

Facilitator-learner feedback experiences in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN): A cross-sectional study of facilitators' and learners' feedbacks in Lagos, Abuja and Kano Study Centres

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Abstract

Informal and semi-structured interaction with the learners of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) during synchronous sessions indicated that there are some factors that militate against an academically-rewarding facilitator-learner experience. These factors span from the perception of the facilitation sessions by both students and learners as well as how external factors such as unstable electrical power supply and telecommunication/ICT also erect themselves as challenges too. Being a quantitative research, a survey was conducted among some of the academics of NOUN between July and September, 2024. Some 1, 046 learners who are attached to study centres in Lagos, Abuja and Kano participated in the survey as 152 facilitators or academic partook also took part. Overall, there were 1, 198 respondents who partook in the study. The preliminary hypothesis of the study that telecommunication network fluctuation/ICT challenge and electricity serve as the key impasse to a rewarding facilitator-learner experience in NOUN was proved right. Some suggestions were offered concerning how to overcome this challenge. Unless concrete steps are taken to address the possession of computer-assisted learning gadgets to enhance their studies through soft loans, as well as the challenge of power and network providers, the poor perception of ODL even by the learners of NOUN may surge eventually.

Keywords: ODL, Facilitator-learner experience, NOUN Study Centres, Computer-Assisted Learning, Student performance

Introduction

The primary mode through which the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN, hereafter) uses as a medium of instruction with her numerous students is computer-assisted learning, given the fact that the institution operates as open and distance learning (ODL, hereafter). In recent times, studies have arisen toward indicating some of the challenges or impasses that are peculiar to computer-assisted learning in the mode of ODL. One of the most lauded challenges has been whether to adopt synchronous and asynchronous approaches (see Akomolafe & Obi 2024). In plain language, the former is a situation where learning takes place in real time between the facilitators and learners (Finkelstein 2006). The latter, on the other hand, refers to schedules of students rather than in real time. It is the type of learning environments that are one-way systems which do not allow for real-time collaboration or live participation (Alam 2016). Elsewhere, Okworo and Anatsui (2016) announced that ODL must admit both asynchronous and synchronous mediums for their instructions. Udofia and Tommy (2021) consider asynchronous and traditional modes. The challenge of attaining the correct approach is not limited to Nigeria alone but is also experienced by some countries in the Middle East. Ghilay (2022) whose study was conducted in Israel found that the asynchronous mode was preferred over the synchronous.

Aside the challenge of which of these modes are appropriate, another challenge is that of computer self-efficacy. Thompson et al. (2020) found that there is a connection between computer self-efficacy and teaching effectiveness in ODL settings. Power and telecommunications are other challenges peculiar to Nigeria's drive toward the implementation of ODL in some institutions. Hence, an undeniable aftermath of whether or not the exploration of asynchronous or synchronous modes as well as the various challenges cited as militating factors against ODL in Nigeria lead to one thing –

failure. The fundamental question is how do we assess the reasons for these failures as perceived by academics and learners within the context of ODL? This study investigates this question as it situates the context of its analysis to the ODL relationship between facilitators and learners of selected study centres of NOUN.

The motivation for this research is borne out of the need to seek ways for overcoming the learning experience in NOUN. Although this will not be the first study to explore concerns over this central challenge between learners and facilitators, it will be the first to avoid arm-chair scholarships and move to acquire data albeit, electronically, from NOUN Study Centres in three states: Lagos, Kano and Abuja. Whereas most studies have not been able to specify the relationship between internal and external factors in facilitation experience, this research will be among the trail blazers to take the study further. This because of the realisation that previous studies have not emphasized how external factors such as data, power outage, which are actually part of the challenges of facilitator-learner, are assumed to not be key issues. The recent study of Akomolafe and Obi (2024) has however succeeded in making a case for ODL due to the economic challenges peculiar to the era of fuel subsidy removal. Their study however is restricted to Lagos State University, which is a conventional. Hence, it is clear that Akomolafe and Obi (2024) does not admit the issues related to the facilitator-learner experience which the present study explores.

