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DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' MOTIVATION TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING MODE: A CASE OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA, MBEYA REGIONAL CENTRE


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ABSTRACT

Understanding why in-service teachers pursue higher education through distance learning mode is fundamental for promoting access, retention, and programme suitability in open and distance learning (ODL) systems. While systemic and institutional factors influencing participation have been extensively examined, little consideration has been given to teachers' dispositional motivations, especially in developing African contexts. This study investigated dispositional factors which motivate primary school teachers to pursue higher education through distance learning mode. Using a qualitative case study design, the study collected from 26 participants including primary school teachers who were pursuing various distance education programmes at the Open University of Tanzania in Mbeya Regional Centre, academic staff and the director of the regional centre. The study found that positive attitude toward distance learning, teachers' self-efficacy and belief in learning capability, expectations of career and pedagogical success, and intrinsic professional aspirations motivated teachers' participation in distance education. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of strengthening self-efficacy, professional relevance and positive attitudes towards distance learning on improving accesses and retention in distance learning programmes and of considering dispositional factors along with institutional factors in developing support learner systems.

Keywords: Distance learning, Teachers' motivation, Dispositional factors, Teachers' Participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advance of ODL has enhanced access to higher education worldwide, specifically for adults who always encounter difficulties in participating in the conventional, campus-based programmes due to work-related, family, or geographic constraints [1]. Development in digital technologies, along with policy vows to lifelong learning and teacher professional development, has made distance education a strategy for upgrading in-service teachers' qualifications [2], [3]. In low and middle-income countries, where shortage of teachers and uneven access to educational opportunities persevere, ODL bridges the gap in both equity and capacity challenges in education systems. In sub-Saharan Africa, distance education has expanded rapidly in the past two decades stimulated by progress in education, financial limitations and the need to upscale massive groups of teachers without affecting service delivery in schools [4]. Tanzania exemplifies this trend.

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Following the development of basic education and the implementation of teacher upgrading policies, majority of primary school teachers have sought higher education without leaving their jobs.

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT), as the country's leading distance education institution, has become a central provider of such learning opportunities, especially for teachers in geographically dispersed regions such as the Southern Highlands. Whereas access-related and institutional factors for participation in distance education are widely documented, evidence consistently shows that adult learners' choice to participate and withstand in ODL are also strongly shaped by dispositional factors. These are inner characteristics like attitudes, self-perceptions, expectations, confidence and readiness for self-directed learning [5], [6]. For teachers, these factors are tied with professional character, prior learning experiences and belief about the acceptability and worth of distance educational qualifications. Understanding these intrinsic motivations is of paramount importance for distance learning institutions targeting to boost retention, student support and programme design.

Literature on teacher participation in ODL in Tanzania and similar contexts has to a large extent paid attention to the structural barriers and facilitators, namely costs, institutional flexibility and technological infrastructure [7], [8]. Little focus has been given to dispositional factors, notwithstanding their indispensable role in adult learning theory and their established influence on active engagement and unremitting effort in ODL environments. Where dispositional factors have been examined, studies tend to be older, context specific, or part of broader analyses in which learners' intrinsic motivation are not the primary focus. This paper builds on this gap by examining the dispositional factors that motivate primary school teachers to pursue higher education through distance learning mode. It draws on qualitative data gathered from primary school teachers enrolled at the Open University of Tanzania, Mbeya Regional Centre. Although the empirical data stem from a study conducted prior to recent technological and policy advances, the study remains analytically relevant. The paper recognizes the age of the data and situates the findings within the current literature on adult learners' motivation and distance education. The specific objective addressed is to assess the dispositional factors that motivate primary school teachers to pursue higher education through distance learning mode.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section integrates theoretical and empirical literature on dispositional factors motivating teachers' participation in distance learning. Dispositional factors denote internal learner characteristics that drive their decisions to take part in, deal with, and sustain in learning activities [9]. With regards to adult learning, these factors generally comprise attitudes toward learning, self-esteem needs, perceptions of capability, goal orientation, prior learning experiences, and expectations of outcomes [10]. Unlike institutional or situational factors, dispositional motivations come from within the learner and are linked to self-concept and professional character. The study is primarily guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which attempt to differentiate between autonomous and controlled forms of motivation [11]. Autonomous motivation comprises of intrinsic motivation and identified regulation. It usually happens when individuals involve in learning because it is personally of value or linked to their professional values. Recent research constantly shows that autonomous motivation is linked to enhanced learner engagement,

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determination, and satisfaction in ODL environments [6], [12]. Classical adult learning models such as Cross's Chain of Response (COR) framework and Boshier's Congruence Model, further irradiate how self-perceptions, expectations of success, and expected benefits influence decision to participate [9], [13].

