



The Nexus Between Online Facilitation and the Performance of MA English Students at the National Open University of Nigeria

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Abstract

COVID-19 brought a lot of changes to the world. The new normal is one of the linguistic coinages that has gained popularity in our new world. The world of education took a somersault. One of the new norms in the world is the delivery of education through digital channels. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), being an ODL institution, totally embraced this new way of life and plunged into it headlong through e-facilitation (electronic facilitation). This study set out to ascertain if there is a link between NOUN's embrace of e-facilitation and its effect on students' performance. The population of the study covered the 2023 MA English students of NOUN. This study establishes a nexus between the students' experience of e-facilitation and the subsequent performance in their courses in the 2023 session. Data were collected using a Google form questionnaire administered to the MA English 2023 session set and the interview of the e-facilitators was also done electronically. The data collected were analysed using statistical tools, which include frequency count presented in pie and bar charts. The study found that there is a connection between the students' attendance level at e-facilitation and their performance. The students and facilitators also agree that NOUN should sustain the practice of e-facilitation for the students. This is despite some perceived hitches due to the issue of facilitation attendance being sometimes poor, resulting from factors such as no explicit reward for attendance and the inconvenience of the time for many of the students owing to their work schedule. They suggest that its benefit to the students in terms of the mastery of the course contents and influence on course performances are enormous, which are also empirically proven by the data in this study. It was thus suggested that the e-engagement of the MA English students is a step in the right direction for digital humanities in the 4IR for our practices as English scholars. It is an innovative option for engaging with our craft and scholarship.



Keywords: E-facilitation, students' performance, NOUN MA English students, Fourth Industrial Revolution, Digital Humanities

Introduction

Right from the start, it has always been assumed that the methods through which education is communicated to learners are linked to the possible outcome of the learning in terms of the students' performance (cf. Daniel, 2012; 2013). The fact that teachers over time have tried to adopt different teaching methods to get across to their learners to be able to make an impact on them shows this clearly. However, in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system, the basic operation is that of the teacher being away from the learner as the learners are usually required to learn independently, using the resources made available to them (NOUN, 2002). Usually, the learner is expected to read the course materials given to them as part of their registration package for the semester. The other materials and resources that may be accessible to the learner could be in the form of print or electronic materials that the learner could use to aid their learning process. Some institutions add the optional platform of guiding the learner through contact hours, which is meant to help the learner get answers to some possibly thorny content the learner might have come across during their self-study. The question then is to determine what this method is which is used in the ODL system to meet these learners' needs as well as assess the impact it has on their learning and performance in their registered course(s). This study thus seeks to investigate the connection between online facilitation and the performance of students, with a special focus on the Master of Arts (MA) English students at the National Open University of Nigeria.

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is essentially a sort of guided teaching that is employed by the ODL tutors to help guide the students within the ODL practice for them to attain a high level of mastery of the courses they are taking in their chosen programme of study. It involves giving answers to students' questions as well as giving live teaching to the students when necessary. Many tend to confuse facilitation with lecturing. But as noted above, they are quite different. While lecturing involves the lecturer being at the centre of the learning process, facilitation is a mere additional tool that is meant to help the ODL learner to improve their learning ability and fast track their mastery of the content made available through their self-study material(s). This facilitation could be engaged in through diverse means and platforms. The engagement of technology to aid this has come to stay with the advent of COVID-19 and all its consequences on the educational system as we used to know it globally.

Electronic facilitation is engaged in through using electronic platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams. In the case of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), the Zoom platform is the main way that facilitation is done for the learners. It involves a licensed Zoom platform that the University paid for to have virtual, real-time interactions with NOUN learners.

History of facilitation in NOUN

As part of its take-off process, NOUN accommodated facilitation in its original Blueprint for NOUN operations (NOUN 2002: 36-40). It however projected moving from the face-to-face (f2f) mode of facilitation, which used to be done on the campus of Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos State by the Lagos Study Centre. Due to this f2f process that is said



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to be done only after working hours by the interested NOUN academic staff, NOUN made it optional for the academics. Indeed, it was seen as being stressful by many of the academics but a few who needed the extra cash seemed not to mind doing it. This researcher was not so privileged as the distance to her house at the time and the perennial unpalatable traffic situation in Lagos made it almost impossible for her to experience it. Moreover, coming from a conventional system where she had her timetable within the morning to afternoon hours, having to go to work in the morning and going back to do f2f facilitation in the evening was too demanding and as such she was glad it was optional.

Over time, NOUN also had to review its facilitation policy as the bill being generated from the Study Centres became too unrealistic for its sustenance. As such, the policy of only 50 students per course as the minimal requirement to be facilitated physically came into force by the pronouncement of the University Senate. This policy threw off many courses that hitherto were on the f2f facilitation regime. The economics of education has taken its toll on the business of facilitation!

The beginning of e-facilitation

In 2018, the lead researcher was drafted into the GST courses in NOUN through the creation of the Centre for Entrepreneurial and General Studies. She was approached by the newly appointed Head of the Centre, Dr Juliet Inegbedion, to handle the English GST courses. She turned it down due to having junior colleagues in the Department who should be able to handle it. However, on receiving a letter from the University that she was appointed to handle those courses on the strength of being the only language specialisation PhD holder in the Department at the time, she could not say 'no'. She had to accept the new challenge and become a part of the team she was putting together to commence the handling of the programme. To cut a long story short, seeing the large number of students required to do the courses and their dispersal geographically, as these are University-wide courses, it became necessary to become innovative in how to help them achieve better in their studies. The Centre Head thus got together with Dr Adewale Adesina to find a way of solving the problem. They came up with the idea of doing e-facilitation. This became necessary as the students do not get the commensurate value from the outsourced facilitators who also sometimes become their exploiters. As such, the way to solve this problem appeared to be to go online. So, in 2018, the University started experimenting with online facilitation, starting with the GST courses. This was a bit tricky because many people were not used to this. In addition, the physical facilitation by the GST teachers also ended that same year.

