

EDITORIAL

Assuring Quality in ODL Provision: How Context Shapes Practice

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The Discourse

Quality in education, even if defined in its full comprehensive contours, is still contextual in its application. Open and distance education is no exception. Context plays a significant role in the organisation and delivery of open distance education (ODE/ODL); its articulation has strong foundations — natural settings shaping perception and behaviour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), situated learning (Brown et al., 1989), a triad of context-media-teachers and learners in online learning (Lowenthal et al., 2009), and much more. We have contended elsewhere that quality expresses through and is also influenced by the triad of policy-technology-capacity building in national ODL design and managing change (Panda & Mishra, 2020); and quality in the case of open universities is contingent upon the varied contextual business models that these institutions follow (Mishra & Panda, 2025).

In a contextualised online VET research study, Cox (2021) underlines the importance of teachers' conception of teaching influencing actually enacted teaching practice (Gibbons et al., 2018); and the enacted practice is affected by teaching context—functional teaching context, and the nature and purpose of educational context. The enacted practice might not always align with the conception of teaching since the 'teaching context' could affect both (Doyle et al., 2019). Conceptions about practice and the actual practice might affect each other depending on the context (Scott, 2016). These findings in the context of VET are also equally applicable to non-VET education and the contexts of blended and face-to-face learning. In a recent study on online and blended learning, van den Berg (2020) underlined the role of student context in interaction and learning — each institution and each curriculum being distant from the others, and exhibiting unique contexts to address. Similarly, learners' context influences learning in MOOCs (Hood et al., 2015) and in remote learning contexts (Oliveira et al., 2021).

In the editorial to the preceding issue of the *JL4D* titled "Quality ODL Provision: Stakeholder Perspectives" (Panda, 2026), we contended that stakeholder perception, involvement and satisfaction comprise a major dimension of quality in ODL. The 'context' might include a mix or all of: geographic, institutional, teaching-learning, discipline study, technological, and socio-political factors, among others. While context shapes practice, localisation of contextual practice is of utmost importance to appreciate the effectiveness and quality of the practice; and, therefore, understanding the contextual application of ODL through research and analysis of reflective experiences assumes critical importance. The present issue of the *JL4D* centres around this theme of "Assuring Quality in the ODL Provision: How Context Shapes Practice".



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Based on the focus of this issue, we have included 14 peer-reviewed papers — seven under ‘Research Articles’, five under ‘Case Studies’, and two under ‘Reports from the Field’ — and two ‘Book Reviews’.

Research Articles

In the first research article, Aluko and co-researchers report the findings of research on studying the e-readiness of students, organising mentoring support, and the impact of the support on students’ (school principals in an advanced diploma programme on school leadership) performance. The research used the SAMR model (substitution-augmentation-modification-redefinition) the findings of which show that technology choices did not influence pedagogies including content assimilation and student engagement, that technology facilitated the design of alternative assessments which did influence student engagement, and that ‘context’ was important in the entire exercise of online delivery which, when considered, did positively influence student learning outcomes. Das and colleagues, in the second research article, report that student perception of blended learning (BL) was not influenced by variations in gender, residence, family type, semester, level of internet access, prior blended learning experience, or academic streams; that teaching presence, perceived learning outcomes, and instructional design were strong predictors of perception of blended learning; and that pedagogic design and teacher facilitation should be underlined in any blended teaching-learning design. On the other hand, Bon and co-researchers, in the third research paper, reported that technology played a significant role in secondary school students’ perception of the role of technology in self-directed learning (SDL) in respect of learning flexibility, variety of learning resources, and cross-cultural knowledge; that technology access, technology integration, knowledge about effective use of technology and supporting technological devices played key roles in students’ SDL with technology; and that these technologies were context-specific, in this case in secondary schools in Cambodia.

In the fourth research paper, Shrestha and Clinton-Lisell, in their research based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, reported the contextual factor of facilitating conditions as an important predictor of adoption of digital education resources (DER), though no gender difference was reported. Zülal Ayar, in the next research paper, on enactment of digital agency (DA) through emotional labour (EL) among EFL teachers, reports that while negative emotions acted as constraints to this process, it is important to consider emotional processes for improving the agentic behaviour of teachers to achieve effective digital and pedagogic capacity. In the sixth research paper, by using a TOEK framework, Mondal and Das report that the K factor (i.e., knowledge development) was the most significant predictor of student-teachers’ ICT competency, and therefore, there is need to ensure adequate institutional and pedagogic support to student-teachers during pre-service teacher training. The seventh research paper, by Suprihatiningsih and co-researchers, is a systematic literature review of artificial intelligence (AI) in mathematics education, which should be of interest to readers, including the benefits and drawbacks of using AI.

Case Studies

We have included five case studies dealing, respectively, with an online game, emergency online accounting education, a digital library, soft skills, and an LMS and problem solving. In the first case study, Rahmi and co-researchers suggest the effectiveness of an arcade-based

educational game (Pali-Pali Game) in enhancing the needs analysis ability of online designers in relation to student characteristics, contextual constraints, and instructional requirements. In the second case study, Sekgota and co-researchers report online learning in a resource-constrained university in South Africa, which included constraints related to pedagogical disruption, heightened emotional and psychological stress, inadequacy in informal mentoring practices, and technology access; and suggest the development and adoption of context-responsive technology-enabled learning models to deal with such situations. The third case study, by Hosman and Nova, report the effectiveness of partnerships in the development of an offline digital library in Northeast Syria, which could act as a model for other conflict-affected areas. In the next case study, on soft skills in IT education, Anne Wachira reports needs-provision gaps in Kenyan universities, and suggests mechanisms to address this gap for more effective curriculum reform, assessment policy, and faculty development. In the last case study, Abtokhi and co-researchers suggest that factors such as LMS quality, information quality, organisational structure of digital resources, service quality, and user convenience and satisfaction need to be addressed in enhancing problem-solving skills in physics in LMS-based teaching-learning.

Reports from the Field

The two peer-reviewed reports from the field on, respectively, the emotional state of online students by Hlazunova and co-researchers from Ukraine, and a learning and development website in a higher education institution in UK by Micallef, Hurman and West should be of high interest and utility to our readers.

Book Reviews

Two book reviews, edited and prepared by Jako Olivier, dealing with the themes ‘Risks and Opportunities in Using Educational Technologies’ (by Barbieri and Palmer, and reviewed by Masibo Lumala), and ‘Innovative Models and Practices in Teacher Development: Case Studies from the Commonwealth’ (by Ogange, Newman and Mays, and reviewed by Udhin and Oojorah) should be useful to teachers, researchers and librarians alike.

Conclusion

All the fourteen papers and the two book reviews included in this issue deal with one or more dimensions of ‘context’ in ODL and technology-enabled learning; and the findings from contextual researchers should be handy to many in reflecting upon and dealing with teaching-learning, and organisation and management, in their contexts. We hope the current issue shall be of interest to readers and instil new ideas in researchers of ODL.

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