# INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT MOTIVATES ADULT LEARNERS IN ODL

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper presents a research aimed at studying adult learner's motivation in open and distance environment. The sample included one hundred forty-nine undergraduates enrolled in open and distance learning courses involving learners in their second and third year of study. The research instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire. Learners demographic variables included were age and gender. Motivation variables included were about tutor, course materials and support services. Findings indicated that all three motivation variables had positive effects on adult learner's motivation level.*

*Keywords:*    *open and distance learning, institutional factors, motivation, adult learners, tutor, course contents, support services*

## INTRODUCTION

Open and distance learning (ODL) had become a first choice of education path for most working adults in order to survive in the current workforce. Their initial or basic education obtained is not enough in meeting the increasing of demand in human workforce. More marketable employees are expected by employers and in order to survive employees need to enhance themselves with higher education. Therefore, more employees return to higher learning institutions to increase their knowledge and skill (Giancola, Grawitch & Borchert, 2009).

In local context, higher learning institutions had expanded their missions to provide higher education opportunities for adult learners. In accordance with this, ODL has become another path for higher learning institutions in reaching out students especially adult learners from all walks of life. In Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia pioneered distance learning in 1971 (Santhi & Rajesh, 2008). After 42 years, distance learning had expanded in Malaysia with more local public higher learning institutions had taken step in providing the same learning mode (Santhi & Rajesh, 2008).

Today, in Malaysia we have ODL for adult learners with establishment of private institutions namely Open University Malaysia (OUM), Wawasan Open University (WOU), Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) and Asia e-University (AeU). OUM expanded tremendously and by 2011 had more than 100,000 students while WOU with establishment in 2007 and expanded rapidly with more than 6,000 students (Chan, Latifah & Ramli, 2011). The growing number of learners indicates that ODL is well received by working adults in Malaysia.

Adult learners are mostly those who are currently working and continuing their higher studies on part time basis. Adult learners are also known as non-traditional students. Adult learners include employed, those who need new upgrading skills, those who need a change in their

career or those returning to learning environment after a long absence. These adult learners strive beyond traditional education through ODL to achieve their needs. In Malaysia, the number of adult learners furthering studies through ODL has grown significantly over the past few years (Tan, Pillay & Spencer, 2004). ODL offers learning by educators not physically present at the same place. Adult learners are on their own in terms of learning process in ODL. Therefore, adult learners need to be highly motivated while pursuing their higher education through ODL. It is believed that the high rates of participation in adult learning depends on motivation of adults learners in order to fulfill their needs (Abdul Razaq Ahmad et al., 2009). Adult learners may be motivated in different ways while pursuing their higher education including personal development, career development, family and institution.

Few studies had been conducted in Malaysian context regarding the relationship between institutional factors and adult learner's motivation level: for example, Lum (2014). Past research on Malaysian context shows that there is a need to explore motivation level among adult learners in order to reduce the barriers that may lead to retention among learners (Lai, 2012). Although ODL has its long history, it hasn't been an extensive research area (Zirkle, 2004). There seems to be lack of studies regarding adult learners (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2011; Lee & Vincent, 2013).  Thus, there is also a strong need to study beyond academic and achievement of adult learners (Dzakaria, 2004).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The paper reports on the issue of how far institutional factors motivate adult learners in ODL environment. The findings from this paper will provide a better understanding of adult learners' motivations in pursuing their learning in ODL environment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researches had been conducted involving motivations since motivations are vital especially in organizational research involving education. Many factors that drive adults in learning through distance learning have been identified through past research and one factor is through motivation (Bekele, 2010).  Various motivation factors exist depending on the theories proposed, but overall the factors could be divided into three categories: dispositional (intrinsic), situational (extrinsic) and institutional (intrinsic, extrinsic).  Present study concentrates on institutional factors which are related to elements reside within the learning institutions. It includes elements like tutor, course contents and student support services. This is because even though adult learners are motivated extrinsic and intrinsically, they might not motivated to learn without institutional factors. As mentioned by Tinto (1999), institutions should look into factors of attrition from the education setting itself including support and learning rather than students characters. Past research including by Chirume (2013) revealed that ODL students faces obstacles in their learning materials and support services. Research in local further supported that institutional factors contribute towards ODL learners attrition (Santhi, Mohd Ghazali & Loo, 2015).

