



**Determinants of Adults' Choice of Open and Distance Education:  
The National Open University of Nigeria Experience**

**Les déterminants du choix des adultes en matière d'éducation  
ouverte et à distance : l'expérience de National Open University of  
Nigeria**

By

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***Abstract***

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*The working class adult in the cotemporary time choose the distance learning mode option more than before for reasons best known to them. Their choice of the mode may be due to factors like personal lifetime desire, career expectations, distance, career constraints, general commitments and finance. The essential thing is the realization of individual's objective through determination, hard work and consequently certification in which the mode may not be revealed. It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the determinants of adults' choice of Open and Distance Education. Three hundred students of National Open University of Nigeria formed the sample of the study. Determinants of Adults' Choice Questionnaire (DACQ) was developed to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was subjected to construct validity and test-retest reliability technique using the Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient formula. The reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.79. Four research questions were raised for this study and four hypotheses were also formulated. Two were analysed with t-test, one with one-way Analysis of variance and the fourth one with regression analysis. The result of the study showed that the middle old adult mostly chose the open and distance mode. So also, learners with full employment had greatest support for open and distance learning. The study*

*concluded that open and distance learning is steadily gaining ground and from all indications it is the mode of the future. Thus, it is recommended that open and distance learning best suits the adult learners (working class), it should be given priority over the traditional mode.*

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**Key words:** Determinants, Adults, Choice, Open and Distance Learning.

### **Résumé**

*De nos jours, la classe ouvrière adulte choisit l'option du mode d'apprentissage à distance plus qu'avant pour des raisons bien connues **des concernés**. En donner la cause véritable n'est pas chose aisée, mais des facteurs comme le désir personnel d'une vie, les attentes de carrière, la distance, les contraintes de carrière, les engagements généraux et la finance semblent y jouer un certain rôle. L'institution d'autre part doit fournir des ressources didactiques, la technologie, un coût abordable et certain niveau de flexibilité pour stimuler la participation, assurer la qualité et en même temps se tenir au courant des développements. C'est dans ce contexte que cette étude s'est attelée à chercher les déterminants du choix de l'enseignement ouvert et à distance par les adultes. Trois cents étudiants de National Open University of Nigeria ont constitué l'échantillon de l'étude. Les déterminants du questionnaire sur le choix des adultes (DACQ) ont été **élaborés** pour obtenir de l'information auprès des intimes. L'instrument a été soumis à l'épreuve de validité de la construction, de fiabilité et de la technique de test-retest en utilisant la formule **du** coefficient de corrélation des moments  $r$  de Pearson. La fiabilité a donné un coefficient de 0,799.*

*Quatre questions de recherche ont été **posées** pour cette étude et quatre hypothèses ont également été formulées. Deux ont été analysées au test, la troisième a été traitée par l'analyse de la covariance et la quatrième avec l'analyse de régression. Le résultat de l'étude a montré que l'adulte a principalement choisi le mode ouvert et à distance. Les apprenants qui sont employés à plein temps sont fortement en faveur de l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance. L'étude a conclu que l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance est en train de gagner du terrain et selon toutes les indications, il se présente comme le mode d'apprentissage du futur. La recommandation qui en découle est que l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance convient mieux aux adultes (classe*

*ouvrière), il faut donc lui donner la priorité par rapport au mode traditionnel d'apprentissage.*

**Mots-clés:** Déterminants, adultes, choix, formation ouverte et à distance.

### **Background to the study**

Education, according to Omolewa (2001), is of great importance to a nation. It is even of greater importance to individuals and families. Education determines the altitude of a person because it promotes values and attitudes. The training and preparation of people for different careers build, introduce and usher them into various professions. Education has the capability of transforming individuals and societies. This explains why families, communities and organisations involve themselves in the training of children, youth and even the adult group in what is referred to as lifelong learning.

These importance and potentials of education necessitate adult learners' desire to learn through the Open and Distance Learning. This mode according to Omolewa in Sarumi 2002 dated back to 20<sup>th</sup> century when the correspondence education was made possible in Nigeria by the British, it gave opportunity to people like S. O. Ajayi, Alvan Ikoku and L. S. Ogunlesi among others. They had their Bachelor of Arts Degrees with the help of London Matriculation.