Literature Review

In recent times, interest in ODL has surged in Nigeria. It is no longer news that NOUN is not the only full-fledged ODL institution in the country, as some others, such as Miva Open University have come on board. This means that there is competition. For NOUN to be able to maintain its competitive edge, it is crucial to understand and tend to one of the crucial mechanisms in the ODL experience of students

and facilitators. Unless this is addressed NOUN may lack the competitive edge to retain her status as the leading ODL institution in Nigeria. On this note, the study explores the fundamental issues plaguing learner-facilitator learning experiences with ways to overcome+ing it. It considers the views of both the facilitators and the learners from some study centres in the FCT, Abuja, Lagos State and Kano State. Perhaps the starting point is to first of all provide a brief history of the sojourn of ODL in Nigeria.

In the history of Nigeria, one of the earliest practices of distance education has been cited in the 1930s when some Nigerian students engaged in correspondence education from some British universities (Obilade 2012). ODL has progressed since the establishment of the University of Ibadan in 1948. It has also progressed and encountered some metamorphoses in other institutions of learning such as University of Lagos, Lagos under several headings as “Correspondence and Open Studies Unit,” “Correspondence and Open Studies Institute” before eventually settling for Distance Learning Institution in 1997 (see Obilade 2012).

It was not until 1983 that Nigeria’s first and formal ODL institution emerged as National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). However, it did not commence operation for a year before it was suspended only to be resuscitated in 2001 by Nigeria’s former president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Since 2001, the institution has not wavered in her zeal to provide her students irrespective of where they reside on the planet with robust, cost-effective and flexible learning. However, just like any ODL institution all over the world, NOUN has her fair share of limitations and challenges such as lack of adequate power supply, internet provider issues, adequate funding and also the widespread scepticism related to the quality of ODL graduates (Musa et al. 2020).

It must be relayed that the widespread scepticism over the acceptability and reliability of learners that had undergone training in

ODL setting was weaved around lack of adequate and proper information over how ODL institutions function (Musa et al. 2020). This scepticism has dipped in recent times following the surge in the ODL, even by conventional institutions necessitated by the unfortunate incident of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19). The lock down era has been noticed as a mitigating influence of these sceptical contentions since graduates of conventional institutions were subjected to the same training as those in ODL institutions with similar outcomes (see Musa et al. 2020).

As stated earlier that NOUN has her fair share of challenges. It must be amplified that these challenges can be presented as internal and external. Lack of adequate funding, internet provider challenges, scepticism over graduates account as external factors which are beyond the direct influence of NOUN. However, there are internal challenges which NOUN must engage with in order to meet her students' intellectual needs. One of these is low level of utilisation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), both on the part of the students which have led to minimal and non-encouraging facilitator-learner interaction (see Baio 2012) as well as poor facilitator-learner experiences. This study does not make bold, the capacity to provide answers to all of these challenges both at the internal and external levels. As a result, the present study, tackles one of the principal challenges facing NOUN at the internal level – poor facilitator-learner experiences.

It needs to be reiterated that in ODL settings, there are at two routes in learning: synchronous and asynchronous (Akomolafe & Obi 2024). These two are pertinent to the success of the facilitator-learner experience. More so, it is worth adding that they complement each other in ways that will bring about the education of a well-nurtured and balanced individual (Ofuasia 2019).

Synchronous learning takes place in real time in which the participants interact in a specific virtual environment at a set time. This type of learning allows students to ask and the facilitator to answer questions instantly, and students to interact (Finkelstein 2006). Synchronous allows for real-time online contact, collaboration, flexibility and individualized learning opportunities (Keengwe & Agamba 2015). Some methods used in synchronous learning include video conferencing, teleconferencing, live chatting, and live-streamed lectures that have to be viewed in real time. The advantages of this type of learning method are: classroom engagement, dynamic learning and instructional depth.

As for the asynchronous learning, it occurs on the schedules of students rather than in real time. It is the type of learning environments that are one-way systems which do not allow for real-time collaboration or live participation (Alam 2016). In this method, the facilitator provides study materials in various forms (e.g. texts, videos and recordings) and the learners access this information on their own time and complete their course requirements as long as they meet deadlines. Examples of asynchronous methods of learning are self-guided lesson modules, lecture notes, virtual libraries, pre-recorded video or audio content, links to internet sources, and online discussion boards (Rennell 2020).

