The Role of Entrepreneurial Mindset and Institutional Factors in Enhancing Learner Retention in ODeL: A Critical Literature Review

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Abstract

Open Distance and E-Learning (ODeL) programs provide opportunities for higher education for different people who may otherwise never have access to traditional educational institutions. Access to education, breaking down geographical barriers, and a diverse learner's needs. However, despite their potential to democratize education, ODeL programs face persistent challenges related to learner retention. Understanding and addressing these challenges is paramount for both educational institutions and learners. This article explores the critical intersection of entrepreneurial mindset and institutional support in enhancing learner retention within Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL) environments. It proposes a framework that integrates entrepreneurial principles such as adaptability, resilience, and proactive problem-solving into established retention strategies employed by educational institutions. By examining existing literature, the article highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by ODEL learners and emphasizes the importance of fostering both individual learner attributes and institutional practices. Key strategies for implementation include robust support systems, effective course design, technology integration, and financial assistance. The findings suggest that merging entrepreneurial mindset with institutional support will empower learners to take ownership of their educational pursuits which in no small way will create an engaging environment, enhance learner outcomes, and promote institutional sustainability in ODEL.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Mindset, Institutional Support, Learners Dropout, Learners Intervention, Learners Retention, ODeL.

Introduction

Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL) programs have revolutionized access to higher education, providing opportunities for individuals who may be excluded from traditional university systems due to financial, social, or geographical constraints [13]. These programs have democratized education, supporting lifelong learning and enabling a diverse range of learners, including working professionals, to pursue higher education. The growth of ODEL has been notable, with enrollment rates increasing steadily, reaching 5.6% in 2016 [23]. In Nigeria, ODEL institutions have expanded significantly, particularly post-pandemic, with 15 universities offering ODEL programs by 2021, and the National Universities Commission now listing 20 such institutions [1].

Despite the importance of ODEL programs, low retention is a major issue. Retention rates lag significantly, posing challenges for both institutions and learners. When retention rates decrease, it translates into financial losses and threatens the sustainability of the programs. Conversely, learners face unfulfilled aspirations and missed opportunities as they struggle to complete their education and meet academic or career goals. In traditional settings, dropout rates in ODEL are notably

higher. Reports show a 10-20% lower completion rate in online classes, with undergraduate graduation rates around 56%. This widespread retention problem underscores the need for holistic solutions to support both learners and institutions.

Key factors influencing retention in ODEL programs are diverse, with institutional support playing a critical role. Other factors such as institutional innovations, technological support, tutoring, and course alignment provide dynamic frameworks for learners. Isolation is reduced when learners have a well-designed learning environment with active instructor facilitation. When communication is clearer and students feel part of a community, retention improves. A well-structured course design enhances motivation and fosters an engaging learning experience. Institutional support is crucial for course completion, as recognized by administrators, students, and faculty. When an innovative institutional design addresses disengagement and dropout, it can significantly improve retention rates in ODEL programs.

The learner's mindset also plays a crucial role in influencing retention, particularly in ODEL programs [16]. By fostering entrepreneurial mindset traits such as innovation, adaptability, risk-taking, and problem-solving, learners can navigate challenges more effectively, stay motivated, and take ownership of their learning journey [12]. Entrepreneurial mindset traits—cognitive, behavioral, and emotional—equip individuals to better navigate opportunities and challenges in education. This mindset combines cognitive and metacognitive processes, distinguishing entrepreneurs through unique approaches. Metacognition—awareness of one's cognitive processes—further improves decision-making. By honing these skills, learners can more effectively navigate their educational journeys, overcome obstacles, stay engaged, and complete their studies, thereby improving retention rates.