With this experiment done for two sessions, the University was ready to apply it to all the courses in the University. As such, this was commenced in the 2020 session. As such, by February 2020, full online facilitation commenced in NOUN. As fate would have it, the COVID-19 pandemic happened and many institutions were forced to shut down across Nigeria and globally due to the threat of the virus as well as the series of lockdowns that seemed to be the only way the governments of the world thought they could defeat the virus that had assumed a pandemic proportion at this time (Nwabueze et al., 2022). In short, in these few months, the whole educational delivery process changed drastically. It thus seemed as if NOUN knew this was coming and was prepared for it. However, as we noted above, this was purely coincidental. It was just a consequence of trying to solve a problem and improving delivery to the NOUN students.



Statement of the problem

Although online facilitation has been widely adopted in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), there remains limited empirical evidence on its actual influence on students' performance. Much of the focus has been on its implementation and accessibility, with less attention given to whether the facilitation provided truly translates into improved academic outcomes. This gap is particularly significant at the postgraduate level, where higher expectations of academic engagement and independent learning prevail.

Against this background, this research investigates the connection between online facilitation and the academic performance of Master of Arts (MA) English students at NOUN. By concentrating on the 2023 academic session, the study aims to determine whether the facilitation received by MA English students had any measurable impact on their performance in that year's courses, thereby providing insights into the continued relevance and effectiveness of online facilitation within the university's ODL framework.

Research objectives

The following objectives thus guided this study. These include to:

1. Investigate the connection between online facilitation and the performance of MA English students at the National Open University of Nigeria;
2. Evaluate how the regularity of online facilitation impacted the MA English students' performance;
3. Ascertain the effect of MA English students' participation in online facilitation on their overall performance in NOUN.

Research questions

This study is expected to provide answers to these research questions:

1. Is there a connection between online facilitation and the performance of MA English students at the National Open University of Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of the regular attendance of online facilitation on the MA English students' performance?
3. What is the effect of the MA English students' participation in online facilitation on their overall performance in NOUN?

Scope of the study

This study is an investigation into the correlation between the online facilitation of English courses and the performance of the MA English students in the Department of English at the National Open University of Nigeria. The population of this study is the MA English students of the 2023 session. This class is chosen as it marks the year of the full deployment of the online facilitation for the MA English class in the Department of English as well as being a class that is still available within the system. This is expected to provide easy accessibility of the research subjects as well as provide empirical data for the Department to ascertain if its decision to go fully into online facilitation for the MA English students has any effect on their performance and thus should be sustained.



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The researchers also interviewed some lecturers of NOUN in the English Department, especially, those directly involved in the facilitation of the class of students that make up the research subjects for this study to determine if they consider their facilitation efforts impactful and useful to their students' performance in their courses. In addition, access is provided to the results of the students from the Directorate of Examination and Assessment (DEA) to get the real time performance data of the students and assess this in connection with the responses provided by the staff members and the students.

The researchers used the Google form to get responses from the study population in addition to the interview done with the students. A minimum of 150 respondents were targeted. The data was analysed, using statistical tools, especially, the frequency counts as applicable to the collected data. In addition, the interview of the staff and students were analysed, using the qualitative method, especially, the content analysis instrumentation.

The place of technology in Open and Distance Education

UNESCO (2002:3) clearly states that “Educational systems around the world are under increasing pressure to use the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century.” In line with this, NOUN has adopted online facilitation to assist students in achieving their goals in the University.

Bates (1997) in Esterhuizen (2012) considered the impact of technological change on open and distance learning and identified four reasons for the frequent use of technology including:

- i. To improve access to education and training
- ii. To improve the quality of learning
- iii. To reduce the costs of education
- iv. To improve the cost-effectiveness of education

However, despite its laudable suggestions on why technology is the way to go in ODL, this study did not consider the important part of the education process, the performance of students who are using this technology in the ODL system after going through the courses they registered for in the programme.

From the perspective of UNESCO (2002),

With the emerging new technologies, the teaching profession is evolving from an emphasis on teacher-centred, lecture-based instruction to student-centred, interactive learning environments. Designing and implementing successful ICT-enabled teacher education programmes is the key to fundamental, wide-ranging educational reforms (p. 3).

This being the fact and one of the approaches already adopted by NOUN, there is therefore need to dig deeper into finding out if the deployment of online facilitation correlates with the performance of students at NOUN.

Online facilitation in NOUN

Significant empirical studies have been carried out on the influence of online facilitation on the performance of students at the National Open University of Nigeria since the initial take-off of the National Open University (NOU) on 22 July 1983 as a springboard for open and distance learning in Nigeria (NOUN, nd). Consequently, there is copious literature from scholarly articles on this subject matter. As the National Open University of Nigeria continues to evolve and expand in population and scholarship, a more robust digitally oriented educational model is crucial to explore the nexus between online facilitation and its impact on MA English



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students' learning experiences to enable us to determine if there is a need to readdress the existing infrastructure and strategies concerning online facilitation in the University. It is against this backdrop that this literature review delves into existing research and scholarship on online facilitation in the context of NOUN, aiming to identify significant trends, challenges and potential areas for improvement.

It has been posited that active student engagement and participation are effectively encouraged via online facilitation. Accordingly, with a focus on the experiences, perceptions, and difficulties faced by NOUN's students, teachers, and administrators, the dynamics of online facilitation and how it is used and accepted within the particular context of NOUN were investigated by Okoliko, Mande and Bello (2023). While this assertion by Okoliko, Mande and Bello (2023) may be true, the study has not discussed the outcome of the relationship between online facilitation and active participation by students, which is the result that is produced at the end of the exercise. In the same vein, Apena (2019) agrees that online facilitation promotes greater participation and aids in learning retention. Apena (2019) also asserts that online learning is appealing to students and holds their interest. This study also has left a gap as it has not fully addressed the impact of the interest, learning retention and participation by students on the outcomes they produce at the end of the semester in terms of their results. While learning retention, enthusiasm and participation are very important to every student and play cardinal roles in the development of every learner, these factors are only a means to an end and may not be taken into consideration at the end of the day. What matters most is the result produced especially in a country like Nigeria where emphasis is placed mostly on paper qualifications rather than skills (Orajiaku, 2019). Nonetheless, development assessment can be identified currently in Nigeria by using the students' results to gauge their mastery of the taught contents.