Distance education has become more popular in the Nigerian university system and it is seen officially as a reliable option to conventional education. The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria gave opportunity to many candidates who would have been denied fulfillment of life ambitions, placement at work and gaining new knowledge. Aside from this, other universities have been given approval to operate dual mode by the National Universities Commission. Such institutions include University of Ibadan, University of Abuja, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Maiduguri and Federal University of Technology, Yola.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) realised the importance of open and distance learning (ODL) in the context of lifelong education thus, the inclusion of lifelong education as the foundation in the national education

policy. The perception of ODL system as providing opportunity for lifelong education and increasing access to education is not peculiar to Nigeria. Raghavan (2008) asserts that today, interest in distance education has grown and its use has been expanded in Malaysia. Likewise, Osei (2012) reported that distance learning (DL) began to receive the attention of the Government of Ghana to address the excess demand for tertiary education. Osei (ibid) added further that distance learning has since emerged as a tool for widening access and participation to higher education for those who are gainfully employed and those who found it difficult to be admitted in the conventional institutions. Okpala (2015), Kaphesi & Banda (2017) agreed that students have positive perception of ODL mode of study probably because of the factors listed above.

Open and distance learning is referred to as distance education because of its ability to reach out to a large number of learners with flexibilities, without barrier and at affordable costs. Another fact is the separation between learners and instructors (distance teaching and distance learning) (Berg, 2016). Kintu & Simon (2019), Fidago, Thormann, Kylyk & Lancencastre (2020) also explains that distance learning is a situation whereby printed materials are developed to serve learners at distance and when learners see it the same way. Delivery of instruction is mostly based on a combination of both online and face-to-face interaction, which allows the opportunity to discuss concepts, ideas and thoughts both on course content, and on the use of educational media such as print modules, audio and radio broadcasts as well as computer supported interaction. Modern trend in education reveals the operation of distance learning in both conventional open and distance learning institutions.

Conventional institutions according to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia is back-to-basic, traditional institutions where students are taught face-to-face (Wikipedia, 2020). In this mode, lecture and tutorial sessions are held weekly with the opportunity for closer scrutiny and criticism from lecturers and course mates. On the contrary, lectures and tutorials are optional in the open and distance learning. Self-study is what is mostly promoted because of the nature of the learners (being people with responsibilities and time constrained). There is a generous application of teacher-directed forms of instruction in lecture rooms, laboratories and other controlled educational settings. Open and distance learning, however, consists of a flexible learning phase where the

learner is in charge of his/her own learning and development. Open distance learning is a term used to describe programmes that are flexibly designed to meet individual requirements. It is usually designed to remove barriers that discourage participation and also suggests learner-centered principles.

The major difference between the conventional mode and the open and distance learning mode is the method of delivery of instruction, learners' commitments, location, and the level of responsibility placed on the students to learn, imbibe and demonstrate understanding and competence in the content of courses and curricula (Javis, 2004).

Knowles (1990) opines that adults engage in post-school education primarily to meet personal needs such as greater job satisfaction or better quality of life. Owusu-Agyeman (2016) argues that knowledge acquisition is an essential factor that influences adult learners' consideration for obtaining higher education credentials. Knight & Yorke (2003) in their own submission affirm that the demand by industries for highly skilled personnel influences the decisions of adult learners to engage in higher education. Commonwealth of Learning (2005) states that adults aspire to enter post-secondary education to solve a problem.

According to Osei (2012) distance learning is mostly patronized by older (30 years and above) and married student population. Dubious (2003) in his own submission affirmed that open and distance learning encourages older people to seek higher education. Park (2007) corroborated the submission by explaining that most distance education students are adults between the ages of 25 and 50. However, the nature of the adult learners influence their decision to learn through the open distance mode of learning. Malamed (n.d) highlights characteristics of learners as autonomy, goal-oriented, practical, competence and mastery, learning by experience, having wealth of knowledge, purposeful, result oriented, having other commitments, likely challenged by age related issues, need big picture of content and learning community to share with.