A significant research gap exists in exploring the entrepreneurial mindset within ODEL environments. While entrepreneurial traits provide tremendous benefits to ODEL programs, little scholarly empirical research has examined this benefit comprehensively. Existing strategies have not been tailored to address the unique challenges faced by ODEL learners, leaving their effectiveness largely untested. Additionally, high dropout rates in ODEL programs are influenced by various factors, including personal, educational, and structural issues, which further complicate learner engagement [4, 34]. The challenge in applying the concept of the entrepreneurial mindset is that it has yet to be rigorously tested. This lack of empirical examination signifies a significant research gap that warrants thorough investigation.

This study aims to address the critical gap in Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL) programs, where many students fail to complete their studies. This not only deprives learners of valuable credentials but also creates challenges for institutions, resulting in financial losses and diminished impact. Furthermore, the study intends to explore how entrepreneurial mindset principles and institutional interventions can enhance learner retention and success in ODEL. By doing so, it will provide valuable insights into effective strategies for improving retention rates and program completion.

Literature Review

Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL)

Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) programs are educational approaches providing flexibility in terms of time and location for learners. It gives opportunities for learners that fall short of the normal, traditional, university admission due to financial, social conditions and the like. These programs have undeniably democratized education, breaking down financial barriers and providing flexible options for those

constrained by social limitations or geographical constraints [19]. Online learning attracts students with specific expectations, but many find their assumptions like time efficiency and minimal disruption—contradicted by reality, leading to dropouts influenced by various economic, intellectual, social, and organized factors.

ODL programmes are well accepted even among workers in the desire to get better qualifications. These programmes are well accepted because of ICT growth and the support services that the distance learners provide along with students interacting with one another. The growth in ICT develops to something better than the early correspondence courses era. According to [2] there is a high demand for ODL which comes about by the drives of people working and wanting to get better qualifications and skills. One can hence anticipate good return on investment that is associated with ODL to be an advantage. For example, a woman that is able to juggle between pressing family commitments, work, and the pursuit of learning through ODL Consequently, ODL would have contributed to the increased participation of women in higher education globally.

There is significant growth in Online Distance Learning Education which has consistently increased each year: 3.4% in 2013, 3.3% in 2014, 3.9% in 2015, and peaked at 5.6% in 2016. [12]. In Nigeria, Distance learning universities had also grown especially after the pandemic. Research has shown [11] the popularity of distance learning extends to both youth and adults. More than 7.3 million students were registered in distance education courses at institutions that confer degrees. This number saw a substantial rise in 2020, attributed to the pandemic, and the trend continues to experience growth. By 2021, Nigeria had a total of 15 universities offering ODL, out of which 11 were federal, two were run by state governments, and the other two

were private [1] and at the time of writing this thesis, NUC had a total of 20 ODL on their list.

Retention Challenges in ODEL

Despite the appeal and benefits of online learning, there has been a persistent issue of inadequate retention. It was revealed [23] that dropout rates in online learning settings surpass those in traditional learning environments. It also reveals [23] that dropout rate has increased and that ODL programmes continue to experience low student retention and high dropout rates, which range from 10 to 20 percent. It has been established that between 40 to 80 percent of students enrolled in ODL programmes are likely to withdraw before they complete their courses. In Kenya, it was established that students taking Bachelor of Education-related programmes in Open distance education mode account for 15% of the overall student dropouts.

All over Africa, the dropout rates are estimated to be over 50 percent and that includes the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where ODL is considered by high dropout rates. In Kenya, there is a high hope of using ODL to increase education access, especially in higher learning. Its Universities Act of 2012 recognizes ODL and e-learning modes of delivery [24] and in 2019, there is a call for ICT integration in education at all levels. The government of Kenya has put in efforts to address access through MoE, key policy documents, Kenya's Vision 2030, blueprints, strategic plans and curricula that support the use of ICT in teaching and learning activities at all levels of education. Nevertheless, challenges still remain in the ODL programmes in Kenya because of the retention rates.

Retention rates are a significant concern for colleges and universities worldwide. Distance learning programs will face high attrition rates and lower retention compared to traditional classroom settings. ODL learners often

struggle to meet task deadlines and maintain consistent progress on assignments, which is a greater challenge than for students in face-to-face. Research has shown that traditional students have a 82% possibility of completing their programs, and the face-to-face learners a 90% completion rate for similar programs These disparities become more pronounced when considering vulnerable students, such as those requiring additional teaching and first-time students.

