VOLUME 2

Introduction

In the series titled *Does Distance Education in the Developing Context Need More Research? Building Practice into Theory* Volume 1 deals with these three thematic sections:

- History, philosophical and theoretical approaches and paradigms in distance education;

- Building frameworks in distance education research; and

- Praxis in distance education research

Volume 2 continues this work and focuses on these three sections:

ix

- Regional trends and gaps in distance education research

- Scholarship in distance education research

- Quality assurance in distance education research

The organisation of the chapters are briefly detailed below.

Theme 4: Regional trends and gaps in distance education research

Theme 4 has four chapters. In his focus on research trends and gaps in Cameroon, the author in *Chapter 14* examines the use of technologies with regard to existing policies and strategy documents guiding the development of distance education. Findings show there is a paucity of research on how academia is exploring the use of various technological devices in the distance mode. The chapter concludes with the outline of some of the challenges emerging from the existing studies, how they

can be addressed, and future research directions. *Chapter 15* stresses the credence the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has given to the indispensability of the distance education delivery mode and operational principles in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the author bemoans the challenges of technological infrastructure, public perception regarding quality, student retention, and success, amongst others, confronting the mode in the country. It highlights the trends in research in the afore-mentioned areas with a view to envisioning a future for the field of open and distance learning in terms of research and practice in Nigeria. *Chapter 16* attempts to address the gap in research on continuous professional development programmes regarding distance education. The exemplified case study discusses the design and implementation of a short course titled *Certificate in Online Teaching for Educators* (COTE) in view of extracting a framework for relevant and up-to-date short courses. Although still open to refinement, scholars in the field will find the framework useful irrespective of their context. Guided by connectivism and content analysis, *Chapter 17* addresses trends and gaps in distance education research in Africa. Despite the value of the mode and evidence of the critical role it can play during the time of crises (as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic), the authors lament the paucity in its research on the continent in comparison to conventional learning. Development in technology, particularly access to electricity and internet, makes them question the effectiveness of online learning in Africa.

Theme 5: Scholarship in distance education research

The theme **Scholarship in distance education research** covers three chapters. *Chapter 18* critically surveys the recent corpus of scholarly literature on open and distance higher education with the aim to determine a research agenda to guide the expansion of this mode of higher education in South Africa in particular. The chapter identifies two major voids: the lack of a comprehensive theory to first organise knowledge pertaining to the distinct mode of open and distance higher education, and second the lack of research-based guidelines to improve open and distance higher education practice. The chapter identifies South African scholarship as a potential in constructing such theory, especially theory appropriate to its contexts of the Global South. With a focus on the same country, *Chapter 19* analyses ODL research levels and publication vehicles towards the development of a context-specific ODL research framework. The findings reveal that the number of research articles published in international journals for all South African authors is relatively low. The chapter argues for the need to develop a context-specific ODL research framework for South

Africa and other developing countries. Framed within a broadly pragmatic perspective, *Chapter 20* explores some of the leading journals dedicated to distance education research and examines the recent trends in what is being researched. It brings to the fore the relatively low number of journals focusing on distance education despite the blurring of boundaries between the mode and its conventional counterpart. It further identifies some of the gaps that might usefully be addressed in future research.

Theme 6: Quality assurance in distance education research

There are three chapters in theme 6. *Chapter 21* addresses enhancing the quality in distance education through research-based quality assurance approaches. This becomes necessary in view of the positive developments in the mode on the continent, coupled with concerns about the quality of the offerings. The chapter stresses the need to move away from a purely technical approach to quality assurance. It draws from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) supported work in Southern Africa to propose methodologies grounded in the day-to-day activities of practitioners that involve cooperation and collaboration with the use of technology. With focus on student supervision ethics and the general conduct of producing quality distance education research, *Chapter 22* explores quality matters through the lens of Harvey and Green (1993), as well as ethics in distance education research. The chapter stresses the important place of quality and ethics in distance education and the need to uphold them for both professional growth and accountability for those involved in research. *Chapter 23* tackles quality and ethics as critical subjects given the increase in distance education research to ensure that all stakeholders are protected from harm due to violating ethics guidelines and that quality is assured. Within transactional distance theory, the chapter, through a systematic review of literature, identifies the current trends, the gaps, and the areas where special attention needed to be directed with recommendations on how to address these apparent challenges and grey areas.

The last chapter, consolidates the chapters in both Volume 1 and 2. The chapter looks into the past of distance education research, its present state in the Global South, and concludes with highlights on further research priorities and possibilities.

We look forward to more works emanating from this project, especially in view of the fact that it is not possible for only two books to cover the extensive work still needed in the field of distance education.