The Open University of Sri Lanka

40 YEARS

AAOU 2021 Sri Lanka

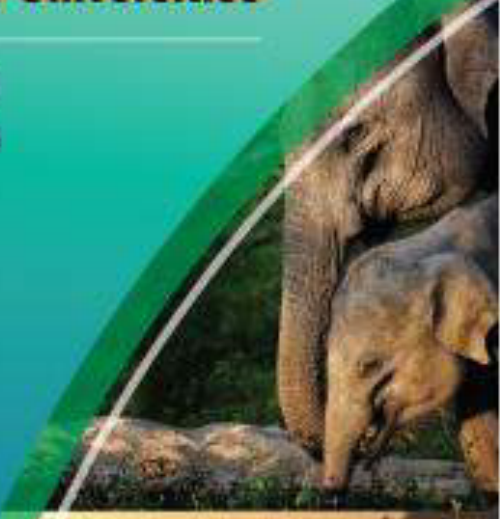
Asian Association of Open Universities

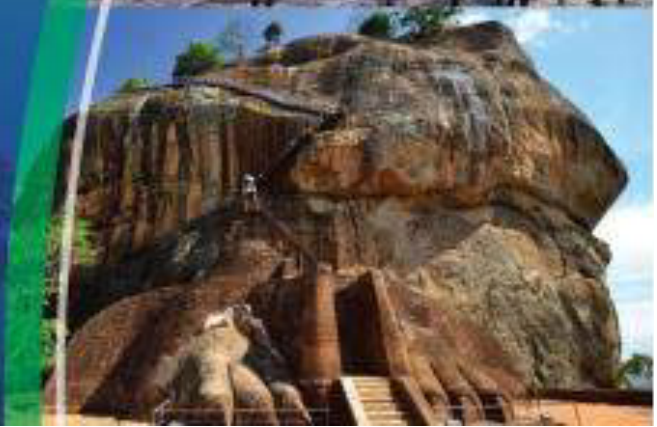
34th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities

Opening minds for a sustainable future: Re-orienting ODL to Surmount Challenges

1-3 JUNE 2021

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA





Volume II - Full Papers

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ABOUT AAOU

The Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU), founded in 1987, is a non-profit association of autonomous legally established institutions of higher learning primarily concerned with education at a distance. It strives to widen the educational opportunities available to all people in Asia and improve the institutions' quality in terms of their educational management, teaching, and research. It promotes education by distance teaching systems and professional and ethical standards; develops potentialities of open and distance education; cooperates with official bodies and others directly or indirectly interested in education at a distance; and facilitates cooperation with other similar regional and international bodies. At present, AAOU has 61 member institutions, with 46 being Full Members and 15 being Associate Members.

The AAOU Annual Conference, hosted in turn by member institutions, is a stimulating forum for all those associated with open and distance learning in Asia, particularly academics, administrators, and students. It provides a focal point for bringing everyone up to date on the issues, ideas, and developments in the field of open distance learning.

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ABOUT OUSL

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is the premier Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Sri Lanka, where students can pursue their studies through ODL methodologies.

It was established in 1980, under the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 and the OUSL Ordinance No. 1 of 1990, as amended. The OUSL is one of the 15 national universities coming under the purview of the University Grants Commission and enjoys the same legal and academic status. However, it differs from the other national universities because of its dependence on ODL philosophy to expand opportunities for higher education regardless of age, previous qualifications, geography, employment barriers, and income. In 2020, the OUSL celebrated 40 years of excellence in offering higher educational learning opportunities through ODL methodologies.

Due to its teaching methodology and infrastructure, the OUSL can serve a large student population spread throughout the country. More than 40,000 students are currently studying at the OUSL, whom nine (09) Regional Centres are serving, and nineteen (19) Study Centres are located around the country.

The University has six Faculties: Natural Sciences, Engineering Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences, Education, Health Sciences, and the Faculty of Management Studies.

Over the years, the OUSL has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with several international and national institutions to promote ODL opportunities in Sri Lanka and overseas. The OUSL has maintained an excellent collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for over two decades. COL is an Inter-Governmental organization that has the mandate to promote distance education and open learning.

In 1991, OUSL proudly hosted the annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) – as one of the founder members of the AAOU.