Retention in Open Distance Learning (ODL) programs has emerged as a pressing issue within the educational landscape, revealing stark contrasts in completion rates between different modes of instruction. At the Open University in the United Kingdom (OUUK), for instance, 85% of face-to-face learners successfully complete their programs, while only 74% of ODL students achieve similar outcomes. This discrepancy is reflected in broader trends, with dropout rates in Europe and North America are estimated to fall between 20% and 30%, and even higher in Asia, where attrition can soar to 50%. Such data not only illustrates the significant challenges ODL learners face in maintaining their educational trajectories but also underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to mitigate these attrition rates effectively.

The concept of dropout is multifaceted, with literature offering a range of definitions and terminologies to describe it. Dropout was broadly [34] define as the failure of a student to enroll in a consecutive number of semesters. The decision to drop out can be influenced by numerous factors. According to [4], one effective approach to comprehending the reasons behind student dropouts is to directly inquire with the students themselves. They note that the literature contains various studies aimed at uncovering the motivations for learner dropouts. This phenomenon, being multidimensional, can be attributed to diverse factors impacting students' decisions to discontinue their studies.

Online learning may present a novel platform for learners; their selection of this mode is guided by a diverse set of criteria and assumptions. However, these assumptions can sometimes serve as identifiable root causes for learner dropouts too. Many such assumptions, like anticipating a program to be time-efficient, straightforward, or non-disruptive to one's lifestyle, have, in fact, turned out to be profound reasons for attrition.

Emphasizes was made [4] that interaction levels and the alignment of qualifications with student expectations are important factors in dropout decisions. Additionally, instructor qualifications can influence withdrawal rates [4, 34]. Socio-economic status is a key factor in university dropout rates worldwide. Financial challenges, identified as a primary cause of withdrawal were also the biggest hurdle in East Africa and accounted for 70% of dropouts in South Africa. Reports show a positive link between financial aid and university completion.

Entrepreneurial Mindset

There are varied definitions of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) identified in recent research [17]. The diverse perspectives have led to inconsistent definitions and confusion regarding its nature and application. Reports highlights the challenge of a lack of consistent definition for the entrepreneurial mindset (EM), which has led to fragmented literature dispersed across various disciplines. Overarching themes was [6] Identified and defined as a means by which an individual generates value. The entrepreneurial mindset is a distinct manner of thinking [8] that sets entrepreneurs apart.

The entrepreneurial mindset's exploration [16] was delved into and it indication is that it will aids students in accessing entrepreneurship education courses, facilitates the development of teaching methods to

disseminate entrepreneurial awareness, and fosters the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Nonetheless, it encompasses more than just this.

This review advances the literature by addressing the varied definitions of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) identified in recent research [17]. While scholars have examined various facets of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) and offered insights into its attributes and functions, the diverse perspectives have led to inconsistent definitions and confusion regarding its nature and application.

The entrepreneurial mindset is a distinct manner of thinking [8] that sets entrepreneurs apart. According to Studies, it is a means by which an individual generates value. [8], however, cites what he terms the "most cited definition of the entrepreneurial mindset", which defines it as "The ability to rapidly sense, act, and mobilize, even under uncertain conditions." [18] Delved into the entrepreneurial mindset's exploration and indicated that it aids students in accessing entrepreneurship education courses, facilitates the development of teaching methods to disseminate entrepreneurial awareness, and fosters the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Nonetheless, it encompasses more than just this [18]. Describing the entrepreneurial mindset as a concept that is progressively emerging in the field of entrepreneurship and assumes a significant role. They further point out that the field of entrepreneurship doesn't fit a singular definition, and from a perspective standpoint, there isn't an absolute and universally best way to define an entrepreneur and their roles. Despite this, there is a universal attraction to entrepreneurship, both in practice and study [7] even state that the quest to comprehend the elements behind entrepreneurial success has gained considerable momentum.

