



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR FOSTERING COLLABORATION AMONG OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNERS IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

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Abstract

Achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals demands that one integrate social media into the learning programme for all open and distance learners and the needs for all the learners to master how to navigate through them. This study aims to promote collaboration among learners by focusing on challenges faced by learners in open and distance learning such as isolated learning experiences and poor integration of social media in open and distance learning. The results of these challenges is distractions, poor internet connections, and lack of digital skills to utilize social media by open and distance learners in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This research highlights key strategies to overcome these challenges, emphasizing the importance of fostering collaboration through meaningful interactions, effective communication and active engagement. Ex-post facto research design, three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw 378 learners from national Open University. Two instruments were used for the data collection, the instruments were validated by three experts. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer all the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. By addressing these challenges and implementing collaborative strategies, it is recommended that educators should harness the full utilization of social media to enhance the learning experience for open and distance learners.

Keywords: collaboration, Social Media, open and distance learning, open and distance learners.

Introduction

Open and distance learning is an approach of learning where learners are separated in time and space from their facilitators and from their fellow learners. Okebukola (2009) states that Open Learning implies “removing barrier to learning such as restriction on time or place of study” while Distance Learning means “the learner and the tutor are physically separated from each other and teaching takes place via print, electronics and/or telecommunications media. Open and distance learning have offered openness in accessing learning contexts and also has also extended opportunities for learners to access alternative mode of learning, For Naidu (2017), distance learning is characterized by openness and flexibility, this kind of learning permits interactions between learners and their facilitator and among learners themselves, This openness in open and distance learning take care of lack of formal entry requirements, prerequisite credentials, an entrance examination and also the use of technology, such as electronic media thereby reflecting accurately the key characteristics of open and distance learning. Together, these approaches aim to make

education more accessible, flexible, and inclusive. According to Bernie Ikegulu and Susan Oranusi (2014), it is the need of people to learn at their convenience outside the confines of the four walls of the traditional conventional system of education.

Open and distance learning (ODL) initially began with correspondence classes, extending educational opportunities to those who missed out or lacked resources for traditional education. ODL is not just for academically struggling individuals but is inclusive, accommodating those facing barriers like distance, age, time, or occupation. This approach has global reach, catering neglected learners and ambitious individuals striving for social mobility. ODL's effectiveness lies in its integration of diverse media, ensuring accessibility for people regardless of age, status, gender, or location, thus offering a wide array of studies to diverse learners. Ojo and Olakunlehin (2006) found out that experiences both nationally and internationally have shown that conventional education is extremely hard to meet the demands of today's socio-educational milieu especially for developing countries like Nigeria. This demand is as a result of the undergoing rapid technological advancements and globalization in the wordleading to the emergence of new industries and changing job market demands. In Nigeria, open and distance learning is seen as a popular way to increase educational accessibility, particularly given Nigeria's vast population and variety of geographical issues. In accordance with Akpan (2016), ODL in Nigeria are seen as a means to bridge the educational gap caused by limited physical infrastructure, insufficient educational facilities, and a growing demand for higher education. In an effort to tackle the problem of access to higher education in Nigeria, the National University Commission (NUC) in the last six years licensed additional 46 Federal, State and Private Universities bringing the number of Universities in Nigeria to 117. However, despite this additional number "access to higher education still remains a formidable challenge" (Okojie, 2011). ODL is therefore designed to cater for these challenges, as it caters to the diverse needs of different categories of learners. "The reasons for Open and Distance Learning in National Open Universities in Nigeria stem from the necessity to update workers' certifications for promotion in their workplace, as well as to accommodate different categories of learners with various responsibilities, such as work and family commitments."

This style of learning is marked by its inception and subsequent development, leading to a significant shift from the conventional in-person teaching method to one conducted remotely and is characterized as thus according to, UNESCO (2002), COL (2011) and Keegan (2018) flexibility, accessibility, cost- efficiency, individualized learning, diverse delivery modes, learner-centered approach, technology integration, continuous support and interaction, assessment adaptability, inclusivity, and global reach. Open and distance learning have offered openness in accessing learning contexts and also has also extended opportunities for learners to access alternative mode of learning, for Naidu (2017) distance learning is characterized by openness and flexibility, these kind of learning permits interactions between learners and their facilitator and among learners themselves. Additionally, it encompasses the utilization of technology, including electronic media like social media platforms (e.g., video conferences, WhatsApp, Telegram), and other ICT tools through which online learning materials and contexts are accessible to learners. The following terms delineate the basic principles of open and distance education, accompanied by their definitions and explanations as presented by the Commonwealth of Learning are as follows:

1. **Accessibility:** Education becomes available to individuals who are unable to participate in traditional classroom settings because of social, structural, or personal circumstances, such as



limited educational opportunities, geographical distance from schools, familial obligations, and work commitments.

