

National Open University of Nigeria

Directorate of Learning Content Management System



A Guide to Online Facilitation

2022

1. Introduction

The concept of tutorial or instructional facilitator has been in place since the inception of the National Open University of Nigeria. The tutorial or instructional facilitator was described as “an academic staff of the university but employed on part-time basis to facilitate teaching and learning processes as well as serve as a catalyst and director of individual student’s learning in specified disciplines”.

The facilitator serves as an essential academic support provided by the university for learners. When NOUN began, facilitators were distributed throughout all study centres and held face-to-face sessions with students. However, with the advent of web-based instruction, facilitation has largely moved online. Facilitators are now appointed by the heads of departments and ratified by the deputy vice-chancellor academic. To carry out their duties, they can be anywhere in the country (or the world).

The purpose of this guide is to outline the role online facilitation plays in NOUN’s instructional delivery processes. It provides an overview of how online facilitation works, and why it is necessary. Also included are key topics such as platforms and infrastructural requirements and tips for conducting effective facilitation sessions.

2. The key Characteristics of Open and Distance Learning

- Accessibility
- Flexibility
- Learner Centeredness
- Extensive learner support services (administrative, academic and personal support)

3. Why Facilitation?

Online facilitation provides a new and dynamic method of engaging with learners and is different from conventional approaches of lectures. There are many important reasons for this exercise. The main reasons for online facilitation are to:

- Help develop the appropriate attitude towards course materials
- Help develop the needed study and time management skills
- Motivate learners to get started and then remain on the courses for successful completion
- Provide feedback on learner performance
- Stimulate independent and original thinking, problem-solving skills, collaborative skills, and other 21st century skills
- Remove the feeling of isolation for learners who are studying at a distance

4. Roles and responsibilities of Facilitators

The facilitator plays an important role in assisting learners completing their studies. For a facilitator to be able to facilitate effectively, he or she must first understand the learners’ characteristics.

4.1 Learner Characteristics

Some characteristics of modern learners are:

- inadequate background for the level of the course
- unclear goals for learning
- lack of study skills
- difficulties with the language of instruction
- time management problems
- learning disabilities - some have been away from formal learning for some time
- may not be able to reach libraries or other academic resources
- technology difficulties
- emotional problems
- physical disabilities
- demands from work and family
- often interested in the implications of their learning for their life and work

The facilitator takes the time to understand the learners needs and characteristics so as to effectively support their learning.

4.2 The Role of a Facilitator

The role of the facilitator includes the following:

- Academic advising - Advising learners about course choice, options for continuing or completing the study programme
- Academic instruction and facilitation - Responding to questions from learners, clarifying course materials when necessary, developing additional resources or tutorial materials, helping learners develop specific skills, providing remedial help, or advice on where to obtain it, providing information about additional resources from learners who want to pursue a particular interest in greater depth, planning and guiding discussions among learners
- Academic Assessment - Setting assignments for learners (consult the HOD), clarifying assessment tasks and options to learners, assessing, grading and providing feedback to learners on their assignments
- Maintaining supportive communication with learners - Initiating contact with learners at the start of the course, maintaining regular contact with learners for the duration of the course, helping learners address issues that may impede their progress in the course
- Maintaining communication with the Head of Department - Learn about administrative procedures, and deadlines that affect students

4.3 Attributes of a “Good Facilitator”

Although it may not be possible to attain perfection, we can strive to improve our work. From the students’ perspective ‘The ideal tutor is a paragon: she or he is consistent, fair, professional in standards and attitudes, encouraging but honest, unbiased, kind, positive, respectful and accepting of students’ ideas, patient, personal, tolerant, appreciative, understanding and helpful...’ (O’Rourke, 2003)

The good facilitator

- provides clear explanations on his or her expectations and marking style
- welcomes extra questions
- “locates one’s faults but corrects them kindly”
- makes thorough but cheerful and constructive comments (in contrast with another student’s plaintive remark “the comments left one feeling criticized, threatened and nervous”)
- gives an extra boost to encourage a student in difficulties clarifies points which have not been easily grasped or correctly learned
- is helpful in achieving the student’s objectives
- offers flexibility when it is needed
- shows a genuine interest in motivating learners (even those who are beginners and so perhaps at a less interesting stage for the tutor)
- writes all corrections legibly and at a meaningful level of detail

There are four core skills identified by educators for effective facilitation in ODL are:

- supportive: helping learners deal with issues not related to content, that may affect their learning
- guiding: helping learners to understand the content and its relationship to their learning goals
- enabling: helping learners to develop and apply appropriate learning processes effectively
- administrative: serving as a link between learners and institution on administrative issues.