The entrepreneurial mindset embodies qualities such as ingenuity, flexibility, risk-

taking, and a proactive stance toward resolving challenges. It's a mindset accessible to anyone willing to rely solely on their capabilities for financial security and to recognize that opportunities emerge only by generating value for others in advance [18]. By having the capacity to shape one's own prospects, fear finds no place. Strive to achieve desired outcomes. As accomplishments accumulate and self-assurance flourishes, continue to pursue this mindset!

In their study titled "Enhancing Students' Entrepreneurial Mindset, [20] advocated a shift from traditional, discipline-oriented business education to a flexible, opportunity-centric approach using pedagogical techniques and content that encourages students' entrepreneurial orientation. This process commences with the identification of an opportunity, which is then creatively developed, and, if successful, culminates in exploitation. In this context, "entrepreneurial" bears a comprehensive implication, referring to the broad processes that enable individuals and organizations to harness economic openings [20].

Presently, a strong emphasis is placed on cultivating entrepreneurship by underscoring the significance of mindsets and skills. These factors empower individuals to not merely spot but also effectively harness entrepreneurial possibilities. The recognition that numerous of these mindsets, forms of knowledge, and skills can be cultivated through learning firmly positions educational institutions and training programs within the wider discourse on entrepreneurship promotion. The theme of this thesis revolves around learners' entrepreneurial orientation, which is opportunity-oriented. By infusing ODeL (Open and Distance Learning) programs with these attributes, learners can develop a sense of ownership over their education, paralleling how entrepreneurs take charge of their ventures.

Ref. [12] Identify three interconnected aspects of the entrepreneurial mindset—

cognitive, behavioral, and emotional highlighting how these elements integrate to influence an individual's approach to opportunities, challenges, and motivation in entrepreneurial activities. This dimension plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals think and act. The behavioral aspect, or the actions entrepreneurs take, impacts both their cognitive processes and emotions, demonstrating that behavior can alter perceptions and mental models. Additionally, emotions directly affect cognition and behavior, contributing to a reciprocal cycle within the entrepreneurial mindset Disruptions in any of these aspects—whether through a lack of action, stifled emotions, or negative cognitive patterns—can impede entrepreneurial effectiveness. Conversely, a well-integrated mindset that harmonizes cognition, behavior, and emotion enhances entrepreneurial capabilities over time.

The entrepreneurial mindset, encompassing cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects, demands careful management to prevent any dimension from being compromised. To sustain and enhance this mindset, individuals must either internally regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions or externally mitigate constraints that may impact these aspects. For learners, applying this integrated approach can address challenges and improve retention by cultivating a balanced and resilient mindset, crucial for successfully completing their programs.

Cognitive Aspect

Entrepreneurial mindset (EM) is [12] define the as a cognitive framework which allows people to develop value by recognizing and making use of opportunities, decisions with limited information, and adapting in uncertain conditions. This review adopts his [12] classification of EM into cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects, focusing on how this integrated approach can be applied to students. It explores how understanding and applying these aspects can address student challenges, particularly enhancing retention and program completion, by employing a cohesive strategy that supports students in navigating their educational journeys.

In entrepreneurship research, scholars have increasingly focused on the cognitive processes that influence entrepreneurial activities. Early studies examined individual trait, but recent research has emphasized cognitive processes, highlighting their importance in understanding entrepreneurship. Overall, research indicates that entrepreneurs think differently from other business individuals, with a focus on how they plan and execute strategies. Understanding these cognitive differences helps in analyzing entrepreneurial actions and behaviors.