2. **Flexibility:** Students ought to engage in learning at a time, speed, and location that aligns with their preferences, with access to subjects, courses, and programs tailored to their individual requirements.
3. **Learner Centeredness:** ODL is learner – centered because of its accessibility and flexibility, it offers Provision of good quality learning materials in learner friendly formats; and Provision of adequate learner support system. Open and distance learning is also characterized by important structures such as study centres where the learners receive instructions and obtain needed information and guidance. Other infrastructures include technology, electricity and internet connectivity (Yaqub) and Suleiman, 2008), these are very critical for meaningful ODL delivery.

Technology for example which accounts for the phenomenal growth of distance education and which has made instructional delivery flexible is in poor stage in Nigeria. The same is the case for electricity. Poor internet connectivity, irregular supply of electricity and slowness of some staff and students in acquiring IT skills are huge challenges to be surmounted. Also Okebukola (2009) listed some challenges of delivering open and distance learning program to open and distance learners as follows:

- Erratic power supply
- Poor reading culture among the youths
- Teaching of practical subjects not feasible
- Inadequacy of trained tendencies to run the system.
- Perception of the public of inferior status of ODL certificates. Presently learners in open and distance learning institutions faces several challenges resulting in geographical separation associated with open and distance learning, causing less engagement and interactive learning environment. This, in turn, increases the dropout rate among distance learners in open and distance learning programs. This isolation leads to limited interaction and learning experiences for distance learners.

Collaborative Learning and Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learners are mostly adults who engage in open and distance learning programmes according to Hülsmann and Sancho (2019). People from various places, whether cities, countryside, or different nations, benefit from open and distance learning (ODL), which is essential for broadening educational opportunities. Typically, ODL learners are adults who autonomously decide on the learning materials they want. They are driven by specific objectives, selecting the type of learning they want and the schedule that fits them best. They possess self-direction and adept time-management skills, enabling them to thrive in a flexible learning setting. Holmberg (2017) stated that open and distance learners have a spectrum of educational goals, from earning degrees to acquiring specific skills or knowledge and as such, caters for this diversity by offering a wide array of courses and qualifications that will equip them with knowledge, attitudes and skills, that will help them to become better informed and self-reliant individual. In the digital age, open and distance learners are expected to possess basic digital literacy skills. They need these skills to navigate online learning platforms, access digital resources, and communicate effectively in virtual environments



(Hülsmann& Sancho, 2019). Learning for these groups of learners is possible due to the various technologies utilized to bring learning closer to them, irrespective of their geographical locations. Some of these technologies in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) are integrated into social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Google Meet, Instagram, TikTok, etc. For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the use of WhatsApp and Google Meet to enhance collaboration in Open and Distance Learning at the National Open University of Nigeria.

Collaborative learning is a kind of learning which lay emphasis on group learning. Different authors have defined the concept of collaborative learning. Smith and MacGregor (2015) describe collaborative learning as a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. This definition sees collaborative learning as a learning exercise involving more than one person. Supporting the above, collaborative learning is also defined as a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together by exchanging thoughts, ideas, and information (Panitz, 2018). Here, collaborative learning is seen as a mutual exercise where thoughts and ideas are exchanged during the learning process. Furthermore, Bruffee (2016) sees collaborative learning as an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Lending credence to the above, Dillenbourg (2019) provides a more interactive perspective by defining collaborative learning as a situation in which learners help each other to learn and, in doing so, share responsibility for each other's learning. The idea expressed here is that, in collaborative learning, all learners participate in the learning process by fulfilling their assigned task. Through the use of different kinds of technology they form mutual interactions among themselves and these help to bridge the gap existing among learners in their different location. Collaborative learning plays a crucial role in the context of open and distance learning (ODL), as it enhances engagement, facilitates peer interaction, and promotes a sense of community among learners who are geographically separated. In the digital age, technology plays a crucial role in enabling collaboration in ODL. Thus, online discussion forums, video conferencing, and collaborative document editing tools empower learners to connect, share ideas, and work on projects collectively, regardless of their geographic locations (Harasim, 2017). Collaboration involves learning activities such as interactions, teamwork, communication which are very crucial in construction of knowledge as learners have the freedom to develop different important skills, such as listening skills, questioning skills, and critical skills, analytical skills that will help them to justify their view and impart knowledge. In the learning environment, it conveys how learners converse and collaborate with their peers which form great positive impact on the learners (Clark, 2001). Similarly, Jonassen and Land (2012) view collaboration in distance learning as learning that aligns with social constructivist principles, emphasizing that knowledge is constructed through interactions and dialogues with others. From these definitions, it can be deduced that learners in ODL can collectively build knowledge by discussing, debating, and sharing their insights within virtual learning communities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 2013). Picciano (2017) noted that collaborative learning in ODL environments can enhance learner motivation and engagement. The opportunity to work with peers on shared tasks, projects, or group discussions adds an element of social interaction that can make the learning experience more enjoyable and meaningful.