In addition, these two types of distance learning cannot be done without the assistance or use of computer. It means both the facilitator and the learners should be computer literate to some extent. It is at this juncture that the moderating effects of computer self-efficacy come into the discursive fray.

Dealing with educational activities in the ODL system makes it inevitable to interact with computer and related technological gadgets in the NOUN learning delivery systems. Emerging technologies are

integrated into different disciplines like those in the Faculty of Arts in NOUN. In the Faculty of Arts' courses, for instance, the use of computers in instruction delivery has been in practice since its creation. According to Alam (2016), the revolutionary change which is taking place in Information and Communication Technologies... requires a shift in the delivery and pedagogy used in the current education system, especially in the Faculty of Arts. The use of ICT in instruction enables the learners in the Faculty to take a more active role in their learning rather than their more traditional role of passive observer and listener. With all parameters, ICT acts, generally as a change agent in education and specifically in the Humanities by promoting a proper balance between content generations and research in critical areas. Therefore, it is pertinent to pay attention to the ICT implementation in the educational system for imparting easily accessible, affordable and quality higher education.

Computer self-efficacy according to Simonson, et al. (2012), is an individual's belief in his or her ability to apply computer skills to a wider range of tasks. Computer self-efficacy has a direct influence on classroom performance since the use of technology improves students' learning and motivation (Teo 2006) as it can be associated with training effectiveness (Thompson et al 2020), intentions to use computers, their perceived ease of use and test performance (Simonson et al. 2012).

While computer self-efficacy is crucial for learning, most studies have not tried to demarcate the two modes – synchronous and asynchronous. For instance, Okworo and Anatsui (2016: 55) maintain that "...distance learning and indeed the education system in Nigeria should integrate synchronous, asynchronous media tools for effective delivery system in cloud computing." Whereas the study of Udofia and Tommy (2021) may be commendable, it focuses only on the asynchronous mode alone with the traditional approach. Other studies

such as that of Raymond et al. (2016) succeed in not only comparing synchronous and asynchronous modes, they are bedevilled by two crucial problems. First, the work was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an era where the ODL was not as influential as it is in post-COVID-19 era. Second, it was conducted in an engineering faculty but not in the Humanities. In the Middle East, Ghilay (2022) whose research was based in Israel had concluded that distance learners in Israel prefer asynchronous to synchronous modes.

Methodology

As a multidisciplinary research, the method is quantitative analysis where the snowballing sampling technique is used for sourcing the sample size in this study. The use of quantitative analysis become crucial following the revelation of Leavy (2017) that the attitude of people and how they react to same may be influenced by some socio-cultural and economic contexts of these peoples. The snowballing technique is a method of acquiring data by using the influence of persons familiar with the study to reach a target audience (see Safa et al. 2019).

Since the ethical consideration was upheld in the study, the identifying information of the learners such as phone numbers are not recorded as indicated in the consent form (see Appendix 3). The chief contacts for the data retrieved from the students were the desk officers of each course at NOUN's study centres which are scattered across the states of the federation. As members of staff of the institution, these desk officers have the access to the learners' Whatsapp Groups and platforms through which they explored to administer the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the facilitators, being academics of NOUN were reached through the Whatsapp Group of the Faculty. Through this, the identity and revealing information of respondents were protected. As

this research is strictly about the facilitator-learner experience in NOUN, the following inclusion criteria for both learners and facilitators were central and listed below:

- 1) Participants must be learners enrolled in any course of study in NOUN;
- 2) Participants must be facilitators who are academics affiliated to NOUN;
- 3) Participants must be must be learners in any study centre in Lagos, Kano and FCT; and
- 4) Participants must be adults.

By the end of the survey which took place between July and September, 2024, the total number of respondents (i.e. both facilitators and learners) were 1, 198. The sample students were 1, 046 NOUN students that are based in some of the study centres in Lagos, Kano and Abuja and 152 NOUN full time academics who are facilitators. The research's ethical considerations and consent for respondents' participation are also given high priority.

