Understanding Adult Learners' Motivation and Preferences in Online and Distance Programs in the post Covid-19 era: A Case Study of the Institute of Continuing Education & Professional Studies

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Abstract: *As online distance learning continues to gain popularity, it becomes increasingly essential to gain insights into the distinctive motivations and preferences of adult learners. These insights are critical for the development of effective and engaging educational programs. This article conducts an examination of the motivations and preferences of adult learners, highlighting how program designers can tailor their approaches to enhance the educational experience. The study adopts a mixed methods research design, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data collected from a participant group consisting of 1582 students affiliated with the Institute of Continuing Education & Professional Studies (iCEPS). Among these participants, 72.3% endorse the concept of a fully online distance program (ODL), while 21.4% express a preference for a blended program, and 6.3% express a strong inclination toward exclusively face-to-face learning. When delving into the motivations behind the ODL program, the respondents emphasise certain factors. The most prominent of these is the effectiveness of cost reduction in education, garnering a substantial score of 57.4%. Additionally, 51% of participants prioritize time efficiency, encompassing reduced commute times and the flexibility to utilize various devices for learning. In contrast, the two aspects that receive comparatively lower scores are student satisfaction through ODL (37.6%) and the efficiency of data presentation (35.8%). Qualitative content analysis unearths dissatisfactions within the realm of ODL, attributed to factors such as social isolation, limited adaptability for dynamic interaction, challenges related to technological infrastructure and access, as well as perplexities associated with assessment methods in the ODL context. To address these learning preferences and enhance the overall satisfaction of students engaged in ODL, educational institutions and policymakers are encouraged to contemplate a range of support measures. These measures encompass ensuring equitable access to technology, providing comprehensive academic and student support services, crafting responsive course materials, and fostering a sense of community and engagement among learners.*

Keywords: *adult learners, andragogy, iCEPS, ODL*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of technology has propelled the growth of online distance learning (ODL), reshaping the educational landscape. Despite the increasing popularity, there are concerns about the readiness for the transition to online education. Research found that university students experienced feelings of fear, and uncertainty, and encountered numerous challenges, primarily due to a significant digital divide hindering their adjustment to this unforeseen shift. Their focus remained on their previous in-person learning experiences before the COVID outbreak, leading them to perceive the online shift as a temporary response to the pandemic, without discerning viable alternatives. (Kundu, A., & Bej, T. (2021). A similar finding in Malaysian university students revealed their uncertainty about their readiness to engage in Online Distance Learning (ODL). This hesitance might stem from concerns about their potential challenges adapting to the online learning environment (Khairuddin, Z., Arif, N.N., & Khairuddin, Z. (2020).

This article holds significance in its focus on adult learners who experienced both blended learning before the COVID-19 pandemic and online distance learning during the pandemic. The uniqueness of these findings lies in the investigation of how adult learners transitioned from blended learning to exclusive online distance learning. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the motivations that drive individuals to participate in online distance learning is of utmost importance for educators, institutions, and policymakers as they strive to design effective and learner-centred online educational programs.

Within this article, suggestions are put forth to establish strong support mechanisms for students and advocate for the recording of self-instructional materials in video format to benefit online distance learners. As we look to the future, the implications of these findings highlight the necessity of delving deeper into the preferences for online distance learning programs. This may involve the expansion of such programs to on-campus full-time students as a viable alternative, especially for those individuals seeking to balance work commitments with their studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The motivations behind adult learners' engagement in ODL are multifaceted and dynamic. Flexibility and convenience are consistently identified as major motivators (Mazlifah et el;2022; Yoke, S.K., & Ismail, N., 2021; Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T.,2019; Baxter, J. 2012; Park & Choi, 2009). Adult learners, often managing work, family, and personal commitments, are drawn to the flexible scheduling and location-independent nature of ODL (Meyer, K.A., 2014). The ability to balance learning with existing responsibilities enhances the appeal of ODL (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Personal and professional development also emerge as strong motivations (Debeş, G. (2021). Lifelong learning has become a necessity in rapidly evolving industries, prompting individuals to seek ODL to upgrade skills and remain competitive (Keegan, 2014). The aspiration for career advancement, job transitions, or exploration of new interests motivates learners to pursue online programs (Perry & Pilati, 2020). Furthermore, learners' intrinsic motivation is triggered by the opportunity to engage with interactive and engaging learning materials. Gamification elements, collaborative projects, and multimedia content have been shown to enhance learners' intrinsic motivation by making the learning experience enjoyable and meaningful (Hamari et al., 2014).