More so, in today's highly digitalized world where technologies are used in all sphere of life ODL often attracts a diverse group of learners with different backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, collaborative learning provides a platform for these learners to exchange ideas, share



their unique perspectives, and learn from one another, thereby enriching their educational experience (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). Collaborative learning is therefore a type of learning that emphasizes cooperation among learners and facilitators, as well as among the learners themselves. It is a learning approach that de-emphasizes individual learning by promoting group learning. Hence, collaboration creates group formations. It provides facilitators with opportunities to develop collaborative projects within the group, allowing learners to interact with one another and benefit from the experiences and skills of their peers. Here, learners or facilitators can leave comments for each other, or they can use social media platforms to communicate.

The Place of Social Media in Collaborative Learning

Social media encompasses digital platforms where users can generate, distribute, and engage with content, facilitating global connectivity, communication, and community formation. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2011) explained that social media networks are platforms or sites that facilitate the building of social relationships among people of different races and provide opportunities for them to share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Social media is a collection of online websites, which operates through community-based interaction; social media is based on the crux of people-to-people interaction (Rakshit, 2015). There are numerous social media and each have their own purpose. Recently, social media have increasingly become a haven for youth to connect with like-minded individuals to share their interest and anxiety. It could therefore be said that social media platforms such as Facebook, blog, YouTube and Instagram are veritable tools to foster collaboration among learners in open and distance learning in NOUN. Social media can foster collaboration in ODL. It enhances self-motivated purposes, it promotes future career networking and help to discuss work in self-motivated and peer-organized learning communities, it is an important element of learners learning journey, a process mirrored widely by many other learners in their divert location worldwide (Collins 2012). It also indicates that social media is more important for forming friendship bonds and developing a feeling of belonging among learners in their learning community. Through social media learners can create group formation, provide facilitators with the opportunity to develop group collaboration projects that allows the learners to interact with one another and benefit from each other's experience and skills of their peers. Here, learners or facilitators can leave comments for each other or using different platform can chat directly using whatsapp or Google Meet. What this mean is that social media can foster collaboration in open and distance learning among open and distance learners using different social media platform such as whatsapp and Google Meet.

Google Meet for Fostering Collaboration among Learners in Open and Distance Learning in National Open University of Nigeria

Google Meet is a video conferencing tool by Google for virtual meetings, collaboration, and sharing content. It is popular for remote work, online classes, and social events.. Its aim is to democratize high-quality video conferencing, making it accessible to a wide range of users. With its premium features like polls and live streaming, Google Meet proves beneficial for users engaged in online distance learning (ODL). These functionalities empower ODL participants to engage with up to approximately 250 attendees in virtual meetings and broadcast to a maximum of 100,000 viewers within a specified domain. Notably, an important feature for monitoring online classes includes