The questionnaires adopted were developed by the researchers as a way of properly contextualising the peculiar challenge facing the facilitator-learner experience in NOUN (see Appendices 1 & 2). They are consequent of the various informal, semi-structured interviews and interactions with facilitators and students over a two-year period. Although there are slight variations between the questionnaire developed for facilitators and learners, items 8 and 9 in each of the questionnaires are similar. The remaining questions are meant to test the level of understanding and perceived effectiveness of the facilitator-learner experience mediated by the ODL set up. A Likert scale of between (1) for Strongly Disagree and (5) for Strong Agree was be used for receiving feedbacks from the respondents in order to not only understand how they perceive the facilitation experience but suggestions about how to make it better. Before the participants were

offered the questionnaire, a consent form was offered at the beginning of the survey (see Appendix 3).

Since a descriptive approach is adopted in this study, it needs to be said that such does not demand the use of hypothesis since it may not be needed at the beginning of the study and may be developed even after data collection (Sreekumar 2023). However, given that this study was a motivation from the informal and semi-structured interactions with learners and academics of NOUN, the hypothesis of this study is that:

Network providers/ICT-related gadgets along with the challenge of power supply are the key challenges to an academically-rewarding facilitator-learner experience in NOUN.

The essence of this research, it needs to be highlighted is to indicate key factors that are responsible for a poor facilitator-learner experience and also offer a robust and plausible suggestions for overcoming the challenge. The data generated from the survey were analysed through the 2021 version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (i.e. SPSS 21). In the section that follows, the results are discussed.

Results

From the analysis of the data that were retrieved from the respondents, it is important to highlight that the results will be discussed in two parts – the facilitators and the learners. The deduction from each of these two will assist with the core research aim – to understand some of the underlying factors frustrating a health facilitator-learner engagement and also offer useful suggestions. In the first place, one needs to consider the demography of the research respondents.

As previously stated, the total number of respondents were 1, 198 which comprises of 152 facilitators or academics and 1, 046 students of the selected study centres in the three states – Lagos, FCT Abuja and Kano. Of the 152 respondents that partook in the study, 29.6% were female and 70.4% were male. This shows that in the sample population, there are more academics that are men vis-à-vis those that are women. This is evident in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Biological Sex of Facilitators

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	107	70.4	70.4	70.4
Female	45	29.6	29.6	100.0
Total	152	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand, of the 1, 046 respondents who are learners, the sexual orientations are diverse as individuals who perceive themselves as the third gender were noticed. Specifically, 59.1% of learners in the population sample are male. 36.4% affirm that they are female whereas 4.3% do not consider themselves as manifestations of the binary model of sex.

Table 2: Biological Sex of Learners

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	2	.2	.2	.2
Male	618	59.1	59.1	59.3
Female	381	36.4	36.4	95.7
Prefer not to say	45	4.3	4.3	100.0

Total	1046	10 0.0	100.0	
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As a way of ascertaining the feedback provided, the response retrieved from the facilitators or academics will first be discussed. When it comes to conviction of the facilitators concerning whether or not the ODL system is able to allow students to learn from the comfort of their homes, 40.1% of the facilitators were ambivalent. Where 16.4% disagreed, 15.8% and 27.6% of the facilitators are positive that through ODL, learners are able to learn effectively from the comfort of their homes. When it comes to the question of whether an ODL system is helpful for facilitators to be able to develop as researchers, 42.1% are undetermined. While 9.9% and 16.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively, 23% and 8.6% agreed and strongly agreed respectively. The deduction from this question is that almost half of the respondents are not sure if they can develop their research and sharpen their intellectual skills in an ODL setting. This is a curious feedback because if these researchers are not sure if the system can assist their research growth, the quality of attention given to learners may be affected.

The results in the foregoing may be contrasted with the third question (see Appendix 1) where facilitators were asked if they found it easy to balance teaching with research within the context of NOUN's ODL structure. Where 20.4% were undetermined, 18.4% and 30.9% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The deduction is that more than half of the facilitators are convinced that the ODL structure currently in operation in NOUN can support their potentials to balance teaching with research.

The next question shifts to their perception of learners. It considers whether or not they found learners friendly and interactive in ways that make learning to be interesting. 17.8% and 39.5% facilitators

strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. This is more than half of the entire lot so it is safe to deduce that most of the facilitators are convinced that learners are friendly and interacting during the synchronous sessions. Another item in the questionnaire focused on the general satisfaction of learners with the time slated for their synchronous sessions. 22.4% of the lot are ambivalent concerning the timing. However, 30.3% and 7.9% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that learners find the timetable for synchronous sessions conducive. 17.8% and 21.7% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively on the topic of timing – which they think is not convenient for learners. A critical consideration however is that nearly all facilitation sessions commence at around mid-day down till around 7pm or 8pm in the evening. If more than half of the facilitators contend that the timing does not favour the learners then one is not sure what other time of the day is more convenient – one which does not affect the learners' and facilitators' other equally important daily tasks or commercial activities.

When some learners are unable to encounter their facilitators in real time, the option is the access to the recorded session which is usually made available to learners. Concerning how facilitators see the influence of recorded synchronous sessions for learners to access at their more convenient time, 27.6% are undetermined. 9.2% and 25% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively, meaning that they found it inefficient. On the other hand, 19.7% and 18.4% found that these recordings are helpful for the learners. Since more than half of the facilitators are both ambivalent and unconvinced that recorded videos do not assist the academic development of learners, this is an important point to consider whether or not it should be sustained or discontinued.

When it comes to the attendance and participation of learners during the synchronous sessions, more than half of the facilitators attested that when learners are absent, they found the entire affair to

be discouraging. This is not divorced from the fact that in most instances where facilitators have prepared and mapped out what they seek to engage the learners with, they found the low or non-participation to be discouraging. Another crucial item on the questionnaire was if the number of courses available to each facilitator was not over-burdening. Usually, facilitators have between four and nine courses allotted to them for each semester. 16.4% and 27.6% of facilitators strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that the courses allotted to them are overburdening. Where 25.7% of the respondents are undetermined, 11.8% and 18.4% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that courses allotted to them are overburdening. The general revelation however is that more than half of the respondents do not think that the courses are too much for them to handle.

Concerning the challenge of power and electricity which is a general challenge for anyone living in Nigeria, the facilitators also offered feedback concerning how this affects their interaction with the learners. More than half of the facilitators attest that this is a serious challenge to maintaining a stable interaction with their students. The last question has to do with the expertise of the facilitators with the relevant software such as Zoom, Whatsapp and Google Mail for interacting with students asynchronously. Again more than half of the facilitators do not think that this does not portend a grave problem or challenge. 13.2% and 33.6% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Whereas 29.6% were undetermined, 13.8% and 9.9% agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Overall, it is safe to deduce that ICT and related software do not present themselves as serious issues or impediments militating against the facilitator-learner experience.

Now that the ten items on the questionnaire for facilitators have been discussed, the next task is to consider how the learners

responded to the items on the questionnaire supplied to them. The first item considers how learners perceive ODL and learning at their comfort zones. More than half of the respondents contended that ODL does not endorse such. 35.9% were undetermined. However, 14.5% and 8.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. On the other hand, 13.9% and 27.5% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that ODL does not assist learners with academics at the comfort of their individual spaces. What this implies is that although enrolled in ODL settings, most of the learners are unhappy and would have wished to engage in non-ODL means of learning.

The above question is closely-knitted with the second item on the questionnaire that was put to the learners. The item seeks to understand how ODL students perceive the effectiveness of their learning when compared with their peers from conventional tertiary institutions. 24.2% of the respondents were not sure. 13.1% and 29.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that under ODL settings learners are equipped with the necessary skills to the extent that they are able to compete with their peers in conventional tertiary institutions. On the other hand, 23.5% and 10% agreed and strongly agreed respectively. The deduction from this feedback is that most of these students perceive themselves as inferior when they assess themselves with their peers in conventional universities. This indicates that the University Management of NOUN needs to allay the fears of these learners by organising various workshops and seminars that will increase the overall confidence of the learners.