### **Statement of the problem**

Open and distance institutions across the globe seem to operate based on the fact of global, national or institutional development without much

consideration for the learners' drive or motive. There is also not enough literature on what actually drives adult learners' involvement in open and distance learning though there's more than enough on their characteristics. The propellant of the need and desire should also be of great importance to stakeholders in open and distance learning for proper planning and handling of the learners. The mode is gaining ground on daily basis and so these stakeholders need up-to-date information and data to guide their decisions on the learners and they need to be involved in planning of matters that concern them. The advantage of the data provided for this study is that it will reduce the rate of attrition to the barest minimum. It is against this background that this study sought to find out factors that inform adult learners' choice of open and distance learning.

### **Purpose**

The study:

1. Determined male and female's choice of open distance learning.
2. Ascertained the influence of marital status on learners' choice of open distance.
3. Find out the influence of age on learners' choice of open and distance learning.
4. Investigate the influence of employability on learners' decision to choose open and distance learning

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between male and female in the learners' choice of learning mode.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: Married or single would not have significant influence on learners' choice of open and distance learning.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: Learners' age would not have significant influence on their choice of open and distance learning.
- Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant difference in learners' employment status and their choice of open and distance Learning.

### **Methodology**

Self-developed Determinants of Adult Choice of Open and Distance

Learning Questionnaire (DACODLQ) was distributed to a total of 330 samples selected through simple random sampling technique for the purpose of the study from the general population of National Open University of Nigeria students which was about 515,000 at the period of the research. It comprises two sections, section A solicits for responses on personal data of the learners. Section B contains 19 items to determine reasons for learners' enrolment in open and distant learning institution with response options “Strongly Agree” (4); “Agree” (3); “Strongly Disagree” (2) and “Agree” (1). The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field of open and distance learning and was administered by the researcher and two research assistance who administered the questionnaire to the respondents and collected it back after it had been filled. Pilot study was conducted on different samples about one month before the actual study. The reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.79. Three hundred (330) copies of questionnaire was administered on various respondents from various departments of the institution.

## **Results**

t-test was used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested with Analysis of Variance. The analysis of the result goes thus:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female in the learners' choice of mode.

Table 1: t-test analysis of gender as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance learning

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	T	df	Sig.
Male	180	62.80	7.297	.544	2.692	328	.007*
Female	150	60.41	8.855	.723			

A t-test Analysis of Male and Female learners in Table 1 shows that there is significant difference in their choice of distance education ( $t(328) = 2.692, p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected. The mean score for male, 62.80 is greater than that of female, 60.41. The implication is that male learners have

higher choice for open and distance learning. The result therefore shows that gender significantly influences learners' choice of open and distance learning.

**Hypothesis 2:** Marital status would not have significant influence on learners' choice of open and distance learning.

Table 2: t-test analysis of marital status as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance learning.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	Sig.
Married	226	63.11	7.863	.523	4.763	328	.000*
Single	104	58.67	7.865	.771			

A t-test analysis of married and single learners in Table 2 shows a significant difference in learners' choice of open and distance education ( $t(328) = 4.763$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, hypothesis 2 is rejected. The mean score for married, 63.11 is greater than that of single. This indicates that married learners have higher choice of open and distance learning. The result reveals that marital status significantly affected learners' choice of open and distance learning.

**Hypothesis 3:** Learners' age would not have significant influence on their choice of open and distance learning.

Table 3: One-way analysis of variance of age as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance learning.

Age	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
15-25 years	69	58.59	9.561	1.151
25-35 years	146	61.11	7.309	.605
Above 45 years	115	64.35	7.374	.688
Total	330	61.71	8.118	.477



ANOVA

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1522.680	2	761.340	12.349	.000*
Within Groups	20160.971	327	61.654		
Total	21683.652	329			

The analysis of variance among the three age groups of learners indicates a significant difference in their choice of distance learning  $f(2,327) = 12.349, p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. The mean score for 45 years old and above, 64.35 is the highest, this means that learners from 45 years and above indicates higher choice of open and distance learning. The result therefore shows that age of learner significantly influences their choice of open and distance learning.

Table 4: Scheffe Post Hoc Multiple comparison of age of learners as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance learning.

