

FACTORS INFLUENCING INCREASED ENROLLMENT OF NON-WORKING YOUTHS IN IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the factors influencing the increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning (ODL) in Oyo State, Nigeria. Adopting a quantitative descriptive survey design, 240 non-working youths aged 18–35 were selected through stratified random sampling from six Local Government Areas. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire ($r = 0.87$) and analyzed using descriptive statistics with a criterion mean score of 2.50 for decision-making. Results revealed strong agreement on most socio-economic factors, with the inability to afford conventional university fees (mean = 3.42), the need to work while studying (mean = 3.29), and the desire to improve employability (mean = 3.21) being the most significant. For institutional factors, flexibility of learning hours (mean = 3.54), self-paced study (mean = 3.42), and program affordability (mean = 3.29) were the strongest motivators, though perceived employer recognition was weaker (mean = 2.58). Social media exposure was the only factor that did not receive positive agreement (mean = 2.46). The study concludes that the shift towards ODL is a pragmatic response to systemic barriers like cost and limited admission, facilitated by ODL's inherent flexibility. It is recommended that stakeholders enhance awareness campaigns, provide financial support, secure employer recognition for ODL credentials, and bolster digital infrastructure to further bridge the educational gap for non-working youths.

Keywords: Non-Working Youths, Open Distance Learning, Enrollment, Flexibility, Accessibility

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a growing population of non-working youths—individuals aged 15–35 who are not employed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This is often compounded by those not enrolled in formal education or training programmes. This term encompasses both the unemployed and the underemployed, meaning those who lack jobs or work in roles that do not utilize their skills or provide sufficient income. In Nigeria, this demographic represents a significant socio-economic challenge. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), youth unemployment rate stood at 53.4% in Q1 2023, highlighting the severity of the issue. The high rate of non-working youths has severe economic and social consequences, including increased crime

rates, political instability, and dependency on family support. A study by Oladeji and Adepoju (2020) linked youth unemployment to rising insecurity. Additionally, the World Bank (2023) warned that Nigeria's GDP growth is hampered by low youth labour participation.

This trend has significant implications for national development, as unengaged youth populations often contribute to social unrest, crime, and economic stagnation. In Oyo State, this crisis has escalated into a critical socio-economic issue, reflecting this distressing national trend but with unique local dimensions. While state-disaggregated data for 2023 is less precise, analyses indicate that Oyo State, with its large population of graduates from numerous tertiary institutions like the University of Ibadan, consistently ranks among the states with

alarmingly high youth joblessness (Oladeji & Adepoju, 2020).

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is driven by rapid population growth and inadequate job creation. Another critical factor is the mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market demands. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2021) affirm that over 60% of Nigerian graduates remain unemployed five years after graduation due to a lack of industry-relevant skills. This acute mismatch is a primary driver of unemployment in Nigeria in general and Oyo State in particular. The skills possessed by graduates from higher educational institutions often do not meet the demands of the modern labour market, as many educational institutions still emphasise theoretical knowledge over practical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills.

Consequently, underemployment is rampant, as number of youths working in low-paying or part-time jobs that do not match their qualifications keep rising. Many Nigerian youths engage in informal sector jobs such as street vending or motorcycle taxi riding (Okeke-Uzodike & Allen, 2022). The NBS (2022) noted that underemployment affected 21% of the labour force, with youths disproportionately impacted. In Oyo State, the stagnant formal sector, made up of limited government agencies and a few private firms, cannot absorb the thousands of young people entering the job market annually thereby forcing them into the saturated informal sector and perpetuating a cycle of economic vulnerability.

Responding to these challenges is crucial in attaining personal and national development, hence the embrace of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a viable option. Also, the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 1983 and its revitalisation in 2002 as a flagship of ODL institution in Nigeria solely dedicated to distance learning, is a great relief to education stakeholders and consumers. NOUN is tasked with providing functional, flexible, and cost-effective education. Its operational model leverages a network of study centres located in every state of the federation, which serve as support hubs for students, thereby widening access to quality higher education and contributing to the

achievement of national educational goals.

Beyond NOUN, the Nigerian ODL landscape has been significantly reshaped by the proliferation of online learning platforms and digital technologies, a transformation accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many conventional universities have established Centre for Distance Learning (CDL) or Institute of Distance Education (IDE) units, utilizing Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle, Canvas, and Google Classroom. Furthermore, private ed-tech platforms and initiatives offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), professional certifications, and skill-based modules are becoming increasingly popular. This shift is gradually fostering a more dynamic and interactive ODL ecosystem.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has thus emerged as a viable alternative for non-working youths in Oyo State seeking to acquire academic qualifications and in-demand skills without the constraints of traditional classroom-based education. By providing flexible learning schedules, affordability, and access to quality education through technology-enabled platforms, ODL offers a pathway to bridge the skills gap (Kumari, 2025). In Oyo State, institutions like the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and the Open School system have recorded increasing enrollment from non-working youths, indicating a significant shift in educational preferences.