When asked whether the learners perceive facilitation to be interesting, most of the learners strongly disagreed and disagreed (19.7% and 29.1% respectively). 23.1% and 12.4% of the learners agreed and strongly agreed that facilitation is interesting. 15.7% were undetermined. The implication from this is that most the learners may

possibly think that the conventional mode of interaction in conventional university may be a better option. However, ODL, by its very structure affords learners the capacity to be able to work and learn at their own pace when compared with the conventional mode of learning in tertiary institutions. Perhaps one reason why the most of the learners surrendered that facilitation is not interesting may be connected to the challenges posed by data, power and telecommunication network providers. The feedback from the items that sampled the opinion of the learners on this will be considered shortly. For the meantime, it is instructive to point out that even facilitators were well-rated by the learners. 13.9% were undetermined over this item. However, 19.1% and 31.7% of the learners strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that facilitation sessions are not interesting and interactive enough. This means that they found facilitation serving its purpose. On the other end, 20.1% and 15.2% agreed and strongly agreed that facilitators are not friendly and interactive enough. What this means is that the facilitators are assisting the learners with their studies but they cannot afford to rest on the oars. This is one of the important revelations that the facilitators at NOUN are making commendable efforts in the progress of learners in NOUN.

The next consideration on the questionnaire was concerning the conduciveness of the slated time for facilitation sessions. For this, the learners seemed to agree (25%) and strongly agree (13.9%). On the other hand, some other learners strongly disagreed (18.5%) and disagreed (17.4%). Of the total number of responses garnered, 25.1% are ambivalent. Clearly, more research may need to be conducted over the need to understanding the perception of the slated time for learners to attend the synchronous sessions. Most of the learners however possess the conviction that facilitation is crucial for students to pass as 17.7% and 26% strongly agreed and agreed respectively. However, 18.3% and 17.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed that

facilitation is not necessary for them to excel. The implication here is that most of the learners seemed to understand the importance of facilitation or the synchronous aspects of ODL.

Another topic on the questionnaire is that which pertains to the role of NOUN in assisting learners with the procurement of ICT and related computer-assisted learning gadgets especially for learners who lack the wherewithal to get them. On this, most of the learners think that the University Management should assist learners with these devices. This was indicated by those who strongly disagreed (19.5%) and those who disagreed (27.4%) that University Management should not. This figure is much higher than those who agreed (24.5%) and those who strongly agreed (12.8%) that the University Management should not consider assisting learners with these devices. Of the total number of learners that responded, 15.8% were ambivalent.

The next two items on the questionnaire are related to the external forces that may affect the facilitation venture – power, telecommunication network providers and data. Concerning the possession of data to be able to participate in the synchronous sessions, learners are divided. 17.3% and 24% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that the lack of data is an excuse for learners not being able to attend their facilitation. On the other hand, 17% and 22.8% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that data was an impasse to attendance. 18.8% were ambivalent on this issue. Given the proximity between the learners who contended that data is a challenge, vis-à-vis those who do not think so, it is clear that the economic influence on education cannot be wished away. Concerning electricity and power, the learners were slightly divided. Those who strongly disagreed and disagreed that electricity was a challenge to facilitation were 18.5% and 14.9% respectively. There are however learners who indicated that electricity is a crucial challenge – 11.6%

(agree) and 23.3% (strongly agree). 31.7% of the learners are unsure about this item on the questionnaire.

The last item on the questionnaire was intended to understand how learners take their facilitation recordings seriously. The item was to test whether it was better for the recorded sessions to be viewed by learners at their own convenient time with the intention of understanding their perception of these recordings that are mandated by the University Management for facilitators to paste for learners' convenient access. 13.6% and 35.7% strongly disagreed and disagreed that the recordings should be accessed by learners at their convenient time. The result here shows that these respondents would simply favour the live interaction rather than seeing the recordings. On the other hand, 15.1% agreed as 14.9% strongly agreed that learners should see these recorded videos at a later and much more convenient time. 20.7% of these respondents were ambivalent.