While ODL presents numerous benefits, challenges can undermine learners' motivation. Technical issues, such as platform glitches or unreliable internet connectivity, can lead to frustration and disengagement (Mansoor, et, (2022; Joo et al., 2021; Thandevaraj, E.J., Gani, N.A., & Nasir, M.K. (2021). The absence of face-to-face interactions may also diminish feelings of belongingness and motivation to persist ((Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T. (2019; Murphy & Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2015). Learners may struggle with self-regulation and time management, affecting their ability to maintain consistent engagement (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). Online education experiences also face challenges in keeping students enrolled and engaged in their courses. Many students who start online courses do not complete them or drop out before finishing. This issue of low retention rates indicates that there are difficulties in maintaining students' interest, motivation, and commitment in the online learning environment. (Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T.,2019).

Despite recognising the pivotal role of institutional support in enhancing student retention, numerous institutions have reportedly exhibited limited advancements in assisting online learners (Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T. (2019). Attaining student engagement in online courses could hold greater significance compared to on-campus courses. This is due to online students having fewer avenues for institution-related engagement and potentially facing heightened demands on their time and attention (Meyer, K.A. (2014). Inadequate consideration for the unique needs and circumstances of online students, demographic variables along a shortage of appropriate technological support for learners engaged in remote studies were cited as reasons (Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T. (2019). In summary, institutional backing, resource availability, proficiency in utilising the ODL system, assistance in overcoming obstacles, adaptable scheduling, and access to ICT facilities, all contribute to the enhancement of learning outcomes. Sarkam, N.A., Nasrudin, N.H., Razi, N.F., & Junid, R.A. (2022)

Understanding these motivations and challenges has significant implications for designing effective ODL programs. Institutions must prioritise learner autonomy, interactivity, and social connectedness within the online environment (Peng, 2020). Course designers should integrate elements that promote a sense of competence and achievement, such as clear learning objectives, regular feedback, and opportunities for mastery experiences (Deci et al., 2017). To address technical challenges and support self-regulation, institutions can offer technical assistance and provide resources on time management and study skills (Park & Choi, 2009). Cultivating a sense of community through virtual interactions, peer collaboration, and instructor engagement can help combat feelings of isolation and enhance learners' motivation to persist (Mandernach et al., 2020). Pedagogical training also holds a pivotal role in the evolution of effective teaching practices, catering to the dynamic landscape of education, by delving into various teaching approaches and strategies that foster active engagement and meaningful learning. For example, instructional material design stimulates active learning by the trainees so they can track their progress during the training, contributing to this result (Mansoor et al., 2022).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods research design is a research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods within a single study (Lisboa, J.L., & Julio, J.F. (2019). This approach seeks to leverage the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of a research problem or question). By integrating both types of data collection and analysis, researchers can gain deeper insights and a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. A mixed method approach is frequently used in understanding ODL as by integrating both types of data collection and analysis, researchers can gain deeper insights and a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Mansoor, M., Dian, A.M., Omar, H.H., & Mansor, S. (2022); Ramli, A.A., & Aladdin, A.B. (2021).,

Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data in the form of a survey of the participant group of 1582 students from the Institute of Continuing Education & Professional Studies). They utilized distance learning (ODL mode) for their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, after the pandemic, they returned to a conventional program. The quantitative data was collected through self-developed five-point Likert-type questionnaires used to quantify relationships, patterns, and trends that can be used to draw descriptive conclusions about their interest in the ODL program.

Qualitative research involves collecting non-numerical data in the form of content analysis to understand the context, motivations, experiences, and perceptions of participants of the ODL program. The 1582 students are allowed to participate in the non-numerical data by sharing their motivations, experiences and perceptions of the ODL program. These data are analysed separately but are integrated at various stages of the research process. Based on this survey, the students give their opinions on the benefits and challenges of online learning. Thematic analysis is designed within qualitative content analysis to furnish comprehensive depictions and explanations of social phenomena and explain the least substantial scores (Haggarty, L. (2022); Vaismoradi, M., & Snelgrove, S.R. (2019). The survey studied the causes for disagreement that ODL enhances students' satisfaction and efficiency of data presentation by using a quantitative design. The survey includes

open-ended questions designed to elicit responses regarding the overall ODL program. Upon collecting these responses, the goal is to recognize prevalent themes, patterns, and recurring feedback centred around essential aspects like syllabus content, instructor interaction, technical support, and user interface. Subsequently, the responses will be categorised according to different facets of the program.

