The OCEM Journal of
Management, Technology & Social Sciences

Received: Aug. 21, 2023 | Revised: Sept. 15, 2023 | Accepted: Oct. 12, 2023 | Published: Jan. 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/ocemjmtss.v3i1.62235 **Paper Type: Research Article**

Motivation for Joining the Open and Distance Learning Mode Program: Student's Perspectives

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Volume 3, Issue 1
ISSN Print:2705-4845
ISSN Online:2705-4845

Abstract

The adoption of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has gained considerable attraction as a transformative educational approach, offering unparalleled flexibility and accessibility to learners while accommodating a multitude of diverse commitments. In the context of Nepal, ODL presents itself as a powerful method to mitigate the persistent challenges of educational access and exclusivity. This research underscores to focus into the intricacies of motivation that drive students to enroll in ODL programs within the hallowed precincts of the Faculty of Education (FOE) at Tribhuvan University (TU). This study carefully examines the factors influencing students' motivation to choose ODL programs, providing insights for improving program design and support. The study applied a quantitative approach, collecting data through a structured Google Forms questionnaire and analyzing results using statistical tools.

The study revealed key motivations for ODL enrollment, including a strong preference for independent online learning and recognition of ODL's career and academic benefits. However, the results highlight lower perceptions of interaction within ODL classes. Findings further show that gender and caste/ethnicity significantly affect motivation, reflecting disparities in access. On the other hand, demographics like provinces, religion, study programs, device used, employment status, and training involvement have limited impact on motivation. The results hold substantial significance in the discourse on ODL in Nepal's education landscape. This research calls upon educational institutions to address interaction concerns and adapt strategies to diverse demographic motivations for effective ODL program delivery.

Keywords: *cross-sectional study, educational access, motivation, open and distance learning, quantitative method, tribhuvan university*

How to cite this paper:
Joshi, B. M., Acharya, U., & Koirala, P. (2024). Motivation for Joining the Open and Distance Learning Mode Program: Student's Perspectives. *The OCEM Journal of Management, Technology and Social Sciences, 3*(1), 160-167.

Introduction

In recent years, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a transformative approach to education, providing individuals with the flexibility and accessibility to pursue higher learning opportunities while accommodating diverse personal and professional commitments (Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006; Sallehuddin et al., 2023). This educational mode has gained significant prominence globally, offering an alternative pathway to attaining qualifications and advancing knowledge and skills (Bordoloi et al., 2021; Dey & Panda). It has significantly influenced higher education, altering how information is shared and gained in the current digital era. ODL has grown substantially in relevance due to its adaptability, accessibility, and promise to democratize learning as technology continues to change the face of education. An in-depth discussion on benefits of ODL education in higher education is provided in this article, with special emphasis on how it fosters lifelong learning, encourages diversity, caters to various learning preferences, and meets the need for global education scale(Au et al., 2019; Kour, 2013; Misra, 2012).

For several reasons, understanding the motivations behind students' choices to engage with ODL is crucial. First, it sheds light on the unique appeal of ODL programs, elucidating the factors that attract learners to this mode of education over more traditional classroom-based approaches. Second, uncovering the motivations can guide educational institutions, such as the Faculty of Education, in refining their marketing strategies and outreach efforts to align with the aspirations and needs of potential ODL students. Third, insight into student motivation can inform the development of targeted support systems to enhance student engagement, satisfaction, and success in ODL programs.

The ODL mode of education has gained significant prominence in contemporary educational landscapes due to its flexibility and accessibility (Dzakiria et al., 2013; Hussin et al., 2020). This study aims to develop the factors and motivations influencing students' decisions to enroll in ODL mode programs at the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University (FOETU), Nepal.

ODL mode programs are often chosen by students seeking to balance their educational pursuits with work, family, or other commitments (Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; Rupande & Nyenya, 2014). In Nepal, where socio-economic conditions and geographical disparities may hinder access to traditional on-campus education, ODL offers an opportunity for individuals to pursue higher education without the need to relocate or disrupt their daily lives (Ghimire et al., 2022).

