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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES AND ICT UTILIZATION IN ENHANCING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING SKILLS AMONG DISTANCE LEARNERS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at how quality assurance practices (QAP) and information and communication technology (ICT) use can help predict self-directed learning (SDL) skills among distance learners in Southwest Nigeria. The study used a correlational survey approach based on Garrison's Community of Inquiry framework and Knowles' theory of andragogy. A total of 420 undergraduate students from certain National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) study centres took part. We used a systematic, validated questionnaire including scales on QAP, ICT use, and SDL abilities to gather data. We employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis to look at the data. The results showed that there was a strong positive link between QAP and SDL skills ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and between using ICT and SDL skills ($r = .56$, $p < .001$). Also, QAP and ICT use together predicted SDL skills, explaining 46% of the difference ($R^2 = .46$, $F(2,417) = 88.92$, $p < .001$). ICT use ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) was a little better at predicting than QAP use ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). These results show how important it is for institutions and technology to help remote learners develop SDL skills. The study finds that improving quality assurance systems and encouraging the use of ICT in a smart way are both very important for developing independent learning skills in open and distance education. Suggestions are offered for changing institutional policies, improving digital infrastructure, and starting professional

development programs that will help SDL outcomes. The results add to the body of research on learner support and digital transformation in ODL systems.

KEYWORDS: Self-Directed Learning, Quality Assurance Practices, ICT Utilization, Distance Education, Open and Distance Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Open and remote learning (ODL) is becoming more popular as a way to improve access to education, fairness, and flexibility, especially in poor countries. Because of this, it is becoming more crucial for schools to give students the skills they need to do well in school. One of the most crucial of these competences is self-directed learning (SDL), which involves learners' capacity to define personal learning goals, manage time effectively, monitor progress, and reflect critically on outcomes. SDL encourages independence, perseverance, and lifelong learning habits, all of which are necessary for navigating ODL environments on your own (Yusuf et al., 2025; Bozkurt, 2019).

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has become one of the best places in Nigeria for people of all backgrounds to get distance education. But there are still worries about whether students are ready to do SDL, partly because of problems with the system and the institutions. Quality assurance procedures (QAP), like clear course frameworks, timely feedback from tutors, and full support services for learners, are important for getting students more involved and helping them do better in school (Yousuf, 2007). At the same time, knowledge and Communication Technologies (ICT), such as learning management systems, video conferencing platforms, and e-resources, have become very important for getting students more motivated, getting them to communicate with each other, and giving them easier access to knowledge (Adeoye et al., 2020). The integration of ICT in higher education has been recognised as a critical mechanism for enhancing civic competence, learner engagement, and societal responsiveness (Ayantunji & Makanjuola, 2025).

Even though QAP and ICT tools are being used more and more in ODL delivery, there aren't many research in Nigeria that look at how these two things affect the development of SDL skills together. This study aims to fill that gap by looking into how the use of QAP and ICT might help NOUN distant learners in Southwest Nigeria improve their SDL abilities.

Statement of the Problem

Open and distance learning (ODL) systems work best when students can study on their own (SDL), especially when they can't get help in person. The National Open University of

Nigeria (NOUN) and other schools in Nigeria have made it easier for a wider range of people to get a college education. But even if more people are signing up, many distance learners still have trouble mastering SDL skills like setting goals, managing their time, and solving problems on their own. It is not apparent how institutional quality assurance practices (QAP) and information and communication technology (ICT) tools actually help students become more independent and engaged, even though they are meant to do so. Most of the research that has been done so far has looked at QAP and ICT separately, without properly looking at how they work together to affect student results. Also, most studies in Nigeria have looked at issues at the policy and infrastructure levels, not at learner-centred measures like SDL. This lack of real-world research makes it harder for teachers and policymakers to come up with evidence-based ways to help students succeed. So, it is very important to find out how the use of QAP and ICT together affects SDL skills among Nigerian distance learners.

Purpose of the Study

This study's goal is to find out how well quality assurance techniques and the use of ICT might predict distance learners' ability to learn on their own at certain NOUN study centres in Southwest Nigeria. The goal of the study is to find out how institutional and technological elements affect how well learners can control their own learning in an open and remote education setting.

Research Questions:

1. What is the relationship between quality assurance practices and self-directed learning skills among distance learners?

2. How does ICT utilization relate to self-directed learning skills in the context of distance education?

3. Do quality assurance practices and ICT utilization jointly predict self-directed learning skills among distance learners?