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THE INTEREST OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

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high school graduates, Interest, open and distance education

Abstract

Having graduated from high school or its equivalents, in an ideal sense, is not an end in itself; it is, instead, part of a larger trajectory of academic life that opens up a new beginning in higher education. Transitioning from high school can be painstakingly arduous as high school graduates typically cope with major challenges in taking on different paths to success; be it involving productive employment, opting for academic rigor of college or resorting to early marriage. This transition also often marks the time period in which they encounter confusion as to attending conventional or open and distance institution. Flexibility and accessibility that are essential characteristics of distance learning environment at the Open Universities. The present study delves on students' interest in pursuing tertiary education in an open and distance mode at the Open University. The study is a qualitative descriptive research within a population of 1,404 high school graduates. The census of populations allowed a wide range of data collection to provide treatments to all populations both in urban and rural schools within the regional government areas of South Sulawesi. The data set fits into relative qualitative descriptive analysis. A high proportion of students (1,131 individuals), which earned 80.55%, indicated interest in attending the Open University, while the remaining 279 students or 19.87% did not. The percentages for other questionnaire items that represent students' interest in pursuing tertiary studies at the Open University are similarly favourable, including students' recognition of the reputable existence of the Open University as the 45th Public University in Indonesia (98.29%), students' recognition that the Open University is a Public University that runs open and distance education (96.15%), students' recognition that studies at the Open University fit around regular responsibilities (89.03%), and students' recognition that the Open University charges affordable tuition fees (85.47%). These findings point to a substantial number of high school graduates' interest in engaging in distance learning environment at the Open University of Makassar for their educational needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 66 of 2010 Article 118, distance education aims to promote the expansion and distribution of educational access and to improve the quality and relevance of education. The term "distance education" is distinctly conceptualized in the Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2012 Article 31 Section (1): distance education embodies a remote teaching and learning process through which a various use of communication media is adopted. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 24 of 2012 Article 2 Section (1), distance education contributes to an essential role that enables students who are unable to attend face-to-face classroom lectures, to implement education without lowering its educational tasks and challenges.

Distance education embraces a distinct form of education in which the major elements include, (1) education setting in which instructors and learners are separated in terms of distance, time, or both; (2) content delivery that supports both printed media and electronic devices which utilize audio-visual aids including computer applications to approach teaching and learning implementation, and (3) a new paradigm that advocates consequent implication on teachers embracing their main role as facilitators and learners as participants in their own learning trajectory. In that sense, distance education accounts for teachers' responsibility to foster effective teaching strategies and instructional deliveries in a way that is both comprehensible and interesting to learners so as to encourage them to actively participate and to be authentically engaged. Educational endeavors that fail to boost student encouragement and involvement will most likely create prominent learning difficulties, which in turn escalate into student failure.

1.1 The Essence of Interest

A wide body of literature overwhelmingly sheds light on the conception of interest in a broad sense. Interest is largely perceived in a sense of preference or a feeling of liking (Slameto, 2010), attentiveness (Lin & Huang, 2016), focus, determination, effort, knowledge, skill (Ainley, Hillman, & Hidi, 2002), motivation (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1999), regulation of behavior (Wang & Adesope, 2016), and the outcome of an interaction between an individual and an object or an activity (Schiefele, 2001). Interest plays a decidedly pivotal role in, and profound impact on, each aspect of individual life in such a way that it activates one's behavior and attitude. Education is no exception. Interest is a powerful motivational source that energizes learning and navigates academic trajectories. Etymologically, interest pertains to one's effort and willingness to learn or a desire to seek knowledge. Similarly, the terminological sense of interest capitalizes on the conception of desire, liking and willingness for an object or an activity. According to Hilgar, interest manifests in a constant process through which one pays attention to and focus on an object that is of interest to him or her which comes with feelings of pleasure and satisfaction.

Andi Maprare (in Muhibbin, 2004: 15) contends that interest is a mental device that refers to the incorporation of feeling, expectation, conviction, prejudice, fear or other tendencies that navigate an individual toward a certain thought. In its simplest sense, interest is associated with a tendency of craving or longing for something. In a similar manner, H.C. Witherington (1992) explains that interest explores one's awareness that an object, a person, a matter or a situation has something to do with him or her.