attendance tracking. Khan, Jhanjhi and Humayun (2020) emphasized the importance of attendance monitoring as a component of an effective organizational information system. Likewise, in an academic setting, such as ODL attendance records are critical for lecturers to monitor the students' performance and help to determine the eligibility for the student to sit for their exams. In the same vein, Elizabeth, Khatib and Chizzotti (2020) contended that attendance generally reflects student's level of engagement and commitment to their course. Prior research has demonstrated that students (especially those who are academically weak) tend to gain better marks when they attend classes more regularly; however, additional research is needed to substantiate this claim (Muir, 2009). However, with the evolving educational landscape, this method has transitioned into a more convenient and time-efficient online system. Specifically, Google Meet offers online attendance tracking, but it is accessible only in selected editions like Google Workspace Essentials, Enterprise Essentials, Business Plus, and Education Plus. For regular users, alternatives include utilizing Google Chrome extensions or requesting learners to complete a Google Form. Nevertheless, the attendance report generated by these methods typically includes limited participant details such as names, emails, and timestamps indicating their entry and exit from the session. Google meet should be integrated into National Open University of Nigeria to foster collaboration among learners in ODL. There are various reasons for integrating Google Meet into National Open University of Nigeria such as Ravi (2022) identifies a number of reasons such as:

- Google Meet is a versatile tool for facilitating virtual meetings in open and distance learning (ODL).
- It allows facilitators to conduct meetings with learners seamlessly, bridging the gaps inherent in ODL.
- With the ability to host multiple users, including up to 250 attendees depending on the Google Workspace version, it accommodates various group sizes.
- Collaboration is encouraged through features like screen sharing, which is easily initiated by selecting "present now" and choosing the desired screen or window.
- Additionally, integration with Google Calendar and Google Contacts facilitates event and meeting organization, promoting efficient communication.
- The user-friendly interface simplifies joining meetings via links, while host controls enhance security and privacy measures to prevent unauthorized access. These features collectively contribute to fostering collaboration among learners and facilitators in ODL environments, such as those found in the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

WhatsApp for Fostering Collaboration among Learners in Open and Distance Learning in National Open University of Nigeria

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application created in 2009 and acquired by the Facebook family of companies in 2014. It is a messaging application that permits users to send text messages, voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, videos, documents, and location with other users. WhatsApp is a social media chat platform which enable users to discuss in different WhatsApp groups as well as follow links to read messages in other platforms. Kamat (2022) stated that WhatsApp is one of the most popular social media platforms and instant messaging applications available today. WhatsApp's prominence in social media and instant messaging is driven by several key factors namely:



- **Global User Base:** With over 2 billion monthly active users worldwide, WhatsApp is widely used across various regions.
- **Cross-Platform Compatibility:** Available on iOS, Android, and web browsers, WhatsApp caters to users regardless of their device preference.
- **Ease of Use:** Its intuitive interface simplifies messaging, voice/video calls, media sharing, and group chats.
- **End-to-End Encryption:** Privacy and security are ensured through this feature, appealing to users concerned about data protection.
- **Free Messaging and Calls:** Users can communicate via Wi-Fi or mobile data without additional charges, replacing traditional SMS or voice calls.
- **Integration of Additional Features:** Continuous updates introduce features like status updates, document and location sharing, and voice messaging, enhancing user experience.
- **Business Integration:** WhatsApp Business assists businesses in customer communication, service, order updates, and marketing outreach.
- **Cultural Relevance:** WhatsApp is deeply embedded in daily communication practices, both personally and professionally, in many regions, solidifying its position as a premier messaging platform.

The platform enables individuals to conserve information by communicating via an internet connection on a computer. Traditionally utilized on mobile devices, the introduction of the Windows version now permits direct access to conversations through the desktop messenger. WhatsApp in particular has become a primary network for sharing and discussing news (Newman, Levy, & Kleis, 2019). This news are mainly for fostering collaborations in education. Also, WhatsApp can serve both as an asynchronous learning platform akin to email and a synchronous communication tool. When installing WhatsApp, users transmit their contact lists to Facebook Servers, with the option to manually select message storage preferences. End-to-end encryption ensures data confidentiality, allowing only senders and recipients to decipher messages. Learners frequently utilize WhatsApp to communicate with peers, especially during project work for distance learning. Additional benefits include enhanced communication, streamlined workflows, reduced isolation, decreased distractions, and the promotion of collaborative environments, which contribute to improving graduation rates in open and distance learning (ODL). Similar to WhatsApp, numerous messaging apps exist, some linked to social networking sites like Facebook Messenger, while others such as Telegram and Vibes operate independently without requiring additional software. The use of these social media encourages learning, such as it promotes motivation, interactions, feedback, teamwork among learners despite all these benefits learners in ODL who uses social media, they face different challenges in their learning environments while using them such as lack of skills to navigate social media, problems of time management, poor concentration, poor internet connection etc.