Present study utilised three main theories namely: ARCM Model of Motivation, Androgogy Theory and Facilitation Theory. John Keller proposed a theory of motivation in 1979 and a model named as Keller's ARCS to design and incorporate motivation in instruction. ARCS motivational model theory describes a set of learning motivation principles. Motivation is viewed as highly unpredictable and changeable (Keller, 1987). The ARCS Model of Motivation was designed to explore ways of understanding what influences students motivation and solving problem with learning motivation (Keller, 1987). There are four conditions that help to motivate learners by helping them to overcome barriers and persist

towards achieving learner's goal: attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction. It helps a person from a novice to an expert by gaining skills and knowledge needed. Knowles (1984) theorized adult learning theory also known as Androgogy. An adult is prepared to gain knowledge or to learn when they experience a need to learn in order to gain skills or knowledge in coping with life task or problem (Knowles, 1984). Adult will learn only believing that learning could aid in solving real life problems. Adults are motivated by many internal factors but external factors are still needed to motivate them to learn. Adult learners as they grow older tend to become more self-directed and internally motivated to be involved in learning (Knowles, 2011). The Adult Learning Theory also becomes base for exploring institutional course design and services that will motivate adult learners to continue to participate in learning.

Carl Rogers shares Knowles's adult learning theories and developed Facilitation Theory. It is a humanist approach to learning. According to this theory a tutor or an educator is seen as a key role in learning process. Learning will occur whereby educator (tutor) acting as a facilitator creates an environment where learners are comfortable and not threatened by external threats (Laird, 1985). Facilitator should be aware of his/ her students and communicate with them. A facilitator should also be open to new ideas, listen to students and encourage students to take responsibility for their learning.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample Group

The present study was conducted in higher learning institutions offering open and distance learning in Penang. Since the study is on institutional elements that motivate adult learners, higher learning institutions in Penang will targeted as the study population. This study used quantitative method. This paper reports the impact of institutional elements on motivation level among adult learners at two higher learning institutions in Penang. The selected population are all adult learners, who are senior students pursuing their degree or master programs at the related learning institutions. The study adopted non-probability convenient sample as its sampling design. The reason for selecting this method is due to unavailability of sampling frame of all adult learners in the higher learning institutes in Penang. Altogether 240 adult learners were selected randomly from two higher learning institutes in Penang. The target respondents for this study are adult learners ranging from undergraduate and postgraduates. The respondents aged above 25 years are selected since they represent the adult learner's category.

### Research Instrument/Questionnaire

This study utilized a quantitative survey method since survey is useful and powerful in providing answers to research questions through data collection and later data analyses (Sekaran, 2003). The survey questionnaire was designed to determine and explore the institutional factors that influence motivation among respondents. The survey used consists of past suggested and valid measurement on motivation level of respondents. Present study is a deductive and exploratory study whereby there were no new theories discovered. However, existing theories related to motivations that affected by institutional factors were examined in this present study. A questionnaire was designed and adapted from Keller (2008) and Green and Chandrika (2006) with appropriate modification to suit local research study. The factors identified in Green and Chandrika study were transformed into statements to which students will respond. Additional factors were gleamed from literature review that focuses on institutional elements.

## Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to respondents via e-mail. Respondents were given 2 weeks to return to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed and received completed questionnaires within five weeks from March to April. A cover letter was attached to explain the background and objective for the study and ensuring the information of respondent's is confidential and anonymity of respondents. A total of 240 questionnaires were distributed via e-mail and 152 questionnaires were received. Following data collection, the data set was cleaned eliminating 3 empty cases and only 149(N=149) questionnaires were analysed. The total valid respondent rate was 62 %.
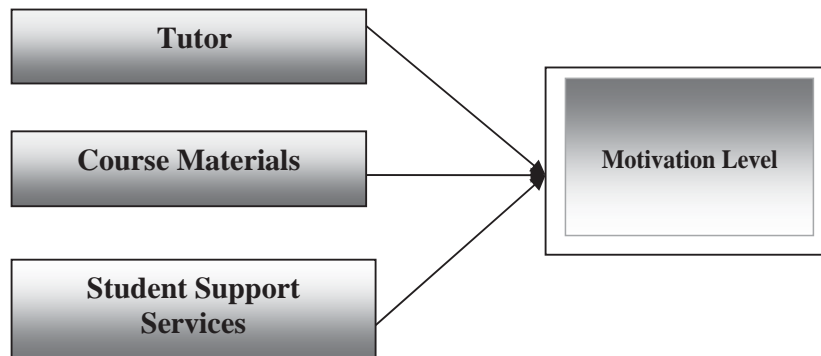


Figure 1: Research Framework of adult learners motivation

## RESULTS

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data of sample indicates that the female respondents (63.1 %) out-numbered the male (36.9 %). There were 94 females in this study. Apart from that, the age of respondents were divided into three groups. Most of the respondents belong to young age group that is 25-34 years old (49.7%). Meanwhile 42.3% of respondents are 35- 44 years old. Only 8.1 % respondents aged above 45 years old.