4.4 Expectations from NOUN Facilitators

Facilitators should be aware of the following expectations

- Create Course Resources
 - Have a facilitation plan to cover 8 weeks
 - Upload course materials
 - Add Instructional Videos
 - Add Power Point Presentations and other resources
 - Add references and other course documents (virtual library)
 - Post links to previous facilitation sessions
 - Communicate weekly to students
 - Online Presence is Essential
 - Be available to answer student questions

- Facilitate discussions
- Explain concepts
- Provide feedback
- Have office hours to respond to students

4.5 Online Facilitation Tips

Below are some tips to facilitate effective facilitation sessions,

- Provide useful, unique material; don't just duplicate asynchronous content
- Find smart ways to make connections to supportive asynchronous material
- Contact learners prior to synchronous events to get them ready
- Tell them what to expect and how they can prepare for online class participation
- Request/send discussion questions in advance to help guide your discussion
- Where possible prerecord lectures and post asynchronously then schedule a follow-up synchronous Q&A session - (flipped classroom model)
- Provide a session overview and cover essential concepts. Focus on learning objectives rather than the technology
- Avoid monologues - encourage learners to respond as much as possible
- Reduce learner anxiety by allocating time for learners to ask questions or make comments, and encourage learners to submit their questions in writing before the session, to be answered 'on air'
- Divide learners into groups by using break-down sessions, allow groups to make presentations and present group activities
- Use the whiteboard feature to draw illustrations, write equations, formulas and present graphics

4.6 Structure of the Virtual Learning Environment

The figure below depicts the structure of resources and activities on the Learning Management System

Introductory video
Timetable
Course materials/lecture notes
Lesson videos
Live session (Online Facilitation)
Discussion forums
Chats
Assignments & quizzes
Practical task
Recorded Sessions

5. The Key components of NOUN Course Content Delivery

NOUN's present instructional delivery model is composed of three main components; (1) print/electronic course materials (2) Instruction videos (3) Online facilitation. These are integrated to provide necessary academic resources to the learners.

The key components of deliver are illustrated below.

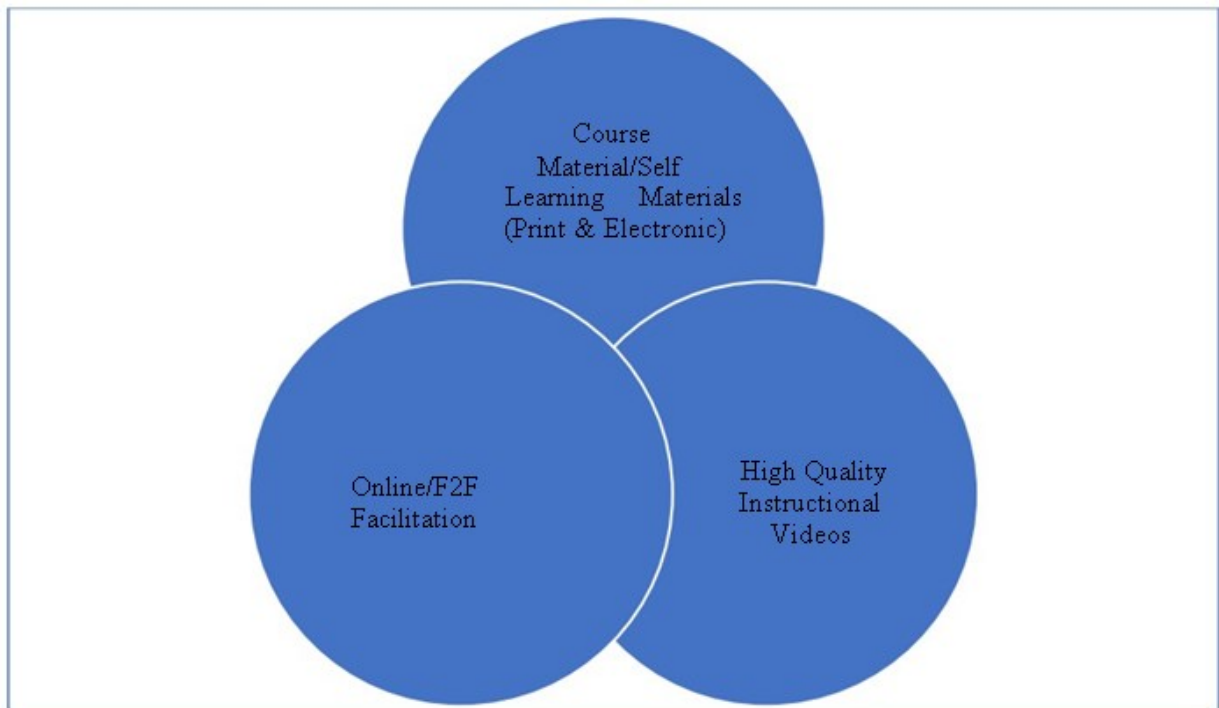


Figure 1: NOUN's Blended Learning strategy

The multi-modal delivery system provides varied opportunities for students to learn at any pace at their place. The self-learning course materials are provided to student on registration this is supplemented with online virtual facilitation sessions and high-quality instructional videos. All these are available on the Learning Management System (LMS). The Tutor marked assessments (TM 's) have also been integrated into the LMS.

