

**ICT and quality assurance in ODL**  
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Abstract

ICT-based ODL has also been taken up by conventional campuses. Thus there is a proliferation of virtual programs, computer-mediated instruction in lecture halls/websites. Nations can therefore tackle the dearth of quality academic staff. Combined with transborder education and increased web-based delivery of higher education, the quality of ODL is thus challenged furthermore. Content would be updated easily and user should be notified when the last changes were made. Video conferencing with the students would be a more appropriate feedback system and would make the program less static. Limited bandwidth on the user side slows down the performance for multimedia and frustrates the learners. Thus robust multimedia courses cannot be developed. One of the key quality assurance processes for ICT based ODL is trialling the unit of study websites before they go live. This is done by trialling the websites from a student perspective, checking whether the websites are technically sound, checking that a unit of study outline is consistent with Board (Univ.), adequate Student Support Services - live websites, staff support via phone or email for the development of websites, ensuring copyright issues are adhered to with the help of the library. There should be comparison of learning competence with traditional classroom. ICT enabled education is not just transferring class notes or a videotaped lecture to the Internet, new paradigms of content delivery are needed. Interactivity between professor and student and amongst students should have priority. Students should engage in the material deeply and attain academic maturity. Distance learning should not be 'delivered' just by CD ROMs, but by motivated live qualified teachers. Trial launching is thus a good way of assuring quality in ICT enabled ODL.

**Methodology**

ICT- based ODL has been in vogue for the past decade. It has been taken up even by the conventional universities. But there are no strict methodologies for quality assurance in these cases. In this article, a qualitative methodology is devised by following the general quality assurance methods of UNESCO, COL etc. This would enable the users to understand whether the material on the web through ODL has credibility or not.

Questions to be answered regarding the website of the e-course launched:

1. Is the e-Course approved by the university/Board?
2. Does the respective University handbook/public document clearly specify the technological requirements of the online courses, so that the students are aware of the prerequisites before enrolling?
  - a. RAM
  - b. Software
  - c. Hardware
  - d. Internet connectivity speed
  - e. MultimediaEtc.

3. Whether the e-course has been test-launched?
4. What was the result of the test launch?
  - a. No. of students taking the test
  - b. Problems encountered (broken links, multimedia not functioning, language of e-course not understood etc.)
5. Were all the broken links taken care of?
6. All grammatical/editorial/spell checks done?
7. Did the editor verify the course content with popular text books (international/national) and which of them?
8. Was the e-course dealing with special topics, then what were the reference materials with which the authenticity of the topics verified by the editor?
9. Did the academic supervisor give a green signal to the authenticity of the e-course material?
10. Was there any 24-hour helpline available for staff and students?
11. What was the last time that the course was revised (should not be more than three years)?
12. Are there regular sessions of peer review for the e-courses? Is it clearly mentioned in the web? It is in what form? (Video conferencing/chat sessions/email etc)
13. Is there supporting staff from the IT department of the University which will regularly look into technical difficulties encountered?

These questions are to be answered by the e-course preparation team before the launch of the course and the answers to this must be consolidated and clearly mentioned in the website of the e-course. A separate link : “Quality assurance policies followed” may be maintained.

#### **Implications of this study for practice**

ICT-based open and distance learning has been launched especially in the case of higher education operation in many Southeast Asian countries. A new direction and responsibility for the faculty, challenging pedagogical practices have arised. Mushrooming of e-courses by private, as well as conventional varsities, ICT based teaching learning and distributed learning (virtual as well as physical learning) is being practiced by many higher education institutions. The ICT-based distance education has indeed offered remarkable opportunity for many governments to deal with the dearth of quality academic staff. Nationally as well as transnationally the quality staff can now be shared. So has developed the concept of transborder education through the means of ICT-based open and distance learning mode. As a result there is a rise in the demand on the quality of education from stakeholders as well as the public. Thus regarding ICT based ODL, the quality is now of prime importance. But there is a lack of concrete methodologies for coordinating various ODL initiatives at the national as well as international level. So the user is often vulnerable to low-quality/ unauthenticated e-courses. The above qualitative methodology will be of particular use in these cases.

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