4. FINDING

A survey was conducted to gather insights from 1582 iCEPS students regarding their preferences for the ODL program. The respondents were divided into 70.2% male students (1110.56 students) and 29.8% female students (47.1 students). Respondents' ages encompassed various ranges: below 25 years (39%), 26-35 years (46%), 36-45 years (13.9%), and 46-55 years (1.4%). The participating students were enrolled across different semesters, with the highest participation rate observed among semester 1 students (21.7%). These students represented a diverse array of academic programs (40 in total), with the most prominent being the Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons) of Human Management (35.3%) and Bachelor of Accountancy (26.5%). In terms of employment, the surveyed students were distributed among various sectors: private sector (61.8%), public sector (28.3%), unemployed (5.8%), and self-employed (4.25%). Their job roles were categorized as follows: non-executive employees (64.9%), executives (28.7%), and managers (6.4%).

The findings from the survey revealed that 72.3% of participants are in favour of a fully online interaction mode, excluding any in-person meetings. Additionally, 21.4% indicated a preference for an 80% online and 20% face-to-face interaction blend, while 6.3% expressed a desire for exclusively face-to-face learning. Participants were also asked about their preferred distribution of program content, with 65.8% favouring a 100% coverage of courses, 21.1% leaning towards 80% coverage, 7.9% opting for 60%, and 5.1% indicating a preference for 40% coverage. In the context of a degree program in Malaysia, students are required to complete 120 credit hours, encompassing a range of 30 to 45 courses.

The respondents also requested to prioritise their motivations for the ODL program based on seven criteria, as listed below:

Motivation for the ODL program	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Efficiency of time	4.4%	1.9%	16.9%	26.7%	50.1%
Efficiency in presenting data	4.2%	4.6%	24%	31.4%	35.8%
Flexibility in learning	4.1%	2.8%	13.7%	31.5%	47.9%
Efficiency in educational costs	5.1%	3.9%	10.8%	22.9%	57.4%
Flexibility of the learning platform	4.2%	1.2%	11.9%	33.5%	43.9%
Flexibility in using multiple devices	3.8%	0.9%	9.2%	35.2%	51%
Enhances students' satisfaction	4.6%	4.9%	23.1%	29.9%	37.6%

Table 1: Motivation for the ODL program

The survey findings align with existing literature, indicating that the ODL program is favoured for its cost reduction, versatility in device usage, and time efficiency. The most prominent score is 57.4% for the effectiveness of educational cost reduction, followed by 51% for time efficiency, encompassing commute time, and the flexibility to use various devices. The two least substantial scores within the "Strongly Agree" category are 37.6% for the enhancement of student satisfaction through ODL and 35.8% for the efficiency of data presentation.

5. DISCUSSION

The research uses content analysis to study the explanation for the preferences and motivations for the ODL program. The causes for disagreement that ODL enhances students' satisfaction and efficiency of data presentation are also studied by using content analysis design.

Theme	Keywords	Objective
Preference module for the ODL program	Blended learning, fully online, physical class	To understand how respondents' preferences for the physical program (6.3%) blended learning (21.4%) and ODL program (72.3%)
Motivation for the ODL program	Efficiency time, educational costs, learning platform, flexibility in learning, flexibility of multiple devices	To understand the two highest scores based on the findings above
Dissatisfaction towards ODL	Presenting data, technology, dissatisfaction, inefficiency time, educational costs, inflexibility of the learning platform, inflexibility in learning, in the flexibility of multiple devices	To understand the two lowest scores based on the findings above

Table 1: Motivation for the ODL program

Preference for the extent of the ODL Program

The preference shown by 72.3% of participants, and who are in favour of a fully online interaction mode, excluding any in-person meetings is explained in their quantitative answer in terms of educational cost reduction and time efficiency, encompassing commute time, and the flexibility to use various devices. The same finding can be seen with a higher score of the survey for the strongly agree with a score of 57.4% for the educational cost, and 51% for the flexibility in terms of time and learning devices.

