriculum relevance and compliance. This inclusive approach ensures that programmes are aligned with labour market needs, institutional strategy, and national education frameworks while maintaining academic quality and digital learning standards.

3.1.2 Criteria for Course Selection

At Open University of Kenya, course selection is guided by a combination of strategic, demand-driven, and institutional alignment factors to ensure relevance, sustainability, and responsiveness to national and global education needs.

- **Market-driven Programmes**

  Programme development is strongly informed by labour market needs and emerging industry trends. Courses are designed to equip learners with competencies aligned to 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, leadership, entrepreneurship, and data-driven decision-making. Engagement with external stakeholders and industry experts helps ensure that programmes remain competitive and responsive to evolving economic demands.

- **Institutional Priorities**

  Course selection is also guided by the university's strategic vision of providing inclusive, flexible, and technology-enabled education. Priority is given to programmes that support national development goals, digital transformation, and the expansion of access to higher education. This ensures alignment with the institution's mission of fostering innovation, research, and global citizenship.

- **Student Demand**

  Learner demand plays a central role in determining which programmes are developed and scaled. The university leverages enrolment data, application trends, and feedback mechanisms to identify high-demand disciplines. Rapid growth in enrolment has particularly influenced the expansion of postgraduate and professional development programmes, ensuring that offerings remain relevant and accessible to a diverse student population.

3.1.3 Course Facilitation and Delivery

At Open University of Kenya, course facilitation and delivery are designed within a fully digital ecosystem that prioritizes flexibility, accessibility, and learner-centred engagement.

- **Facilitation Models**

  The institution applies a structured facilitation model where academic staff transition from traditional lecturing to roles as online facilitators, content curators, and learning guides. Facilitators are responsible for guiding learners through structured modules, moderating discussions, providing feedback, and continuously improving course content based on learner engagement data and feedback.

- **Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning**

  The delivery model is anchored on an 80/20 approach, with 80% asynchronous learning through the Learning Management System (LMS) and 20% synchronous sessions. Asynchronous learning allows students to study at their own pace using pre-recorded lectures, interactive materials, and assessments, while synchronous sessions provide real-time engagement, clarification, and academic support.

- **Faculty Engagement**

  Faculty members are actively engaged in content development, online facilitation, assessment design, and continuous course improvement. Their role extends beyond teaching to include monitoring student progress, updating learning materials, and participating in digital academic communities. Workload is measured through engagement metrics rather than physical contact hours.

- **Student Interaction Strategies**

  Student engagement is supported through LMS discussion forums, live virtual sessions, peer collaboration activities, and integrated communication tools. The system encourages continuous interaction between students and facilitators, supported by timely feedback mechanisms, structured discussion prompts, and collaborative assignments that promote active learning and knowledge sharing.

3.1.4 Best Practices Identified

From the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, the following best practices were identified in relation to course development and facilitation:

1. Structured Instructional Design Approach

The institution applies a systematic instructional design model that transforms traditional content into interactive, modular, and competency-based digital learning materials. This ensures clarity in learning outcomes, alignment with curriculum standards, and enhanced learner engagement.

2. Learning Module–Based Content Development

A shift from static "reading materials" to interactive "learning modules" is a key innovation. These modules incorporate multimedia, activities, assessments, and real-life case studies, making learning more engaging and practical.

3. Strong Integration of Digitization Processes

A dedicated digitization unit ensures that expert content is professionally converted into standardized digital formats. This improves consistency, quality, and scalability of course delivery across programmes.

4. Rigorous Multi-Level Quality Assurance

Courses undergo structured review processes involving academic experts, ICT teams, and quality assurance units before deployment. This ensures academic integrity, technical functionality, and compliance with regulatory standards.

5. 80/20 Flexible Delivery Model

The use of an 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous learning model provides flexibility for learners while maintaining opportunities for real-time interaction and academic support.

6. Faculty Role Transformation to Facilitators

Academic staff are repositioned as facilitators, curators, and learning designers rather than traditional lecturers. Their responsibilities include guiding learners, moderating discussions, and continuously improving course content.

7. Continuous Course Improvement Mechanism

Courses are not static; they are continuously updated based on learner feedback, analytics, and emerging knowledge. This ensures relevance and responsiveness to changing academic and industry needs.

8. Data-Driven Teaching and Engagement Monitoring

Student engagement metrics such as interaction frequency, content usage, and completion rates are used to guide teaching interventions and improve course effectiveness.

9. Active Learner Engagement Strategies

Use of discussion forums, live sessions, collaborative tasks, and structured feedback mechanisms enhances student participation and peer-to-peer learning.

3.1.5 Gap Analysis

Based on the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, several gaps were identified in relation to the current course development and facilitation practices at the eCampus of Maseno University:

1. Level of Instructional Design Maturity

While eCampus has adopted online learning delivery, the instructional design process is less standardized compared to OUK. There is limited evidence of a fully structured model that systematically transforms content into interactive, modular, and competency-based learning experiences.

2. Transition from Content Delivery to Learning Design

OUK has fully shifted from traditional lecture-based content to “learning modules” enriched with multimedia and interactive elements. At eCampus, course materials in some cases still reflect a content-heavy approach rather than fully interactive digital learning designs.

3. Digitization Capacity Constraints

Unlike OUK, which has a dedicated digitization unit and standardized production workflows, eCampus faces limitations in specialized teams and tools for large-scale conversion of academic content into digital formats.

4. Quality Assurance Integration

OUK applies multi-layered quality assurance (academic, technical, and system testing) before course rollout. At eCampus, quality assurance processes exist but are less integrated across instructional design, ICT systems, and content deployment stages.

5. Faculty Role Definition and Workload Models

OUK has redefined academic staff roles as facilitators, curators, and content designers, with workload measured through engagement metrics. At eCampus, traditional teaching workload models still dominate, limiting full adoption of digital facilitation roles.

6. Continuous Course Improvement Mechanisms

OUK embeds continuous course updates driven by learner analytics and feedback. At eCampus, course updates are more periodic and less data-driven, limiting real-time responsiveness.

7. Learning Analytics Utilization

OUK uses engagement data (logins, interaction frequency, completion rates) to improve teaching and support interventions. eCampus has limited integration of learning analytics into instructional decision-making.

8. Structured Facilitation Model

OUK's 80/20 synchronous-asynchronous model provides a clear delivery structure. eCampus employs blended and online approaches but lacks a fully standardized facilitation ratio across programmes.

9. Integrated Digital Ecosystem

OUK operates a tightly integrated LMS–ERP–analytics system, while eCampus systems are functional but less fully integrated, affecting seamless tracking of learning and support processes.

3.1.6 Recommendations

Based on the benchmarking findings from Open University of Kenya, the following recommendations are proposed for strengthening the eCampus of Maseno University:

1. **Shift from Content Delivery to Learning Experience Design**

   Redesign courses from static, text-heavy materials to interactive learning modules incorporating multimedia, activities, and real-world applications.

2. **Establish a Dedicated Digitization Unit**

   Create a specialized team responsible for converting academic content into standardized digital formats to improve efficiency, consistency, and scalability.

3. **Strengthen Integrated Quality Assurance Processes**

   Embed multi-level quality assurance across instructional design, ICT systems, and content deployment to ensure academic and technical quality before course rollout.

4. **Redefine Academic Staff Roles**

   Transition faculty roles from traditional lecturers to online facilitators, content designers, and learning guides, supported by appropriate workload and performance models.