Cognition is the faculties that help one process ideas, solve problems, memorize and is present mentally in a setting. It is derived from the Latin cognoscere, meaning "to know. In social cognition theory, cognition is seen as knowledge structures or mental models that aid effectiveness in various situations. Cognitive psychology concepts are increasingly applied to entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurial cognition refers to the mental frameworks entrepreneurs use for assessing opportunities, making decisions, and creating ventures. One of its outcomes is to develop new products and allocate resources. This includes the concept of cognitive adaptability, which is the ability to adjust thinking in response to dynamic environments.

Within the framework of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM), the cognitive aspect encompasses self-efficacy, metacognition, and innovation. It emphasizes an individual's confidence in their abilities, their awareness and management of cognitive processes, and their capacity to conceive and implement novel solutions, all of which are crucial for effective entrepreneurial performance and problem-solving.

Metacognition involves higher-order cognitive processes such as planning how to approach a task. For example, when preparing for a venture capitalist meeting, an entrepreneur must first strategize how to frame the task—this process is metacognitive. Metacognition, or "thinking about thinking," involves an individual's awareness and control over their own cognitive processes and decision-making strategies. This awareness allows individuals to assess and adjust their thinking strategies, which is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Limited metacognitive ability can restrict one's capacity to understand and evaluate their own thought processes, impacting their entrepreneurial mindset and effectiveness. The entrepreneurial mindset blends cognitive and metacognitive processes, setting entrepreneurs apart with their unique thinking patterns and strategic methods emphasize that metacognition, which involves higher-order cognitive awareness and control, greatly influences the cognitive heuristics used in decision-making. For learners, robust metacognitive skills are crucial, as they enhance goal setting, strategic planning, and adaptive approaches through self-assessment. This proactive and strategic mindset mirrors that of entrepreneurs, fostering adaptability and ongoing improvement. By honing these skills, learners can more effectively navigate their educational journeys, resulting in higher retention rates and greater academic success, even in challenging contexts.

Innovation is often perceived as originating from specific external environments, such as tech hubs like Silicon Valley, or from internal organizational cultures that foster creativity. However, it is argued on behalf of innovation as the mindset that can express ideas which actions fuels creativity [19]. For students, cultivating an innovative mindset is crucial for overcoming challenges and completing programs, as it enables them to devise creative solutions and persist through difficulties.

Self-efficacy, the individual confidence of its ability is a key component of the cognitive aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset. Individuals with this mindset tend to have a great impact on how they set goals and fight through difficulties. It shapes their motivation and resilience, impacting their overall effectiveness and success in various endeavors. This concept revolves around confidence in one's skills and capabilities, influenced by experiences, knowledge, and a positive outlook on challenges [3]. It reflects how well a person perceives their capacity to handle various situations and persist through difficulties.

Four psychological processes [3] identified underpinning self-efficacy: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective. Cognitive processes involve assessing one's abilities, while motivational aspects drive engagement and effort. Affective processes shape emotional responses to challenges, and selective processes guide decision-making based on perceived capabilities. Self-efficacy not only enhances motivation and performance but also mitigates anxiety by fostering confidence in navigating potential threats [3]. In the realm of entrepreneurship, self-efficacy is crucial as it empowers individuals to acquire and effectively utilize resources, driving the entrepreneurial mindset [35].

Building on the previous discussion, the cognitive aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) is crucial for addressing student retention and success. Self-efficacy, or confidence in one's abilities, boosts motivation and performance by enhancing persistence through challenges. Metacognition, involving awareness and regulation of one's cognitive processes, aids in strategic problem-solving and task management. Innovation, the capacity to generate and apply novel ideas, drives creativity and adaptability. Together, these cognitive elements enable students to effectively navigate academic obstacles, fostering resilience and improving retention

rates. By strengthening self-efficacy, honing metacognitive skills, and encouraging innovation, students can better manage their educational experiences and achieve their academic goals.

Emotional Aspect

Entrepreneurs often grapple with internal emotions like surprise, anticipation, and stress, which impact their business management and relationships [5].