Almost 87.3% of respondents strongly agree and agree that tutor/course coordinator always encourage them to think critically. Almost 86.6% of respondents strongly agree and agree that tutor/course coordinator do give positive feedback on their request or questions which gives them confidence. 87.3% of respondents strongly agree and agree that tutor/course coordinator do give them opportunity to participate in online discussions.  63.8% respondents agree and 18.8% strongly agree that the tutor/course coordinator has interaction with the students. Almost 81.2% of respondents strongly agree and agree that tutor/ course coordinators share their own experience with them during discussions. Almost 79.2 % of respondents strongly agree and agree that the tutor/ course coordinators are approachable.

Almost 84.5% of respondents agree and strongly agree that the course materials provided are crucial for their examinations. Meanwhile, 77.8% of the respondents respond that course materials are well organized. 71.8% respondents strongly agree and agree that the course materials in e-course are easy to understand and relevant. 88% respondents strongly agree and agree that the course materials are interesting. 76.5% of respondents strongly agree and agree that course materials presented online was attractive and arouse interest.

Almost 78.5% agree and strongly agree that student orientation help them to prepare for their distance learning environment. Furthermore, 86.6% agree and 1.3% strongly agrees that they get timely and adequate support from administrative support services. Majority strongly agree and agree (89.6%) that student service personnel give adequate information related to their studies. 85.9% respondents disagree and strongly disagree that they receive enough information on study skills and time management of distance learning from their university.

The feedback of adult learners on their motivation level while pursuing their study in higher learning institutions. From the table below, we could conclude that 86.5% of respondents are motivated and 13.4% are not highly motivated. The standard deviation is high since the motivation varies from very low to very high among respondents. The mean of motivation level is high (3.79) among respondents.  Overall, this indicates that the motivation levels among respondents are high.

Table 1: Motivation level

| Items | Percentage of Respondents | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Very low | 6.0 | | |
| 2) Low | 7.4 | | |
| 3) Moderate | 0 | 3.79 | 0.925 |
| 4) High | 75.8 | | |
| 5) Very high | 10.7 | | |

## Hypotheses Testing

### Hypotheses 1(H1): Tutor has positive significant affect on adult learner's motivation level

Hypotheses 1 proposed that tutor has positive significant impact on adult learner's motivation level to learn. Regression analysis was performed to test the relationship. Beta coefficient valued at 0.51 signifies a close relationship between the two variables. Similarly to correlation coefficient, beta coefficient shows positive sign which means that tutor positively has positive impact on motivation level of respondents. The t- value of more than 2 indicates higher statistical significance. In this case the t-value is higher than 2 (t=7.23). The value of R=0.51 denoted an average relationship between the two variables. $R^2$ value of 0.26 which means that 26.3% variations of the motivation level could be explained by this model. This indicates that the model is significantly adequate for the populations

ANOVA analysis performed on the variables and showed that the F Statistic (F=52.35) was significant at p=0.000. This further explains that this regression model was a significant model in predicting motivation. Thus, we could say that there is a significant linear relationship exists between the two variables. Overall, Hypotheses 1 was statistically proven since the t- value, F statistic, Beta coefficient and R values were significant. Therefore, tutor has significant positive impact on motivation level of adult learners. This result is in consistent with Lum (2014), Santhi et al. (2015) and Sogunro, O.A (2015) where quality of instructor is the pulling factors for adult learners to participate in ODL learning.

### Hypotheses 2(H2): Course Material has positive significant affect on adult learner's motivation level

Beta coefficient at 0.31 signifies an average relationship between the two variables and it shows positive sign which means that course materials positively has impact on motivation level of respondents. The-value is 3.947(more than 2) indicates higher statistical significance. The value of R=0.31 indicates moderate strength between the variables. $R^2$

value of 0.096 indicates low adequacy of the model. This means that only 9.6% variations in motivation can be explained by the model.

ANOVA analysis between the two variables showed that F Statistic (F=15.58) was significant at p=0.000. This further explains that this regression model was a significant model in predicting motivation. In this regards, there is a relationship exist between course material and motivation. Therefore, Hypotheses 2 was supported since t value and F Statistic were statistically proven significant. This result is in consistent with Santhi et al. (2015) but in contrast with research by Lum (2014) that course materials has no significant impact on adult learners motivation.

### Hypotheses 3(H3): Student Support Services has positive significant affect on adult learner's motivation level

The value of R=0.32 indicates a moderate relationship between the two variables. It shows that student support services gives positive impact on adult learner's motivation level. The t-value is 4.15 (more than 2) indicates higher statistical significance. $R^2$ value of 0.11 indicates low adequacy of the model. It means that 11% of variations of motivations are explained by this model. The ANOVA analysis shows that F Statistic (F=17.20) is significant at p=0.000. This further explains that this regression model was a significant model in predicting motivation. Therefore, significant relationship exists between student support services and motivation level among the respondents. Thus, Hypotheses 3 was supported as t-value and F Statistic were statistically proven significant. Student support services have significant positive impact on adult learner's motivation level. This result is in consistent with Santhi et al. (2015) but in contrast with research by Lum (2014) that support services has no significant impact on adult learners motivation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The present research had shed some light on theoretical implications and also practical implications.