In another study, it was observed that online facilitation remains a crucial component of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as it allows seamless interaction between lecturers and students anytime, anywhere (Adesina, 2020). This study mostly considered the hindrances that come with Online Facilitation, with emphasis on teacher-related factors since facilitators play crucial roles in content development and delivery. Adesina (2020) also posited that, as part of the efforts to engender flexible and interactive learning content, the National Open University of Nigeria has introduced online facilitation to promote interaction and collaboration among the students and between distance learners and their facilitators. He concludes that the idea was to create a learning community, where students could be afforded the opportunity to interact seamlessly with their counterparts across the globe as well as their facilitators. The focus, here, is on the interaction and collaboration that is expected to exist between a teacher and a learner in the 21st century. While this study comprehensively looks at how to strengthen the relationship between stakeholders in online facilitation, it does not look at the end product of this relationship.

Bello (2021), on his part, asserts that online facilitation has been touted as a veritable platform that allows seamless interaction between distance learners and their tutors. This study observed that some student-related factors could hinder effective online facilitation at this level of education. This study, like the others already cited above, has also not addressed the result or consequences of the student-related factors on the overall performance of the students at the National Open University of Nigeria.



While noting some of the key requirements for sustainable and profitable online facilitation, it has also been posited that the inadequacy of the relevant course materials for the distance-learning programmes in Nigeria has been a major hindrance to the success of distance-learning in Nigeria (Abdulkareem, Afolabi & Olorisade, 2011). Obviously, this challenge has been tackled largely since most of the course materials are available online for students at no extra cost and are being updated regularly.

From the foregoing review, while online facilitation has been increasingly integrated into NOUN's instructional framework, there remains a need to situate its impact on student performance within an appropriate theoretical lens. Constructivism offers such a framework, as it emphasises active participation, collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge. These principles align strongly with the objectives of e-facilitation. It is therefore necessary to assess the extent to which the practice of online facilitation at NOUN aligns with constructivist assumptions and contributes to improved academic outcome.

Constructivism and Its Application to the Study

This study is anchored on the Constructivist Learning Theory, advanced by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner. Constructivism views learning not as the passive transmission of knowledge but as an active process in which learners construct meaning through interaction, experience, and reflection (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Learners are therefore co-participants in meaning-making, engaging with content, facilitators and peers to deepen understanding.

A central constructivist principle is the social nature of learning. Vygotsky's (1978) *Zone of Proximal Development* highlights how guided interaction helps learners move from independent ability to higher competence with support, while Bruner (1996) stresses scaffolding, a temporary support that is gradually withdrawn as mastery develops. Within this framework, online facilitation in NOUN functions as scaffolding: facilitators guide and clarify course content at critical points, enabling MA English students to progress more effectively.

Constructivism also underscores collaboration and dialogue as key to knowledge construction (Fosnot, 2013). In NOUN, e-facilitation sessions, often via Zoom, provide opportunities for interaction that extend learning beyond static modules. These sessions allow students to clarify misconceptions, co-construct knowledge and link theory to practice, thereby transforming self-study into a communal, participatory process.

Applied to this study, constructivism predicts that students who actively engage in facilitation will achieve stronger academic outcomes due to enriched interaction, scaffolding and contextual problem-solving (Jonassen, 1999; Garrison, 2017). It further explains disparities in performance: while isolated self-study may leave some learners struggling, facilitation provides the interactive support needed for deeper comprehension and retention.

Thus, constructivism provides the conceptual lens for this investigation, justifying the study's focus on whether regularity of attendance and active participation in e-facilitation enhance student performance. It aligns with the study's central concern to assess how the participatory and collaborative nature of online facilitation influences the academic outcomes of MA English students at NOUN.

The next section looks at the methodological procedures used in the conduct of the study.

The methods



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Below is a description of the methodological procedure adopted in this research in the different subsections applied for this research process.

Research design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between online facilitation and the performance of Master of Arts English Students at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) for the 2023 session. The mixed-methods design allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

Participants

The participants in this study include Master of Arts English students of the 2023 session and NOUN facilitators. A population size of 150 respondents is targeted from the class of 2023 and all the academic staff members involved in facilitation in the Department of English, NOUN.

Data collection instruments

Google form questionnaire

A structured Google form questionnaire was circulated among 2023 class Master of Arts English students of NOUN to collect information on their perceptions, frequency of attendance at online facilitation and impact of online facilitation on their results. In addition, they were asked to provide information on their academic performance, including grades and course completion rates. These were intended to be compared to the records of their performance obtained from the University Directorate of Examinations and Assessments for authentication purposes only.

Interviews

Qualitative data was also collected through in-depth interviews and open-ended survey questions to gain a deeper understanding of faculty and students' experiences with online facilitation. The qualitative discussions were expected to provide insights into the real-life experiences of the facilitators and students to expose the nuances involved in the online learning environment and how it impacts student performance. The interviews explored the participants' perceptions, experiences, and suggestions regarding online facilitation and its impact on students' performance.

Data collection procedure

Questionnaire administration: The Google form questionnaire targeted at the students was administered to them via diverse electronic media channels such as their official emails, WhatsApp group chats for classes and the Departmental platforms created by the Department for learner support services. Their responses were automatically recorded by the Google form. However, the data collected showed that only about a third of the targeted students willingly participated in the research by serving as respondents (45). This is despite several attempts at reaching out to them. Nonetheless, this population is regarded as representative enough because it is made up of the specialisations in the programmes offered by the Department.

Interview of facilitators: The facilitators were selected based on their willingness to participate as research subjects. Interviews were conducted either in person or through open-ended



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questions designed through the Google form, depending on the disposition of the participant. However, these same questions were asked the participants in either case. The facilitators' interview questions are meant to elicit from them their experiences with facilitating their courses with the MA English students in the 2023 session and how they think this impacted the results of the students for the 2023 session. The electronic Google form was sent to the Head of Department to convey to the facilitators while the lead researcher interviewed some of the colleagues, she had physical contact with in the Department. The official emails and Departmental WhatsApp platforms were engaged to reach the e-facilitators at different times. Eventually, only 10 of them responded through the Google form platform. Their responses through this platform served as interview data for this study.