Research indicates that uncertainty is a major emotional driver, and teams of friends often have better collaboration due to pre-existing emotional bonds [15]. Academically, studies reveal that emotion regulation can have varied effects on venture survival [7], dispositional affect influences performance [9], and emerging role demands affect judgment [14] additionally, the entrepreneurial drive has a "dark side," with risk, stress, and ego potentially leading to destructive behavior.

Also, Goal orientation is often considered an emotional aspect because it involves the emotional drive and motivation behind pursuing goals. It reflects an individual's emotional commitment to achieving objectives and overcoming challenges, influencing their persistence and resilience. Emotions such as ambition, determination, and frustration play a key role in sustaining effort and focus towards goal attainment.

Behavioral Aspect

Entrepreneurial component behavioral mindset emphasizes the importance of action in transforming cognitive and motivational elements into tangible outcomes. Research indicates that entrepreneurial success relies on identifying opportunities through prior knowledge and then actively engaging in venture creation. This process is dynamic and socially situated, involving interactions with various actors and responding to diverse events.

Theories Sarasvathy's effectuation theories illustrate how cognitive processes and motivations lead to entrepreneurial actions. Alvarez and Barney's creation theory further supports that opportunities are generated through entrepreneurial actions rather than merely discovered. This focus on action reflects the behavioral aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset, which is essential for students to effectively complete their programs and apply their entrepreneurial skills in real-world contexts.

Risk-taking is a behavioral trait because it involves decision-making under uncertainty. It reflects how individuals engage with opportunities by evaluating risks and rewards. While emotions like fear influence risk-taking, the act itself is driven by cognitive assessments and practical decisions, aligning with the behavioral aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset.

General risk-taking refers to actions with unpredictable results, while academic risk-taking involves students undertaking challenging tasks with potential for failure to gain learning and mastery.

Risk propensity varies with personality traits, such as openness and extraversion, and is not defined by a specific set of actions [10]. Academic risk-taking, akin to entrepreneurial risk-taking, involves undertaking tasks with potential for failure to gain learning experiences and develop skills, characterized by a preference for challenging tasks. Entrepreneurs face distinct types of risk: financial, career, family, and psychic, each impacting their personal and professional lives differently. This understanding of risk is crucial for students developing an entrepreneurial mindset, as it highlights the importance of managing uncertainties and challenges while pursuing innovative ventures and completing academic programs.

Proactivity refers to an individual's tendency to take initiative and anticipate future challenges or opportunities, particularly in

situations where formal support is limited or inaccessible being proactive enables people to develop vital technical and soft skills that impact on performance. When learners are proactive, they develop a mindset that is crucial for overcoming obstacles and completing programs effectively, as it fosters self-reliance and initiative.

Persistence and resilience are core components of the entrepreneurial mindset and it leads to success and creates opportunities and value that is essential. However, they also note that this persistence can sometimes lead to an escalation of commitment, where the entrepreneur becomes so focused on the initial course of action that they may neglect contingency planning or fail to adjust their strategy if the original decision proves suboptimal. This highlights the delicate balance required in entrepreneurial persistence remaining resilient while staying adaptable to changing circumstances.

Institutional Factors

Numerous factors influence retention in Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODEL) environments. These factors span institutional policies, course design, and availability of support services, the learning environment, and the integration of technology. Each plays a critical role in shaping student engagement and persistence. Institutional policies can determine the level of academic support and resources available, while well-structured course designs enhance learner motivation and satisfaction. The learning environment, whether physical or virtual, impacts student focus and productivity. Finally, effective technological integration is vital in facilitating seamless learning experiences, all of which collectively influence retention in ODEL programs.

Institutional support plays a crucial role in ensuring learners complete their program The services offered by learners support could range from emotional support to registration assistance, conflict resolution, online course registration assistance. Learner's support is rated as one of the top three important factors, while students see it as the fifth, acknowledging its importance, especially when absent. It has been acknowledged that learners assisted academically by the support unit perform better than those who did not employ learners support in similar circumstances and studies have shown that outreach and resource-sharing interventions reduce attrition rates.