One of the primary motivations for joining ODL programs is desire (Mahanta, 2017; Misra, 2012). Many students choose ODL to acquire additional qualifications while working, enabling them to up skill and stay competitive in the job market (Ivanovic, 2023; Szücs et al., 2013). This is particularly relevant in Nepal, where higher education is often linked to improved employment opportunities.

ODL programs require high self-motivation and self-discipline (Dak et al.; Vu et al., 2014; Zaki, 2022). Students inclined towards independent learning and wishing to take charge of their educational journey are attracted to ODL programs. This learning mode fosters personal development, including time management, critical thinking, and self-efficacy (Adewoyin & Ebabhi, 2022; Au et al., 2019).

Geographical barriers, especially in rural and remote areas, often limit access to conventional higher education institutions. ODL programs provide an avenue for individuals who might otherwise be unable to pursue further studies due to the lack of nearby institutions (Nayak &Singh. 2021; Pangeni, 2016; Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013). Moreover, the cost-effectiveness of ODL compared to traditional education can be a significant motivator for financially constrained individuals (Ajaz & Women, 2014; David, Rotimi & Kyode., 2006; Hjeltnes & Hansson, 2005).

Students comfortable with technology and prefer online learning environments are more likely to choose ODL programs (Cole et al., 2021). The increasing integration of digital technologies in education has made ODL an attractive option for those who value the flexibility of asynchronous learning and multimedia resources (Nayak &Singh. 2021; Noh et al., 2021).

In certain cultural contexts, societal norms and

family responsibilities can influence the choice of education mode. ODL allows individuals to pursue education while fulfilling familial and societal obligations, making it an appealing option for those who might otherwise be discouraged from pursuing higher education (Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006). The reputation of the educational institution offering the ODL program plays a crucial role in students' decisions to enroll. The prestige and recognition of the FOETU, Nepal, can significantly impact the motivation of students to choose its ODL mode.

In the context of Nepal, where traditional educational models face challenges of accessibility and inclusivity, ODL has assumed a critical role in expanding academic horizons, particularly at the tertiary level (Bajracharya, 2014; Neupane, 2021). The motivation for joining ODL mode programs at the FOETU, Nepal, is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of factors. Accessibility, flexibility, career aspirations, self-directed learning tendencies, geographical constraints, technological readiness, and cultural considerations contribute to students' decisions (Acharya, 2012; Maunonen-Eskelinen & Leppänen, 2015). Understanding the motivation is vital for designing effective ODL programs catering to student's diverse needs and aspirations in Nepal's educational context.

The FOERU, Nepal is a premier institution in Nepal's educational landscape, has recognized the potential of ODL in reaching a broader and more diverse for learners. This study aims to investigate the motivation that drives individuals to enroll in ODL programs at the FOETU.

Literature Review

ODL has emerged as a transformative approach to education, offering flexibility and accessibility to learners while accommodating diverse personal and professional commitments (Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006; Sallehuddin et al., 2023). The educational mode has gained prominence globally, providing an alternative pathway for acquiring qualifications and advancing knowledge and skills (Bordoloi et al., 2021). It has significantly influenced higher education by reshaping how information is shared and acquired in the digital era. In Nepal, where challenges of educational access and inclusivity persist, ODL holds great potential. ODL can overcome barriers to higher education, particularly in remote and underserved areas, and cater to individuals seeking to balance education with work and family commitments (Ghimire et al., 2022). The present study focuses on motivations behind enrollment in ODL programs at the FOETU, Nepal. Understanding motivation for ODL enrollment is crucial for several reasons as mentioned above. ODL's prominence has grown due to its adaptability, accessibility, and promise to democratize learning in the digital age. Lifelong learning, diversity, catering to various learning preferences, and global education needs are some of the benefits emphasized (Au et al., 2019; Kour, 2013; Misra, 2012). Given the transformative nature of ODL, it aligns well with changing educational paradigms. In the context of Nepal, where traditional educational models face challenges of accessibility and inclusivity, ODL has assumed a critical role in expanding academic horizons, particularly at the tertiary level (Bajracharya, 2014; Neupane, 2021). The motivation for joining ODL mode programs at the FOETU, Nepal, is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of factors. Accessibility, flexibility, career aspirations, self-directed learning tendencies, geographical constraints, technological readiness, and cultural considerations contribute to students' decisions (Acharya, 2012; Maunonen-Eskelinen & Leppänen, 2015). Understanding the motivation is vital for designing effective ODL programs catering to student's diverse needs and aspirations in Nepal's educational context.

Methodology

A quantitative research approach, employing a cross-sectional survey design was chosen to collect data on students' motivations (Nayak & Singh, 2021; Setia, 2016; Slavin, 1992). The study is concentrated on students enrolment in the ODL mode program at the FOETU, Nepal. Total number of respondents participation in the study was One hundred forty five (N=145) from all the students enrolled in ODL mode education in the Mahendra Ratna campus, Tahachal, and the central department of education, Kirtipur. The selection of the population was likely influenced by factors such as the accessibility of the researchers to the institution, the institution's reputation, and its relevance to the research topic. The population selection was carefully planned and executed to

align with the research objectives. The choice of a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, along with the use of a census method, aimed to provide a comprehensive and statistically meaningful assessment of students' motivations within the specific context of the ODL mode program at the FOETU, Nepal.

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to measure students' motivations for joining the ODL mode program based on our literature. The questionnaire consisted of Likert type scale items, allowing respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with specific statements related to motivation factors (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). The questionnaire was designed to capture various dimensions of motivation, including academic, career, personal, and societal factors. Each dimension contained Likert type scale items with response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, clearly explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses. Ethical guidelines set by the university were followed.

Respondents were approached through online platforms (email, learning management system) to complete the questionnaire using a secure online survey tool. A cover letter accompanying the questionnaire reiterated the purpose of the study and emphasized confidentiality. Collected data were analyzed using statistical software i.e. SPSS 26 version. SPSS enabled the researchers to perform both descriptive and inferential analyses, visualize the results effectively, and present the findings in an organized manner, all of which are essential for conducting a rigorous and informative research study on respondents' motivation. Descriptive statistics were computed for each Likert type scale item, including means and standard deviations. This allowed for a comprehensive overview of respondents' motivations. The use of descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, is a well-supported and essential analytical approach when dealing with Likert type scale items. Statistics provide valuable insights into the data, enhance its interpretability, support comparisons, and serve as a foundation for more advanced statistical analyses (Campbell, 2006). Furthermore, inferential statistics t-tests and ANOVA are employed to identify any significant differences in average scores for demographic variables. Results were presented using tables, displaying the means, standard deviations, one sample t-test, and ANOVA of each Likert scale item as suggested by Boone and Boone (2012). The statistical tools and techniques helped to uncover significant variations and relationships within data, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing the Likert type scale responses. The findings were organized based on different dimensions of motivation explored in the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Analysis shows that all items were significant motivational factors among participants to join the ODL mode program ($p < 0.05$). The highest mean score was observed in the item, 'I believe the ODL program was an effective option for Nepal to gain higher education' (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.76, t = 17.75). Following this, the statement 'The ODL program aids me in improving the caliber of my education compared to my prior degree' also received a notably high mean score (Mean = 4.08, SD = 0.74, t = 17.60). The lowest mean score was recorded for 'There was enough interaction between students and teachers and among the students in an ODL class (Mean = 3.73, SD = 0.84, t = 10.54). The results demonstrate that the students enrolment in the ODL offered program at the FOETU, are strongly motivated to pursue this mode of education. The high mean scores across all items indicate a positive perception of ODL, its relevance, and its potential benefits. The statement 'I believe the ODL program is an effective option for Nepal to gain higher education', receiving the highest mean score, suggests that the students considered ODL a viable and valuable approach to higher education in Nepal. Which underscores the recognition of ODL's role in expanding access to education and addressing the diverse needs of learners (Bastola & Acharya, 2020; Nayak et al., 2020). The finding that 'The ODL program aids students in improving the caliber of my education compared to my prior degree' also reflects the students' perception of ODL's potential to enhance their knowledge and skills beyond what they gained in their previous academic experiences (See Table 1). This aligns with the transformative

nature of ODL, offering opportunities for continuous learning and improvement (Glazer, 2023; Tsolaki & Stathopoulou, 2023). Notably, 'There is enough interaction between students and teachers and among the students in an ODL class' received a relatively lower mean score. While the mean score is still above the midpoint, this result might suggest a perceived need for greater interaction and engagement within the ODL mode. Also, the finding could inform efforts to enhance collaborative learning and communication strategies within the ODL context (Dzakiria, 2012; Van Den BERG, 2020).

Test of significance of mean between different groups is carried out using t-test for the variable with two categories and and one-way ANOVA for the variable with more than two categories. Findings show the variables of age and caste/ethnicity have significantly different average motivation level within their categories (P-value < 0.05). In terms of gender, male students (Mean = 4.086, SD = 0.497) show significantly higher motivation levels compared to female students (Mean = 3.8117, SD = 0.638) (P-value < 0.05). Among the different castes/ethnicities, Madhesi students (Mean = 4.416, SD = 0.399) demonstrate the highest motivation, while Dalit students (Mean = 3.889, SD = 0.644) display the lowest and shows significant different mean level with in the caste (P-value < 0.05) (see Table 2).

For provinces, students from Karnali (Mean = 4.5000, SD = 0.707) and Madhes (Mean = 4.3810, SD = 0.292) have the highest motivation levels, while Sudurpaschim (Mean = 3.899, SD = 0.775) and Koshi (Mean = 3.893, SD = 0.535) have relatively lower levels of motivation. However, none of the above -mentioned differences are statistically significant (P-value > 0.05). In terms of religion, Buddhist students (Mean = 4.166, SD = 0.474) report the highest motivation, followed by Muslim students (Mean = 4.1111), while Christian students (Mean = 3.766, SD = 0.379) show the lowest motivation. However, there is no significant difference in motivation based on religion (p > 0.05). Among different study programs, students in the M.Ed. in Science Education Program (Mean = 4.339, SD = 0.397) exhibit the highest motivation, whereas students in the M.Ed. in Health Education program (Mean = 3.963, SD = 0.449) display the lowest motivation. The p-value for this analysis is 0.071, indicating no statistically significant difference. Regarding the devices used for learning, students utilizing desktop computers demonstrate the highest motivation (Mean = 4.2593, SD = 0.44905). In contrast, those using laptops (Mean = 3.9196, SD = 0.62798) and laptops with smart phones (Mean = 3.9259, SD = 0.64810) show slightly lower motivation. There is no significant difference in motivation based on using device (P <0.05). Neither job status nor training status (P > 0.05)) significantly influences on motivation for joining the ODL mode program (see Table 2).

To test whether the average ratings is different within the categories of demographics of the respondents, test of independent mean of t-test is applied. The test results indicated that not all the demographic characteristics have same average ratings but they have different ratings also.

The analysis difference in average motivation between socio-demographic variables reveals interesting insights into the variations in motivation for joining the ODL mode program. The significantly higher motivation among male students than female students suggests potential gender-related differences in perceiving the benefits of ODL. The findings of the study connect with previous research (Bubou & Job, 2022; Gnawali et al., 2022).

The motivation variations observed among different castes/ethnicities and provinces could reflect contextual factors, cultural considerations, and access to educational opportunities. It is noteworthy that Madhesi students show the highest motivation, which might be due to regional differences in educational access and opportunities.

Religious background of the students, study programs where they are currently studying, devices used for participating in ODL, their job status, and training status were not significantly influential on the motivation level of participants.

These findings suggest that ODL's benefits and perceived relevance cut across various religious beliefs, academic programs, technological preferences, and employment and training statuses.