Data analysis

Statistical analysis was utilised to analyse the quantitative data obtained through the surveys and academic records provided by the students. Frequency counts in percentages presented as pie and bar charts were used to summarise the survey responses. A table summary of the results and a corresponding graphical representation of the performance data were employed to examine the relationship between the identified variables and assess the significance of the observed patterns.

Thematic analysis was done on the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, identifying motifs and patterns within the responses. Qualitative data were then categorised along the student and facilitator responses and interpreted to extract meaningful insights related to the nexus between online facilitation and the students' performance.

Ethical considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent and voluntary participation. Approval was sought and obtained from the Ethical Committee at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) at both the Faculty and University-wide levels.

Limitations

Potential limitations include sampling bias, self-reporting biases, and the cross-sectional nature of the study. These limitations are duly acknowledged, and efforts were made to mitigate their impact on the validity of the findings.

Data analysis and discussion

This section discusses the data collected from the students and their facilitators in the English MA programme. The approach was to group the collected data in terms of how the responses relate. The simple frequency count as delineated in the Google form responses was used for analysis. These were interpreted in line with the research objectives and questions to provide the lead into the research problem identified. Not much demographic analysis was necessary because the information on the study population was provided above. However, it appears that most of the respondents are of language specialisation. This is shown in the other parts of the result and thus requires to be mentioned here.



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Programme/Course of study

45 responses

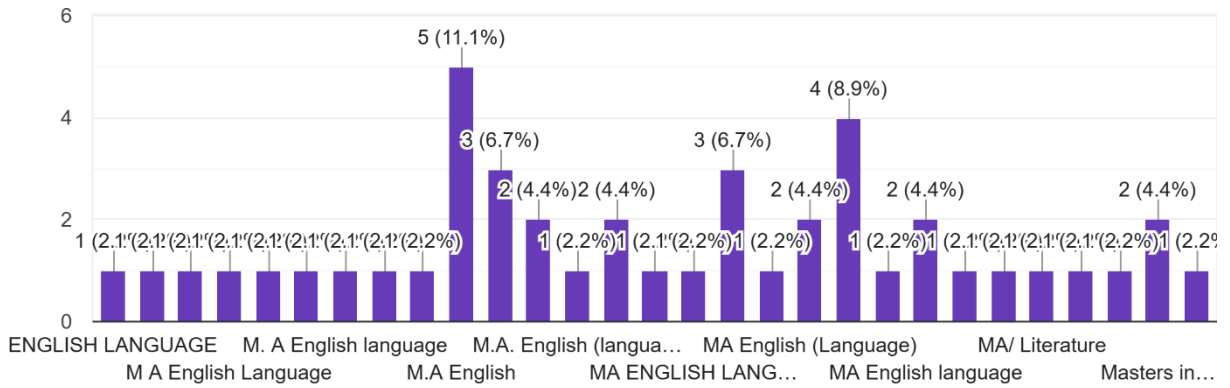


Figure 1: Students' specialisations information

Research question 1: Is there a connection between online facilitation and the performance of MA English students at the National Open University of Nigeria?

The data appears to show that there is a connection. The responses of the students indicate that they believe that there is a link as shown in the pie charts below. Many of the students registered for at least six courses that are facilitated in the 2023 first and second semesters, showing a high degree of interest in having their courses facilitated as shown below.

How many courses did you register for in 2023_1 (1st semester)?

38 responses

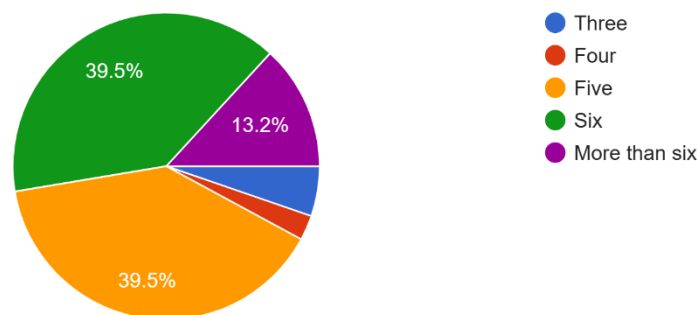


Figure 2: Registered courses for 1st semester 2023



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How many courses did you register for in 2023_2 (second semester)?

39 responses

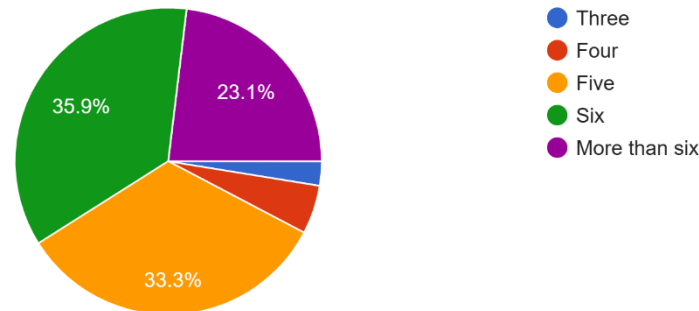


Figure 3: Registered courses for 2nd semester 2023

However, did they really attend the facilitation and did it have any impact on their mastery and performance in the courses they registered for at the end of the day? The next set of pie charts reveals that most of them are impacted by facilitation attendance in terms of their mastery of the course as well as their performance.

What was your average online facilitation attendance per course in 2023?