5. **Introduce Learning Analytics for Decision-Making**
   Implement data-driven systems to track learner engagement, performance, and course effectiveness to support continuous improvement.
6. **Standardize Facilitation Models**
   Develop a clear institutional framework for online delivery, including defined ratios for synchronous and asynchronous learning.
7. **Enhance Continuous Course Improvement Mechanisms**
   Establish formal feedback loops that use student data and analytics to regularly update and improve course content.
8. **Improve System Integration Across Platforms**
   Strengthen integration between LMS, administrative systems, and analytics tools to enable seamless tracking of teaching, learning, and support services.

3.2 Learner Support Ecosystem

3.2.1 Student Onboarding Processes

First-Year Onboarding

First-year students undergo a comprehensive digital orientation process upon admission. This includes guided introduction to the Learning Management System (LMS), navigation of academic resources, and familiarization with institutional policies and support services. Students are also introduced to self-paced learning expectations, communication channels, and assessment procedures. The onboarding process emphasizes digital literacy and independent learning skills to prepare students for a fully online academic environment.

Continuing Student Orientation

For continuing students, onboarding is treated as a continuous engagement process rather than a one-time activity. Returning learners receive updated guidance on new system features, course structures, academic regulations, and support services. The institution also uses analytics and communication platforms to identify at-risk students and provide targeted orientation support where necessary, ensuring continuity in learning and improved retention.

LMS Induction

LMS induction is a core component of the onboarding process. Students are systematically trained on how to access and navigate the LMS, participate in discussions, submit assignments, and engage with multimedia learning

materials. The induction is supported through interactive tutorials, step-by-step guides, and virtual support sessions. The LMS is positioned as the central hub for all academic, communication, and assessment activities, ensuring students are fully integrated into the digital learning ecosystem from the onset.

3.2.2 Learner Support Services

3.2.3 Helpdesk Model

The eCampus of Maseno University faces a myriad of challenges in managing an effective learner support ecosystem, particularly due to the absence of a unified helpdesk and communication management system. The current support environment is characterized by fragmented communication channels, where student interactions are handled across multiple independent platforms including phone calls, WhatsApp messaging, emails, chats, Learning Management System (LMS) messaging, and discussion forums. This fragmented approach creates operational inefficiencies and negatively affects the quality and timeliness of learner support services.

Without a centralized helpdesk platform, missed calls and unresolved student inquiries often go untracked, making it difficult to ensure accountability and timely follow-up. Staff members are required to juggle multiple communication applications simultaneously, leading to delayed responses, duplication of effort, and increased workload pressures. During critical academic periods such as examinations, registration, or assignment submission deadlines, bulk communications relating to system downtimes, examination changes, or technical support may become scattered across different platforms, resulting in inconsistent dissemination of information and confusion among learners. Consequently, these challenges contribute to frustration among students and educators while placing additional strain on administrative and technical support teams.

Benchmark findings from Open University of Kenya indicate that the institution has addressed similar challenges through the implementation of a unified Learner Support Helpdesk built on Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology using 3CX. The platform consolidates communication channels including voice calls, live chats, video conferencing, and messaging into a single integrated environment. Through this centralized system, all learner interactions are tracked and managed within one platform, significantly reducing cases of missed inquiries, delayed responses, and communication breakdowns.

The benchmarked solution also provides scalability and affordability for higher education institutions, with deployment costs starting from approximately USD 125.42 per month for full-feature access. In addition to reducing operational communication costs, the system enhances coordination between academic, administrative, and technical support units. A key strength identified during benchmarking is the integration capability of the platform with virtual learning environments such as Moodle
, enabling streamlined learner support within online and blended learning contexts. This integration allows support teams to respond to student issues directly within the digital learning ecosystem, improving responsiveness, learner satisfaction, and continuity of learning.

The benchmarking exercise demonstrates that adopting a unified helpdesk infrastructure could significantly strengthen learner support services at the eCampus by improving communication efficiency, reducing response times, enhancing issue tracking, and providing a more coordinated and student-centered support experience.

3.2.4 Challenges Identified

3.2.5 Best Practices Identified

From the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, the following best practices were identified in learner support and helpdesk operations:

1. Unified Digital Support Ecosystem

Learner support is managed through an integrated digital environment that consolidates communication channels (calls, chats, emails, and LMS interactions) into a centralized system, ensuring that all student requests are tracked and resolved efficiently.

2. Structured Student Onboarding Process

A formal onboarding system is in place for both first-year and continuing students, ensuring early familiarity with the LMS, institutional processes, and support services. This reduces confusion and improves learner readiness for online study.

3. LMS-Centered Support Model

The Learning Management System (LMS) serves as the central hub for all academic and support interactions, including course access, communication, assessments, and helpdesk services, ensuring seamless integration of learning and support functions.

4. Proactive Student Support Using Data

The institution leverages learning analytics and system data to identify at-risk students and provide targeted support interventions, improving retention and student success rates.

5. Continuous Orientation and Engagement

Student orientation is not limited to entry-level onboarding but continues throughout the academic journey, especially when system updates, new tools, or new courses are introduced.

6. Multi-Channel Communication with Tracking

Support is delivered through multiple channels (chat, phone, email, and LMS messaging), but all interactions are logged and tracked within a centralized system to ensure accountability and follow-up.

7. Self-Service and Digital Literacy Support

Students are provided with tutorials, guides, and FAQs to enable self-service support. This reduces dependency on helpdesk staff and promotes digital literacy among learners.

8. Responsive and Scalable Support Model

The support system is designed to scale with increasing student numbers, supported by technology-enabled tools and structured workflows that ensure timely response to learner queries.

9. Integration of Academic and Technical Support

Helpdesk services are not limited to technical issues but also integrate academic guidance, ensuring holistic learner support across the student lifecycle.

3.2.6 Gap Analysis

Based on the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, several gaps were identified in the learner support and helpdesk ecosystem at the eCampus of Maseno University:

1. Lack of a Fully Unified Helpdesk System

Unlike OUK, which operates an integrated support system that consolidates calls, emails, chats, and LMS interactions, eCampus support services remain fragmented across multiple platforms, leading to tracking inefficiencies and potential loss of student queries.

2. Limited Centralized Ticketing and Tracking

OUK uses structured systems that log and track all student interactions for accountability and follow-up. At eCampus, issue tracking is less centralized, making it difficult to monitor resolution timelines and service performance.

3. Reactive Rather than Proactive Support Model

OUK employs data-driven mechanisms to identify at-risk students and intervene early. In contrast, eCampus learner support is largely reactive, responding to issues after they are reported rather than anticipating them through analytics.

4. Inconsistent Integration of LMS in Support Services

At OUK, the LMS is the central hub for both learning and support services. At eCampus, LMS integration with helpdesk functions is not fully optimized, resulting in parallel support channels that are not seamlessly connected.

5. Limited Use of Learning Analytics for Support Decisions

OUK leverages student engagement data to guide support interventions. eCampus has limited utilization of analytics in guiding learner support decisions and prioritizing interventions.

6. Fragmented Communication Channels

While multiple communication tools exist at eCampus, they are not fully integrated into a single support ecosystem. This contrasts with OUK's structured omnichannel approach where all communications are unified under one system.

7. Limited Automation and Self-Service Capacity

OUK provides structured self-service tools such as FAQs, tutorials, and automated support features. eCampus relies more on manual support processes, increasing workload on staff and response time.