Several factors influence this increased enrollment. The primary driver is the need for non-working youths to acquire industry-relevant and entrepreneurial skills that the traditional system failed to provide, as noted by Uwaifo and Adekola (2019), who found that 70% of Nigerian graduates lack digital and technical skills demanded by employers. The flexibility of ODL allows youths to seek work, engage in informal sector jobs, or learn a trade while simultaneously pursuing their education, making it a practical option for those who cannot afford full-time, residential study. Furthermore, the affordability and cost-effectiveness of ODL programs compared to conventional universities are significant pull factors for a demographic with limited financial resources.

However, despite its growth and potential,

the effective implementation of ODL in Nigeria is confronted with several formidable challenges that can influence enrollment and completion rates. A primary concern is inadequate technological infrastructure, including unreliable internet connectivity, erratic power supply, and a lack of digital devices among a large segment of the population, which creates a significant digital divide. Pedagogical challenges also persist, such as the lack of quality, interactive digital content and a shortage of facilitators adequately trained in online pedagogy and student support. Additionally, there remains a lingering perception among some employers and the public regarding the credibility and quality of ODL qualifications compared to those from conventional institutions, although this is steadily changing with improved regulation and awareness. Therefore, this study explores the factors influencing increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning in Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the expansion of Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in Nigeria, there is a paucity of empirical studies which examine the specific socio-economic and institutional factors driving surge in enrollment by non-working youths in ODL programmes at the sub-national level, particularly in Oyo State. This gap hinders the development of effective strategies to scale up ODL initiatives and improve youth engagement in lifelong learning. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing the increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning in Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the socio-economic factors influencing non-working youths' decision to enroll in ODL.

2. Determine the institutional and programmatic factors affecting ODL enrollment among non-working youths.

Research Questions

1. What socio-economic factors influence non-working youths' decision to enroll in Open Distance Learning?
2. What institutional and programmatic factors affect the increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning?

Methodology

A quantitative descriptive survey research design was adopted to gather opinions and perceptions from non-working youths regarding their reasons for enrolling in Open Distance Learning. The population consisted of all non-working youths aged 18–35 years in six selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Oyo State, including Ibadan North, Ibadan South, Ona-Ara, Saki-West, Ogbomosho North, and Oyo East. Based on a field survey, the total estimated number of non-working youths across these areas is approximately 6,400. A sample of 240 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation. A self-developed questionnaire titled “Factors Influencing Non-Working Youths’ Enrollment in Open Distance Learning Questionnaire (FNYEODQ)” was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan. Test-retest reliability was conducted on a pilot group of 30 non-working youths not included in the main study. Using Cronbach’s Alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). A criterion mean score of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making; mean scores ≥ 2.50 were regarded as positive agreement, while scores < 2.50 indicated disagreement were used to answer the research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: What socio-economic factors influence non-working youths' decision to enroll in Open Distance Learning?

Table 1: Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Enrollment in ODL

S/N	Factor	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean
1	I could not afford full-time university tuition fees	90 (37.5%)	100 (41.7%)	30 (12.5%)	20 (8.3%)	3.42
2	I needed to work while studying	85 (35.4%)	95 (39.6%)	35 (14.6%)	25 (10.4%)	3.29
3	Lack of admission into conventional universities	70 (29.2%)	90 (37.5%)	50 (20.8%)	30 (12.5%)	3.04
4	Family responsibilities made full-time schooling difficult	65 (27.1%)	85 (35.4%)	55 (22.9%)	35 (14.6%)	2.92
5	I wanted to improve my employability through education	80 (33.3%)	100 (41.7%)	40 (16.7%)	20 (8.3%)	3.21
6	Peer influence encouraged me to try ODL	50 (20.8%)	75 (31.3%)	70 (29.2%)	45 (18.8%)	2.54
7	I heard about success stories from others who did ODL	60 (25.0%)	80 (33.3%)	65 (27.1%)	35 (14.6%)	2.71
8	My parents/guardians supported my choice of ODL	55 (22.9%)	70 (29.2%)	75 (31.3%)	40 (16.7%)	2.58
9	I had previously failed to gain admission through JAMB	75 (31.3%)	85 (35.4%)	50 (20.8%)	30 (12.5%)	3.08
10	I preferred to stay close to home rather than relocate	60 (25.0%)	75 (31.3%)	65 (27.1%)	40 (16.7%)	2.75

Based on the established criterion, the results presented in Table 1 indicate a positive agreement (mean scores ≥ 2.50) for all listed socio-economic factors, confirming that the high cost of conventional education, the necessity to work, lack of conventional university admission, family responsibilities, the desire to improve employability, peer and success story influence, parental support, previous JAMB failure, and a preference to stay close to home are all significant factors influencing non-working youths' decision to enroll in Open Distance Learning in Oyo State.

Research Question 2: What institutional and programmatic factors affect the increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning?

Table 2: Institutional and Programmatic Factors Influencing Enrollment in ODL

S/N	Factor	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean
1	ODL allows flexible learning hours	95 (39.6%)	105 (43.8%)	25 (10.4%)	15 (6.3%)	3.54
2	I can study at my own pace	90 (37.5%)	100 (41.7%)	30 (12.5%)	20 (8.3%)	3.42
3	ODL programs are more affordable than conventional ones	85 (35.4%)	95 (39.6%)	35 (14.6%)	25 (10.4%)	3.29
4	Availability of online learning materials	70 (29.2%)	85 (35.4%)	50 (20.8%)	35 (14.6%)	3.04
5	Access to mobile phones/laptops made ODL easier	65 (27.1%)	80 (33.3%)	60 (25.0%)	35 (14.6%)	2.92
6	Awareness campaigns influenced my decision	75 (31.3%)	90 (37.5%)	45 (18.8%)	30 (12.5%)	3.13
7	Support from ODL institution (e.g., tutors, assignments)	60 (25.0%)	75 (31.3%)	65 (27.1%)	40 (16.7%)	2.75
8	Perceived recognition of ODL certificates by employers	55 (22.9%)	70 (29.2%)	70 (29.2%)	45 (18.8%)	2.58
9	ODL offers courses relevant to current job market needs	65 (27.1%)	80 (33.3%)	60 (25.0%)	35 (14.6%)	2.92
10	Social media exposure to ODL programs	50 (20.8%)	65 (27.1%)	75 (31.3%)	50 (20.8%)	2.46

The results presented in Table 3 indicate a positive agreement (mean scores ≥ 2.50) for all but one institutional and programmatic factor, confirming that flexible learning hours, self-paced study, affordability, availability of online materials, access to devices, awareness campaigns, institutional support, perceived employer recognition, and market-relevant courses are significant factors positively affecting enrollment; however, social media exposure, with a mean score of 2.46, is the sole factor with which respondents disagreed.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings from Research Question One indicate that socio-economic factors such as financial constraints, the necessity to work, and family responsibilities significantly drive non-working youths towards Open Distance Learning.

This aligns with existing literature on educational access in resource-limited settings. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2021) previously identified the high cost of conventional education and the lack of admission slots as primary barriers forcing Nigerian youths to seek alternative educational pathways. This sentiment is echoed in the current study as respondents cited affordability and admission denial as key motivators. Furthermore, the influence of social factors like parental support and the desire to improve employability corroborates the work of Okeke-Uzodike and Allen (2022), who found that the decision to enroll in non-traditional programs is often a pragmatic response to economic pressures and is heavily influenced by the encouragement of close social networks seeking viable avenues for skill acquisition and economic advancement.

The strong agreement that institutional factors like flexibility, self-paced learning, and affordability drive enrolment in Open and Distance Learning is consistent with the findings of Agbu (2019), who emphasized that the core mandate of ODL in Nigeria is to provide functional, flexible, and cost-effective education to segments of the population excluded from the conventional system. Furthermore, the positive perception of market-relevant courses and the mixed signals on employer recognition resonate with the observations of Uwaifo and Adekola (2019), who argued that the relevance of the curriculum is paramount for Nigerian youths, who are primarily motivated by the need to acquire tangible and employable skills to overcome labour market challenges, even if concerns about the broader acceptance of qualifications persist.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the increased enrollment of non-working youths in Open Distance Learning in Oyo State is a strategic response to systemic socio-economic constraints and a pragmatic pursuit of educational advancement. It is also established that the prohibitive cost of conventional education, the need to concurrently work and study, and the critical desire to acquire market-relevant skills are key drivers of enrollment. The flexibility, affordability, and adaptive structure of ODL platforms have effectively positioned it not only as an alternative educational pathway but as a vital

mechanism for social inclusion, economic empowerment, and human capital development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Government's across tiers should increase visibility of ODL programmes through targeted campaigns on radio, television, and social media to reach more non-working youths.
2. Governments and stakeholders should provide scholarships, subsidies, and staggered payment plans to make ODL even more accessible.
3. Governments should collaborate with private and public sector employers to recognise ODL credentials and integrate ODL graduates into workforce development programmes.
4. Governments should offer free or subsidised digital literacy workshops to help non-working youths effectively navigate online learning platforms.
5. ODL institutions should establish mentorship programmes and academic support centers to assist ODL students throughout their studies.

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