Support Services

Learner support comprises the support required for learners to progress from one level of education to another, particularly in the context of feeling isolated. In Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) programs, support services are crucial for promoting student retention and success. These services typically include technical support, academic advising, access to digital learning resources, and personalized assistance tailored to the unique needs of distance learners. Given the challenges that ODeL learners often encounter such as self-directed study, isolation, and technical difficulties, effective support systems are essential. They provide timely guidance and resources, helping to mitigate these issues and fostering a more supportive learning environment.

However, the ODEL programmes to be impactful especially through support services is of great interest. Such support from online orientation, training, emotional support, registration and curriculum as well as teaching support will Impact the learners. The implementation of curriculum through the use of learners support services will enhance teaching and learning among students. Sought to investigate the implementation of curriculum through using student support services to enhance teaching and learning among students. Findings reveal that student support services were available but were not

accessed by most students. The study reveals numerous student support-related challenges including poor handling of the application and registration process, delays in delivery and receiving of study material and the absence of an effective assignment feedback administration system.

This study [25] focused on the role technical support has on retention in Open Distance Learning (ODL) programs. The findings indicate that capacity building for lecturers is essential to enhance the effectiveness of technical support services. Among the key variables—library support, mentoring support, and administrative support— administrative support showed the strongest impact on retention, and library support demonstrating the weakest. Since ODL programs rely heavily on technology, the use of ICT, good network, and support to function optimally thus can influence retention [27].

Learning Environment

A learning environment is the physical, virtual, and psychological space where learning occurs. It includes the settings, resources, relationships, and cultural contexts that shape the educational experience. Effective learning environments foster engagement, collaboration, and intellectual growth. Several factors constitute a learning environment, particularly in online education. Online courses often rely on traditional strategies, which can result in less effective support compared to that available to on-campus students. A significant factor is the lack of understanding of online students' unique needs, leading to insufficient technological support.

Key factors impacting the online learning environment include active instructor facilitation, which is essential for promoting social interaction among students. Unlike traditional settings where visuals and sounds can play a role, ODeL means to communicate

cues can throw up some challenges. The absence of these cues can create feelings of isolation and inadequate peer support, contributing to isolation that negatively affects retention.

A low sense of belonging and limited social interaction can further result in disengagement and an increased likelihood of dropping out [29]. Additionally, students may feel intimidated by more active peers, reducing their participation and sense of belonging. Collectively, these factors shape the effectiveness of the learning environment, influencing student engagement, retention, and overall success in online education.

Course Design

Another significant factor is course design. Course design [33] itself plays a crucial role in influencing retention. Design-based factors, impact retentions irrespective of the factors-course structure, interactivity, and flexibility, the main research question addressed is how design-related elements affect retention.

Course design and organization are key factors in student retention and the learning environment. Well-structured courses, with clear instructions, logical layout, and interactive materials, promote cognitive engagement and student satisfaction, which are critical for reducing withdrawal rates. Effective course design, including scaffolding and clear labeling, enhances motivation by making learning elements more attractive and relevant. Students value instructional guidance and well-organized course elements, which contribute to a positive learning experience and support retention.

Merging Entrepreneurial Mindset and Institutional Retention Strategies

To enhance retention in Open Distance Education and Learning (ODEL), institutions should implement strategies focused on improving the educational experience and student outcomes. This improvement will be

most effective when coupled with the merger of Entrepreneurial Mindset principles, fostering adaptability and resilience among learners, with various institutional support characteristics. By integrating these elements, educational institutions will be avenues that result in improved retention rates and better educational outcomes.

The entrepreneurial mindset (EM) has been explored across various disciplines, [12], although most studies are concentrated in Europe, particularly in Nordic countries [30] and the United States. Countries in the underdeveloped world are underrepresented. Most EM studies focus on higher education, primarily undergraduate programs, with fewer addressing postgraduate education or younger/adult learners [36, 30].