Table 1: Description of the NOUN Blended Learning Delivery Strategy

Self-Paced Learning Materials	Online/F2F Facilitation	Instructional Videos
• Course materials (Print and electronic formats)	Live Session for review of concepts	Quality interactive videos
• Discussion Forums	Problem solving	Simulations
• Assessment – TMAs, Quizzes	Interactions/Discussions	Animations
• Portfolio Development	Group tasks, collaborative learning, social media, project based tasks...	Virtual Reality

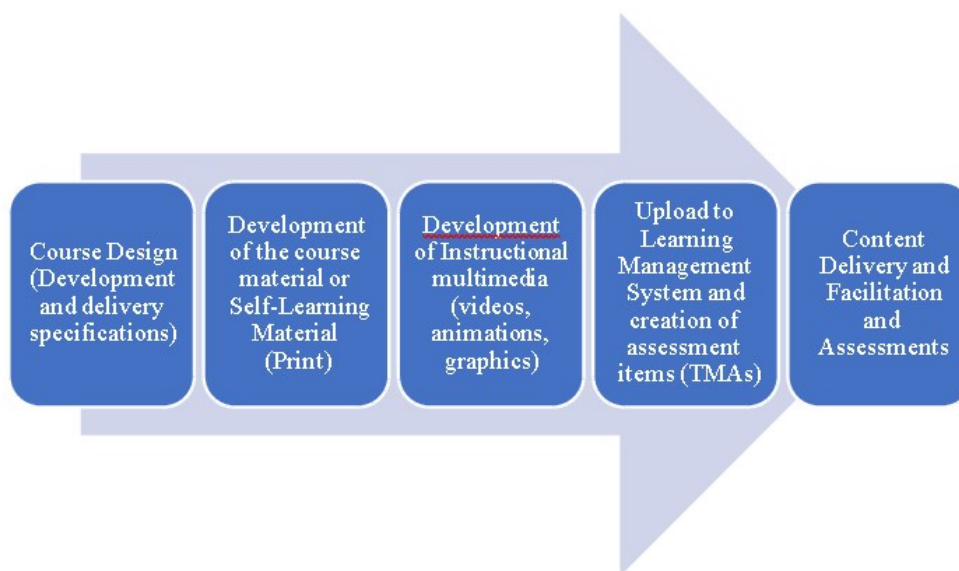
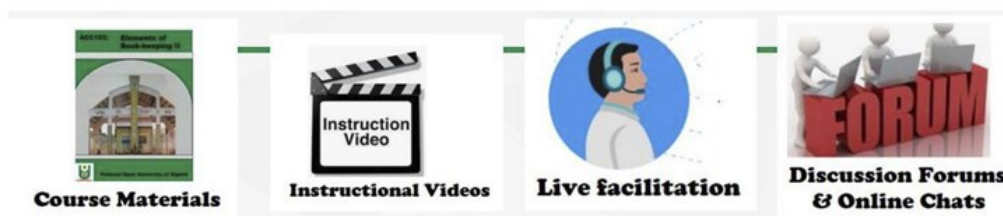


Figure 2: Main processes leading to delivery



6. Facilitation Infrastructure

The Infrastructure deployed for the exercise were:

- Elearn: <https://elearn.nouedu2.net> - the NOUN MOODLE Learning Management System
 - NOUN Enterprise Zoom: <https://noun.zoom.us/> . Each facilitator had a zoom account which could accommodate 500 participants. If required webinars for 1,000, 3,000 and 5,000 participants were available in the NOUN licensed subscription. Cloud storage is available for all recordings
 - The timetable for the exercise
<https://mylearningspace.nouedu2.net/index.php/info/facilitation-timetable>
 - Site for instructional videos - <https://lcms.nou.edu.ng/videos/>
 - Check the status of instructional videos - <https://lcms.nou.edu.ng/digital/video-content-production-report>
 - List of academic support staff in NOUN - <https://pas2.nouedu2.net/supervisors>
 - Five instructional videos production studios

effectively engage in online facilitation the facilitator should have the following

- A laptop or desktop unit with webcam and good microphone (most laptops have this facilities)
- Good internet connection

7. Summary

For the 2022_2 semester's facilitation exercise

- Ensure you can login to <https://elearn.nouedu2.net>
- Ensure you have a licensed Zoom account <https://noun.zoom.us/>
- Create a live facilitation zoom link and ensure it is on the course page
- Get familiar with the course materials, instructional videos ...
- Create a facilitation plan to cover a minimum of 8 weeks
- Know you students by checking the participants
- Agree on a suitable time with students and keep to the time
- Send emails to them and communicate weekly to them (use the quick mail feature on the LMS)
- Record all live sessions and post the links on the course pages
- Contact technical support if you have a challenge

8. References

O'Rourke, J. (2003). *Tutoring in open and distance learning: A handbook for tutors*. Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver.