



Effect of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) on Work-Study Balance for Adult Learners. A Study of Noun Lagos Study Centre

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Abstract

Nigeria and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Lagos Study Centre have faced several challenges such as inadequate study time, family responsibilities, and the difficulty of juggling multiple professional and academic roles simultaneously, which has negatively affected adult learners' academic performance and overall well-being. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) initiated the enhancement of learning flexibility, promotion of effective time management, strengthening of institutional support services, and improvement of course design to address these challenges. This study examines whether the initiatives, strategies, and methods have successfully addressed the challenges. The target population are adult learners enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. The total population of the study is undetermined due to the large and dynamic nature of the student population. A sample size of 120 respondents was determined using the stratified random sampling technique. The study concluded that ODL significantly influences work-study balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre, with learning flexibility emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by course design, time management, and institutional support services. The study recommended, among other things, that the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) should further enhance and promote learning flexibility by expanding its digital learning infrastructure, providing more recorded lecture options, and ensuring that all course materials are accessible offline to accommodate adult learners with varying internet connectivity, as learning flexibility emerged as the strongest predictor of work-study balance. Additionally, NOUN should prioritize continuous improvement of course design by ensuring that all courses feature modular structures, clear learning objectives, flexible pacing, and accessible materials that accommodate the busy schedules of working adults. The university should also develop and implement structured time management workshops and orientation programs specifically designed for adult learners, and strengthen institutional support services including academic advising, responsive counselling, improved library access, and increased tutorial session availability.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Work–Study Balance, Adult Learners, Distance Education, Flexible Learning, Higher Education

1. Introduction

Globally, the demand for flexible and inclusive higher education has increased significantly due to the changing nature of work, technological advancement, and the growing need for lifelong learning. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as an effective educational approach that enables individuals to combine education with employment and family responsibilities while overcoming geographical and time barriers to learning (UNESCO, 2023; Moore & Kearsley, 2019). ODL utilizes digital technologies, self-instructional materials, online platforms, and learner-centred pedagogies to expand access to higher education, particularly for adult learners who are unable to participate in conventional face-to-face education because of work commitments and other responsibilities (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Across developed and developing countries, universities have increasingly adopted ODL as a strategic mechanism for improving educational accessibility, flexibility, and equity while promoting continuous professional development among working adults (Bozkurt, 2021). The effectiveness of ODL is largely reflected in its ability to support work-study balance through flexible scheduling, asynchronous learning opportunities, online interaction, and self-paced study, thereby enabling learners to pursue academic qualifications without abandoning their employment or family obligations.

In Africa, the expansion of Open and Distance Learning has become a critical strategy for addressing the continent's growing demand for higher education amid limited institutional capacity and increasing numbers of working adults seeking academic advancement. According to the African Union (2022), many African countries have embraced ODL to widen access to university education, improve workforce development, and promote lifelong learning. Institutions across countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, and Nigeria have strengthened distance education programmes to accommodate adult learners who combine employment with academic pursuits. Despite this progress, African adult learners continue to

experience challenges relating to internet connectivity, inadequate digital infrastructure, financial constraints, technological skills, and competing work and family responsibilities, all of which affect their ability to maintain an effective work-study balance (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022).

In Nigeria, Open and Distance Learning has gained increasing recognition as a viable means of expanding access to higher education, particularly following the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002. The institution was created to provide flexible, accessible, and affordable university education for working-class adults, civil servants, entrepreneurs, and other learners unable to attend conventional universities (NOUN, 2024). The independent variable of this study is Open and Distance Learning, which comprises flexibility in learning schedules, accessibility to instructional resources, online learning platforms, learner support services, and self-paced learning opportunities. These components enable adult learners to organize their academic activities around work schedules and personal responsibilities, thereby minimizing conflicts between education and employment (Moore & Kearsley, 2019). The dependent variable is work-study balance, which refers to the ability of adult learners to effectively manage academic requirements alongside occupational responsibilities without significantly compromising performance in either domain. Indicators of work-study balance include time management, academic performance, work productivity, stress management, and overall learner satisfaction (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

The relationship between Open and Distance Learning and work-study balance has attracted considerable scholarly attention because the flexibility provided by ODL is expected to improve learners' capacity to harmonize multiple responsibilities. Recent statistics indicate that NOUN has enrolled over 600,000 students across Nigeria, with a substantial proportion comprising employed adults pursuing higher education while maintaining full-time or part-time employment (NOUN, 2024). Similarly, the National Universities Commission (2024)

reports that enrolment in distance learning programmes has continued to increase due to growing demand for flexible education among Nigeria's working population. Empirical studies further support this relationship. For example, Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2022) found that flexible learning schedules significantly enhanced the ability of adult learners to balance work and academic responsibilities in Nigerian distance education institutions. Likewise, Bozkurt (2021) reported that technology-enabled ODL positively influences learner autonomy, academic engagement, and work-life-study integration among adult learners globally. Similarly, Tait (2023) observed that effective learner support services and digital learning resources improve student persistence, satisfaction, and successful management of competing responsibilities in distance education. Despite these positive findings, studies also reveal persistent challenges such as workload pressure, unstable internet connectivity, limited interaction with instructors, and inadequate digital literacy, which continue to affect work-study balance among adult learners in Nigeria (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022; NOUN, 2024). These mixed findings suggest the need for further investigation, particularly within the context of the NOUN Lagos Study Centre, where many students are employed adults facing unique occupational and academic demands. The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of Open and Distance Learning on work-study balance among adult learners, using the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Lagos Study Centre as the study area.

1.1 Literature Review

This chapter provides conceptual clarification of the key variables relevant to the study through scholarly definitions and perspectives. It examines the concepts of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and work-study balance, including the dimensions of the independent variable, namely flexible learning schedules, learner support services, and online learning platforms. The chapter also presents an appropriate theoretical framework underpinning the study, reviews relevant

empirical literature on the relationship between Open and Distance Learning and work-study balance among adult learners, and identifies gaps in the existing literature which the present study seeks to fill.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is defined as an educational system that provides learners with opportunities to access education without the constraints of physical classroom attendance through flexible learning methods and the use of information and communication technologies (UNESCO, 2023). Open and Distance Learning is described as a learner-centred mode of education that enables individuals to study at their own pace regardless of geographical location or employment status (Moore & Kearsley, 2019). Open and Distance Learning is the provision of education through instructional materials, online platforms, and learner support services designed to promote accessibility and flexibility (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Open and Distance Learning is a process whereby teaching and learning occur with minimal face-to-face interaction while technology facilitates communication between learners and instructors (Bozkurt, 2021). Open and Distance Learning is referred to as an approach that expands educational opportunities for diverse categories of learners, particularly adults and working professionals (National Open University of Nigeria, 2024). Open and Distance Learning is an effective strategy for promoting lifelong learning, widening access to higher education, and supporting continuous professional development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

Work-Study Balance

Work-study balance is defined as the ability of learners to effectively manage the competing demands of employment and academic responsibilities in a manner that promotes satisfactory performance in both domains (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Work-study balance is described as a condition in which individuals successfully allocate adequate time, energy, and resources to work and educational activities without significant role conflict (Butler, 2007). Work-study

balance is the harmonious integration of occupational responsibilities and learning commitments that enables adult learners to achieve personal, academic, and professional goals (Markel & Frone, 1998). Work-study balance is a process whereby learners organize and prioritize work schedules and academic tasks to minimize stress and maximize productivity (Creed, French, & Hood, 2015). Work-study balance is referred to as the effective coordination of employment obligations with educational pursuits to ensure sustained performance and well-being (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014). Work-study balance is an essential outcome that reflects an individual's capacity to meet work and academic expectations simultaneously while maintaining overall effectiveness (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Flexible Learning Schedules

Flexible learning schedules are defined as instructional arrangements that allow learners to determine the time, pace, and location of their learning activities according to their personal and professional commitments (Moore & Kearsley, 2019). Flexible learning schedules are described as an educational approach that enables students to access learning materials and complete academic tasks at convenient times without strict adherence to fixed classroom timetables (UNESCO, 2023). Flexible learning schedules are the provision of adaptable study opportunities that accommodate the diverse needs of learners, particularly working adults (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Flexible learning schedules are a process whereby educational institutions organize teaching and assessment in ways that allow learners to combine academic activities with work and family responsibilities (Bozkurt, 2021). Flexible learning schedules are referred to as learner-centred scheduling systems that promote accessibility, convenience, and self-paced learning (National Open University of Nigeria, 2024). Flexible learning schedules are an essential component of Open and Distance Learning that supports lifelong learning and improves educational participation among adult learners (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

Learner Support Services

Learner support services are defined as the range of academic, administrative, technical, and counselling services provided to assist learners in achieving their educational goals throughout their studies (Tait, 2023). Learner support services are described as structured interventions designed to facilitate effective learning by providing guidance, instructional assistance, and access to educational resources (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Learner support services are the institutional mechanisms established to promote student retention, academic success, and learner satisfaction in Open and Distance Learning programmes (Moore & Kearsley, 2019). Learner support services are a process whereby educational institutions provide continuous academic advising, technical assistance, library services, and communication channels that enhance learners' educational experiences (Bozkurt, 2021). Learner support services are referred to as comprehensive systems that address learners' academic and non-academic needs to improve educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2023). Learner support services are an essential component of Open and Distance Learning that strengthens student engagement, persistence, and successful programme completion (National Open University of Nigeria, 2024).

Online Learning Platforms

Online learning platforms are defined as digital environments that facilitate the delivery, management, and assessment of educational content through internet-based technologies (Bozkurt, 2021). Online learning platforms are described as web-based systems that enable learners and instructors to interact, access instructional materials, submit assignments, and participate in academic activities regardless of location (Moore & Kearsley, 2019). Online learning platforms are the technological infrastructure that supports teaching and learning through virtual classrooms, learning management systems, and digital communication tools (UNESCO, 2023). Online learning platforms are a process whereby educational institutions

provide learners with continuous access to learning resources, assessments, and collaborative learning opportunities using electronic technologies (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Online learning platforms are referred to as integrated digital systems that enhance flexibility, accessibility, and learner engagement in Open and Distance Learning programmes (National Open University of Nigeria, 2024). Online learning platforms are essential technological tools that promote effective knowledge delivery, learner interaction, and academic continuity in distance education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

1.2 Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods research design, comprising the descriptive survey research design and the phenomenological research design. The descriptive survey design was employed for the quantitative aspect of the study, while the phenomenological design was adopted for the qualitative aspect. The integration of these two research designs enabled the researcher to obtain both numerical and in-depth descriptive data regarding the effect of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) on work-study balance among adult learners at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Lagos Study Centre.

The descriptive survey research design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from a relatively large population using structured questionnaires, thereby providing reliable information on the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of respondents concerning flexible learning schedules, learner support services, online learning platforms, and work-study balance. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive survey research is suitable for studies that seek to describe existing conditions, establish relationships among variables, and generate findings that can be generalized to a larger population. The design therefore enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between

the dimensions of Open and Distance Learning and work-study balance among adult learners at the NOUN Lagos Study Centre.

The phenomenological research design was adopted to complement the quantitative findings by exploring the lived experiences of selected adult learners regarding how Open and Distance Learning influences their ability to combine employment, family responsibilities, and academic activities. This design provided rich and detailed insights that could not be adequately captured through questionnaires alone. The phenomenological approach enabled participants to express their personal experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The adoption of the mixed methods research design was therefore justified because it allowed for triangulation of data obtained from questionnaires and interviews, enhanced the validity and credibility of the findings, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, and improved the generalizability of the quantitative findings while enriching them with qualitative evidence. Consequently, the mixed methods design was considered the most appropriate approach for investigating the effect of Open and Distance Learning on work-study balance for adult learners at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Lagos Study Centre.

1.3 Results and Discussion

The model shows a strong correlation ($R = 0.782$) between the predictors (Learning Flexibility, Time Management, Institutional Support Services, and Course Design) and Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. About 61.2% of the variance in Work-Study Balance is explained by the model ($R^2 = 0.612$). The adjusted R^2 of 0.598 confirms a good model fit, indicating that even after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model explains approximately 59.8% of the variance in the dependent variable. The Durbin-

Watson statistic of 1.946 suggests no autocorrelation in the residuals, as this value is close to 2, indicating that the residuals are independent.

ANOVA Interpretation

The overall ANOVA model is statistically significant, Sum of Squares value of 42.156 for regression, df (degree of freedom) of 4, Mean Square value of 10.539, F (facto) value of 44.472, Sig. value of 0.000. The F-statistic of 44.472 with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant and that the predictors collectively have a significant effect on Work-Study Balance. The residual Sum of Squares of 26.744 with 115 degrees of freedom and a Mean Square of 0.233 further confirms the model's adequacy.

Multiple Regression Interpretation

The Constant shows the Unstandardized Coefficients of 0.145, Std. Error of 0.087, Standardized Coefficients (Beta) —. The constant term is not statistically significant ($p = 0.098$), indicating that when all predictor variables are zero, the baseline Work-Study Balance is not significantly different from zero.

The result of hypothesis one shows the unstandardized coefficient for Learning Flexibility is 0.234 with a standard error of 0.045. The standardized Beta coefficient is 0.312, with a t-value of 5.200 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.000. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected because the calculated p-value of 0.000 is less than the estimated value of 0.05. The result of the hypothesis therefore revealed that there is a significant relationship between Learning Flexibility and Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. It is concluded that learning flexibility positively influences work-study balance, with higher levels of flexibility associated with better balance between work and academic responsibilities.

The result of hypothesis two shows the unstandardized coefficient for Time Management is 0.178 with a standard error of 0.052. The standardized Beta coefficient is 0.241, with a t-value of 3.423 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.001. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected

because the calculated p-value of 0.001 is less than the estimated value of 0.05. The result of the hypothesis therefore revealed that there is a significant relationship between Time Management and Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. It is concluded that effective time management practices significantly contribute to improved work-study balance among adult learners.

The result of hypothesis three shows the unstandardized coefficient for Institutional Support Services is 0.095 with a standard error of 0.048. The standardized Beta coefficient is 0.128, with a t-value of 1.979 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.050. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected because the calculated p-value of 0.050 is equal to the estimated value of 0.05. The result of the hypothesis therefore revealed that there is a significant relationship between Institutional Support Services and Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. It is concluded that institutional support services, including counselling, library access, and tutorial sessions, play a meaningful role in enhancing work-study balance, though the effect is relatively modest compared to other predictors.

The result of hypothesis four shows the unstandardized coefficient for Course Design is 0.202 with a standard error of 0.056. The standardized Beta coefficient is 0.267, with a t-value of 3.607 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.000. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected because the calculated p-value of 0.000 is less than the estimated value of 0.05. The result of the hypothesis therefore revealed that there is a significant relationship between Course Design and Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. It is concluded that well-designed courses that are structured to accommodate the needs of working adults significantly enhance the ability of learners to maintain a healthy work-study balance.

Finding of hypothesis one indicated that t-value 5.200, p-value 0.000 which is lower than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that Learning Flexibility has significantly influenced Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. This

finding aligned with the study conducted between 2015-2024 by Ndiritu, Chandi and Rugendo (2015), which study also revealed that the flexibility inherent in distance education has a strong relationship with academic performance and the ability of learners to balance competing demands. This finding also aligned with the theory of Adult Learning Theory, Knowles (1984), who also believed that adult learners are self-directed and benefit significantly from flexible learning environments that accommodate their multiple life responsibilities. The flexibility in ODL, characterized by the ability to learn at one's own pace, place, and time, empowers adult learners to effectively integrate their academic pursuits with professional obligations, thereby enhancing their overall work-study balance.

Finding of hypothesis two indicated that t-value 3.423, p-value 0.001 which is lower than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that Time Management has significantly influenced Work-Study Balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre. This finding aligned with the study conducted between 2015-2024 by Gous and Roberts (2015), which study also revealed that management of time and workload is influenced by the quality of awareness of impacting factors, and that effective time management strategies are essential for balancing competing demands in an ODL environment. This finding also aligned with the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, Hobfoll (1989), who also believed that individuals strive to obtain, protect, and conserve their valued resources, and that effective time management serves as a crucial resource for maintaining work-study balance. Adult learners who demonstrate strong time management skills are better equipped to allocate sufficient time to both their professional responsibilities and academic pursuits, thereby reducing role conflict and enhancing their overall well-being.

1.4 Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the ODL learning environment and work-study balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre, as

evidenced by the strong correlation ($R = 0.782$) and the model explaining 61.2% of the variance in work-study balance ($R^2 = 0.612$). The study also concluded that learning flexibility is the strongest predictor of work-study balance ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 5.200$, $p = 0.000$), followed by course design ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 3.607$, $p = 0.000$) and time management ($\beta = 0.241$, $t = 3.423$, $p = 0.001$), all of which significantly enhance adult learners' ability to balance work and academic responsibilities. The study further concluded that institutional support services significantly influence work-study balance ($\beta = 0.128$, $t = 1.979$, $p = 0.050$), confirming that comprehensive support structures are essential for optimizing the ODL experience, and that the overall model ($F = 44.472$, $p = 0.000$) is statistically significant in predicting work-study balance among adult learners at NOUN Lagos Study Centre.

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