45 responses

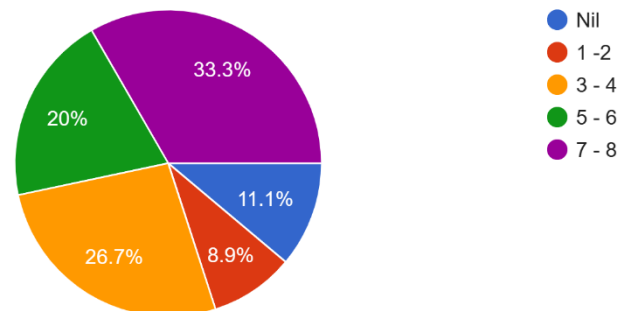


Figure 4: Attendance rate at facilitation in the registered courses for 2023

It is obvious from this breakdown that most of the students attended the facilitation as 33.3% attended 7-8 times, with 8 being the maximum number of times that facilitation holds. Adding this to the next figure of 5-6 times at 20% will give an average of 53.3% attendance. This is not bad but could be better. Unfortunately, a Nil attendance at 11.1% is quite worrisome. Nonetheless, average attendance also appears in contrast to the complaints of facilitators that students don't attend facilitation at all. Some facilitators even suggested attaching a reward system to it to force them to attend it while students on their assert that the facilitation must be fixed at their convenience for them to attend. This appears a stalemate position.



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Did online facilitations assist in making your understanding of the courses easier?

41 responses

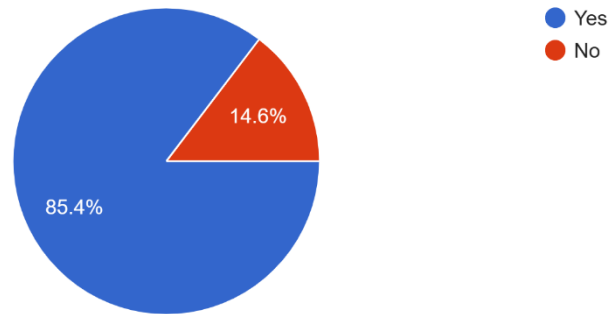


Figure 5: Impact of facilitation on their mastery of the registered courses

Indeed, the overwhelming response of 85.4% from 41 respondents shows that the e-facilitation is having a positive effect on the learning and mastery of their study contents by the students. This is a great testament to show that the facilitation of courses has a good effect on the students' academic journey in NOUN. The next section investigates into the second research question.

Research question 2: What is the impact of the regular attendance of online facilitation on the MA English students' performance?

To answer this research question, we look at the actual results provided by the students as their earned grades. Even though we initially hoped to get access to the actual grades from the Directorate of Examination and Assessment to compare to their responses, the request made to this effect was never responded to. We therefore have to make do with the grades provided by the students for our analysis of their performance.

How will you rate your last semester result?

45 responses

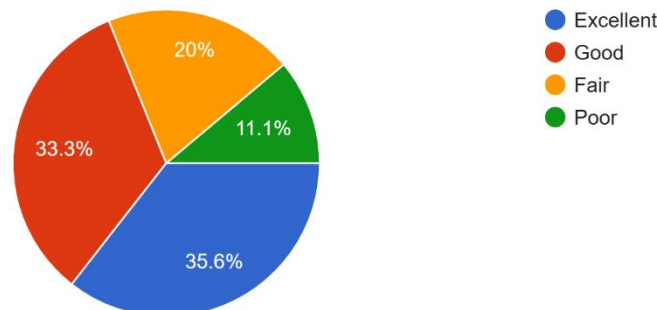


Figure 6: Students assessment of their performance in their semester results



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Most of the students gave themselves a thumbs up in their performance as shown above. 35.6% assert that their result was excellent while 33.3% think it was very good. Putting these two together would give us 68.9%. This looks good. The table below should show us the course-wise performance and the trend of the performance to determine if the claim is backed by their actual grades.

Table 1: Performance of Students in their MA English Courses in 2023

Course	A	B	C	F
General course				
ENG811: Advanced Research Methods	50%	35.6%	14.4%	0%
Language specialisation				
ENG841: Advanced Phonetics and Phonology	16.2%	27%	13.5%	43.2%
ENG821: Advanced English Syntax	25.6%	28.2%	25.6%	20.5%
ENG831: Lexicology and Semantics	61.3%	29%	6.5%	3.2%
ENG833: Pragmatics	29.6%	40.7%	18.5%	11.1%
ENG834: Advanced English Stylistics	61.5%	23.1%	15.4%	0%
ENG852: Advanced Discourse Analysis	50%	40%	10%	0%
ENG854: The English Language in West Africa	58.3%	33.3%	0%	8.3%
ENG812: Contrastive Linguistics	63.6%	36.4%	0%	0%
ENG836: Semiotics	75%	25%	0%	0%
ENG856: Sociolinguistics	50%	50%	0%	0%
Literature specialisation				
ENG881: Studies in African Fiction	85.7%	14.3%	0%	0%
ENG815: Advanced Literary Theory	0%	50%	50%	0%
ENG817: African American Literature	100%	0%	0%	0%
ENG823: Popular Literature	100%	0%	0%	0%
ENG871: Studies in African Poetry	100%	0%	0%	0%
ENG861: Studies in African Drama	33.3%	66.7%	0%	0%
ENG814: Studies in African Oral Literature	25%	75%	0%	0%
ENG816: Literature and Gender	40%	40%	10%	0%
ENG822: American Literature	100%	0%	0%	0%

The performance of the students by course is presented graphically below in Figure 7. It shows that the A and B bars are more prominent. These are further analysed below in Figures 8 and 9 below.