Research Questions.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of whatsapp in ensuring collaboration in open and distance learning?
2. What are the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of Google Meet in ensuring collaboration in open and distance learning?

Hypotheses:

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

HO1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of Whatsapp in open and distance learning.

HO2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of Google Meets in open and distance learning.

Methods

The study used ex-post facto research design to investigate the influence of the independent variable, that is, social media on the dependent variable responses. The respondents were given a questionnaire to ascertain their responses. They were also given an inventory on social media usage, that is, Whatsapp and Google Meet to ascertain their level of usage or non- usage of social media. The population for the study consisted of two thousand five hundred and fifty two(2552) open and distance learners in their second year and in five (5)open and distance learning institutions in Enugu state of Nigeria.

The sample of this study comprised 378 (second year ODLs) of 2classes randomly drawn from two (2) institutions in Enugu state, Nigeria. Questionnaire and open and distance learner social media inventory developed by the researchers were used to ascertain the learners responses and the level of usage of Whatsapp and Google Meets. The questionnaire contained thirty multiple-choice questions drawn from open and distance learning syllabus. The social media usage inventory contained 10 items on learners social media usage, the students response to each item on a four-point scale of always (A), sometimes (ST), Rarely(R), Not at all (NA) where 1 point was given for “NA”, 2 for “R”, 3 for “ST” and 4 for “A”.

The instruments used in the study were face validated by three expert, two from the department of adult education and extra mural studies and one from Measurement and evaluation unit of science education, all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

To find the reliability of the research instrument, it was administered to 20 respondents from another open and distance learning institutions in Anambra state. Using Kuder Richardson reliability methods for questionnaire, a reliability coefficient of 0.82 were obtained for social media inventory. Cronbach alpha reliability method was adopted and a reliability co-efficient of 0.79 was obtained. As a result of the high reliability co-efficient the instruments were considered reliable.



This research was conducted using second year learners in ODL institutions in Enugu state. Social Media usage inventory (SMI) was first administered to the research subjects, after this, the questionnaire was administered to the same set of students. The scores from both SMI and questionnaire were collated to see the influence of social Media on open and distance learning. Data collected were analyzed using mean to answer the research questions. ANOVA was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The learners classified under non-users were those that indicated in the SMI that they did not have Whatsapp and/or Google Meets. Learners classified under low users were those whose mean in SMI was below 2.50. Students who were classified as high users were those whose mean in SMI were 2.50 and above.

Results

Research Question One: What are the mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high -users of Whatsapp in ensuring collaboration in open and distance learning in NOUN?

Table 1: Mean responses of open and distance learners of none, low and high -users of whatsapp in open and distance learning

Group	N	Mean Usage	SD	mean responses	SD
Non- users	223	3.18	0.63	30.90	12.18
Low users	109	1.72	0.58	47.49	11.08
High users	46			64.39	10.45

Table 1 above showed that the non-users had a mean usage of 3.18 with SD of 0.63 and a mean responses of 30.90 with SD of 12.18. Low users had a mean usage of 1.72 with SD of 0.58 and a mean response of 47.49 with SD of 11.08. The high-users had a mean response of 64.39 with SD of 10.45. This shows that high-users had the highest mean response followed by low users and lastly, the non- users. It implies that the more learners use whatsapp the more their responses become. Therefore, Whatsapp influences learners' responses in open and distance learning.

Research Question Two: What are the mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high -users of Google Meets in open and distance learning?



Table 2: Mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high-user of Google Meets in open and distance learning.

Group	N	mean usage	SD	mean responses	SD
Non- Users	197	3.14	0.71	29.67	10.18
Low users	64	1.30	0.63	45.75	15.08
high-users	117	-	-	53.46	14.40

The data on table 2 above revealed that non-users had a mean usage of 3.14 with SD of 0.71 and mean response of 29.67 with SD of 10.18. On the other hand, low users had a mean usage of 1.30 with SD of 0.63 and a mean response of 45.75 with SD of 14.40. This showed that high-users had the highest responses followed by low users and lastly the non-users. It implies that the more learners use Google Meet the more their responses becomes. Therefore, Google Meet influences learners' responses in open and distance learning institutions.

H01:There is no significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of whatsapp in open and distance learning institutions.

Table 3:Summary of ANOVA for the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of whatsapp in open and distance learning institutions.