### Theoretical Implications

In essence, this study has supplemented the literature on combination of several theoretical perspective i.e. motivation and institutional factors. The current research is meant to fill the gap by looking at the scarcity of research that facilitates the investigation between motivation and institutional factors in Malaysian context. Indeed, the present study offers additional support to the past studies. It has provided some insight on the interaction between motivation level and institutional factors. Additionally, the present study has contributed by examining the hypotheses concerning the influence of institutional factors on adult learner's motivation level.

### Practical Implications

The present study also provides some practical implications especially on education providers, instructional designers and tutors (instructors). Even though the findings cannot be generalized, the findings serve as a valuable guideline for education providers, tutors and instructional designers in Malaysia.

High motivation level among learners will push adult learners towards success in their academic performance. The main mission of higher learning institutions is in meeting the needs of students from all walks of life especially adult learners. ODL programmes are delivered through advanced technology for adult learners pursuing their education

regardless of time, geography and career obstacles. Therefore, motivation plays a very crucial part in boosting their interest and energy in understanding course materials, accessing learning portal, be part of the learning institution and finally graduate.

Higher learning institutions need to understand and learn adult learners' characteristics and their motivational orientations. The effectiveness of ODL programme depends on responsiveness of institutions towards learner's needs and expectations. In addition, education providers' consistently need to gather feedback from their students (customers) and review them to improve their services. Higher learning institutions could provide various student support services including, new students orientation, learning advising and workshops on ICT skills so that adult learners could fit into the ODL environment  easily.

Next, tutor (instructors) need to have an understanding that adult learner's is unique and different from young learners. According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) instructors that neglect adult learning principles will demotivate learner in their learning process.  Therefore, adult learner's motivation level need to be increased which will aid in improving adult learner's learning process and further their achievement. Motivation is vital for adult learners especially when there is lack of face-to-face contact with their instructors. Tutors should encourage them to participate actively in tutorials or online discussions and providing motivational strategies in teaching. They need to form frequent interactions and give timely feedback to learners. Since the results of present study reveal that tutor play important role in motivating adult learners, by recognizing and addressing tutor's role that stimulates motivation, tutors could provide far more for their students.

Lastly, instructional designers need to understand adult learner's characteristics and provide course materials that suit them. Adult learners usually are eager to apply what they learn in classroom to their real life situations.  The course materials should relate to their working experience. The course contents should be able to capture learner's attention and enhance motivation. Therefore, during development of course materials careful consideration should be given especially the structure in order to reduce the gap between the tutor and learner (Saba, 2000).


# LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Despite the significant findings and contributions of present study on relationship between institutional factors and motivation level, there are few perspective limitations. The data was garnered from only two higher learning institutions in Penang due to limited time frame. Hence, this will limit the generalization of findings of whole Malaysia as a whole. Perhaps, a bigger sample size with diverse population could give even more distinctive results. Lastly, e-mail questionnaire could be a potential constraint as respondents are reserved when answering to a written survey. Constant follow up is required. There are chances of respondents who rush to complete the questionnaire, leading to insincere answers.


# SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While conducting this study, it became evident that few aspects should be considered as important areas. First, research could be replicated by using bigger sample size. Larger data sample may yield a different result. In order to produce a critical statistical outcome, future research could consider collecting data from more higher learning institutions based on convenience sampling. This may give different perceptions on institutional motivating factors.

Next, instead of limiting to institutional factors that motivate adult learner in learning, research could also explore motivating factors among adult learners in entering higher learning institutions. Study could look into the factors that pull adult learners towards participation in ODL.

Lastly, future research could be done in form of qualitative studies which might give depth research of what are the motivating factors that pull students towards ODL learning. Qualitative method using interviews might explore variable including culture that may or not be salient in learning motivation.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to shed more light on the institutional motivating factors among adult learners. The results from this study indicated that tutor, course materials and student support services have influence on adult learner's motivation level at higher learning institutions. Most adult learners were satisfied with their tutors, courses materials and support services provided by their higher learning institutions as they are motivating for them. This study supports that institutional factors could be motivating factors for adult learners in their learning process. The success of providing ODL to adult learners depends on the ability of education providers in providing services that meet adult learner's needs. As the open and distance educations are gradually changing and more learning opportunities are offered by higher learning institutions especially in Malaysia , it is vital that education providers to pay more attentions on meeting the needs of learners. Since the primary role of ODL is to democratize education, higher learning institutions should decrease the attrition rate among adult learners. As such, higher learning institutions should continue to consider the three main institutional factors in developing a better and improved education services for adult learners to meet the changing needs of adult learners.

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