In Abu Ahmadi's perspective (2003: 151), the term interest is applied to a broadening range of constructs that correspond to the relationship of

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cognitive, conative and affective aspects of the mind that focus on a particular object. Within the relationship, affective feeling attributes to the strongest implication. Crow and Crow (in Abd. Rahman A., 1993:112) observe that interest may stimulate the power in movement to energize one's tendency toward or attraction to another individual, an object or an activity, or an effective experience stimulated by the activity itself. Therefore, interest encompasses a subjective attitude causing a certain task or motivation to participate in the task. In a similar stance, Elizabeth B. (1978: 114) recognizes interest in the realm of wanting behavior and motivational sources that represent driving factors for actions according to one's free choices. One becomes genuinely interested when he or she gains rewards. Consequently, one no longer remains interested when satisfaction alleviates.

The large array of aforementioned literature characterizes the key standpoint on interest, that is, interest commonly refers to preference and a sense of attachment to an object or an activity without directives. The fundamental understanding of interest lies in the acceptance of a relationship between oneself and something outside himself or herself. Interest grows to a greater extent when the relationship is stronger or closer.

1.2 Definition of Interest

Semi (1978: 5) postulates that interest is a driving force for one to engage in good activities. The foundation of interest not only provides insight into a mental state that shapes one's attitude but also develops a more specific psychological perspective such as one's tendency to perform a particular activity or one's need to give selective attention to a particular task and become attached to it of his or her own accord. Heryana (1987) in Niku (2001: 11) claims that interest constitutes the inclination of learners towards one form of activity that captivates their attention in a way that they actively engage in that activity. Sugono D., et al. (2011) mention that interest is the general tendency of the human heart towards immense passion or compelling desire. Interest stems from a self-concept, innate tendency, and a basic nature of one's character to engage in an activity of one's own free will.

The key element of interest is constantly interlaced with that of human tendency to repeatedly give attention to and remember an object (a person, a thing or an activity) while fulfilling a desire to become absorbed in the experience where he or she seeks to learn about it, understand it and prove it even further. Interest is a forceful impetus from which one is able to afford reasonable progress toward the accomplishment of his or her desirable goals. Therefore, interest elicits intrinsic motivation as a potential source of one's desirable act (Sudarsana U., 2014: 1.7).

Secondary education is a formal educational stage that comes after the completion of primary or basic education provided by different types of schools such as Senior High School (Sekolah Menengah Atas/ SMA), Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School), Vocational High School, Vocational Madrasah Aliyah, and its equivalents. This is regulated by the Government Regulation Number 17 of 2010 Chapter I Article 1 Verse 12-13; secondary education takes the form of senior general high schools, one of which is *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (SMA) that continue formal basic education, that is, *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* or SMP (Junior High School), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* or MTs (Islamic Junior High School) and other schools of the same degree.

The graduates of upper secondary school or its equivalents are 12th grade students who have completed the last year of compulsory secondary education. 2020 marks the numbers of high school graduates at approximately 133.384 across 24 regencies and cities

in South Sulawesi (https://berita.news/2020/02/10/133-384-siswa-sma-smk-ma-se-sulsel-akan-ikuti-unbk-ini-jadwalnya/). As the number of high school graduates pursuing higher education remains relatively high, greater attention has been paid to the potential of distance education for helping to address the large-scale demand for higher education in South Sulawesi. *Universitas Terbuka Unit Program Belajar Jarak Jauh Makassar* or UPBJJ-UT Makassar (Open University-Distance Learning Program Unit), which serves as the regional branch of the Open University in Indonesia provides a spectrum of world-quality education for all types of learners. To that end, UPBJJ-UT of Makassar highlights the importance of granting extensive opportunities for education and implementing flexible learning modes as well as providing and imparting knowledge to students and approaching them regardless of where they live so as to help accomplish universal access to quality higher education. This is in line with the mission of distance education regulated in the Law of Government of the Republic of Indonesia Number 17 of 2010; distance education seeks to enhance the expansion and equal access to education as well as improving educational quality and relevance.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The present study takes on a descriptive qualitative design, that is, descriptions of data in the form of words or sentences according to categories to obtain conclusions. A descriptive qualitative design simply measures and observes the real nature of a variable, symptom or condition without controlling or manipulating it using hypothesis testing. The descriptions are expressed in percentages which are subsequently interpreted in qualitative sentences.