2.1 Attitude toward distance learning

The attitude of the learner toward distance learning have constantly appeared as a solid influence on both participation and sustainability in higher education. Studies show that when learners see distance education as something flexible and reliable, they are likely to enroll and withstand in their programmes [5]. This positive attitude is typically predisposed by personal expectations as well as general societal perceptions of distance education. For teachers specifically, confidence in the acceptability of qualifications obtained through distance mode play a vital role in reinforcing their readiness to participate [14]. Moreover, prior exposure to analogous learning environments tends to reinforce positive attitude and lessen uncertainty. Conversely, worries about quality and recognition may fade motivation, even where access chances are available. Generally, attitude act as an entrance point that stimulates how learners approach and endure their educational journey.

2.2 Self-efficacy and confidence in self-directed learning

Self-efficacy is largely documented as a fundamental psychological factor influencing success in distance education, especially among adult learners[15]. This is basically an idea about the extent to which a person believes in his or ability to handle planning and organizing of learning tasks in an often less structured environment. Evidence from Naila et al. (2024) [16] indicates that when learners have strong self-efficacy, they are more likely to encounter the complexities of studying on their own. These learners tend to smoothly navigate challenges with determination and are less likely to dropout when difficulties arise. On the other hand, learners with low confidence in their capabilities tend to struggle to cope with the requirements of the courses and balancing responsibilities [17]. For teachers pursuing distance programmes, self-efficacy turns out to be even more critical as they deploy professional duties along with academic vows. Enhancing this attribute is thus vital for improving both engagement, retention and completion rates.

Studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy is often strengthened by prior learning experience, especially exposure to self-directed learning and flexible learning environment [18], [19]. Individuals who have been previously exposed to such modes of learning are better positioned to possess the self-regulation skills necessary for success, including goal setting, management of time and autonomous problem-solving. These experiences promote confidence, reducing apprehension resulting from unaccustomed learning mode. Consequently, such learners tend to exhibit complex levels of determination and flexibility when they encounter learning difficulties [20]. With regard to teachers, prior learning experience is likely to come through professional development programmes, short courses, or previous academic programmes delivered in less structured formats. This accumulated knowledge usually shapes their career prospects and readiness for more challenging programmes [1]. Thus, readiness is not only a foundation but also a product of persistent learning experiences that strengthen motivation and resilience.

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2.3 Expectations of professional and career outcomes

Expectations regarding professional development and career prospects play an important role in motivating teachers to enroll into distance education programmes [7]. Majority of adult learners consider post-secondary education as their pathway to promotion, increase in salary and greater professional appreciation. Studies suggest that in situations where learners see a real connection between what they learn and concrete career benefits, they tend to sustain and remain dedicated to their studies [3]. In the teaching profession though, expectations are more than salary increments. Enhanced pedagogical skills and classroom efficacy do all also constitute part of professional and career expectations. These expected outcomes provide a sense of purpose that help learners to navigate the challenges of distance learning[19]. However, in situations where such expectations are unclear or note met, motivation may gradually diminish over time. Thus, linking educational programmes to professional realities becomes a significant factor in supporting learner engagement.

2.4 Intrinsic professional aspirations

Intrinsic professional aspirations have increasingly been recognized as a significant factor motivating adult learners' participation in learning. Adults decide to participate in higher education not because they seek for promotion, better jobs or increased pay but because of genuine ambition to grow professionally and strengthen their professional identity. Studies have indicated that majority of teachers participate in higher education because they value opportunity to widen their subject knowledge and improve their effectiveness in the classroom [21]. The role of intrinsic professional aspirations is evident in distance education where intrinsic persistence depends on learners' inner commitment to learning. Kilinc and Goksel (2024) [22] shows that intrinsic motivation plays an active role in sustaining learners' engagement and participation in ODL. This motivation accrues from the individual satisfaction linked to learning and professional mastery rather than from external rewards. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsically motivated learners are better positioned to exhibit continued engagement and persistence since their participation is influenced by genuine interest and personal development goals [11]. For teachers pursuing distance education programmes, intrinsic professional aspirations may therefore act as an important basis of motivation which promote both enrolment and perseverance.