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

Self-directed learning (SDL) is the ability of students to take charge of their own learning. This includes being able to figure out what they need to learn, set specific goals, find and use the right resources, use the right learning strategies, and evaluate how well they learnt (Garrison, 1997). SDL is an important skill to have in today's schools, especially in digital and distance learning settings when organised teacher assistance may not be available. In these kinds of situations, students need to be able to manage their own cognitive, behavioural,

and emotional learning processes. Recent studies have emphasised the strategic role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in strengthening instructional delivery and institutional effectiveness (Makanjuola et al., 2025). It helps students become more independent, motivated, persistent, and develop lifelong learning habits (Zhu, 2021; Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). All of these are important for doing well in open and distributed learning systems.

Quality Assurance Practices (QAP)

Quality assurance in distance education means putting in place a set of rules, regulations, and procedures to make sure that academic programs fulfil certain requirements and keep getting better at helping students learn (Tait, 2020). Quality assurance practices (QAP) are very important for building trust, accountability, and effectiveness in open and distance learning (ODL). Key parts of a good QAP are giving students timely and helpful feedback, setting clear and measurable learning goals, using the same methods to assess students, and creating instructional strategies that focus on the needs of each student (Zawacki-Richter & Qayyum, 2019). These methods not only make learning more enjoyable, but they also help students remember what they've learnt, be happy with their progress, and do better.

But it is very hard to put strong QAP frameworks into place in sub-Saharan Africa. A lot of organisations have trouble because they don't have enough money, don't have enough technological skills, don't have enough skilled staff, or don't have good ways to keep an eye on things (Adarkwah, 2021). As a result, inconsistent delivery of the curriculum, limited support services, and a lack of standardisation make it harder to have good learning experiences. To fill address these gaps, institutions need to make a conscious commitment to quality, ongoing professional development, and smart spending on quality assurance systems. It is very important to improve QAP in remote education settings like the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in order to improve student outcomes and the school's reputation.

ICT Utilization

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) change open and distance learning (ODL) by making learning more interesting, giving students more access to educational resources, and encouraging interactive and collaborative learning experiences. Digital platforms like Zoom, Moodle, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams have changed a lot about how students connect with course materials, teachers, and other students, especially in

virtual settings where they cannot meet in person (Bozkurt et al., 2020). These tools help with both synchronous and asynchronous learning, allow for personalised feedback and encourage peer-to-peer communication, all of which help people learn how to learn on their own.

In schools with a lot of resources, ICTs have become essential for teaching. ICT-supported instructional strategies, such as virtual collaboration and team teaching, have been identified as mechanisms for enhancing teaching effectiveness and institutional quality (Ayantunji et al., 2024). The use of multimedia and digital instructional tools has been shown to improve learner engagement and instructional effectiveness in higher education (Makanjuola et al., 2021). But in many parts of Nigeria, there are problems that make it hard for ICT to be fully integrated into ODL. Some of these are poor internet access, unreliable power supply, restricted access to cheap digital devices, and a lack of digital literacy among both students and teachers (Olutola & Olatoye, 2015). These gaps in infrastructure and skills not only make it harder for students to fully participate in digital learning, but they also make it harder for teachers to conduct lessons and help students learn. To get past these problems, Nigeria has to keep putting money into digital infrastructure, capacity-building projects, and ICT policies that are open to everyone and put access and fairness first for all distant learners.

The use of multimedia and digital instructional tools has been shown to improve learner engagement and instructional effectiveness in higher education

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Garrison's Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, that was first introduced in 2000 by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer which says that cognitive presence, instructional presence, and social presence are three important parts of online and remote education that all operate together. Cognitive presence is the degree to which students can make sense of things and reinforce their understanding through long-term thought and conversation. Teaching presence, which includes things like designing lessons, leading discussions, and giving direct instruction, and social presence, which lets students be themselves, communicate openly, and form relationships with other students, help this process. When these things work together, they create a learning environment that encourages collaboration, which is really important for learning how to study on your own. Combining ICT technologies with quality assurance techniques is very important for keeping these presences alive, especially in distance learning settings. The study also uses Knowles' theory of andragogy, which focusses on the special traits of adult learners, such as their intrinsic motivation, need for independence, life

experiences, and ability to control themselves. These theories give us a strong base to look into how institutional and technical elements affect learner independence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A correlational, cross-sectional survey methodology is employed to look into the link between Quality Assurance Practices (QAP), ICT use and Self-Directed Learning (SDL) skills.

Participants

Researchers randomly chose 420 undergraduate students from seven (7) NOUN study centres in the southwestern Nigerian states of Ogun, Oyo, and Ondo.

Instruments

The study employed a validated questionnaire with subscales for QAP (regular feedback, course clarity, and learner support) and ICT Utilisation (how often it was used, how easy it was to access, how well it worked, and SDL skills: creating goals, managing time, evaluating yourself, being competent, and being related. Using Cronbach's alpha, the dependability coefficient was 0.89.

