

Arenas of Teacher Support in an Online Education Programme from Academic and Administrative Perspectives

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Abstract

What makes open and distance online education unique is its accomplishment by multiple actors who perform pedagogical, technological, administrative, and financial roles and support. With such a nature and with the increasingly prevalent use of new media in online education, it broadens the arena for the participation of a diverse teaching workforce. In addition to the traditional teachers, there are other professionals who are qualified to teach, such as previously engaged retirees, practitioners, and people with disabilities, requiring unique academic and administrative assistance to navigate technology. This autoethnographic study surfaced the nature of support for teachers in a multidisciplinary graduate programme developed by five open universities in the ASEAN region and delivered online. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: What nature of support do teachers require? How is the support performed from academic, technological and administrative perspectives? Qualitative data in the form of email exchanges and programme reports of the authors were collected and analysed thematically. The analysis surfaced three arenas where support is required: 1) Transitioning from being a traditional teacher to being an online teacher (consisting of acquiring the Open and Distance eLearning (ODEL) Framework as a shared performance and awareness of the technological nature of online education); 2) Teaching interaction between teacher and students (consisting of constructing the online classroom and connecting with the students); and 3) Transforming the societal role of the university (consisting of programme completion of students and producing competent workforce).

Keywords: administrative support, autoethnography, online teaching, Open and Distance eLearning (ODEL), shared pedagogical performance, teacher support

1. Introduction

The rapid developments in technology, especially the Internet and the World Wide Web, have revolutionised open and distance learning (Harry, 1999; Labbas & Shaban, 2013). Some of these fundamental changes are the transformation of the web from hyper textuality to a highly interactive communication media, and a shift in learning theory from the traditional educational theory of behaviourism to cognitivist and constructivist methods of instruction (Chukwunonso, 2013).

Technological advancements have resulted in the growth of a new generation of learners who are called digital natives. These learners require new models of teaching and learning and have different patterns of thinking and practices unknown to teachers (Prensky, 2001). These developments result in the changing role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process and in the expansion of who can participate in the teaching and learning process.

What makes open and distance online education unique is its accomplishment by multiple actors who perform pedagogical, technological, administrative, and financial roles and support. With such nature and with increasingly prevalent use of new media in online education, it broadens the arena for the participation of a diverse teaching workforce. In addition to the traditional teachers, there are other professionals who are qualified to teach such as retirees, practitioners and people with disabilities (PWDs), requiring unique academic and administrative assistance to navigate technology.

Online learning employs a variety of online tools, systems, and software which might demand the technical competence of instructors. Bennett and Lockyer (2004) said that instructors need to:

- Design and facilitate collaborative and cooperative activities for learners who are working in different places, at different times and with varying facilities;
- Develop a schedule and study guide around milestones rather than classes;
- Manage an electronic assignment submission and feedback process;
- Create and integrate a greater range of electronic resources; and
- Develop skills and strategies for using computer-mediated tools as the primary means of communication.

They should also be able to effectively communicate, manage technology, and deliver and assess content. However, some teachers who consider themselves as digital immigrants might be reluctant to change and hold on to traditional teaching (Labbas & Shaban, 2013).

In a meta-review conducted by van Dorresteijn et al. (2025), among the factors that contribute to effective online higher education are teacher-related factors, namely, online teaching competences and professional development opportunities, and institution-related factors, namely, an institution-wide vision on online education, adequate technological infrastructure, and accommodating student and teacher support. Meanwhile, in the most recent systematic literature review on perceived teacher support and student engagement among higher education students (Prananto et al., 2025), the authors emphasised the crucial role of teacher support in enhancing student engagement in higher education and urged further exploration in this under-researched area.

The current study turns the focus onto support for teachers, contextualised within a graduate programme, which is a multidisciplinary programme whose framework was collaboratively developed by five open universities in the ASEAN region, and whose teaching workforce comes from various disciplines, academic institutions, and the professional community with diverse situational backgrounds, physical, and technological challenges. The study aims to answer the following research questions: What nature of support do the

teachers of the programme require? How is the support performed from academic and administrative perspectives?