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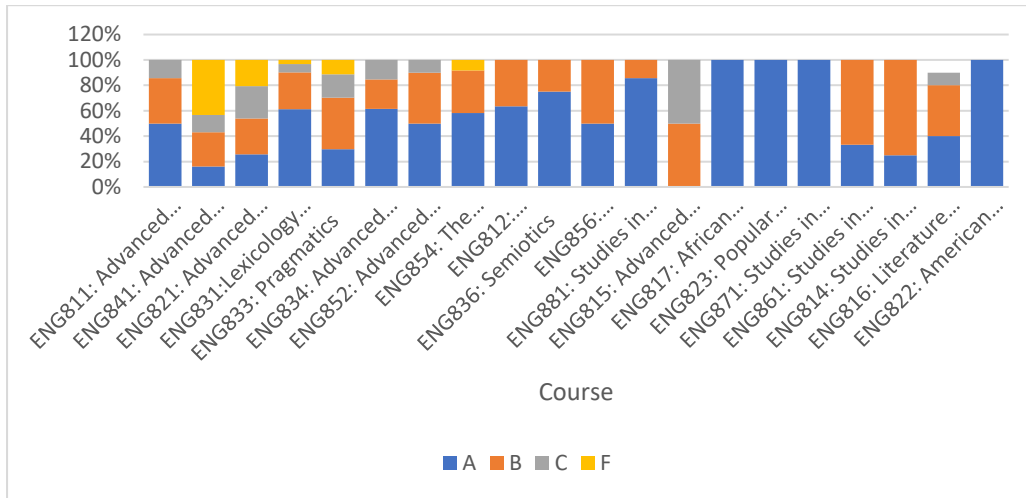


Figure 7: MA English Students Performance by Course

Figure 7 shows the students' letter grades as provided by them in the Google form. Interestingly, many of them obtained As and Bs while fewer number shows their performance as being F. Indeed, some of the literature courses have even 100% As while the language courses, especially, ENG821 and ENG841 provide the normal curve result pattern, with the former providing a better result than the latter. ENG841 has the highest F rate. The reason for this could be attributed to the very technical nature of the course or probably something else that the course lecturer could attempt to find out to enable them to do better in the new session. Nonetheless, the 100% As is also worrisome, even though it is apparent that the courses being literature courses could have accounted for this. ENG811 also not having any F despite being taught by the same lecturer that teaches ENG841, which has the highest failure rate, is another interesting finding while analysing the data.

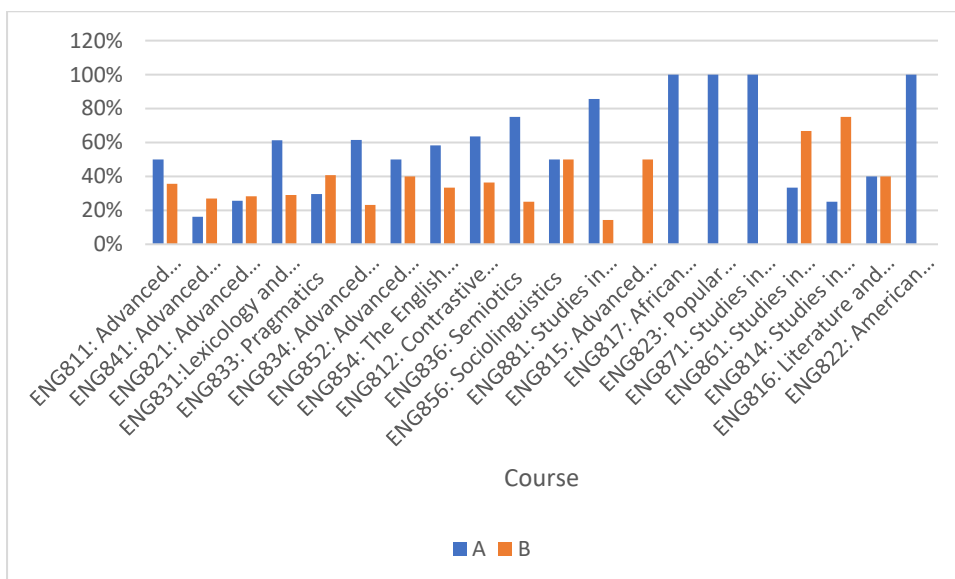


Figure 8: A and B grades by course

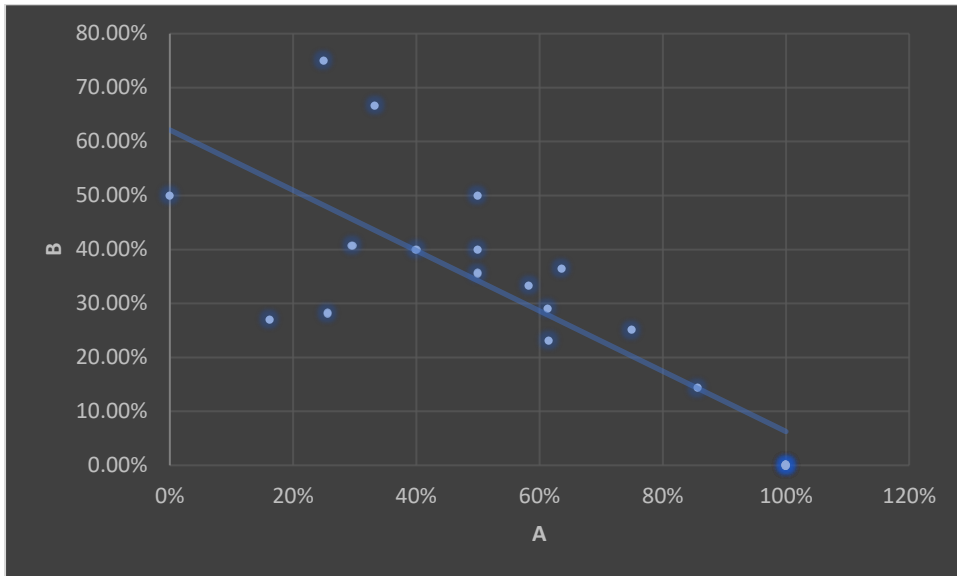


Figure 9: Correlation of A and B grades

Figure 9 presents a correlational analysis of A and B. It shows A having some 100% attainment as discussed above in comparison to B grades that have most appearing within the average performance level.