Data Analysis

SPSS 25 was used to analyse inferential statistics like correlation and multiple regression analysis to expand the frontiers of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between quality assurance practices and self-directed learning skills among distance learners?

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Between Quality Assurance Practices and Self-Directed Learning Skills.

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Quality Assurance Practices	3.84	0.62	—	
2. Self-Directed Learning Skills	3.67	0.58	.52**	—

N = 420. p < .005

The Pearson correlation study found a strong positive link between self-directed learning (SDL) skills and quality assurance practices (QAP) (r = .52, p < .005). Distance learners who said they had more access to clear course goals, regular feedback, and flexible learning paths also had better SDL abilities, especially when it came to establishing goals, managing their time, and being competent.

The positive link between QAP and SDL shows that the way schools do things has a big effect on how independent and engaged students are. This conclusion agrees with Tait (2020), who says that good QA methods, like clearly stating course expectations and giving regular feedback, help students learn on their own and make their jobs less confusing. It also backs up Yousuf (2007), who talked about how important academic support networks are for keeping students motivated.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between ICT utilization and self-directed learning skills among distance learners?

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Between ICT Utilization and Self-Directed Learning Skills.

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. ICT Utilization	3.76	0.68	—	
2. Self-Directed Learning Skills	3.67	0.58	.56**	—

N = 420. p < .005

There was also a strong link between SDL skills and ICT use (r = .56, p < .005). Learners who were good at ICT, used online tools a lot, and had access to digital resources did better on the self-evaluation and relatedness parts of SDL.

The strong link between using ICT and SDL shows that students who have digital tools and know how to use them are better able to direct their own studies. Bozkurt et al. (2020) found that ICT is a major factor in motivating, interacting, and keeping track of one's own progress in open learning environments. These results emphasise the need for focused digital literacy training and infrastructure growth in Nigerian distance education.

Research Question 3: Do quality assurance practices and ICT utilization jointly predict self-directed learning skills among distance learners?

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Directed Learning Skills.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.92	0.18	—	10.67	< .005
Quality Assurance Practices	0.31	0.05	.37	6.82	< .005
ICT Utilization	0.36	0.05	.42	7.81	< .005

Model Summary: $R = .68$, $R^2 = .46$, Adjusted $R^2 = .46$, $F(2, 417) = 88.92$, $p < .005$

Multiple regression analysis showed that the use of QAP and ICT together explained 46% of the differences in SDL skills ($R^2 = .46$, $F(2, 417) = 88.92$, $p < .005$). ICT use was a little better at predicting outcomes ($β = .42$, $p < .005$) than QAP ($β = .37$, $p < .005$). This means that both are important predictors, but technology use had a little more of an impact.

 The combined model explains 46% of the SDL variance, which shows how institutional quality structures and technical assistance work together. Although both variables were significant predictors, ICT utilization marginally outpaced QAP. This shows how important it is to be able to use technology and learn on your own, especially after COVID-19, when digital platforms became the main way to keep learning (Adarkwah, 2021). These results all point to the fact that institutional processes set the stage for learning, but ICT is the tool that learners use to reach their self-directed goals.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown using real data that both quality assurance techniques and the use of ICT greatly improve the ability of distance learners in Nigeria's open university system to learn on their own. The fact that these variables are positively correlated and have predictive power suggests that institutional frameworks and technology engagement can have a big effect on learner autonomy. Since ICT use has a little bit more of an effect, it is important for schools like NOUN to spend money on both strong quality assurance systems and digital tools that are easy for students to use. The results show that adult learning concepts and the Community of Inquiry approach are still useful in online education. To encourage ongoing participation and self-directed learning, it will be important to deal with problems with infrastructure, gaps in digital skills, and inconsistent academic support systems. In the end, strategically combining QAP with ICT will provide distance learners more control over their education, which will lead to better retention, happiness, and academic success in open and distributed learning settings.

Recommendations

1. NOUN and other ODL schools should establish standardised QAP rules that make sure tutors give regular feedback, learners get help, and courses are delivered in a clear way to improve SDL preparedness.

2. The government and schools should put money into ICT tools, internet access, and power supply in areas that don't have them yet so that everyone can use remote learning technology.

3. To get the most out of ICT for promoting independent learning, both students and staff should master digital skills as part of their regular lessons.

4. Tutors and facilitators should have regular training on how to create lessons, use digital tools in the classroom, and help students learn in ways that are in line with QAP and SDL principles.

5. Schools should regularly check how well students are using SDL and ICT to help make policy decisions, find gaps, and customise interventions for ongoing progress.

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