

Facilitators' Digital Training Needs for Improved Instructional Delivery in National Open University of Nigeria, South-South Study Centres

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Abstract: *The study was carried out to examine facilitators digital training needs for improved instructional delivery in National Open University of Nigeria, South-South study centres. Three objectives and three research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consist of 135 facilitators and administrators in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The entire population was studied as census without sampling due to the manageable size of the population. The instrument for data collection was self-designed questionnaire titled "Facilitators Digital Training Needs for Improved Quality Instructional Delivery Questionnaire". The instrument was validated by three experts. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Reliability co-efficient values of 0.88, 0.77 and 0.81 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions while the t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed among others that facilitators need digital skills such as online communication and online content development to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that the government at federal level should support the administrators of NOUN with funding to organize training for facilitators on assessment of online students. This has the potential to improve online learning.*

Key words: *Digital Training, Facilitators, Instructional Delivery*

Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has significantly transformed the educational landscape, particularly in higher education. In contemporary learning environments, facilitators are expected not only to possess traditional teaching competencies but also digital skills that can enhance instructional delivery (Azevedo et al., 2021). Digital competence, as defined by the European Commission (2020), refers to the confident and critical use of information and communication technology (ICT) for work, leisure, learning, and communication. For institutions like the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), which operates through a distance learning model, the need for facilitators to possess robust digital competencies has become paramount for effective instructional delivery.

The shift to online and blended learning has underscored the importance of digital skills among educators. In the context of open and distance learning (ODL), where learners are geographically

dispersed and rely heavily on technology for interaction and content delivery, facilitators must demonstrate high levels of digital fluency (Ugwoke, Oteh, & Onyishi, 2023). This competency includes the ability to navigate digital platforms, create and curate digital content, engage learners through virtual environments, and assess learning outcomes using digital tools. Consequently, facilitators' digital competencies directly impact the quality of instruction and the learners' overall experience in distance learning institutions such as NOUN (World Bank, 2021).

NOUN's South-South study centers serve a significant population of students across the Niger Delta region, many of whom are adult learners balancing education with work and family commitments (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2018). These students rely on flexible, accessible, and efficient instructional delivery to succeed in their studies. Hence, facilitators' digital training competencies are crucial in ensuring that the instructional materials are not only accessible but also engaging and effective for various learning needs.

The demand for facilitators with strong digital skills has grown further due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift toward online learning (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021). Institutions worldwide, including NOUN, had to transition to fully online modes of instruction, revealing gaps in digital competencies among facilitators. According to Ugwoke et al. (2023), many facilitators, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, have struggled with the integration of digital tools in their teaching practices. This challenge has had a direct impact on the quality of instructional delivery, student engagement, and learning outcomes.

Despite the clear need for digital competencies among facilitators, there is limited empirical research that specifically examines facilitators' digital training competencies in open and distance learning institutions in Nigeria (Ojedokun & Ogungbeni, 2020). Furthermore, few studies have explored the specific challenges faced by facilitators in acquiring and applying these competencies in their instructional practices. Given the unique demands of ODL, it is imperative to investigate the current state of facilitators' digital competencies and how they can be improved to enhance instructional delivery.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the digital training competencies of facilitators at NOUN's South-South study centers and exploring how these competencies can be leveraged to improve instructional delivery. In particular, the study seeks to identify the specific digital skills that facilitators require to effectively deliver instruction in a distance learning environment and to determine the factors that influence the development of these competencies.

Statement of the Problem

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the ability of facilitators to effectively integrate digital technologies into their instructional practices has become essential. This is particularly true for institutions that rely on distance learning models, such as the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The successful implementation of digital tools in instructional delivery significantly impacts the learning outcomes, engagement, and satisfaction of students, especially in open and distance learning (ODL) environments where physical interaction between students and facilitators is limited (Ojedokun & Ogungbeni, 2020). At NOUN's South-South study centers, where thousands of students are enrolled in various programs, facilitators' digital competencies play a critical role in ensuring effective instructional delivery.

Despite the increasing demand for digital competencies, there is a growing concern about the preparedness of facilitators to meet these expectations. Several studies have highlighted the gaps

in facilitators' digital training, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where access to technology and training opportunities may be limited (Ugwoke, Oteh, & Onyishi, 2023). Many facilitators at NOUN struggle with adopting and utilizing digital tools effectively for teaching purposes, which hinders their ability to deliver engaging and effective instruction. This challenge became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the shift to fully online learning exposed the limitations of many facilitators' digital skills (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021).

One of the main issues is the lack of structured and comprehensive digital training programs for facilitators. While NOUN, like many higher education institutions, has invested in technological infrastructure, it appears that not enough emphasis has been placed on equipping facilitators with the necessary digital competencies required to use these technologies optimally (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2018). As a result, facilitators may lack confidence in navigating digital learning platforms, designing engaging content, or managing virtual classrooms effectively. This inadequacy negatively impacts their instructional delivery, leading to reduced student engagement, lower learning outcomes, and ultimately affecting the overall success of the distance learning model.

Furthermore, empirical research on facilitators' digital competencies in the context of ODL institutions in Nigeria, particularly NOUN's South-South study centers, is scarce. While several studies have addressed general issues related to e-learning in Nigeria, there is a lack of focused research that explores the specific digital competencies facilitators need to enhance instructional delivery (Azevedo et al., 2021). This lack of research makes it difficult to assess the current state of facilitators' digital skills and the specific areas where improvements are needed. Additionally, without a clear understanding of the problem, it becomes challenging for policymakers and administrators at NOUN to implement effective interventions that can improve facilitators' digital literacy and, consequently, instructional delivery.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to examine the digital competencies of facilitators at NOUN's South-South study centers and how these competencies affect their ability to deliver quality instruction. Understanding the specific digital skills that facilitators require, the challenges they face in acquiring these skills, and the impact on instructional delivery is crucial for developing targeted training programmes that can improve facilitators' digital literacy.

Without addressing these issues, there is a risk that NOUN's instructional quality will continue to decline, negatively impacting student learning outcomes and reducing the institution's ability to fulfill its mission of providing accessible, high-quality education through distance learning. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate facilitators' digital training needs and identify ways to improve these competencies to enhance instructional delivery in NOUN's South-South study centers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine facilitators' digital training needs for improving instructional delivery In National Open University of Nigeria, South-South Study Centres. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Ascertain the learner's online assessment training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria.
2. determine the online communication skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria.
3. investigate the online content development training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the learners' online assessment training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria?
2. What are the online communication skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria.
3. What are the online content development training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 135 administrators (Management Staff) and facilitators of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This comprises 100 facilitators and 35 administrators in the fifteen (15) learning centres of NOUN in south-south geopolitical zone, Nigeria. The sample of the study was 135 administrators and facilitators of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This comprises 100 facilitators and 35 administrators in the fifteen (15) learning centres of NOUN in south-south geopolitical zone, Nigeria. The entire population was studied as census without sampling due to the manageable size of the population. The instrument for data collection was self-designed questionnaire titled "Facilitators Digital Training Needs for Improved Quality Instructional Delivery Questionnaire". The instrument was validated by three experts. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Reliability co-efficient values of 0.88, 0.77 and 0.81 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions while the t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

Results

Research Question 1: What are the learners’ online assessment training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Analysis on Assessment Skills Training Needs of to Enhance Quality Instructional Delivery in National Open Universities in South-South.

S/N	Items	Facilitators = 73			Administrators = 30		
		\bar{x}	SD	Remark	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	Facilitators need to be trained on how to use varied online assessment tools as this will improve the teaching/learning process.	3.61	0.79	Agree	3.50	0.80	Agree
2	Facilitators need training on how to use data analytics tools to track and interpret student performance for effective teaching.	3.60	0.72	Agree	2.58	1.12	Agree
3	Facilitators need training on how to create effective rubrics for online assignments for effective teaching.	3.82	0.57	Agree	3.83	0.56	Agree
4	Facilitators need training on how to design and implement online quizzes and test to aid the teaching/learning process.	3.44	0.73	Agree	3.43	0.77	Agree
5	Facilitators need training on how to ensure academic integrity in online assessments to enhance teaching and learning process.	3.65	0.74	Agree	3.63	0.73	Agree
Grand Mean		3.62		Agree	3.37		Agree

Table 1 which was for research question one showed that all the items in the table had mean scores that are above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed with all the items in the table. With criterion mean of 3.62 and 3.37 respectively, the answer to research question four is that the learners assessment skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are how to use varied online assessment tools, data analytics tools to track and interpret student performance, how to create effective rubrics for online assignments, design and implement online quizzes and test and how to ensure academic integrity in online assessments.

Research Question 2: What are the online communication skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Analysis on the Online Communication Skill Training Needs Improve Quality Instructional Delivery

S/N	Items	Facilitators = 73			Administrators = 30		
		\bar{x}	SD	Remark	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
6	Facilitators need training on how to write clear and concise online announcements and emails to foster effective teaching and learning	3.25	0.71	Agree	2.96	0.86	Agree
7	Facilitators need training on how to manage and moderate online discussions for effective teaching.	3.46	0.75	Agree	3.91	0.35	Agree
8	Facilitators need training on how to provide constructive feedback in digital formats for quality instructional delivery.	3.32	0.75	Agree	2.98	0.90	Agree
9	Facilitators need training on how to use non-verbal communication effectively in video interactions while teaching	3.79	0.45	Agree	3.89	0.37	Agree
10	Facilitators need training on how to adapt communication style for diverse online learners for effective instructional delivery.	3.40	0.79	Agree	3.04	1.08	Agree
Grand Mean		3.44		Agree	3.35		Agree

Table 2 which was for research question two showed that majority of the respondents agreed with all the items in the table. This is seen in items which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean scores of 3.44 and 3.35 for facilitators and administrators respectively revealed that the online communication skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are writing clear and concise online announcements and emails, ,managing and moderating online discussions, providing constructive feedback in digital formats, using non-verbal communication effectively in video interactions and adapting communication style for diverse online learners.

Research Question 3: What are the online content development training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Analysis on the Online Content Development Training Need of Facilitators For Quality Instructional Delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria

S/ N	Items	Facilitators = 73			Administrators = 30		
		\bar{x}	SD	Remark	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
11	Facilitators of NOUN need training on how to design inclusive online teaching content to enhance instructional quality	3.33	1.03	Agree	3.15	0.93	Agree
12	Facilitators of NOUN need training on how to use authoring tools for e-learning content creation for effective instructional delivery.	3.82	0.57	Agree	3.46	0.80	Agree
13	Facilitators of NOUN need training on how to write concise online learning objectives to aid improved instructional delivery	3.72	0.52	Agree	3.22	0.88	Agree
14	Facilitators of NOUN need training on how to create effective online teaching videos for effective learning.	3.44	0.84	Agree	3.70	0.69	Agree
15	Facilitators of NOUN need training on how to create interactive quizzes and assessments to enhance the teaching process.	2.95	0.74	Agree	3.61	0.74	Agree
Grand Mean		3.45		Agree	3.42		Agree

Table 3 which was for research question three showed that all the items in the table had mean scores that are above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed with all the items. With grand mean scores of 3.45 and 3.42 for facilitators and administrators respectively, the answer to research question seven is that are the online content development training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are how to design inclusive online teaching content, use of authoring tools for e-learning content creation, how to write concise online learning objectives, how to create effective online teaching videos and how to create interactive quizzes and assessments.

Discussion of Findings

Findings on research question one on table 1 revealed that the learners assessment skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are how to use varied online assessment tools, data analytics tools to track and interpret student performance, how to create effective rubrics for online assignments, design and implement online quizzes and test and how to ensure academic integrity in online assessments. This finding is in line with the view of van der Vleuten et al. (2022), who opined that Assessment

and evaluation play pivotal roles in identifying and addressing training needs that can significantly enhance the quality of instructional delivery. These processes ensure that educators are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the evolving demands of the educational landscape. Through systematic assessment and evaluation, educators can pinpoint areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions, ultimately fostering a more effective teaching and learning environment. Assessment is crucial in pinpointing the specific needs of facilitators. By employing a variety of assessment tools such as surveys, self-assessments, peer reviews, and observational techniques, trainers can gather detailed information about the strengths and weaknesses of facilitators. Assessment serves as a crucial tool in identifying gaps in educators' knowledge and skills. Guskey (2020) highlights that regular assessments can uncover specific training needs, enabling the design of customized professional development programs that address these gaps effectively. Evaluation complements assessment by analyzing the data collected to measure the effectiveness of training programs. It involves comparing the performance of facilitators against predefined benchmarks or standards.