1.1. Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the nature of teacher support in an online graduate programme delivered through Open and Distance eLearning (ODEL) from academic, technological, and administrative perspectives. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the forms of support required by teachers in an online graduate programme; and
2. Describe how teacher support is performed from academic, technological, and administrative perspectives within an ODeL environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Nature of Support for Faculty in an Online Education

With the changes in the nature of teaching in the online environment, institutions must address issues for training and support of online teachers (Bennett & Lockyer, 2004). The effectiveness of online education depends not only on faculty competence but also on the institutional and organisational support systems that enable faculty to teach effectively in digital learning environments.

According to Baran (2011), support, such as pedagogical, technological, and financial support, is one of the most cited motivational factors for teaching online. Pedagogical support involves assistance in finding new pedagogical strategies for teaching online courses and updates on pedagogical use of technologies. Technological support is needed by teachers while they develop learning resources, reorganise existing course materials, and explore new pedagogical approaches. They emphasised that their role was not as technologists but as online teachers who preferred to invest their time in teaching-related tasks. Clouse (2007) cited emotional, social, programmatic, mentor, and institutional support as a way to help new teachers in their transition to online teaching.

Meanwhile, financial support was needed as a financial reward to compensate for the amount of work spent to create a course for online teaching that is beyond their normal teaching responsibilities. Teachers used the support to attend professional meetings and hire graduate students.

2.2. Academic and Technological Support for Faculty in an Online Education Programme

Kim and Bonk (2006) explained that faculty training and support are a critical component of quality online education. In an earlier study by Rockwell et al. (2000), the faculty believed that it is important to have help in the curriculum content, design and evaluation of the delivery process. Similarly, further education, assistance, and support for developing instructional material and applying selected technologies are very important needs to be addressed in transitioning to distance mode and can be said to be true in online education.

Orr et al. (2009) examined institutional efforts in overcoming faculty members' challenges in creating and teaching online courses. They found that the key element for success in these online learning efforts is in both motivating and then appropriately supporting faculty members in the developing and teaching of online courses (p. 267). In the study of Abaci et al. (2021) on supporting school teachers' rapid engagement with online education, they concluded that

a commitment to systematic professional learning in relation to the pedagogical skills relevant to online teaching is required.

2.3. Administrative Support for Faculty in an Online Education Programme

Recent studies also emphasise that administrative support is an important part of educational quality rather than merely a secondary service. Yidana et al. (2023) argued that administrative support and teaching are closely connected and mutually reinforcing. Their review showed that services such as academic affairs, student services, library systems, guidance and counselling, human resources, and ICT support are closely linked to teaching and learning. The authors noted that quality assurance efforts focused only on teaching provide an incomplete picture if administrative services are not also assessed. Effective administrative support influences institutional efficiency, faculty work, student satisfaction, and overall educational quality, highlighting the vital role of support systems in higher education.

During the emergency remote teaching transition brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Sümer and Yüner (2021) examined faculty support services and found that while institutions generally provided administrative and technical assistance, academic and counselling support were often inadequate. Faculty reported limited help with instructional design, assessment practices, and emotional or psychological support. The study also highlighted peer support as an important but often overlooked source of assistance, with many faculty members relying on colleagues before seeking help from formal institutional units. These findings suggest that faculty support is multidimensional, involving not only institutional systems but also collegial and psychosocial relationships.

Similarly, Moretz (2022) explored online adjunct faculty perspectives on administrative support and found that support is experienced as both structural and relational. Faculty identified technical and academic assistance, trust and academic freedom, administrator awareness of online teaching challenges, professional development opportunities, and consistent communication as important forms of support that promote engagement and inclusion. In contrast, inadequate communication, limited administrator understanding of online teaching realities, and insufficient training weakened faculty perceptions of support. Moretz (2022) further noted that faculty viewed interactions with administrators not merely as managerial supervision but as signs of institutional commitment and professional recognition.