2.5 Rationale for the study

The study took place at the Open University of Tanzania, Mbeya Regional Centre, which is a key distance education provider in the region. The basis for this study accrues from the increasing primary school teachers' participation in distance learning programmes despite the existence of alternative learning opportunities. Understanding the motive behind adult learners' decision to participate in higher education is vital since such knowledge offers insights into their learning needs, ambitions, and programme preferences. In Tanzania, adults can pursue higher education through different modes such as face-to-face, evening, online, blended and distance learning programmes provided by different higher learning institutions. Nevertheless, access to higher education among employed individuals remains a challenge due to adulthood multiple roles. Mbeya Region hosts several conventional universities and colleges that offer programmes similar to those provided through distance learning. However, a big number of primary school teachers continue to enroll in programmes offered through Open and Distance Learning (ODL), particularly at the Open University of Tanzania.

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This situation raises important questions regarding the factors that influence their preference for ODL over conventional modes of study. While institutional flexibility is often cited as an advantage of distance education, there is limited empirical evidence explaining the specific motivations that drive primary school teachers in the region to choose this mode of learning despite the presence of geographically accessible conventional institutions. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the dispositional factors that motivate primary school teachers to pursue higher education through Open and Distance Learning at the Open University of Tanzania, Mbeya Regional Centre. Through such investigation, the study sought to add to the body of knowledge insights that might help higher education institutions, policymakers and educational administrators in designing programmes and support systems that effectively suit the needs of working adult learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to investigate dispositional factors influencing primary school teachers' motivation to pursue higher education through distance learning mode. This section consists of several subsections namely research approach and design, sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis strategies**.**

3.1 Research approach and design

The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a rich and thorough understanding of primary school teachers' dispositional factors for their motive to participate in education via distance learning mode. The approach was selected because studies suggest that in order to get detailed information from the participants a qualitative approach is suitable [23], [24]. A case study design was considered appropriate for the researcher's intent of exploring personal experiences, perceptions, and meanings that could not be sufficiently obtained through the designs of quantitative research. The cases in this study are the Open University of Tanzania and the Mbeya regional centre of the Open University of Tanzania with students (working as primary school teachers), academic staff and the director of regional centre as unit of analysis.

3.2 Sampling techniques

The study involved 26 participants including students, academic staff of the regional centre and the Director of regional centre. The study used criterion purposive sampling technique to select the Director of regional centre. As suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark [25], criterion purposive sampling could give the researcher a chance to set criteria that would guide obtaining a sample from the target population. Convenience sampling technique was used to select two academic staff who were available at the regional centre during data collection. According to Etikan (2016) [26], convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling where participants are selected because they are easily accessible, available and willing to participate. A snowball sampling technique was used to select students. According to Cresswell and Creswell (2018) [27], a snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which existing study participants recruit or refer additional participants from their acquaintances. Since it could not be easy to identify students who were working as primary school teachers, the researcher could identify one participant who could refer him to other participants.

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Table 1: Sampling techniques used to select participants

Category	No of participants	Sampling technique used
Director of regional centre	1	Criterion purposive sampling
Academic staff	2	Convenience sampling
Students	23	Snowball sampling

3.3 Data collection methods

Data for the study were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). Based on the suggestion offered by Patton (2015) [28], the use of semi-structured interviews could provide a balance between systematic data collection and the flexibility needed to capture participants' experiences and meanings. The interview guides were designed to investigate key aspects of participants' experiences, including their motivations for pursuing their programmes through distance learning mode, their perceptions of the mode of delivery, their confidence in their capacities of managing learning tasks, and their expectations regarding professional outcomes. These guides made the participants express their views and opinions at liberty while ensuring that all appropriate themes were sufficiently captured. Before being subjected to use, the guides were validated by two experts in research on ODL. The Interviews were carried out at the regional centre and at the participants' residents. The interviews were conducted in a language that was conversant and easy for the participants and could last for up to 60 minutes. Each interview session was recorded and its data could later be transcribed to ensure accuracy and completeness. The process made the researcher depict both the content and the depth of participants' responses.

FGD was used to collect data from 8 participants who were found at the regional centre during the orientation session. Based on the suggestion offered by Kitzinger (1994) [29], the researcher used FGD in order to obtain insights that could not be obtained from individual interviews. Because these students had only a two days orientation session at the regional centre, FGD was convenient as interviewing all the 8 students could require extra number of days. The discussion was carried at the Computer Laboratory of the regional centre and involved a single group of all 8 participants. The researcher initiated the discussion and led the participants in discussing the questions posed to them while also responding to various questions asked by the participants. The discussion lasted for about 60 minutes.