8. Scalability Constraints in Support Services

As student numbers grow, eCampus support systems face challenges in scaling efficiently. OUK's system is designed for scalability through technology integration and automated workflows.

3.2.7 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should develop a fully integrated, unified helpdesk system that consolidates all learner interactions (calls, emails, chats, and LMS messages) into a single platform, similar to the model implemented by Open University of Kenya. A centralized ticketing system should be introduced to improve tracking, accountability, and response time. The university should strengthen LMS integration with support services and adopt learning analytics to enable proactive identification of at-risk students. Additionally, self-service tools such as FAQs, chatbots, and tutorials should be expanded. Finally, staff capacity should be enhanced to support a scalable, technology-driven, and student-centered support ecosystem.

3.3 Online Assessment and Examination

3.3.1 Online Examination Processes

At Open University of Kenya, online examination processes are fully digitized and integrated within the institutional Learning Management System (LMS), ensuring secure, flexible, and scalable assessment of learners in a fully online environment.

The examination process begins with structured course assessment design, where faculty align learning outcomes with continuous assessment and final examination requirements. Assessments are delivered through an online examination portal integrated with the LMS, enabling students to undertake examinations remotely or under controlled conditions depending on programme requirements.

To uphold academic integrity, the institution employs proctoring and invigilation mechanisms, including online monitoring tools, identity verification processes, and time-controlled assessment windows. In some cases, proctored examinations are supported through virtual invigilation systems and secure login authentication to prevent malpractice.

The system supports both formative and summative assessments, with continuous assessments embedded within the learning modules and final examinations conducted at the end of each semester. The examination platform is designed to handle large-scale concurrency, ensuring system stability during peak examination periods.

Additionally, the university ensures that examination processes are supported by clear policies, technical support teams, and real-time monitoring to address any system challenges promptly. This integrated approach enhances reliability, fairness, and efficiency in the administration of online examinations within a fully digital learning ecosystem.

3.3.2 Student Identity Verification Mechanisms

At Open University of Kenya, student identity verification during online examinations is strengthened through the use of multiple AI-powered and digital proctoring tools designed to ensure academic integrity, authenticity, and secure assessment environments.

The institution employs a combination of proctoring solutions, including **AutoProctor**, **Digiproctor**, **Mercer AI-powered proctoring systems**, and **Quilgo**, each contributing to different layers of identity authentication and examination monitoring. These tools support real-time verification of student identity through webcam monitoring, facial recognition, and ID validation processes prior to and during examinations. The systems are configured to capture and analyze student behavior during assessments, including eye movement tracking, browser activity monitoring, and detection of unauthorized resources or external assistance. This enables continuous invigilation in a fully online environment, reducing the risk of impersonation and academic dishonesty.

3.3.3 Examination Security and Integrity

At Open University of Kenya, examination security and integrity are ensured through a multi-layered digital framework embedded within the Learning Management System (LMS) and supported by AI-powered proctoring tools. The institution uses identity verification systems, browser lockdown features, and real-time monitoring to prevent malpractice during online assessments. Tools such as AutoProctor, Digiproctor, Mercer AI proctoring, and Quilgo enhance invigilation by tracking student behaviour and detecting suspicious activity. Secure login authentication,

timed assessments, and encrypted examination portals further strengthen system security. Continuous technical monitoring and clear examination policies ensure fairness, reliability, and credibility in all online examinations conducted across programmes.

3.3.5 Best Practices Identified

1. Fully Integrated Online Examination Ecosystem

Examinations are seamlessly integrated within the Learning Management System (LMS), enabling students to access, complete, and submit assessments within a single secure digital environment.

2. Use of AI-Powered Proctoring Tools

The institution employs advanced identity verification and proctoring systems such as AutoProctor, Digiproctor, Mercer AI, and Quilgo to ensure real-time monitoring, identity authentication, and academic integrity during examinations.

3. Multi-Layered Security Framework

A combination of secure login authentication, browser lockdown features, time-controlled assessments, and encrypted examination portals enhances system security and reduces opportunities for malpractice.

4. Scalable Examination Infrastructure

The system is designed to handle high concurrency during examination periods, ensuring stability and uninterrupted access for large student populations.

5. Continuous and Flexible Assessment Model

Assessment is embedded within learning modules through continuous formative assessments, complemented by structured summative examinations at the end of each semester.

6. Real-Time Monitoring and Technical Support

Dedicated technical teams provide real-time monitoring and rapid response to system issues during examinations, ensuring smooth delivery and minimal disruptions.

7. Clear Policy and Governance Frameworks

Examination processes are guided by well-defined policies that support fairness, transparency, and standardization across programmes.

8. Data-Driven Assessment Integrity

System logs, analytics, and proctoring reports are used to detect irregularities and strengthen decision-making on academic integrity matters.

3.3.6 Gap Analysis

Based on the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, several gaps were identified in the online assessment and examination systems at the eCampus of Maseno University:

1. Inconsistent Proctoring Coverage Across Student Categories

While eCampus uses Respondus LockDown Browser for fully online students, there is no equivalent standardized digital proctoring system for on-campus students, creating inconsistency in examination security and monitoring approaches.

2. Limited Device Compatibility for Secure Examinations

Respondus LockDown Browser does not support mobile phones, yet on-campus students are required to use mobile devices in some instances. This creates a technological mismatch and weakens standardization of secure assessment environments.

3. Dependence on Manual Invigilation for On-Campus Exams

On-site invigilation is still heavily reliant on human supervision, which introduces variability in enforcement of examination rules and reduces uniformity in monitoring compared to automated proctoring systems used in fully online settings.

4. Infrastructure and Connectivity Challenges

On-campus examination venues experience recurring internet connectivity issues, which affect system stability, exam continuity, and student experience during assessments.

5. Lack of Unified Examination Security Framework

Unlike Open University of Kenya, which uses integrated AI-powered proctoring tools and centralized systems, eCampus lacks a fully unified, cross-platform examination security solution that covers all learner modes.

6. Fragmented Assessment Delivery Models

The coexistence of fully online proctored exams and physically invigilated mobile-based exams creates dual systems with different standards of control, monitoring, and risk exposure.

7. Limited Automation in Integrity Monitoring

Compared to OUK's AI-based monitoring tools (e.g., AutoProctor, Digiproctor, Mercer AI, Quilgo), eCampus relies more on manual oversight, reducing scalability and real-time detection of malpractice.

3.3.7 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should adopt a unified, cross-platform examination security framework to ensure consistent assessment integrity across all learner categories. It is recommended to expand the use of AI-powered proctoring solutions similar to those used by Open University of Kenya, ensuring compatibility across devices, including mobile phones where necessary. The institution should invest in stable examination infrastructure and improve internet reliability at examination venues. A standardized digital invigilation system should replace fragmented manual processes, supported by real-time monitoring tools and centralized exam management.

Additionally, capacity building for invigilators and technical staff should be strengthened to enhance examination security and operational consistency.

3.4 Human Resource and Governance

3.4.1 Staffing Structure and Required Competencies

3.4.2 Staff Recruitment and Qualification Requirements

3.4.3 Faculty Facilitation and Support Models

At Open University of Kenya, faculty facilitation follows a structured digital learning model anchored on an 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous delivery approach. Academic staff act as facilitators, content designers, and learning guides rather than traditional lecturers. The 80% asynchronous component enables self-paced learning through the Learning Management System (LMS), while the 20% synchronous sessions support real-time engagement, discussion, and feedback. Faculty are supported through continuous capacity building in digital pedagogy, instructional design, and online assessment. ICT and digitization teams provide technical and content development support. This model enhances learner-centred teaching, flexibility, and continuous professional development in a fully online environment.

3.4.4 Remuneration and Incentive Structures

The OUK remuneration is structured around an output-based model aligned to its digital learning environment. Academic staff, especially part-time lecturers, are paid per course per semester, with rates ranging approximately between KES 125,000 and KES 158,000 depending on course requirements. Incentives are provided through allowances for participation in course development, digitization workshops, and content creation activities. In line with public service regulations, overtime payments are limited, with recognition instead through structured engagement opportunities. Additional incentives include flexible working arrangements, remote work options, and continuous professional development, promoting productivity, innovation, and engagement in a fully online academic ecosystem.

3.4.5 Faculty Workload Allocation

3.4.6 Resource Mobilization and Financial Administration

3.4.7 Governance Structures

3.4.8 Best Practices Identified

From the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, the following best practices were identified in human resource management and governance for a fully digital university model:

1. Lean Core Staffing with Scalable Support Model

The institution maintains a lean core staff structure supported by a flexible pool of part-time lecturers, enabling rapid scalability in response to growing student enrolments.

2. Integrated Functional Staffing Model

Academic, ICT, instructional design, quality assurance, and learner support roles are integrated into a unified operational structure, promoting collaboration and efficiency in service delivery.

3. Output-Based Workload Management

Staff workload is measured based on engagement metrics such as learner interaction, content updates, and course delivery outputs rather than traditional contact hours.

4. Flexible and Remote Working Arrangements

The institution supports flexible and remote work models, allowing staff to operate beyond traditional office hours and accommodate the demands of a distributed student population.

5. Strong Use of Part-Time Academic Staff

A structured recruitment system for part-time lecturers enables the institution to scale teaching capacity efficiently while maintaining academic quality.

6. Continuous Capacity Building and Retooling

Staff undergo ongoing training in digital pedagogy, LMS use, instructional design, and online facilitation, ensuring continuous professional development.

7. Cross-Functional Training Culture

Employees are trained across multiple functions, enabling ICT, QA, and academic staff to support basic troubleshooting, system understanding, and quality checks.

8. Governance through Structured Hierarchies

Clear reporting structures ensure accountability from departmental levels through to senior leadership and governance organs, strengthening oversight and decision-making.

3.4.9 Gap Analysis

Based on the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, several gaps were identified in the human resource and governance structures at the eCampus of Maseno University:

1. Limited Adoption of Output-Based Workload Models

Unlike OUK, which uses engagement metrics (learner interaction, content updates, and digital activity), eCampus largely relies on traditional contact-hour-based workload systems, limiting alignment with digital teaching realities.

2. Partial Integration of Functional Roles

OUK integrates academic, ICT, instructional design, and learner support roles into a unified ecosystem. At eCampus, these functions remain more siloed, reducing operational efficiency and cross-functional collaboration.

3. Underdeveloped Remote and Flexible Work Structures

OUK supports structured remote working and flexible schedules due to its fully online model. eCampus has limited formalization of flexible work arrangements for academic and support staff.

4. Limited Scalable Staffing Model for Rapid Growth

OUK effectively uses a structured part-time staffing system to scale rapidly. eCampus faces challenges in rapidly expanding academic delivery capacity using flexible staffing models.

5. Weak Cross-Functional Capacity Building

While OUK emphasizes cross-training across ICT, QA, and academic functions, eCampus staff development is still largely role-specific, limiting multi-skilling and operational flexibility.

6. Less Formalized Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Digital Pedagogy

OUK has structured and continuous training in instructional design and online facilitation. At eCampus, CPD in digital teaching practices is less systematically institutionalized.

7. Governance Integration Gaps

OUK demonstrates tighter integration between operational units and governance structures, while eCampus shows more traditional hierarchical separation, affecting agility in decision-making.

3.4.10 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should transition towards an output-based workload model that measures staff performance through learner engagement, content development, and digital facilitation outputs. It is recommended to integrate academic, ICT, instructional design, and learner support functions into a more coordinated governance structure to enhance efficiency. The university should formalize flexible and remote working arrangements to align with online learning demands. A scalable part-time staffing model should be strengthened to support rapid enrolment growth. Continuous professional development in digital pedagogy and cross-functional training should be institutionalized to enhance staff capacity, agility, and effectiveness in a fully digital learning environment.

3.5 eLibrary and Online Resources

3.5.1 Access to eResources

OUK provides centralized access to eResources through an integrated discovery system that enables students and staff to locate, retrieve, and utilize academic materials from multiple databases within a single interface. The system is designed to ensure equitable and uninterrupted access to digital journals, eBooks, and course materials regardless

of user location. Access is fully embedded within the Learning Management System (LMS), allowing learners to engage with library resources directly within their courses, thereby enhancing usability and academic integration.

3.5.2 Subscription and Licensing Management

The institution utilizes the EPSCORE discovery tool to streamline access to subscribed academic resources and improve resource visibility across platforms. In addition, OUK has implemented Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) library integration with Single Sign-On (SSO) functionality, enabling seamless authentication and access to eLibrary services without multiple logins. This integration enhances user experience, reduces access barriers, and ensures efficient management of subscriptions and licensing agreements. The system also supports centralized monitoring of resource usage, which informs subscription decisions, cost management, and resource optimization strategies within the university's digital learning ecosystem.

3.5.5 Best Practices Identified

From the benchmarking engagement with Open University of Kenya, the following best practices were identified in the management of eLibrary and online learning resources:

1. Integrated eResource Discovery System

The institution uses a centralized discovery tool (EPSCORE) that enables seamless search and access to multiple academic databases, journals, and eBooks through a single interface, improving efficiency and user experience.

2. LMS-Embedded Library Access

eLibrary services are fully integrated within the Learning Management System (LMS), allowing learners to access academic resources directly within their courses without navigating external platforms.

3. Single Sign-On (SSO) Authentication

The implementation of Single Sign-On (SSO) simplifies access to multiple library and academic systems, reducing login barriers and improving user convenience.

4. LTI-Based Library Integration

Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) integration enables seamless connection between the LMS and library systems, ensuring smooth access to subscribed resources within learning modules.

5. Centralized Subscription and Licensing Management

Resource subscriptions are centrally managed, allowing efficient monitoring of usage, cost control, and informed decision-making on renewals and acquisitions.

6. Improved Resource Visibility and Accessibility

The discovery system enhances visibility of available academic materials, ensuring that students and staff can easily identify and utilize relevant resources.

7. Data-Driven Resource Utilization

Usage analytics are applied to track engagement with eResources, supporting evidence-based decisions on subscriptions and resource optimization.

These practices demonstrate a highly integrated, user-centred, and technology-driven approach to eLibrary management within a fully digital university environment.

3.5.6 Gap Analysis

1. Limited Integration of Library Systems with LMS

The main gap lies in the level of system integration, user authentication efficiency, and data-driven management of eLibrary services compared to a fully integrated digital library ecosystem at OUK.

2. Absence of Single Sign-On (SSO) Functionality

OUK employs SSO to simplify access to multiple systems, while eCampus users often rely on multiple login credentials, creating access barriers and reduced user convenience.

3. Fragmented Resource Discovery Systems

OUK uses a centralized discovery tool (EPSCORE) that consolidates access to multiple databases. At eCampus, resource discovery is more fragmented, limiting efficient search and retrieval of academic materials.

4. Limited Centralized Subscription Management

OUK applies centralized subscription and licensing management with usage analytics. eCampus lacks a fully integrated system for monitoring resource usage and optimizing subscription decisions.

5. Underutilization of Usage Analytics

OUK uses data-driven insights to guide resource allocation and subscriptions. eCampus has limited application of analytics in evaluating eResource usage and impact.

6. Reduced Visibility of Available Resources

Without a unified discovery layer, students and staff at eCampus may experience challenges in easily identifying and accessing all available academic resources.

3.5.7 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should strengthen integration of eLibrary services with the Learning Management System (LMS) through LTI-enabled connections and consider implementing Single Sign-On (SSO) to improve seamless access to digital resources. It is recommended to adopt a centralized discovery tool similar to EPSCORE to enhance resource visibility and retrieval. The university should establish a unified subscription and licensing management system supported by usage analytics for evidence-based decision-making. Additionally,

eCampus should proceed with the deployment of anti-plagiarism software to strengthen academic integrity. Continuous staff and student training on effective use of eResources should also be prioritized for improved digital literacy.

3.6 Policy and Quality Assurance

3.6.1 ODELL Policies and Operational Guidelines

The OUK is guided by a structured and emerging policy framework designed to support fully online education delivery. The institution is actively developing and operationalizing key policies that provide direction for ICT use, artificial intelligence integration, learner support, facilitation, and assessment within a digital learning environment.

The ICT Policy establishes standards for the use, management, and security of digital systems supporting teaching and learning. The AI Policy provides guidelines for the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence in academic delivery, research, and administrative processes. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy defines mechanisms for assessing and accrediting learners' prior knowledge and experience, promoting access and flexibility. The Student Support Policy outlines structured mechanisms for academic, technical, and psychosocial support services, ensuring learner success in a fully online environment. The Facilitation of Learning and Assessment Policy provides operational guidelines for course delivery, assessment design, feedback mechanisms, and quality assurance in digital learning contexts.

3.6.2 Quality Assurance Frameworks

The Quality Assurance (QA) framework at OUK is designed to ensure academic integrity, consistency, and excellence in a fully online and open learning environment. The framework integrates institutional policies, instructional design standards, ICT systems, and continuous monitoring mechanisms to maintain high-quality delivery across all programmes.

Quality assurance begins at the course development stage, where academic content undergoes structured review by subject matter experts, instructional designers, ICT specialists, and QA officers. This ensures alignment with curriculum standards, learning outcomes, and regulatory requirements. Courses are further validated for functionality and accessibility within the Learning Management System (LMS) before deployment.

The QA framework also includes continuous monitoring of teaching and learning processes through learner feedback, engagement analytics, and system performance data. This allows for real-time identification of gaps and continuous improvement of course delivery.

In addition, the institution conducts targeted audits focusing on pedagogy, system security, data management, and disaster recovery readiness. These audits ensure that both academic and technological systems function effectively

and securely. Overall, the QA framework is embedded across the entire academic lifecycle, ensuring that quality is not a one-time activity but a continuous process supported by data, technology, and institutional governance structures.

3.6.3 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms are embedded within the digital learning ecosystem to ensure continuous improvement, accountability, and data-driven decision-making across teaching, learning, and support services.

The institution applies **student assessment analytics** through the Learning Management System (LMS), tracking performance in continuous assessments, assignments, and final examinations. This enables early identification of learning gaps and targeted academic interventions.

Course facilitator assessment is conducted using learner engagement data, peer reviews, and instructional effectiveness indicators such as responsiveness, feedback quality, and interaction levels within online learning environments.

Course audits are undertaken periodically to review content relevance, instructional design quality, system functionality, and alignment with curriculum and quality assurance standards. These audits ensure that courses remain current, accessible, and pedagogically sound.

Student satisfaction monitoring is strengthened through structured surveys and analysis of **social media feedback channels**, allowing the institution to capture learner sentiment, emerging concerns, and service experience trends in real time.

Together, these mechanisms create a comprehensive M&E system that integrates academic performance, teaching quality, course integrity, and learner experience. This ensures continuous improvement and supports the institution's commitment to high-quality, responsive, and scalable online education delivery.

3.6.6 Best Practices Identified

the following best practices were identified in policy implementation, quality assurance, and monitoring and evaluation systems:

1. Comprehensive ODELL Policy Framework

The institution is developing integrated policies covering ICT, AI, Student Support, Recognition of Prior Learning, and Facilitation of Learning and Assessment, ensuring a strong governance foundation for fully online education.

2. Embedded Quality Assurance Across the Learning Lifecycle

Quality assurance is not isolated but integrated from course design through delivery and assessment, ensuring continuous alignment with academic and regulatory standards.

3. Structured Course Audit Systems

Regular course audits are conducted to evaluate content relevance, instructional design quality, system functionality, and pedagogical effectiveness.

4. Data-Driven Monitoring and Evaluation

LMS analytics are used to track student performance, engagement, and completion rates, enabling evidence-based decision-making and timely interventions.

5. Multi-Dimensional Student Assessment Monitoring

Student performance is continuously tracked through formative and summative assessments, supported by digital analytics to identify learning gaps early.

6. Faculty Performance and Facilitator Evaluation

Course facilitators are assessed using learner engagement metrics, responsiveness, feedback quality, and interaction levels within the LMS environment.

7. Integration of Student Satisfaction Feedback Channels

Student feedback is collected through surveys and social media monitoring, enabling real-time understanding of learner experience and service quality.

8. Cross-Functional Quality Governance

Quality assurance is supported by collaboration between academic departments, ICT units, and QA teams, ensuring holistic oversight of teaching and learning processes.

3.6.7 Gap Analysis

1. Fragmented Policy Framework for ODELL Implementation

Unlike OUK, which is developing an integrated set of ODELL policies (ICT, AI, Student Support, Assessment, and RPL), eCampus policies remain less consolidated, limiting coherence in digital learning governance.

2. Limited Integration of Quality Assurance Across the Learning Lifecycle

OUK embeds quality assurance from course design to delivery and assessment. At eCampus, QA processes exist but are less fully integrated across instructional design, ICT systems, and continuous delivery processes.

3. Inconsistent Course Audit Mechanisms

OUK conducts structured and periodic course audits focusing on pedagogy, content quality, and system functionality. At eCampus, course review processes are less formalized and less frequent.

4. Underutilization of Data-Driven Monitoring Systems

OUK uses LMS analytics extensively for real-time decision-making. eCampus has limited use of learning analytics in monitoring student performance, engagement, and course effectiveness.

5. Limited Structured Assessment of Faculty Facilitators

Unlike OUK, where facilitator performance is evaluated using engagement metrics and learner interaction data, eCampus lacks a standardized digital system for assessing facilitator effectiveness.

6. Weak Integration of Student Feedback and Social Media Insights

OUK systematically incorporates student satisfaction data and social media feedback into M&E processes. At eCampus, student feedback mechanisms are more traditional and less real-time or digitally integrated.

7. Limited Cross-Functional QA Governance

OUK uses integrated collaboration between academic, ICT, and QA units. eCampus governance structures remain more siloed, reducing agility in quality assurance decision-making.