Leadership further shapes the availability and effectiveness of faculty support in online education. Barefield and Meyer (2013) argued that successful and sustainable online programs depend on institutional leaders who can provide resources, foster supportive work environments, and address barriers that discourage faculty participation. Using the Administrative Support Matrix (ASM), they explained that leadership support involves foundation, development, and maintenance stages. Faculty reluctance toward online teaching was linked to limited training, heavier workloads, insufficient incentives, and technological difficulties, which they described as the “hassle factor.” Thus, effective leadership is essential in creating supportive and collaborative environments that encourage faculty engagement.

While existing literature recognises the importance of institutional and administrative support in online education, many studies focus primarily on infrastructure, leadership frameworks, emergency remote teaching, or faculty experiences in Western contexts. Existing studies often examine support structures or institutional practices separately, leaving faculty-centred understandings of support relatively underexplored.

Comparatively limited research examines how faculty in ODeL institutions perceive, experience, and make sense of support within their specific institutional settings. Faculty experiences provide important insights into how support operates in online teaching environments. However, in the contexts of ODeL institutions, there remains a limited understanding of the nature, meaning, and lived experience of faculty support in online

teaching. This gap highlights the need to examine teacher support within online higher education institutions, thereby providing the basis for the present study.

3. Research Method

This study employed autoethnography, a qualitative research methodology that generates knowledge grounded in the researcher's experience. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273). Rather than positioning researchers as detached observers, autoethnography recognizes them as participant-researchers whose experiences provide insight into broader social, institutional, and cultural contexts.

Of the many approaches to autoethnography, the study employed the use of layered accounts. Ellis et al. (2011) described layered accounts as an approach that:

...often focus on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasises the procedural nature of research. Similar to grounded theory, layered accounts illustrate how "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110) and frame existing research as a "source of *questions* and *comparisons*" rather than a "measure of truth" (p. 117). But unlike grounded theory, layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to "invoke" readers to enter into the "emergent experience" of doing and writing research (Ronai, 1992, p. 123), conceive of identity as an "emergent process" (Rambo, 2005, p. 583), and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995, 1996)" (Ellis et al., 2011, pp. 278-279)

The research questions were answered through the autoethnographic approach, with the authors being participants in the programme course delivery. Data, in the form of text messages and email exchanges between the programme chair and the programme development associate, notification of assignments from the administrative office, and assessment reports since the programme was offered in 2014, were collected and analysed thematically. Through iterative reading, coding, and thematic analysis, the study examined how teacher support was experienced and performed from academic, technological, and administrative perspectives.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis surfaced three arenas where support is required: 1) Transitioning from being a traditional teacher to being an online teacher (consisting of acquiring the ODeL Framework as a shared pedagogical performance, and awareness of the technological nature of online education; 2) Teaching interaction between teacher and students (consisting of constructing the online classroom and connecting with the students); and 3) Transforming societal role of the university (consisting of program completion of students and producing competent workforce).

4.1. Transitioning from Being Traditional to Being an Online Teacher

In this arena, the academic support, the assistance for technology, and the administrative support needed pertain to two areas of concern: a) acquiring and understanding the ODeL Framework as a shared pedagogical performance; and b) awareness of the technological nature of online teaching.

4.1.1. Acquiring and Understanding the ODeL Framework as a Shared Pedagogical Performance

The ODeL Framework espouses the plurality of ideas and the production of scholarly texts in a networked world (Alfonso, 2014). This suggests that teaching is a shared performance. At the graduate programme, teaching involvement for a particular term begins with a notification of assignment as faculty-in-charge (FIC) and a welcome email from the programme chair. The shared nature of pedagogical performance in an online education can be seen in the FIC notice:

Review the course materials used in previous offerings of the course (if any);

And in the welcome email by the programme chair:

We have imported the courses from the previous semester...