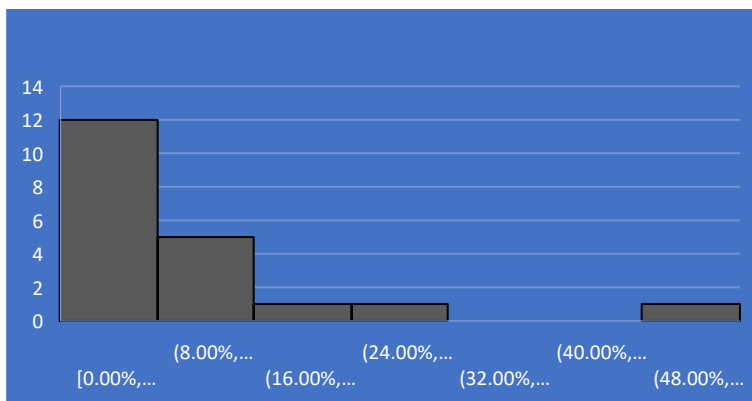


Figure 10: Frequency Of C

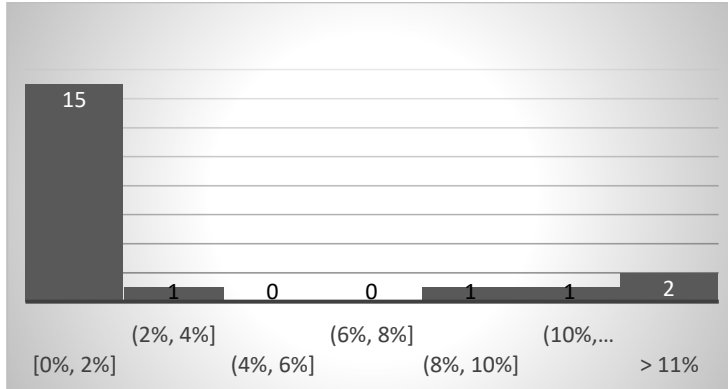


Figure 11: Frequency of F

Nonetheless, the C and F grades are less frequent compared to the A and B grades. Figures 10 and 11 show this. This is another indication that facilitation has an impact on the positive results obtained by the students.

Research question 3: What is the effect of the MA English students’ participation in online facilitation on their overall performance in NOUN?

Do you think regular or frequent attendance at online facilitation will have an impact on your performance in NOUN?
45 responses

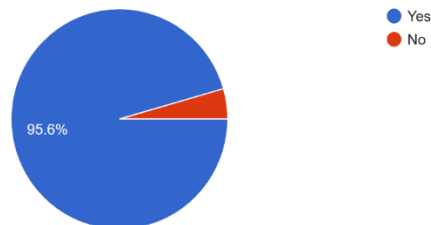


Figure 12: Students’ perception of the possible impact of facilitation attendance on their overall performance in NOUN

Most of the students believe that facilitation will have an impact on their overall achievement in NOUN. This is their assertion. However, the 2023 results tend to confirm rather than disprove this assertion. Therefore, we have been able to establish the fact that there is a connection between facilitation, regular attendance by the students and the expected overall performance of the students. This research question thus indicates that the students’ expectations are met.

There are many issues to raise as questions though. This has to do with some of the complaints of the students as well as the observations made by their facilitators. We now go into a textual/content analysis of the comments by the facilitators and students.

Improving the students’ experience in NOUN through the facilitation of their courses

Both the students and the facilitators have a lot to say about this. While many students agree that providing facilitation for all the courses in NOUN is the way to go as shown by their



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responses, many of the facilitators assert that the students' attendance at facilitation is poor. The question then is: Who is not stating the facts here? We see some of these comments below.

However, both facilitators and students agree that the facilitation of courses is what needs to be retained in NOUN as it is apparently helpful to the students because it allows them to interact with the course materials in a livelier manner as well as provides them with the opportunity to interact with their facilitators and peers in real-time.

Do you agree that online facilitation should be sustained in NOUN as it helps to improve the MA English students' performance in the programme?
45 responses

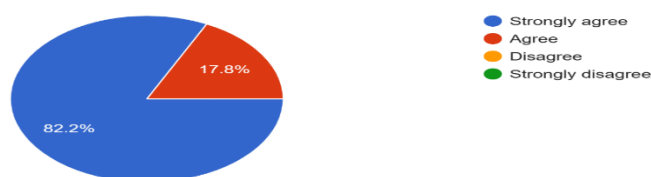


Figure 13: Perception of students on the need to sustain facilitation in NOUN

The whole 82.2% of the students threw their weight behind sustaining facilitation as an important part of the delivery mode in NOUN. That is huge and shows that the online facilitation remains an important path to success in their studies in NOUN.

Figure 14: Students' comments:

Frequency of attendance will pay handsomely in the long run.
Weekly individual assignments should be given out. For me, it will spur me to want to study more. Honestly, studying in an ODL system after transitioning from a conventional university ain't easy. Thus, having weekly assignments will help me to study and research more.
There should be marks awarded for class attendance. This will encourage students to attend online facilitations.
The department should encourage the lecturers involved to actually do the facilitation. That is, they should not leave the facilitation to students for mere presentations which, like the one I participated in was not worth the time because I did not learn, because we all just read the course material at the presentation and knowledge was not gained.
The department is doing well and should improve on interaction with the students to know how to help us better. Some people are new to most of the courses and will need help from professionals like our facilitators to make the journey smoother. Thank you.
Nil
Attendance should be scored and facilitation should come after noon during the week
Let the online facilitation be graded too
Create awareness during registration because most students are not aware of the online facilitation.
Course materials should be given to student in hard copies after registration for the courses
Students should access laptops and Android phone with Data for better participation and understanding
Marks should be awarded to a certain percentage of attendance.
Facilitation timetable should be made accessible to all students



Most times ,the timing clashes with work hours

Consistency in participation

It should continue

It should be awarded marks

Marks be allocated to those who are attending facilitation

One way to encourage students to get involved in online facilitations is maintaining or even enhancing our current collaborative learning setup, where students actively share their insights on the courses while facilitators offer valuable comments and support. This not only helps students grasp the material better but also keeps them engaged throughout the sessions. Creating an atmosphere of participation and dialogue makes facilitations more than just an extra part of the course; they become opportunities for meaningful exchanges and learning. When students feel like they're part of the conversation and receive personalised help from facilitators, they're more motivated to attend these sessions. By embracing this approach, we can effectively inspire students to take an active role in facilitation, enriching their overall learning experience in the MA English programme.