3.6.8 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should develop a consolidated ODELL policy framework integrating ICT, AI, student support, assessment, and recognition of prior learning to enhance governance coherence. Quality assurance should be fully embedded across the learning lifecycle, from course design to delivery and assessment. It is recommended to institutionalize regular course audits supported by clear standards and digital tools. The university should strengthen the use of LMS analytics for real-time monitoring of student performance, facilitator effectiveness, and course quality, including **purchase of a dedicated LMS analytics dashboard tool for automated reporting and visualization**. Student feedback systems, including social media sentiment analysis, should be integrated into M&E processes to support continuous improvement and responsive decision-making.

3.7 Capacity Building Strategies

3.7.1 Staff Capacity Development Programmes

At Open University of Kenya, staff capacity development is a strategic priority designed to support the transition to a fully digital and technology-driven learning environment. The institution implements structured and continuous training programmes to equip academic, technical, and administrative staff with relevant competencies for Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL).

Capacity building focuses on digital pedagogy, instructional design, online facilitation, Learning Management System (LMS) use, and online assessment practices. Staff are also trained in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence integration in education, data analytics, and digital content development.

The university adopts a “learning-by-doing” approach, where staff are actively involved in course development, digitization, and facilitation while receiving continuous mentoring and support from instructional designers and ICT specialists. Cross-functional training is also emphasized, enabling staff to acquire skills across academic, ICT, and

quality assurance domains. Regular workshops, retooling sessions, and collaborative training initiatives are conducted to ensure continuous professional growth and alignment with evolving digital education needs. This approach ensures that staff remain adaptable, competent, and responsive within a rapidly changing online learning ecosystem.

3.7.2 Faculty Training and Continuous Professional Development

At Open University of Kenya, staff certification and professional development are structured as mandatory and progressive pathways to ensure readiness for online teaching and support roles. A key requirement for engagement as a part-time facilitator is completion of at least **Online Facilitation Pedagogy** and **Online Assessments** certification courses.

3.7.3 Digital Literacy and Pedagogical Skills Training

The institution offers a range of structured professional development programmes, including the **ICDL Professional Certification Programme**, **Digital Foundations Module**, **Digital Empowerment Module**, **My Digital World**, **Online Facilitation Pedagogy**, and **Online Assessments**. These programmes are designed to build both foundational and advanced digital competencies required for effective Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) delivery.

3.7.4 Certification and Support Models

Certification is used as a formal mechanism to validate competency and readiness for online facilitation roles. Support is provided through structured training pathways, mentorship, and continuous upskilling opportunities facilitated by instructional designers and ICT specialists. This model ensures that all academic staff meet minimum digital teaching standards while continuously improving their pedagogical and technological capabilities in a fully online learning environment.

3.7.5 Best Practices Identified

1. Mandatory Certification for Online Facilitation

The institution requires academic staff, especially part-time facilitators, to complete compulsory certifications such as **Online Facilitation Pedagogy** and **Online Assessments** before engagement in teaching activities.

2. Structured Professional Development Pathways

A clearly defined set of professional development courses (e.g., ICDL Professional Certification, Digital Foundations, Digital Empowerment, and My Digital World) provides progressive learning pathways for staff digital upskilling.

3. Competency-Based Staff Readiness Model

Staff participation in online teaching is based on demonstrated competency through certification rather than informal or experience-based appointment alone.

4. Integration of Pedagogy and Technology Training

Training programmes combine digital literacy with pedagogical skills, ensuring faculty are not only technically competent but also effective online educators.

5. Continuous and Modular Learning Approach

Capacity building is delivered through modular, flexible training programmes that allow continuous upskilling and alignment with evolving digital education needs.

6. Learning-by-Doing Model

Staff apply newly acquired skills directly in course development and facilitation while receiving ongoing mentorship and support.

7. Institutionalized Support Systems

Instructional designers, ICT specialists, and peer learning communities provide continuous technical and pedagogical support to staff.

8. Certification as Quality Assurance Mechanism

Certification serves as a formal quality assurance tool ensuring minimum standards for online teaching and assessment delivery are met.

3.7.6 Gap Analysis

1. Absence of Mandatory Certification Pathways

Unlike OUK, which requires compulsory certification in Online Facilitation Pedagogy and Online Assessments for part-time engagement, eCampus lacks a formal certification prerequisite framework for online teaching roles.

2. Limited Structured Digital Competency Framework

OUK offers clearly defined modular training programmes (ICDL, Digital Foundations, Digital Empowerment, My Digital World). At eCampus, capacity building is less structured and not fully mapped into progressive competency pathways.

3. Weak Integration of Pedagogy and Digital Skills Training

At OUK, pedagogy and technology training are integrated, while at eCampus, training in digital tools and teaching methodology is often delivered separately, reducing coherence in skill development.

4. Lack of Competency-Based Staff Readiness Model

OUK uses certification as a gatekeeping mechanism for online facilitation roles. eCampus relies more on academic qualifications and experience, with limited formal assessment of digital teaching readiness.

5. Limited Continuous and Modular Training Structure

OUK provides ongoing, modular, and flexible training pathways. eCampus capacity building is more episodic and workshop-based, limiting continuous skill progression.

6. Underdeveloped Learning-by-Doing and Mentorship Model

OUK embeds practical application of skills with mentorship from instructional designers and ICT specialists. eCampus has less formalized mentorship and applied learning structures.

7. Limited Institutionalization of Certification as Quality Assurance

At OUK, certification serves as a quality assurance mechanism for teaching readiness, while at eCampus, certification is not fully embedded as a standard requirement for teaching quality assurance.

3.7.7 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should institutionalize a structured, competency-based staff development framework aligned to digital learning needs. It is recommended to introduce mandatory certification requirements for online facilitation and assessment, similar to the model used by Open University of Kenya. A progressive training pathway should be developed, including modules such as digital foundations, instructional design, and LMS-based teaching. Capacity building should integrate pedagogy and technology training to ensure coherence in skill development. The university should also adopt continuous, modular, and mentorship-based training approaches. Certification should be linked to staff deployment, quality assurance, and recognition of teaching readiness in online education delivery.

3.8 Infrastructure and Technology

3.8.1 Learning Management Systems

The Open University of Kenya Learning Management System (LMS) forms the central backbone of all teaching, learning, assessment, and student support activities within its fully online education model. The LMS is designed as an integrated digital ecosystem that supports asynchronous and synchronous learning, course delivery, communication, and performance tracking.

The system enables structured delivery of learning content through modular course design, incorporating multimedia resources, interactive activities, and continuous assessments. It also facilitates real-time communication between students and facilitators through discussion forums, messaging tools, and virtual learning sessions.

The LMS is integrated with other institutional systems, including the ERP and analytics platforms, allowing seamless data flow for academic management, reporting, and decision-making. This integration supports monitoring of student engagement, course performance, and institutional effectiveness.

Additionally, the LMS supports scalability and high concurrency, ensuring stable performance during peak usage periods such as examinations and assignment submissions. Security features, including controlled access, authentication protocols, and system monitoring, enhance data protection and academic integrity.

3.8.2 Communication and Collaboration Tools

Communication and collaboration are supported through integrated digital platforms that connect students, faculty, and support teams within a unified learning ecosystem. The institution utilizes LMS discussion forums, live virtual sessions, messaging tools, emails, and Voice over IP (VOIP) systems such as 3CX and Zoom to facilitate real-time and asynchronous communication. These tools support learner engagement, collaborative learning, academic consultations, and centralized learner support services.