3.4 Data analysis strategy

The data collected through both Interviews and FGD were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis was employed because based on the suggestion provided by Braun and Clarke(2006) [30] it was suitable for identifying patterns within qualitative data. The process started with a careful reading of the data transcripts to become familiar with the content and to develop an initial understanding of participants' viewpoints. This was followed by coding which was done inductively, letting themes emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed in advance. In this process, repeated ideas and patterns related to dispositional motivation were identified and organised into meaningful categories. These were then examined to see if there were any relationships among them upon which a coherent interpretation of the findings could be made.

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Moreover, the emerging themes were well-thought-out in light of the theoretical framework guiding the study, which helped to expand the analysis.

4. FINDINGS

From the analysis of the data, a set of interrelated dispositional factors that motivated primary school teachers to pursue higher education through the distance learning mode could be revealed. These factors highlight both inner psychological motive and perceptions of future benefits, showing the multifaceted nature of motivation amongst adult learners. Whereas each factor can be discussed separately, they were frequently expressed in combination, indicating that teachers' motivations are guided by numerous, overlapping influences. In most cases participants described their choices as being driven not only by their personal ambitions but also by their practical considerations related to their professional career. The findings thus highlight the importance of understanding motivation as a dynamic and complex phenomenon. Four key themes emerged from the analysis, each representing a significant aspect of teachers' dispositional motivation.

4.1 Attitude toward distance learning

Participants largely expressed positive attitude toward distance learning, especially with regards to its flexibility and accessibility. Majority of teachers cherished the opportunity to remain in their jobs while undertaking their studies, which gave them a chance to maintain their income and job responsibilities. The opportunity to learn at one's own learning pace also appeared to be big advantage, particularly for adult learners with multiple roles. For example, in response to the question "how do you feel being a distance learner?" one of the participants remarked

> "I feel good since I study and at the same time enjoying privileges at work that enables me to pay for fees. It is easy to study at home" (P11).

These positive perceptions drove their motive to participate and sustain in the programmes. Additionally, some of participants expressed change of their attitude over time as they became more exposed to the system. The exposure to distance learning built in them confidence and reduced uncertainties and misconceptions. This highlights that attitude is not static but can change with practice, for example another participant said

> "At first when I was joining the university I was worried. I thought I could not succeed studying while working, but as time goes, I am much confident that I will complete my studies" (P22)

This was further corroborated by what interview with the Director of the regional centre revealed regarding the community attitude toward distance learning programmes. The interview demonstrated that community attitude changed from time to time.

> "In the past people had negative attitude towards our programmes, rumors were it all that takes too long for distance learners to graduate and that the graduates of distance learning have weak qualifications compared to other graduates in normal universities, but we thank that the graduands are the real witnesses that the programmes are good. Through them more students are coming and get enrolled into our programmes" (P26)

4.2 Self-efficacy and belief in learning capability

Perceived competence in the participants' ability to engage in self-directed learning was another factor motivating teachers' participation in distance learning programmes. Those teachers who expressed strong learning autonomy demonstrated confidence in managing the stresses of distance

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learning, including balancing study time with job and family responsibilities. Such confidence seemed to reinforce their commitment and fortitude, even in situations where they experienced challenges. One participant was quoted saying

> "I chose to study through distance learning because of my personal ability, I assessed myself and found that I could study through distance learning"

This was response from the interview with P4 in response to the question "why did you choose to pursue higher education through distance mode and not conventional?". Teachers revealed the importance of self-discipline, time management attitude and personal determination in managing learning especially in ODL environment. In responding to the same question, another participant had this to say:

> "I chose to study through distance learning mode because I wanted to be autonomous learner" (P1).

Those who were confident in their abilities were in the position to stay focused and remain motivated throughout their study period. Findings from the focus group discussion also indicated that self-efficacy and belief in the participants' learning capability influenced teachers' choice over distance learning programmes. This excerpt exemplifies the finding:

> "It is not that we here because we have different qualifications compared to others. The entry requirements for the programmes are the same regardless of the university type, we are here because we can manage. Students from other universities congratulate us for being brave to pursue degrees through distance learning"

Interview with one of the academic staff who were interviewed regarding their confidence in their students indicated that the participants had enough learning capabilities which made them choose ODL.

> "We receive students of different capacities some of them are more qualified than those in conventional universities. By the way the entry qualifications are the same as regulated by the Tanzania Commission for Universities "(P24).

4.3 Expectations of professional and career outcomes

Anticipated future paybacks also appeared to be a strong motivating factor among participants. Majority of teachers considered higher education as an asset that could in turn lead to career development, salary increment and more job security, for example one participant would say:

> "I wanted to acquire more qualifications and reach higher leadership positions without leaving the current position" (P8).