This kind of academic and administrative support has a practical utility in that it eases up the task of the teacher as the teaching work will not start from scratch and the teacher can focus on the updating of the content of the course, but it also has philosophical value in that within the ODeL framework, the previous course site can contribute to the teaching of the succeeding course offering.

The teachers are also provided assistance in their attendance to the faculty orientation, where the ODeL framework is discussed and where they can get familiar with the shared nature of pedagogical performance in an online set-up. This is clearly seen in the email of the programme development associate (PDA):

*We would just like to remind you of the online orientation for new faculties-in-charge tomorrow via Zoom. Official invite was sent via Google Calendar.
Forwarding below the details of the invite for your reference.*

Assessment as part of the teaching process takes a shared nature within the ODeL framework. The shared performance does not necessarily mean in the execution of assessment but in the form of guidance, for instance at the FIC notice of assignment:

Prepare and submit examinations at least one month before the scheduled date of examinations.

Shared performance can also be seen in the following example of technical assistance provided to the programme and shared with individual courses during programme meetings regarding the online assessments which required clarity, as gleaned from the consultant's report:

The appropriate way to see if the assessment achieves the purposes of the course is to look at the instruction of the assessment, the criteria of marking, and the assessment results.

4.1.2. Awareness of the Technological Nature of Online Education

Engagement in online teaching requires awareness of its technological nature. At the graduate programme, those who have the potential for ODeL teaching, that is, they are not necessarily technologically savvy but are experts in their field, are invited to teach as long as they are able to teach via the virtual classroom if given assistance.

Technical assistance is given anytime the teacher needs it. For instance, the PDA provided assistance to a teacher in navigating the online platform as follows:

Attached is the list of students with their specific groupings, just for your reference. I have uploaded the course guidelines in the portal so students have an idea/background of the activities for the whole semester. I have also plotted some of the activities for modules 1-3 but are still hidden for students except for Assignment 1 due on February 1, as per course guide.

Please check the portal and let me know if there will be changes. Many students have already posted to the self-introduction forum. Some sent a message for questions.

Another example of technical assistance can be seen as follows, when a teacher was unable to send an email notification:

I already emailed the Myportal administrator to help you with the email notification. Manually, you can opt to subscribe to every forum discussion thread but it will be too tedious. But let me teach you how to do it anyway:

Just turn the editing on (right side), go to the discussion forum you want to subscribe to, then under the administration tab (left side, bottom part), you can click to subscribe to this forum. Please see below...

4.2. Teaching Interaction Between the Teacher and the Students

In online education, the interaction between the teacher and the students is mediated by technology. In this arena, the academic, administrative and technological support needed pertains to two areas of concern: constructing the online classroom and connecting with the students.

4.2.1. Constructing the Online Classroom

The online classroom is a space that is not like a traditional classroom. It is not filled with physical artifacts but with activities that are designed to achieve course goals and objectives and prepared ahead of time. At the graduate programme, in the notice of FIC assignment, the teachers are informed of their access to the learning management system and guided on the timeline they have to observe:

Prepare the online course site for a virtual classroom on [the university's] learning management system at least two weeks prior to the course start date.

Further guidance on constructing the online classroom is given in the programme chair's welcome email:

We have imported the courses from the previous semester for your easy revision and updating. When updating, please take note of the following:

- *Update all published dates in the course sites.*
- *Check hidden sections and hidden resources/activities.*
- *If possible, use short labels to make it compatible with Moodle Mobile that some students may be using.*

Please remember to make the course site visible to students when ready. (To do so, click Course Administration>Edit setting>Visible>Show).

4.2.2. Connecting with the Students

In an online classroom, there is a “communication space to be crossed” (Moore, 1997) between the teacher and the students. At the graduate programme, technological support is provided to meet the teacher’s need to connect with the students through the same learning management platform. This support is exemplified in the following exchange between a teacher and the programme development associate:

Faculty-In-Charge:

Dear PDA,

I have not been receiving any email notices of the posts of my students. Can you please show me the page where I can activate this?