3.8.3 Network and Server Infrastructure

The university operates a technology-driven infrastructure designed to support a fully online institution with high student concurrency. The infrastructure includes cloud-supported systems, virtual servers, and integrated digital platforms capable of supporting teaching, learning, assessment, and administrative operations. Continuous system upgrades and infrastructure scaling are undertaken to accommodate increasing enrolment and ensure stable performance during peak periods such as examinations.

3.8.4 Data Security and Backup Systems

At Open University of Kenya, data security is supported through structured ICT governance and regular internal audits focusing on system security, database management, backups, and disaster recovery. Secure authentication systems, controlled access protocols, and monitoring tools are used to protect institutional and learner data. Backup and disaster recovery mechanisms are regularly reviewed to ensure operational continuity and data protection within the digital learning environment.

3.8.5 Integration of Digital Platforms

OUK operates an integrated digital ecosystem linking the Learning Management System (LMS), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, analytics platforms, eLibrary systems, and learner support tools. The institution has also implemented LTI integrations and Single Sign-On (SSO) functionality to streamline access across systems. This integration enhances operational efficiency, centralized reporting, and seamless user experience for students and staff.

3.8.6 Emerging Technologies and Innovation

The university actively integrates emerging technologies to enhance teaching, learning, and institutional operations. These include AI-powered proctoring systems, learning analytics, multilingual transcription tools, assistive technologies, virtual laboratories, and digital content development platforms. OUK is also developing AI governance frameworks to guide ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence in education. This innovation-driven approach positions the institution as a leader in technology-enabled open and distance learning in the region.

3.8.7 Best Practices Identified

1. Fully Integrated Digital Ecosystem

The institution operates an integrated ecosystem connecting the LMS, ERP, analytics platforms, eLibrary systems, learner support services, and communication tools, enabling seamless academic and administrative operations.

2. LMS-Centred Academic Operations

The Learning Management System (LMS) serves as the central platform for teaching, learning, assessment, communication, and learner support, ensuring consistency and centralized management.

3. Advanced Communication and Collaboration Infrastructure

The use of integrated communication tools such as discussion forums, virtual classrooms, messaging systems, and VOIP technology (3CX) supports effective learner engagement and institutional communication.

4. Scalable Network and Server Infrastructure

The university maintains scalable server and network infrastructure capable of supporting high student concurrency, particularly during examinations and peak learning periods.

5. Strong Data Security and Disaster Recovery Measures

Regular audits on system security, database management, backups, and disaster recovery ensure operational continuity, data protection, and system reliability.

6. Single Sign-On (SSO) and LTI Integration

Implementation of SSO and Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) enhances seamless user access and integration across multiple institutional systems.

7. Adoption of Emerging Technologies

The institution actively deploys innovative technologies such as AI-powered proctoring, learning analytics, virtual laboratories, assistive technologies, and multilingual transcription systems to improve learning experiences.

8. Accessibility and Inclusivity by Design

Digital systems are designed with accessibility features including captions, assistive technologies, and multilingual support to accommodate diverse learner needs.

9. Data-Driven Decision-Making

Analytics systems are integrated into institutional operations to support monitoring, reporting, learner tracking, and evidence-based planning.

3.8.8 Gap Analysis

1. Limited Integration of Digital Systems

Unlike OUK's fully integrated ecosystem linking LMS, ERP, analytics, eLibrary, and learner support systems, eCampus platforms operate with lower levels of integration, resulting in fragmented workflows and reporting challenges.

2. Incomplete Centralization of Communication Tools

OUK utilizes integrated communication platforms such as 3CX VOIP and LMS-based communication systems. At eCampus, communication channels remain more decentralized across email, calls, messaging apps, and LMS forums.

3. Infrastructure Scalability Challenges

OUK has invested in scalable infrastructure capable of supporting high concurrency. eCampus continues to experience system strain during peak examination periods, particularly due to bandwidth and server limitations.

4. Weak LMS Analytics and Reporting Capabilities

OUK applies advanced analytics for monitoring engagement and institutional performance. eCampus has limited deployment of dedicated LMS analytics dashboards and automated reporting tools.

5. Limited Adoption of Emerging Technologies

While OUK has integrated AI-powered proctoring, multilingual tools, assistive technologies, and virtual labs, adoption of emerging technologies at eCampus remains relatively limited and less institutionalized.

6. Data Security and Disaster Recovery Gaps

Although eCampus has security measures in place, OUK demonstrates more structured and regularly audited approaches to disaster recovery, database management, and infrastructure resilience.

7. Limited Accessibility and Inclusivity Features

OUK incorporates accessibility-by-design features such as captions and assistive technologies. At eCampus, accessibility integration within digital learning systems remains less comprehensive.

8. Limited Single Sign-On (SSO) and LTI Integration

OUK's implementation of SSO and LTI integration provides seamless user experience across systems. eCampus users still navigate multiple systems with limited authentication integration.

3.8.9 Recommendations

The eCampus of Maseno University should strengthen integration between the LMS, ERP, eLibrary, learner support, and analytics systems to create a unified digital ecosystem similar to that of Open University of Kenya. Investment in scalable server and network infrastructure is necessary to support high concurrency during examinations and peak learning periods. The university should procure an LMS analytics dashboard tool for automated reporting and data-driven decision-making. Adoption of emerging technologies such as AI-powered proctoring, virtual laboratories, and assistive technologies should be prioritized. Additionally, completion of Single Sign-On (SSO), stronger disaster recovery systems, and accessibility features will enhance efficiency, security, and inclusivity.

CHAPTER FOUR: CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS

4.1 Key Strengths Observed

The benchmarking exercise at Open University of Kenya revealed several institutional strengths that support effective implementation of Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL). One of the major strengths observed was the existence of a fully integrated digital learning ecosystem that supports teaching, learning, assessment, administration, and learner support through interconnected systems. The institution has successfully operationalized a centralized Learning Management System (LMS) integrated with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), analytics platforms, eLibrary systems, and communication tools, enhancing efficiency and user experience.

The university also demonstrated strong commitment to learner-centred education through its flexible 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous delivery model, which promotes accessibility and self-paced learning (Anderson, 2008). In addition, the institution has invested significantly in digital infrastructure, including AI-powered online proctoring systems, virtual laboratories, and Voice over IP (VOIP) communication technologies that enhance assessment integrity and learner support.

Another key strength observed was the institution's emphasis on continuous staff capacity development through mandatory certification programmes in online facilitation, digital pedagogy, and online assessment. The use of structured quality assurance mechanisms, learning analytics, and data-driven monitoring systems further strengthens institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement processes (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

The institution also demonstrated strong policy direction through ongoing development of ICT, AI, student support, and online assessment policies aligned with international best practices in open and distance learning.

4.2 Major Gaps Identified

The benchmarking exercise identified several gaps within the eCampus of Maseno University when compared with the digital learning model implemented at Open University of Kenya. Key gaps included limited integration of

institutional systems, fragmented learner support services, and inadequate use of learning analytics for decision-making. The university also lacks a fully unified helpdesk system capable of tracking student interactions across communication channels. In online assessment, inconsistencies exist between remote and on-campus examination security models due to limited cross-platform proctoring solutions. Additional gaps were observed in structured staff certification programmes, LMS analytics reporting tools, accessibility features, and centralized quality assurance processes for digital learning delivery.