Assessment and evaluation facilitate the enhancement of instructional strategies by providing insights into what works and what doesn't in the classroom setting. Through continuous evaluation, educators can reflect on their teaching practices, receive constructive feedback, and make informed adjustments to their instructional methods. Hattie (2019) emphasizes that formative assessments, in particular, are instrumental in helping teachers modify their teaching strategies in real-time, thereby improving student engagement and learning outcomes. The integration of assessment and evaluation into the professional development of educators fosters a culture of continuous improvement. This culture encourages educators to view professional growth as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Fullan (2016), when educators are regularly assessed and evaluated, they become more proactive in seeking out new learning opportunities and staying updated with the latest educational trends and technologies. This proactive attitude towards professional development ultimately translates to higher quality instructional delivery.

Findings on research question two revealed that online communication skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are writing clear and concise online announcements and emails, managing and moderating online discussions, providing constructive feedback in digital formats, using non-verbal communication effectively in video interactions and adapting communication style for diverse online learners. In agreement with the view of Kalmijn and Tubergen (2020), opined that Communication Skills is the capacity to convey information clearly and effectively to students through verbal and non-verbal communication. This includes active listening, asking probing questions, and using language that is appropriate for the students' age and understanding. Communication is the process of giving and receiving information. Communication is an intrinsic part of method used as the medium of exchange common to the learner and the teacher. Communication has to do with an exchange of ideas in the form of a dialogue in which audio-visual equipment are often used to ensure effective. He also stated that Enabling facilitators to communicate to learner involves the development of listening ability to decode messages in the right context. This is collaborated by Nation and Jonathan (2019:38) who states that listening is a bridge to learning a subject matter. Having good ability in listening is one of the main skills that has to be mastered by facilitators to enhance learners' understanding. Harmer (2007:133) also states that listening can be helpful for students in running successful communication. The

teachers'/learners' communicative competence successfully runs together with good listening skills. It also involves competency in knowing the demographic nature in which a message is sent.

Findings on research question three revealed that that online content development training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are how to design inclusive online teaching content, use of authoring tools for e-learning content creation, how to write concise online learning objectives, how to create effective online teaching videos and how to create interactive quizzes and assessments. The corresponding hypothesis seven revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings administrators and facilitators on the online content development skills training needs of facilitators to enhance quality instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria. This is consistent with Mishra and Koehler (2016), who noted that Content development is a crucial facet of facilitator training aimed at enhancing the quality of instructional delivery. This process involves the creation, organization, and refinement of educational materials to effectively meet the training needs of facilitators. Content development begins with a thorough analysis of the target audience and their learning objectives. Understanding these aspects helps in tailoring the content to be relevant and engaging. For facilitator training, this means identifying the specific skills, knowledge, and competencies facilitators need to acquire or improve upon.

In line with the view of Black and Wiliam (2018), opined that effective content development for facilitator training involves a systematic approach to creating, organizing, and refining educational materials that meet the specific learning needs of facilitators. Content development should consider the flexibility of instructional materials. Facilitator training programs often cater to a diverse audience with varying levels of experience and learning preferences.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the digital training needs for facilitators to improve instructional delivery in National Open Universities in South-South, Nigeria are learners' online assessment skills, online communication skills, and online content development. The acquisition of these skills through training has the potential to improve the quality of instructional delivery of facilitators in these centres.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government at federal level should support the administrators of NOUN with funding to organize training for facilitators on assessment of online students. This has the potential to improve online learning.
2. Facilitators of ODL programmes should engage in self study on how to engage in online communications as this will improve their instructional delivery to a large extent.
3. Administrators of NOUN should organize workshops for facilitators on online content development to give them hands-on skills on these topics. This will improve their instructional delivery.

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