(i) Age	(j) Age	Mean difference	SE	Sig
15-25 years	26-35 years	-2.515	1.147	.092
	Above 45	-5.754*	1.196	.000
26-35 years	15-25 years	2.515	1.147	.092
Above 45 years		-3.238*	.979	.005
Above 45 years	15-25 years	5.754*	1.196	.000
26-35 years		3.238*	.979	.005

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

The mean difference between 15-25 years and above 45 years has the highest significant value. This shows that out of the three categories of age groups, age exerts the greatest influence on learners' choice of open and distance learning between 15-25 years and above 45 years.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference in learners' employment status and their choice of open and distance Learning.

Table 5: One-way analysis of variance of employment status as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance education.

Employment status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	
Part time	72	60.35	8.265	.974	
Full time	203	62.84	7.734	.543	
Unemployed	55	59.33	8.654	1.167	
Total	330	61.71	8.118	.447	
ANOVA					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	706.267	2	353.134	5.505	.004*
Within Groups	20977.384	327	64.151		
Total	21683.652	329			

The analysis of variance among the three categories of learners reveals clearly by employment status shows a significant difference in their choice of open and distance learning  $f(2,327) = 5.505$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected. The mean score of learners on full-time employment, 62.84 is the highest. It shows that learners on full-time employment exhibit highest preference for distance education. The result however revealed that employment status of learner significantly influences learners' choice of open and distance learning.

Table 6: Scheffe Post Hoc Multiple comparison of learners' employment status as determinant of learners' choice of open and distance learning.

(i)	Employment status	(j) Employment status	Mean difference	SE	Sig
Part-time		Full time	-2.495	1.099	.077
			1.020	1.434	.777
Unemployed					
Full time		Part time	2.495	1.099	.077
		Unemployed	3.515*	1.218	.016
Unemployed		Young old	-1.020	1.434	.777
		Middle old	-3.515*	1.218	.016

\*= The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

The mean difference between unemployed and full time learners has the highest significant value. The implication is that among the three categories of learners classified with the variable of employment status, highest significant difference was calculated between unemployed and full time learners.

### **Discussion**

The study has revealed that learners' characteristics: (sex, marital status, age and employment status) have great influence on their choice of open and distance learning. Table 1 indicated that hypothesis 1 was rejected. The result also showed that male learners have higher choice of open and distance learning. It corroborated Weelahan (2007) survey that 75% of learners are male. It also contradicts the finding of Teichler and Hanft (2009) which indicates that, between 60% and 77% of distance learners in North America are females. The implication of this is that although the study indicates that male learners have greater choice of open and distance learning, this situation may not hold at all times as shown in the findings of Teddlie and Tshakkori (2009).

The result in table 2 shows that married learners exhibit higher level of choice of open and distance learning. This supports Owusu-Agyeman (2016) and Raghavan (2008), that open and distance learning is most patronized by married learners.

The result table 3 reveals that among learners in the three age categories under investigation, learners within age category of 45 years and above have highest preference for distance learning. This aligns with Awe (2016) and Osei (2012) that distance learners are on the average older than typical undergraduates.

The result table 5 indicates that learners on full-time employment had greatest preference for distance learning under the three categories of employment status under investigation. This finding is in agreement with Maruatona (2012) and Sandberg & Andersson (2011).

### **Conclusion**

This study has affirmed that adult learners have peculiar characteristics which differentiates them from students in conventional institutions. It is those

characteristics highlighted by Malamed (n d) that necessitated the learners' choice of open and distance learning over the traditional mode. They are people who have responsibilities, wealth of experience, time constraint, want immediate result. It important to note that the nation's economy also played a major role in learners' choice of ODL because some of them were not employed, those who were employed had limited income that might probably not be enough to cater for their needs and that of their families. So, it would not be wise of anybody in any of these categories to have chosen the traditional mode of learning over ODL under the circumstances.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher recommended among other things that:

- Stakeholders should take time to understand the nature, drive and need of adult learners so as to made proper provision for them and handle the correctly.
- Learners should be involved in matters that concerns them in order to make them feel belong and be well taken care of.
- The word 'flexible' should not be lip service or a mirage. It must be practicable and realistic in distance learning because of its significance.
- Institution needs to provide needed study materials as and when due to avoid discouragement on the part of the learners

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