Level of Usage	N	Mean	f	df	Sig.	Decision
Non- users	223	30.90				
Low users	109	47.49	190.605	375	0.000	significant
High-users	46	64.39				

Table 3 showed the summary of ANOVA for the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of WhatsApp in open and distance learning institutions. From the table, the f value(190.605)is significant at 0.000 level. This is less than the 0.05 significant level at which the hypothesis was tested; hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore there is a significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high-users of WhatsApp in open and distance learning.

H02:There is no significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high- users of Google Meets in open and distance learning institutions.



Table 4: Summary of ANOVA for the mean achievement scores of open and distance learners of non, low and high- users of google meets in open and distance learning institutions.

Level of Usage	N	Mean	f	df	Sig.	Decision
Non- users	197	29.67				
Low users	64	45.75	141.552	375	0.000	significant
High-users	117	53.46				

Table 4 showed the summary of ANOVA from the mean responses of learners in open and distance learning institutions of high, low and non-users of Google Meets in open and distance learning institutions. From the table, it is observed that F value(141.551) is significant at 0.000. This level is less than 0.05 significant level at which the null hypothesis was tested. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non- users of Google Meets in open and distance learning institutions.

Discussions

The findings of the study under research question one showed that Whatsapp influences learners' responses in open and distance learning institutions. This is further confirmed with the test of the hypothesis one that revealed a significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of high, low and non-users of Whatsapp in open and distance learning institutions in favour of high users. The reason for the observed differences in learners responses based on the level of Whatsapp usage could be due to the fact that Whatsapp has many activities one can engage in such as chatting, viewing of status update, upload of videos, pictures and audio notes, ask questions, get feedback etc. These activities promote effective communication, interaction and teamwork among learners as these influence their responses and keep them motivated to engage in their studies. Under research question two and hypothesis two, the finding indicated that Google Meet influences learners' responses in open and distance learning institutions and there is a significant difference between the mean responses of open and distance learners of non, low and high-users of Google Meet of open and distance learning institutions in favour of high users. The reason for the observation could be attributed to the high isolated learning experience faced by open and distance learners in ODL institutions, as well as the lack of feedback offered to learners by their facilitators in their institutions. This is observable as learners sometimes ask their facilitators questions, which often require immediate feedback but can take months for these learners to receive responses or answers to their questions. With the availability of free data and some mobile networks offering free data to their customers, learners are allowed to spend time with their fellow learners, sharing insights, providing support, motivating themselves, and contributing to the success of their colleagues. This is facilitated by creating class groups and allocating time for each class, where learners are offered opportunities to interact with each other regardless of their location, status, educational background, and experiences. Additionally, learners of all ages and backgrounds are provided with educational opportunities asynchronously and synchronously.



Conclusion

Social networks have positive effects on open and distance learners in open and distance learning institutions. The more engaging these learners are with social media, the more their responses increase. For collaboration in open and distance learning to be achieved, there is a need for ODL learners to master the skills needed for navigating their social media in order to engage and meet their colleagues synchronously (studying the same learning contents with colleagues and facilitators at the same time) or asynchronously (studying the same learning contents at different times). Learners need to be helped by their fellow learners in the absence of their facilitator by motivating them to take part in educative activities using social media to bridge the gap associated with isolated learning opportunities that lead to high dropout rates among distance learners. This will go a long way in enhancing collaboration, which is lacking in open and distance learning institutions, and through these means, reduce the rate of dropout of learners in open and distance learning institutions to the minimum.

Recommendation Based on the findings and discussions presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Given that learners in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) are primarily adults with diverse responsibilities, they often exhibit reluctance towards utilizing various social media platforms. They may lack the necessary understanding of how these platforms can be utilized for academic purposes. Therefore, facilitators should actively involve learners in academic activities through social media channels, such as conducting online classes, assigning tasks, and allowing assignment submissions via platforms like WhatsApp and Google Meet.
2. Recognizing that ODL learners typically possess varying educational backgrounds and experiences, it is advisable for learners to form groups with fellow members. Within these groups, learners can seek clarification and guidance from peers who possess greater expertise and knowledge.
3. Institutions offering ODL programs should establish regular online meetings with learners via social media platforms, preferably twice a week. This initiative aims to encourage learners to familiarize themselves with various social media tools and enhance collaboration within the ODL environment.



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