This was a response to the question regarding participants expectations with the programmes they had enrolled into. On the other hand, they expected advances in their teaching process, including improved teaching strategies and classroom management practices. One of the participants was quoted saying,

> "I wanted to continue educating the entire community to recognize the importance of lifelong learning. To widen skills and competence" (P1).

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These expectations offered participants' sense of purpose and direction, helping them to persist and being in the position to navigate the challenges of distance learning.

4.4 Intrinsic professional aspirations

Professional and self-improvement motivations was among the most recurring themes from data. A majority of the participants expressed a strong inner desire to be more competent, skilled, and effective in their teaching career. They considered higher education not just as a way to attain external rewards, but as an opportunity to grow professionally and personally. For example, in responding to the question **"**why did you choose to pursue higher education through distance learning mode and not conventional?", one of the participants said

> "I want to move up in academic life up to PhD, to improve my service to the community" (P7).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that dispositional factors motivated primary school teachers' decisions to pursue higher education through the distance learning mode. Positive attitude toward distance learning appeared the most important motivating factor among others. Teachers' perception of ODL as a flexible and practical pathway for reaching higher education without quitting their job and family responsibilities played an active role in motivating their decisions. This finding corresponds to the findings in Semwenda et al. (2025) [14] which found that learners' positive attitude of distance education strengthens their readiness to enroll and persevere in ODL programmes. Adults' Positive attitude toward distance learning programmes helps them to view distance education as an opportunity rather than a challenge, hence strengthening their enthusiasm to participate. The positive attitude expressed by the participants were closely associated with their self-efficacy and belief in their learning capacity. Teachers who were confident that could successfully manage studying at their own pace, cope with learning environments and manage studies while undertaking other job and family responsibilities were more motivated to persist in their programmes.

This finding is in line with Naila et al. (2024) [16]which found that when learners have strong self-efficacy, they are more likely to encounter the complexities of studying on their own. Adult learners who consider themselves as capable are in the position to navigate challenges associated with ODL and stay committed to their learning goals. The findings confirm the Cross's Chain of Response Model, which highlights the importance of positive attitude in enhancing learners' participation in educational activities. Moreover, expectations of professional and career outcomes was another significant dispositional factor influencing primary school teachers' motivation to pursue ODL programmes. Teachers had the expectation that pursuing higher education was likely to enhance their teaching skills, increase their chances for promotion and boost their career prospects. Similar observation has been put forth by Abakah (2023) [21], who argue that anticipated personal and professional benefits serve as powerful motivators for adult learners. The expectation of tangible outcomes appeared to strengthen teachers' commitment to enrolling in ODL programmes, particularly when combined with confidence in their ability to succeed academically.

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Beyond expected career benefits, the findings demonstrated the role of intrinsic professional aspirations. Majority of the participants reported a sincere wish to improve their knowledge, job performance and professional identity. This ambition was at all linked to a sense of pride in their work and a commitment to offering the best learning experiences for their pupils. The participants indicated the ways in which the acquisition of new knowledge and skills improved their self-confidence and their ability to perform their roles proficiently. In most cases, this intrinsic motive continued even in absence of direct monetary or job-related incentives. Such aspirations highlights that participation was not influenced solely by extrinsic motivation but also by an internal vow to professional development. This finding concurs with the Self-Determination Theory, which stresses the importance of personal interests, growth needs and a sense of self-improvement in influencing learners' engagement in learning activities[11].

The intrinsic desire for professional development complemented expectations of career advancement, creating a stronger motivational foundation for participation in higher education. Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers' participation in distance higher education was influenced by an interconnected set of dispositional factors. Positive attitude toward ODL strengthened confidence in learning capability, while self-efficacy enhanced the likelihood that teachers would pursue the professional and career benefits they expected to gain. At the same time, intrinsic professional aspirations reinforced these motivations by providing a personal commitment to learning.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significance of dispositional factors in influencing primary school teachers' motivation to pursue higher education through distance mode. Positive attitude toward distance learning, participants' self-efficacy beliefs, professional and career expectations benefits, were fundamental motivators. For Open and Distance learning institutions, the findings highlight the importance of designing learner support systems that promote self-efficacy, foster professional relevance, and promote positive attitude towards distance learning. Policymakers and providers of teacher education should contemplate dispositional factors together with institutional conditions when developing strategies to enhance access and strengthen retention in higher ODL programmes. Future research may well build on these findings using mixed-methods designs to investigate how dispositional motivations develop in rapidly growing digitalized educational environments.

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