The remaining 21.4% prefers blended learning and 6.3% of physical class The rationale behind the inclination towards blended and physical learning programs by 27.7% of respondents is rooted in the necessity for face-to-face learning, particularly in subjects requiring hands-on understanding, calculations, laboratory work, and practical applications such as kitchen skills. One respondent said, "Ideally, the majority of the curriculum should be offered in a fully online distance learning (ODL) format. However, certain subjects that demand physical presence, like mooting or similar activities, should remain in a traditional setting. Drawing from my experience of nearly a year in ODL, subjects characterized by advanced levels of learning

and thinking, such as programming and networking, are better suited for face-to-face instruction as opposed to ODL". Another rationale for the 20% face-to-face interaction is due to the need to meet and discuss for group discussion as well as limited data access.

On the participant's preferred percentage distribution of program content, there are no significant explanations given for numerous preferences. However, the same reason is given for preferring some subjects to be conducted physically, particularly in subjects requiring hands-on understanding, calculations, laboratory work, and practical applications such as kitchen skills.

Motivation for the ODL Program
Quantitative analysis elucidates the top two scores in terms of reducing educational costs, optimizing time efficiency, and enhancing the adaptability to different devices. One notable motivation for the ODL program is personalised learning. The finding shows that the respondents favoured ODL in terms of personalised education, where respondents indicated that the ODL program empowered them to learn at their own pace, using the term "comfort" to describe this self-directed approach. Increased flexibility and self-paced learning were highlighted as benefits.

However, the respondents said that a prominent aspect of instructional material is that audio and video recordings must be provided as part of the self-instructional material. The effectiveness of this learning method hinges on students being able to listen to recordings at their convenience. Video recordings are lauded for their efficacy, as students can review and replay content multiple times while simultaneously engaging in other tasks.

The excerpt of the provided responses:
> "I find ODL classes to be more accessible for learning due to enhanced comprehension, time conservation, energy efficiency, and cost-effectiveness for students. The recorded videos can be revisited multiple times, aiding in revision and tutorials."

> "Videos can be stored online, allowing us to rewind and review them without difficulty."

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"Asynchronous learning, such as pre-recorded lectures, ensures clear and understandable recordings for students to view. This is in contrast to the technical difficulties that students sometimes encounter during synchronous classes, potentially leading to truncated lecture outputs."

"Part-time students with limited internet access, often residing in rural areas, won't be excluded from classes. They have the option to download recorded lectures or create their presentations when they have stable internet connectivity."

"Kindly motivate instructors to consider recording the lectures, as it offers substantial convenience for reviewing the class whenever necessary during revision."

"ODL enables the recording and playback of live classes".

"The effectiveness of delivering ODL hinges on educators who remain available and consistently create recorded lectures even after live online sessions. This approach greatly assists students in referring back to the content and improving their readiness for studying and completing assessments".

This discovery can provide educators with valuable insights into crafting appropriate designs for creating self-instructional materials. It highlights that relying solely on printed self-instructional materials might not adequately support ODL learners in comprehending the subjects. An important observation is that "certain lectures make use of previously recorded videos from past sessions, resulting in outcomes that do not meet the desired standard." This indicates that recorded videos should not simply capture live classes with other students. Instead, they should offer content that is pertinent and applicable to all students, regardless of the semester in which they are enrolled.

Dissatisfaction with the ODL Program
The examination of factors contributing to dissatisfaction with ODL programs revealed four significant elements: social isolation, non-conducive communication platform, assessment quandary, and technological barriers.

Social isolation

The respondents differentiated themselves as adult learners from non-adult learners. The viewpoint was that the latter group benefits from a face-to-face learning mode to immerse themselves in the campus study environment, which supports the development of their social skills and independence. In contrast, the respondent noted that adult learners can acquire these attributes through their work experiences and life journey. However, social isolation was raised by some of the respondents as there was the absence of consistent communication through the ODL platform, in contrast to in-person interactions. Four notable responses on the topic of social interactions are as follows:

"Engaging with a monitor displaying faces gives rise to a sense of detachment from the entire learning experience."
"While ODL efficiently manages time, the interpersonal engagement with instructors and peers remains equally vital."