Continue with online facilitation

Encourage students to see the importance. Also, facilitation should be in the evening or weekends as most masters students are workers.

Motivation.

They should allot marks for facilitation, most especially the group or individual presentation

If attendance will be considered part of the marks assigned to the course no matter how small it may be.

Make most of the time for facilitation 7-9pm. This will improve attendance.

Free Wi-Fi in study centers and pushing the time of facilitations to evenings when most students will be back from work.

The facilitators should explain better whatever lessons they are trying to pass and not read directly from course materials, like garbage in garbage out

Online facilitation should be scheduled towards evening, not during working hours

The facilitators should sort out the difficult topics in their courses and tutor them themselves and not allowing students whom have come to learn do it all in the name of 'seminar'. I believe students will be encouraged to attend class when they know that the facilitators are the ones teaching and breaking down the points clearly.

Facilitation should be recorded and accessible to all students at all times. Especially for those who couldn't join the live class.

By introducing attendance

Evening sessions will be best for maxim participation

Students should make the online facilitation a priority.

it can carry like 4% in student grading.

Facilitation should be scheduled in the evening hours (6-10pm).

Online facilitations should commence as soon as the semester kicks off. It will help the students to be grounded in all the topics in their course materials most especially areas they are not clear with as there will be time to treat every difficult areas with the help of the facilitators

Students should attend online facilitation despite challenges.

Facilitation should be fixed in the evening from 6_8



I know sometimes, some do not have data, low battery, Sick etc but it's good to always join in the facilitation. Try and make summary of the course material

Figure 15: Facilitators' comments:

Improve reasons for students' attendance Create dedicated NOUN network carrier at subsidised rate
The asynchronous method of facilitation will be appropriate since many M.A. students are employed and busy. They are not always available for Live sessions
There is need for upward review of facilitators' allowance.
Make the students have a target pass mark in attendance so they can attend some of the live sessions.
I suggest improvement on the area of students' participation during online classes. The students prefer interaction during lectures to just listening to the facilitator. This makes the class very boring.
More digital literacy for the students
Attendance can be taken even if it is not used at the end of the day.
Yes. Kill communication gap. Ensure that each Facilitator is invited at the right time to join the Facilitator's training from the onset. Re-train interested Facilitators. Make the academic calendar available to Facilitators so that they will know the duration of the courses. Make the PG Handbook available to Facilitators so that they will be familiar with NOUN Dissertation/Thesis supervision modalities, the number of defence, time frame, and patterns/styles acceptable to NOUN etc.
Some marks should be allotted for online facilitation attendance
Checking students' attendance and probably using certain level of it as a yardstick to qualify for participating in exams.

From the comments from both students and facilitators, it is obvious that one main thing that cuts across is that not scoring or attaching a form of reward to the student's facilitation attendance is part of why some do not consider it necessary. Nonetheless, the Facilitators also agree that when they were able to get the students to attend live classes, it had some impact on their students' performance. Some call it 'positively impactful' as shown below in Figure 16. Their rating of the effect of facilitation on the students' performance appears to be above average.



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Has online facilitation impacted on the performance of your students? On a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the least and 10 being the highest), what is the average impact of online facilitation on your students?

10 responses

8
9
5
6 (for those who attend facilitation sessions)
7, positively impactful
-
Just starting the facilitation
7
I'm yet to find out.

Figure 16: Facilitators' rating of the impact of facilitation on their students' performance

Conclusion

This study set out to determine if there is any connection between facilitation and achievement among MA English students of NOUN. Findings indicate that there is a strong correlation between regular attendance of students at the facilitation and their performance in their courses. We were able to establish that those who attended most of the facilitations in the period under study also obtained good results as indicated by their analysed score grades. Even though we were never able to access the scores from the Directorate of Examination and Assessment in NOUN, we do not believe the students have a reason to tell a lie in responding to the questions posed to them through the questionnaire. As such, we take in good faith the data provided and draw our conclusion based on these data.

On the issue of if they think NOUN should sustain facilitation due to its positive impact on the students' achievement in their semester results and eventually their overall performance index in NOUN, both the students and facilitators agree that it should be sustained. 82% of the students strongly agree with this. There appears to be overwhelming proof of the positive impact of facilitation on the students' performance in their MA English courses. Their A scores in virtually all their courses, with a few courses having 100% rating, confirm that facilitation is very effective in adding value to their academic journey.

In essence, this study has established a clear nexus between facilitation and student performance, underscoring the indisputable need to sustain the facilitation programme for MA English students at NOUN, as evidenced by the collected data. Nonetheless, it is also important to note some of the suggestions made. The major one is that the university needs to attach some rewards to the attendance at facilitation as a way of motivating some of the other students who are yet to catch on about the need for facilitation in their sojourn in NOUN. They make up about 11.1% of the respondents for this study. Applying this to the overall population appears to still have implications. Even though ODL does not encourage compulsory facilitation, the



overwhelming benefit suggests the need to consider finding a way to encourage the students to attend. This is to their benefit as well as for better results and rating of NOUN. The issue of timing is also important. However, this can be worked out between the students and their teachers.

Recommendations

In light of the conclusion above, the following recommendations are made:

1. NOUN should continue with the practice of facilitation, as it has proven to be a valuable support mechanism for postgraduate learners.
2. Attendance at facilitation should be incentivised by linking it with a modest percentage of continuous assessment marks. This would motivate reluctant students and reinforce the importance of participation.
3. Facilitation sessions should be rescheduled to evenings or weekends to accommodate working-class students who may be unable to attend during regular hours.
4. The university should consider providing subsidised data packages for students or installing Wi-Fi facilities at study centres to reduce the burden of high internet costs, thereby improving participation.
5. Continuous sensitisation campaigns should be organised to enlighten students, particularly the 11.1% identified as non-participants, about the academic value of facilitation.
6. Students and facilitators should jointly determine suitable timing and modalities for facilitation, ensuring inclusivity and reducing absenteeism.

By implementing these recommendations, NOUN cannot only sustain but also enhance the impact of online facilitation, thereby improving learning outcomes and strengthening its position as a leading ODL institution in Nigeria.

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