Thanks very much.

Program Development Associate:

Dear FIC,

Just click the discussion forum where you want to receive email notices of the posts of the students, then look for the "administration" box at the left side of the window, then click "subscribe to this forum".

Faculty-In-Charge:

Dear PDA, Thanks, I got it.

4.3. Transforming Role of the University in Society

It has been said that “at core of the universities social contract is its role in social transformation” (Alfonso, 2014, p. 10). In this arena, the academic, administrative and technological support needed pertains to two areas of concern: programme completion of students and producing a competent workforce.

4.3.1. Programme Completion of Students

In an online learning set-up, the responsibility of completing the programme is also a shared responsibility. It does not solely rest on the shoulders of competent teachers or on responsible students who may both face insurmountable obstacles in their respective contexts. Both need support to arrive at such a destination. At the graduate programme, the academic and administrative support for programme completion are bundled together, as suggested in the following email response of the programme chair to a student who faced difficulty in finishing the thesis that is a partial requirement for the completion of the programme:

As educators, to us the completion of the degree of the student is paramount. This is the reason why, as the Program Chair, I am attempting to find out where the problem lies and trying to provide a remedy if still possible.

I suggest that you stick with what you proposed and send the draft to your adviser. I consulted the thesis panel on how you can go forward. They suggested having the committee video conferencing with you. I have copied on this email our PDA, to set up the Zoom invite should everyone be free at the suggested time.

This is where we are, we are finding a way that you can still finish your thesis within this term.

4.3.2. Production of Competent Workforce

Due to the affordances of technology and its capacity to widen access for education, online education providers are in a unique position to produce a competent workforce. At the graduate programme, this end is at the beginning of the teacher's engagement with the programme, as a kind of support to orient the teacher to what an open university is and the context of their participation in the course delivery, as articulated in the notification of FIC assignment:

an opportunity to help the university fulfil its mission of democratizing access to quality education and to realize its vision of a nation and people with capacity to meet the challenges of the Information Age.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned in the literature, pedagogical support for online teaching involves assistance in finding new pedagogical strategies for teaching online courses and updates on pedagogical use of technologies; technological support is needed by teachers while they develop learning resources, reorganise existing course materials and explore new pedagogical approaches as teachers emphasised that their role was not as technologists but as online teachers who preferred to invest their time in teaching-related tasks and administrative support in terms of financial compensation. This study has widened understanding of teacher support in terms of three arenas: 1) their transitioning from being traditional teachers to being an online teacher (consisting of acquiring the ODeL) Framework as a shared pedagogical performance, and awareness of the technological nature of online education); 2) Teaching interaction between teacher and students (consisting of constructing the online classroom and connecting with the students); and 3) Transforming societal role of the university (consisting of programme completion of students and producing a competent workforce) where pedagogical, technological and administrative support are bundled together. Across these arenas, pedagogical, technological, and administrative support are not separate functions but are bundled and performed in an integrated manner. This wider understanding of teacher support highlights important implications for ODeL knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of both teachers and support personnel. The findings suggest that understanding the ODeL framework may be developed through varied learning pathways, that technological expertise is not necessarily a prerequisite for online teaching when adequate support is available, and that transactional distance may be bridged through the mediating role of teaching support. On the part of the support staff, the study also surfaced the competency required of them to fully support teachers in an online education, to wit, flexibility to adjust to the teachers varied learning pathways, expertise in the ICT requirement of teaching, and communication proficiency to be able to perform the mediating role of teaching support.

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Data Availability Statement / Supplementary Data: The data supporting the findings of this study consist of autoethnographic materials, including email exchanges, text messages, assignment notifications, and program assessment reports generated during the implementation of the graduate program. Due to the presence of confidential and personally identifiable information, these materials are not publicly available.

Ethics Statement: The study complied with institutional research ethics guidelines. Being autoethnographic, informed consent is not necessary. All data was anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Ethics Approval No.: 2026-021-F-FICS

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