2.2 Population

According to Nata Wirawan, (2016: 5), census is dedicated to collecting data from each individual member of the population that becomes the research object. It appeals to the entire population, without exception, for information gathering. All the members chosen for the research sample are referred to as population. Given that all the members are chosen for participation and observation in the study, data collection using census is demanding in terms of time, effort and cost, particularly when it deals with a large-scale population. However, approaching data using census is not possible in the event of the destructive nature in testing. Conducting a census has a wide range of merits that includes the true values of data that accurately reflect the characteristic parameters. The population of the study takes on 1404 graduates from 24 Public and Private Senior High Schools or other schools of the same degree in South Sulawesi.

2.3 Technique of Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed to respondents following the presentation, socialization and promotion of the programs of the Open University in three areas, i.e., urban areas, suburban areas, and rural areas with a total of 24 Public and Private Senior High Schools and other schools of the same degree. The use of census was for monitoring all individuals within the population of interest.

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2.4 Technique of Data Analysis

Sugiyono (2003:21) concludes that descriptive statistics seek to define or provide insight into the measurable object within sample data or population as it is, without appealing to analysis or general conclusions. The calculation of descriptive qualitative data fit into the relative frequency formula as shown below (Sudijono Anas, 1997):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} x100\%$$

Description: f = Frequency
N= Number of cases (the number of frequency or individuals)
p= The number of percentage

3. RESULTS

Table 1 demonstrates the scores among the respondents regarding how well they recognize the Open University as the 45th Public Higher Education Institution in Indonesia. Based on the data analysis that fit into relative frequency for qualitative data, the rates of the respondents' knowledge were described in percentages as Table 1 shows below:

Table 1: Open University as the 45th Public Higher Education Institution in Indonesia

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Highly recognize	4	1380	98.29
2.	Recognize	3	24	1,70
3.			0	
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	

In Table 1, the bulk of the respondents (98.29 %) claim to have recognized the Open University as the 45th Public Higher Education Institution in Indonesia, while the remaining 24 respondents, who made up 1,70%, do not. The overwhelmingly high percentage represents how the Open University is highly recognized in terms of its reputable existence by the majority of High School graduates in South Sulawesi.

Table 2 indicates the percentages that represent the respondents' recognition of the Open University in terms of how it runs education and accommodates the learning environment. Similar to those in Table 1, the results in Table 2 are tremendously favorable with 96.15% of the respondents claiming to have recognized the Open University as a distance learning platform for higher education in Indonesia. The remaining 3.13% and 0.71% claim to have recognized and barely recognized it, respectively.

Table 2: Open University as a Distance Higher Education Institution in Indonesia

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly recognize	4	1350	96,15
2.	Recognize	3	44	3,13
3.			10	0,71
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		

Table 3 measures the respondents' knowledge of the entry requirements to the Open University where written examinations are excluded. It is to be noted that 1100 respondents that make up 78.34% are highly aware, 260 (18.51%) are aware, and 44 (13.3%) are barely aware of this. Socialization regarding the application and admission to the Open University remains integrated to the framework of promotion concerning the General Programs at the Open University. Comprehensive information that captures the eligibility to gain admittance to the Open University will likely captivate the desirable segmentation within the student audience

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Table 3: Written Examinations Are Not Applicable for Admission Test at the Open University

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly recognize	4	1100	78,34
2.	Recognize	3	260	18,51
3.			44	3,13
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	

In Table 4, respondents were asked about one of the merits of pursuing academic degree at the Open University, that is, being able to earn a degree and still able to fit around their daily full-time or part-time responsibilities. 1250 respondents (89.03%) highly recognize this merit, indicating that distance learning mode is increasingly present in the current education. The remaining 136 (9.61%) and 19 (1.35%) moderately recognize and barely recognize this benefit respectively. These two categories may represent students who often have apprehensions over opting for higher education through distance setting.