From the interpretation of the data undertaken in this section, it is clear that aside the various challenges noted in each of the items on the questionnaires for facilitators and learners, three core problems that frustrate a conducive and academic-enhancing facilitator-learner experience stand out:

- 1) The challenge of the possession of gadgets for computer-assisted learning;
- 2) The challenge of unpredictable and inadequate power supply; and
- 3) The challenge of telecommunication network providers

Analysis and Recommendation

The revelations from the survey conducted among the facilitators or academics of NOUN as well as the learners who are situated in the various study centres in Lagos, FCT Abuja and Kano offers significant implications for how NOUN's ODL structure is perceived. Before expounding over these implications and revelations, it is instructive to

first of all, understand that there have been previous studies that have tried to consider the relevant tools and their efficacies for the sustenance of ODL in Nigeria. In this connection, the study of Okopi et al. (2015) identified how Moodle and i-learn turn out to be the most used computer-assisted learning tools for ODL in Nigeria. Their study considered how ODL in Nigerian institutions is run by the Learning Management System which assists with the tracking of learners' performances and academic progress. In spite of these, the study concluded that the use of computer-assisted learning which is peculiar to all ODL structures should not extend to being used for counselling. This is because of some of the risks identified in the study. In the words of the authors: "the risks of sharing client information on the internet in unencrypted and non-therapeutic environments; self-disclosure and blurring personal and professional boundaries..." (Okopi et al. 2015, 36). Although the present study does not consider whether or not ODL can assist with counselling, it is crucial to point out that these researchers offered some useful suggestions that approximate some of the results deduced from the present data. One of the most relevant is the recommendation that "ODL institutions should be as a matter of necessity, provide computer and internet facility as soft loan for students to enable them own laptop computers and thereby minimise the problem of ownership and increase accessibility to computer-based learning" (Okopi et al, 2015, 37).

Although in the case of NOUN, the University Management was able to, provide laptop computers to her academics, the suggestion of Okopi et al. (2015) would go a long way to increase the trust and confidence in ODL in Nigeria, if such a gesture extends to learners, albeit as soft loan. Through such a gesture, learners are able to keep a sustained and increased interest in their academics thereby enhancing an increased level of confidence when they encounter their peers from conventional universities.

The finding of Okopi et al. (2015) has been corroborated by that of Adetayo Adebajo (2021). This study focused on the level of computer literacy for examination purposes among the learners of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) who are based in South-West Nigeria. Based on the revelation that there is a significant difference between computer literacy and the competence of NOUN's learners, the study recommended that "all students of NOUN should be encouraged to procure mobile technologies such as laptops, ipads, internet enabled phones compulsorily for ease access and effective preparation for e-exams" (Adebajo 2021, 75). The suggestion or recommendation offered by Adebajo (2021) had already been considered by the study of Okopi et al. (2015). The latter however recommended the use of soft loans to make access to all elements of ODL easy for the learners. It is a better proposal when compared with the compulsion offered by Adebajo (2021) that all learners must possess relevant computer-assisted learning gadgets. When this proposal is given critical attention in the light of the economic realities of Nigerians in the era of fuel subsidy removal by the Federal Government leading to high inflation, it is doubtful if the recommendation of Adebajo (2021) will do. On this note, the present study contends that NOUN may explore the option of soft loans to increase learners' ICT by owning technology that will directly impact their academic exploits. Aside the various deductions that may be noted from the respondents in the previous section, it is important to highlight that there are external factors that are beyond the learners and academics or facilitators of NOUN also pose serious challenge to ODL.

These two external factors are the volatile nature of electricity and telecommunication network providers. These two factors, when put together have the potential to frustrate any element of synchronous interaction between learners and facilitators. There is no doubt that this is one of the reasons why the learners of NOUN may feel that they

are not receiving as much guidance and tutelage as they would have preferred. Unfortunately, it is the responsibility of the Federal Government and the National Communications Commissions (NCC) to address the challenge of unstable power and volatile telecommunication coverage or network. There is no doubt in the fact that when these are given proper attention, there will be a surge in the facilitator-learner relationship at NOUN.

In a future or related study, one of the issues that will be avoided is that which has to do with the elimination of the element of neutral on the Likert scale. In other words, the Likert scale will contain four options instead of the five that were used in this study. This is because when the option of neutrality is eliminated from the study, there is a clearer picture concerning the level of agreement and disagreement over an item on the questionnaire.