4.3 Emerging Trends and Innovations

The benchmarking exercise revealed several emerging trends shaping the future of Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODELL). These include the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching, learning, assessment, and learner support; adoption of AI-powered proctoring systems; increased use of learning analytics for monitoring student engagement; and implementation of virtual laboratories and assistive technologies. The use of Single Sign-On (SSO), Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI), and integrated digital ecosystems also emerged as key innovations supporting seamless learner experience. In addition, competency-based learning, modular professional certification programmes, and flexible 80% asynchronous and 20% synchronous delivery models were identified as evolving practices enhancing accessibility and lifelong learning opportunities.

4.4 Opportunities for Adaptation

The benchmarking exercise presented several opportunities for adaptation within the eCampus of Maseno University. These include adoption of a unified learner support and helpdesk system, implementation of LMS analytics dashboards for automated reporting, and integration of Single Sign-On (SSO) across institutional systems. Opportunities also exist for strengthening digital pedagogy through structured certification programmes in online facilitation and assessment. The university may further adapt AI-powered proctoring tools, centralized eResource discovery systems, and enhanced quality assurance frameworks to improve scalability, efficiency, and learner experience. Establishment of dedicated digitization units and integrated monitoring systems would further strengthen the institution's ODeL ecosystem.

4.5 Cost–Benefit Considerations

Implementation of advanced digital learning systems requires significant financial investment in infrastructure, software licensing, staff training, and system integration. However, the benchmarking exercise demonstrated that long-term benefits outweigh initial costs. Integrated digital ecosystems improve operational efficiency, learner satisfaction, scalability, and quality assurance while reducing duplication of systems and administrative workload. Adoption of centralized learner support systems, AI-powered proctoring tools, and LMS analytics platforms may

involve recurring licensing and maintenance costs, but these investments enhance institutional responsiveness, assessment integrity, and data-driven decision-making. Additionally, flexible online learning models expand student access and enrolment opportunities, generating potential long-term institutional sustainability and increased competitiveness in digital higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The benchmarking exercise between Maseno University and Open University of Kenya demonstrates significant differences in the maturity of digital learning ecosystems, particularly in system integration, learner support, assessment security, staff capacity development, and use of learning analytics. The Open University of Kenya presents a more advanced, fully integrated, and data-driven Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) model supported by strong policy frameworks, unified digital systems, and structured capacity building. The eCampus model at Maseno University shows strong foundational structures but requires further integration, automation, and standardization to achieve comparable efficiency, scalability, and learner experience in a fully digital learning environment.

5.2 Strategic Recommendations

Short-term recommendations

- Deploy a unified LMS analytics dashboard for real-time reporting and decision-making.
- Implement a centralized learner support/helpdesk system to track all student interactions.
- Introduce mandatory training in online facilitation and online assessment for faculty.
- Strengthen communication integration across LMS, email, and messaging platforms.

Medium-term recommendations

- Integrate institutional systems (LMS, ERP, eLibrary, and support systems) into a unified digital ecosystem.
- Adopt Single Sign-On (SSO) and Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standards.
- Implement AI-powered proctoring solutions for both online and on-campus examinations.
- Develop structured staff certification pathways for digital pedagogy and instructional design.

Long-term recommendations

- Establish a fully integrated digital university ecosystem with advanced analytics and AI-driven decision support.

- Institutionalize a competency-based staffing and certification model for all online teaching roles.
- Invest in scalable cloud infrastructure and virtual learning environments, including virtual laboratories.
- Develop a fully automated quality assurance and continuous improvement framework for ODELL.

5.3 Proposed Implementation Roadmap

The implementation roadmap is informed by the Commission for University Education (CUE) audit conducted on 3rd October 2024, which identified key areas requiring urgent strengthening for the accreditation and operational effectiveness of the eCampus of Maseno University. The recommendations emerging from this benchmarking exercise reinforce and extend the CUE audit findings and should therefore be prioritized for immediate implementation starting in the 2026/2027 financial year.

The implementation should be phased to ensure feasibility, sustainability, and alignment with institutional readiness. In the **short term (0–6 months)**, priority should be given to immediate "quick win" interventions, including deployment of an LMS analytics dashboard for real-time reporting, establishment of a unified learner support/helpdesk system, and mandatory staff training in online facilitation and online assessment.

In the **medium term (6 months to 1 year)**, the institution should focus on deeper system transformation, including completion of the integration of core institutional systems (LMS, ERP, eLibrary, and support systems), adoption of Single Sign-On (SSO) and Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standards, implementation of AI-based proctoring systems, and institutionalization of structured staff certification programmes in digital pedagogy and instructional design.

In the **long term (2 - 3 years)**, the university should aim to establish a fully integrated and intelligent digital learning ecosystem supported by advanced analytics, AI-driven decision-making, virtual laboratories, and a mature, automated quality assurance framework for ODeL delivery.

Appendices

- Data collection tools (questionnaires, interview guides)

Benchmarking Interview Guide / Questions

1. Course Development and Delivery

(i) How is the course development process structured for online course development?
(ii) What criteria or factors guide the selection of courses developed for online delivery?

(iii) What facilitation models are used for delivering online courses?
(iv) How are synchronous and asynchronous learning approaches integrated?
(v) How is faculty engagement and student interaction managed in online courses?

2. Learner Support Services (Learner Support Ecosystem)

(i) How are learner support services structured and managed within the institution?
(ii) What model is used for student onboarding onto the online platform (first-year and continuing students)?
(iii) What processes are followed for orientation and LMS induction?
(iv) How is the helpdesk system structured and managed?
(v) How are student queries, complaints, and support requests tracked and resolved?

3. Online Assessment and Examination

(i) How are online examinations conducted and administered?
(ii) What systems are used to ensure examination integrity and security?
(iii) How is student identity verified during online assessments?
(iv) What tools or technologies are used for online proctoring?

4. Human Resource and Governance

(i) What key roles and qualifications are required to implement online learning programmes?
(ii) How are staff involved in course development, facilitation, and learner support remunerated?
(iii) How is faculty workload calculated in an online learning environment?
(iv) How are financial resources mobilised and managed for ODeL operations?
(v) What governance structures support online learning implementation?

5. eLibrary and Online Resources

(i) How is access to electronic resources (eResources) managed for learners?
(ii) How are subscription costs for eResources managed and controlled?
(iii) How are copyright and intellectual property issues handled in course development?
(iv) What systems are used for discovery and access to digital academic resources?

6. Policy and Quality Assurance

(i) What operational guidelines support the implementation of ODeL policies?
(ii) What quality assurance frameworks are used for online learning?
(iii) What key challenges have been experienced and how have they been addressed?
(iv) How is continuous improvement in online learning ensured?

7. Capacity Building Strategies

(i) What capacity building strategies are in place for ODeL support staff?
(ii) What training programmes exist for faculty involved in online course facilitation?
(iii) Is certification required for online teaching roles?
(iv) How is continuous professional development (CPD) supported and monitored?

8. Infrastructure and Technology

(i) What Learning Management System (LMS) is used and how is it structured?
(ii) How are communication and collaboration tools integrated into the learning environment?
(iii) What network and server infrastructure supports online learning?
(iv) How is data security, backup, and disaster recovery managed?
(v) How are digital platforms integrated across academic and administrative systems?
(vi) What emerging technologies are being used or planned for adoption?