"I require face-to-face interactions, such as workshops once or twice per semester, to provide me with the necessary mental and moral support. Learning without direct interaction led to a sense of confusion in my studies. Physical engagement is crucial for sustaining my study momentum."
"Excessively using WhatsApp or Telegram for social interaction would not be equitable to both lecturers and classmates."

The aforementioned responses align with existing literature that indicates ODL does contribute to social isolation among students (Sharin, A.N., 2021; Muljana, P.S., & Luo, T. (2019). Online learners often experience feelings of isolation and perceive a lack of support when faced with expectations of interaction levels similar to traditional learning settings. This finding underscores the greater significance of fostering student engagement in online courses compared to on-campus courses. This is due to the limited opportunities for physical engagement that online students have, potentially leading to increased isolation (Meyer, K.A., 2014). The evidence also indicates that blended learning can mitigate the impact of social isolation by incorporating physical interactions between students and instructors. This is consistent with a recent survey of Malaysian students who expressed a preference for blended learning over a fully online approach (Yoke, S.K., & Ismail, N., 2021).

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Challenges in the Dynamics of ODL Communication Environment

Another significant discovery pertains to the participant's empathy towards educators and peers, as they perceived social media applications like WhatsApp and Telegram as ill-suited for genuine social interactions. This stands in contrast to an earlier study concerning students' perceptions of the Telegram app. Jnr Gyane (2021) highlighted Telegram's effectiveness in nurturing students' skills, capabilities, discipline, and self-directed learning by furnishing educational resources. The study assessed aspects such as applicability, user-friendliness, ease of learning, and levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, the research carried out by Mulyono, H., Suryoputro, G., & Jamil, S.R. (2021) divulged that a majority of students embraced social media as a means to bolster their learning and to feel more connected to the educational process. This acceptance was driven by factors such as perceived practicality, available support, motivation, and peer connections. However, discontent arose about WhatsApp's role in online learning support. Students voiced challenges in terms of collaboration, inconvenience, and difficulties in interaction. While some scholars acknowledge WhatsApp's communication advantages, they also acknowledge potential negative outcomes, including excessive exposure and conflicts (Mulyono, H., Suryoputro, G., & Jamil, S.R., 2021). In summary, despite the convenience and benefits of utilising social media, it may not be suitable as a communication platform for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs. This stems from its potential to trigger conflicts due to the absence of time constraints or limitations on its usage. Additionally, it fails to curtail the range of discussion topics among students and instructors, which could lead to discussions straying off-topic.

Technological Infrastructure and access barrier

Establishing the necessary technological infrastructure to support online learning can be demanding. Institutions need to ensure reliable internet connectivity, access to appropriate learning management systems (LMS), and the integration of various online tools and resources. Survey respondents encountered challenges related to technological access, leading to failures in subjects due to computer-related problems. One of the respondents' excerpts regarding technological access said, "Challenges related to technological access persist in the realm of ODL. I failed four subjects due to technical issues with my computer."

The issue of mobile access, server reliability and a more user-friendly platform are among the issues raised in the survey. In terms of mobile Access, the Respondents suggested the inclusion of mobile apps to facilitate the downloading of online learning materials via mobile devices. The issue of server reliability is that the students expressed a preference for highly available servers to prevent system malfunctions that could arise from potential disasters. One of the students said, "Enhancing ODL involves establishing a more reliable connection on the Ufuture portal and i-student portal. This would simplify student access to the portal without encountering difficulties". On the same note, respondents proposed modelling the online learning system after user-friendly platforms like udemy.com to help students manage their time effectively. Additionally, they suggested consolidating multiple websites into a central UITM system and utilizing cloud hosting for greater efficiency, particularly for numerous concurrent users across different regions. These changes were seen as potential enhancements to the user experience. There is also the issue of students' weak data connection which becomes the reason for them to opt for blended learning. An excerpt from one student said "Strong data connectivity is imperative for successful ODL classes. Otherwise, students risk missing out on valuable class content." The aspect that needs to be improved on is the technical area of ODL where students and instructors need more exposure and knowledge related to technology to further smoothen the ODL process.

Assessment Conundrums in ODL
A major concern through the content analysis is the assessment of the use of group assignments in assessing students in the ODL program. The respondents said that the difficulty lies in finding the group member due to offline screen communication and coordinating group members' schedules, especially if they are in different time zones, can be challenging and result in delays. Some students might face technical difficulties or lack access to the necessary tools for effective online collaboration. They felt that low group dynamics can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, or lack of effective communication, especially in online settings. They also raised concerns about how assessing individual contributions within a group can be complex and subjective. It might be unclear how much each member contributed.

6. ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND IMPROVING SATISFACTION

Starting an ODL program requires a multidimensional approach that considers various aspects of curriculum, technology, faculty, students, and support services. Careful planning and continuous evaluation are essential for ensuring the success and sustainability of the program. institutional readiness for Online Distance Learning (ODL) involves several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure a successful implementation of online programs.

Offering academic support services
Institutional and instructor support measures for improving student experience should be developed. This can be achieved by establishing mechanisms for online academic advising, technical assistance, counselling, and other forms of student support that are accessible remotely.

Ensuring access to technology
Establishing the necessary technological infrastructure to support online learning can be demanding. Institutions need to ensure reliable internet connectivity, access to appropriate learning management systems (LMS), and the integration of various online tools and resources.

Designing responsive course materials
The institution must prepare the instructors to effectively teach in an online environment requires specialized training. Some instructors may be unfamiliar with online teaching methods, tools, and pedagogies, making it necessary to invest in their professional development. Institutions must allocate sufficient resources for instructional design, technology support, and ongoing course maintenance Assistance must be given to help the instructors produce audio and video recordings suitable to the program.

Designing assessment

Ensuring consistent quality across online courses can be challenging. Developing standardised guidelines, rubrics, and peer-review processes for online course design and delivery can help maintain quality. Literature shows there are alternatives to group assignments in the form of individual assignments and individual project-based assessments. Similarly, discussion forums and participation can encourage engagement and reflective thinking. Incorporating a mix of assessment methods can provide a well-rounded evaluation of students' skills and knowledge in an ODL program. The choice of assessment method should align with the learning objectives and the desired outcomes of the course. Formative assessment strategies, as advocated by Black and Wiliam (1998), emphasize timely feedback and learner involvement in the assessment process. Research in this domain has led to a shift from summative evaluations toward assessments that inform instruction and guide learners' self-regulation.

Conclusion and recommendation

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration among various stakeholders, effective planning, ongoing evaluation, and continuous improvement efforts to ensure that institutional readiness for ODL is effectively established and maintained. Institutional and program designers must adapt to adult learners' preferences and needs to ensure the success of the ODL program. Discussion of visual and auditory learning preferences was observed in the study. Technology influences learning processes, the effectiveness of online learning environments, and the role of multimedia in enhancing engagement and comprehension. Educators should be provided with professional development programs that encompass training in pedagogical approaches and instructional design. Balancing personalised learning with a customised support system is essential. The effectiveness of student support lies in its ability to align with program objectives by providing the necessary assistance, guidance, and resources to both students and faculty members. Firstly, the academic support platform should focus on cultivating a sense of community and

active engagement. The use of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram should undergo evaluation, as they may not be the most effective means of communication. Secondly, academic support services should include mechanisms for tracking students' progress. Thirdly, social support services should offer tailored motivational strategies to address external factors such as family and work commitments, as well as internal challenges like social isolation and burnout. Additionally, internal support is vital for aiding learners in their persistence. Early intervention efforts aim to identify signs of struggle, particularly among new students or those who have withdrawn from an online class. Another approach to early intervention involves the development of orientation programs covering topics like college readiness, learning strategies, self-discipline, time management, self-efficacy, technological skills, and expectations. Lastly, technological support services should be provided to students who may not be familiar with technology or are experiencing issues with access and connectivity.

The course design in the form of self-instructional materials has no physical interaction and does not acknowledge the diversity of learners and their unique ways of processing information. The SIMS design must allow learners to construct knowledge through active engagement with their environment. In addition, the issue of group assignment as the suitable mode of assessment must be evaluated in the context of the ODL program. Commencing an Online Distance Learning (ODL) program necessitates a multifaceted strategy that takes into account numerous facets, including curriculum, technology, faculty, students, and support services. Meticulous planning and ongoing assessment are vital components in securing the triumph and long-term viability of the program. Preparing an institution for ODL involves confronting various challenges that must be tackled to guarantee the effective deployment of online programs, as outlined in the article. Further exploration into the preparedness of both the institution itself and the external support systems is imperative to ensure the achievement of online students.

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