Conclusion

The overall agenda of this essay was to understand some of the factors militating against the facilitator-learner experience in NOUN. Learners attached to the study centres in three states – Lagos, Kano and the FCT Abuja are used as the population sample for addressing the problem that frustrate the facilitator-learner experience. From the findings of this study, there are internal and external problems. Whereas the internal problem can be handled by NOUN through efforts of making sure that all gadgets that will translate into ease of learning for learners are made available through soft loans, the external factors cannot be handled by the institution. The external factors are power and telecommunication coverage. These two are responsible for the failure of learners and facilitators to meet in real time, which in the end serve as a reason for the various internal challenges that frustrate the learner-facilitator experience. It is the suggestion of this study that NOUN may have to leverage on Federal Government's quest for the intensification of power across the country

while also encouraging the NCC to initiate policies that will aid stable internet networks that will not jeopardize the facilitator-learner engagements.

Acknowledgements: The field research which culminated into this publication was made possible through the generous support of the Senate Research Grant (SRG) 2024 of the National Open University of Nigeria. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organizations.

Conflict of interests: There was no conflict of interests in any way whatsoever as pertains to the present research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Facilitator-Learner Questionnaire for NOUN Academics

Please tick the appropriate option with the following indicators: **1** for **strongly disagree**; **2** for **disagree**; **3** for **undetermined**; **4** for **agree**; and **5** for **strongly agree**

S/ N	Question	Strongly Disagree 1	Agree 2	Undetermined 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1.	Open and Distance Learning (ODL) helps students learn at the comfort of their individual spaces					
2.	ODL system allows for research development of facilitators					
3.	Facilitators can balance teaching with research in NOUN's ODL structure					
4.	Learners are not friendly and interactive enough					
5.	Learners					

	are generally satisfied with the time slated for facilitations					
6.	Recordings of facilitation sessions are crucial for learners' understanding					
7.	Low or non-participation of students during facilitation is discouraging					
8.	Lack of internet data and telecommunication challenges makes facilitation difficult for students to attend					
9.	Power outage and poor electricity supply makes it difficult for facilitators to maintain their facilitation schedules					

	with learners					
10	Facilitators find the use of ICT and related software applications for facilitation session to be challenging					

Appendix 2: Facilitator-Learner Questionnaire for NOUN Students

Please tick the appropriate option with the following indicators: **1** for **strongly disagree**; **2** for **disagree**; **3** for **undetermined**; **4** for **agree**; and **5** for **strongly agree**

S/ N	Question	Strongly Disagree 1	Agree 2	Undetermined 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1.	Open and Distance Learning (ODL) helps students learn at the comfort of their individual spaces					
2.	ODL affords students the capacity and ability to compete with their peers from conventional institutions due to its flexible mode which allows for the combination of work and study					
3.	Facilitation is interesting					
4.	Facilitator					

	s are not friendly and interactive enough					
5.	The time slated for facilitations for my courses are conducive					
6.	Facilitation is not necessary for students to pass					
7.	University Management should not assist learners with procuring gadgets of computer-assisted learning					
8.	Lack of internet data and telecommunication challenges makes facilitation difficult for students to attend					
9.	Power outage and poor electricity supply makes it					

	difficult for students to participate in facilitation					
10	Students ought to see recoded facilitation videos on the course at their convenient time					

Appendix 3: Consent Form and Ethical Consideration

Dear Participant,

I hope this meets you well.

My name is Dr. Theodore Iyere of the English Studies Department at National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). My research team and I hereby humbly contact you for your assistance and cooperation in a study that we are currently undertaking in a bid to overcome the challenges of the facilitator-learner experience in NOUN. I should tell you from the outset that your participation in this study is voluntary and all information from the study and your identity will be treated as confidential. The data that will be garnered from this survey will be used strictly for the purpose of improving the learning experience at NOUN.

If you are willing to participate in this survey, please note that you must be:

- 1) Participants must be learners enrolled in any program in NOUN (applies only to learners);
- 2) Participants must be facilitators who are academics affiliated to NOUN (applies only to facilitators);
- 3) Participants must be must be learners in any study centre in Lagos, Kano and FCT (applies only to learners); and
- 4) Participants must be adults (applies only to learners).

If you do not meet the foregoing inclusion criteria, please discontinue and disregard this survey.

Thank you

Dr. Theodore O. Iyere