Table 1: *Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Motivation on Online and ODL Programs in Nepal (N=145)*

Statements	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
The methods of instruction used in online programs inspire me to independent learning and development	4.01	0.83	14.65	0.00
Using ICT technologies in ODL is relevant and inspires me to study.	3.96	0.75	15.32	0.00
I believe the ODL program is an effective option for Nepal to gain higher education	4.12	0.76	17.75	0.00
The ODL classes are successfully delivered on time while relevant online technology	3.87	0.77	13.66	0.00
My professional development to become an effective teacher will benefit from ODL online education	**3.94**	**0.80**	**14.10**	**0.00**
The ODL program aids me in improving the caliber of my education compared to my prior degree.	**4.08**	**0.74**	**17.60**	**0.00**
The ODL courses assist me in achieving several teaching-learning objectives for my field of work	**3.92**	**0.84**	**13.19**	**0.00**
The ODL teaching methods encourage independent and self-directed learning to advance my abilities.	**3.92**	**0.71**	**15.51**	**0.00**
There is enough interaction between students and teachers and among the students in an ODL class.	**3.73**	**0.84**	**10.54**	**0.00**

Table 2: *Test of Significant Differences of Average Motivation of Respondents for Joining the ODL mode Program by Demographic and Educational Variables (N=145)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Mean	SD.	P-value
Gender	Female	72	3.811	0.638	0.004*
	Male	73	4.086	0.497	
Cast/ Ethnicity	Brahmin/Chhetri	89	3.910	0.631	0.011*
	Dalit	7	3.888	0.644	
	Janajati	44	4.037	0.403	
	Madeshi	4	4.416	0.399	
	Other	1	2.222		
Provinces	Koshi	23	3.893	0.535	0.404
	Madhes	7	4.381	0.292	
	Bagmati	47	3.957	0.499	
	Gandaki	24	3.912	0.529	
	Lumbani	31	3.896	0.731	
	Karnali	2	4.500	0.707	
	Sudurpaschim	11	3.899	0.775	
Religions	Buddhist	12	4.166	0.474	0.611
	Christian	10	3.766	0.379	
	Hindu	116	3.943	0.620	
	Kirat	6	3.925	0.327	
	Muslim	1	4.111		
Programs	M.Ed. English	17	3.908	0.582	0.071
	M.Ed. Health	3	3.963	0.449	
	M.Ed. Nepali	21	3.894	0.729	
	M.Ed. Science	17	4.339	0.397	
	MSSE	87	3.895	0.565	
Devices Used	Desktop computer	3	4.259	0.449	0.785
	Laptop	47	3.919	0.627	
	Laptop; Smart Phone	30	3.925	0.648	
	Smart Phone	65	3.969	0.535	
Job	No	31	3.906	0.566	0.644
	Yes	114	3.962	0.593	
Training	No	31	3.971	0.645	0.822
	Yes	114	3.944	0.571	

Conclusion

This study provides significant insights into the motivation on influencing the enrolment in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode program at the FOETU, Nepal. The study indicates that respondents possess substantial motivation to join the ODL program, with a strong belief in its effectiveness for higher education in Nepal. The participants highly value Independent learning facilitated by online methods, career enhancement, and educational improvement. The findings also indicate that while interaction in ODL classes was comparatively lower, the overall positive perception of ODL's potential for education and career advancement remained robust.

The study underscores the critical role of ODL in addressing challenges of educational access and inclusivity, particularly in a geographically diverse context like Nepal. It highlights the need of enhancing interactions and collaborative learning opportunities within the ODL environment to better align with students' preferences. Moreover, the analysis of average motivation between socio-demographic variables suggests that gender, caste/ethnicity, and regional disparities significantly influence motivation levels, emphasizing the importance of tailoring strategies to specific demographic motivations for effective program delivery.

As ODL continues to evolve as a transformative approach to education, the study's findings have implications for program design, marketing strategies, and support mechanisms on ODL. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on ODL's role in expanding educational access and improving learning and career prospects. Addressing the identified interaction concerns and embracing a student-centric approach based on demographic motivations would be vital for realizing the full potential of ODL in Nepal's educational landscape.

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