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Table 4: Studies at the Open University Fit around Regular Responsibilities

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly recognize	4	1250	89,03
2.	Recognize	3	135	9,61
3.			19	1,35
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	100

Table 5 summarizes the percentages concerning respondents' awareness of how the Open University charges affordable tuition fees. 1200 respondents (85.47%) contend this is very well-known information, while the remaining 150 (10.68%) and 54 (3.84%) professed this is moderately and barely well-known information, respectively. The significance of the percentage may indicate that studying at the Open University is an economically viable option with respect to higher education.

Table 5: Affordable Tuition Fees

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Highly recognize	4	1200	85,47
2.	Recognize	3	150	10,68
3.			54	3,84
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	100

When it comes to the questionnaire item regarding the Open University's capacity to cater to students' needs, the resulting percentages are not so favourable in comparison to the aforementioned items. Among 1440 respondents, 750 (53.41%) perceive this as well-established information. The remaining 554 (39.45%) are moderately aware of this information, and 100 (7.12%) barely recognize it. This identifies the lack of awareness among students in Senior High Schools regarding the Open University, including its instructional supports that cater to individual needs. Socializing strategy and campaign development for promotional purposes are therefore of great importance to assuage students' lingering doubts about the challenges in online learning and the quality of education provided by the Open University.

Table 6: Open University Tailors Distance Learning to Meet Students' Diverse Needs

No.	Parameter	Weight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly recognize	4	750	53,41
2.	Recognize	3	554	39,45
3.			100	7,12
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	100

Table 7 reveals information about the extent to which respondents recognize the educational access to the Open University in remote rural areas. At least half of the entire population, 715 respondents (50.92%), highly recognize that Open University education is consistently accessible for rural communities while 350 respondents (24.92%) discern this as common knowledge. And 339 (24.14%) profess little knowledge about it. The remoteness and availability of rural learners remain vital challenges when it comes to opting for tertiary studies via distance platforms. The Open University constantly strives to explore these challenges for students from rural backgrounds to reduce the wide gap between rurality and access to distance higher education. The Open University does this through its commitment to equal and inclusive education for all learners from diverse backgrounds.

Table 7: Access to the Open University in Rural Areas

No.	Parameters	Weight	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly recognize	4	715	50,92
2.	Recognize	3	350	24,92
3.			339	24,14
4.	Barely recognize	2	0	0
	Don't recognize	1		
Total			1404	100

The number of students who share common interest in pursuing post-secondary education at the Open University is sufficiently impressive, peaking at 80.55% (Table 8). The remaining 19.87% end up lacking personal interest in the practice of distance learning to earn higher education degrees. The surge of the Open University's emergence as the leading distance university in Indonesia is subjected to a comprehensive course of promotional operations and marketing campaigns to give publicity and exposure to its existence, reputation and qualities of academic services.

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Table 8: The Interest of High School Graduates in Studies at the Open University

No	Interest	Number	Percentage
1	Interested in studies at the Open University	1131	80,55
2	Not interested in studies at the Open University	279	19,87

4. CONCLUSIONS

Key points that sum up essential insights into the present study are summarized below:

1. The proportion of high school graduates expressing critical interest in higher education trajectories in distance environment at the Open University is significantly higher than those who do not, peaking at 80.55%, and 19.87%, respectively.
2. The Open University stands as the 45th Public University in Indonesia and is well-regarded among the majority of high school graduates in South Sulawesi with a staggering 98.29%.
3. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents, peaking at 96.15%, exceedingly perceive that the Open University distinguishes its educational system from others as a distance higher education platform.
4. In terms of admission and eligibility requirements, 78.34% respondents recognize that the Open University does not call for written entry tests designed for prospective students to measure their competencies in particular subjects to establish admissibility to a program.
5. The recognition and understanding that the Open University accommodates learning that fits around regular responsibilities and takes place entirely remotely unaffected by the factors time and place, is very well apprehended among the bulk of respondents, peaking at 89.03%.
6. With a percentage of 85.47%, the cost affordability of higher education at the Open University is a commonly pervasive knowledge among the respondents.
7. At least more than half of the population (53.41%) is highly aware of how the Open University constantly seeks to tailor its academic services to better fit the needs of students who come from diverse backgrounds.
8. However, only half of the entire population (50.92%) recognizes that distance learning at the Open University remains constantly manageable for rural students and it is important to note this in overcoming the wide gap between rurality and access to distance higher education.

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