Institutional support plays a vital role in enhancing learner retention in Open Distance Education and Learning (ODEL). Key approaches include robust support systems that provide academic and emotional assistance through mentorship, peer networks, and counseling. Effective course design—emphasizing modular learning, personalized paths, and active methods—can boost engagement. Technology integration is also crucial; learning management systems (LMS) enhance communication, while gamification and data analytics identify at-risk students for targeted support. Additionally, offering financial aid, academic support services, and career counseling further strengthens student retention and institutional effectiveness.

Summary and Conclusion

The article addresses the critical issue of low learner retention in Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODEL) programs by proposing a framework that includes mindset factors, institutional support, and learner characteristics. Each of these dimensions significantly influences retention rates. Entrepreneurial mindset—such as adaptability, resilience, proactive problem-solving and

established institutional retention strategies addresses the diverse challenges faced by ODEL learners. This approach empowers students to take ownership of their educational journeys while encouraging institutions to create supportive environments that effectively respond to learners' needs. Ultimately, it bridges the gap between individual attributes and institutional practices, promoting improved retention rates and fostering a more engaged and successful student population in ODEL contexts.

Entrepreneurial mindset is especially relevant as students navigate self-directed learning with less guidance than in traditional education settings. Additionally, the growth mindset, which encourages resilience and perseverance in the face of challenges, is key to maintaining motivation and overcoming obstacles such as isolation and the perceived difficulty of remote learning. Together, these mindset traits enable learners to approach their education proactively and with greater independence, thus improving retention.

Institutions play a pivotal role in providing the necessary infrastructure, support services, and pedagogical frameworks to ensure learner retention in ODEL environments. A well-designed learning environment, characterized by strong student support, clear communication, and an engaging curriculum, significantly enhances student success. For instance, flexible course structures, responsive learning management systems (LMS), and personalized student services reduce the sense of isolation and encourage a sense of community among learners. Institutions that are proactive in offering these services, while fostering instructor presence and peer interaction, create a more supportive environment that can mitigate many of the challenges ODEL learners face, thus enhancing retention.

The diverse characteristics of ODEL learners also play a crucial role in retention. ODEL typically attracts a varied learner

demographic, including adult learners, part-time students, and professionals who balance work and family responsibilities. The article suggests those learners' intrinsic qualities, such as self-discipline, motivation, prior experience, and digital literacy, significantly affect their ability to succeed in ODEL programs. Highly motivated learners, those with good self-regulation skills, and those who are digitally literate are more likely to succeed, while learners lacking these skills face greater challenges in completing their studies. Institutions need to recognize these diverse learner characteristics and tailor interventions to meet their specific needs, such as offering self-regulation training or providing more personalized learning pathways.

This study contributes to improving retention through entrepreneurial and growth mindset, institutional support systems, and recognizing the unique characteristics of ODEL learners. These findings suggest those developing learners' self-directed capabilities, such as innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving, can empower them to navigate challenges in ODEL environments. Moreover, enhancing institutional support—through better communication, flexible learning structures, and proactive student services—can reduce feelings of isolation and create a more engaging learning experience. Acknowledging diverse learner characteristics, such as self-discipline and digital literacy, ensures that retention strategies are tailored to address specific challenges faced by ODEL students.

Future research in these areas could contribute to the development of more robust, evidence-based retention strategies in Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL). By focusing on these critical aspects:

1. Future research could explore how mindset interventions (entrepreneurial and growth mindsets) can be systematically integrated into ODEL programs and their specific impact on different learner demographics.

2. Investigating the most effective institutional practices for improving retention, particularly in diverse ODEL contexts with varying technological and resource constraints.
3. Research could focus on the development of personalized learning pathways that cater to the specific needs of adult, part-time, and professional learners to enhance their engagement and completion rates.
4. Further studies on how emerging technologies, like AI and data analytics can provide timely, personalized support needs to be pursued.

In conclusion, this article asserts that a unified approach that integrates the principles of Entrepreneurial Mindset with diverse institutional support characteristics is crucial for enhancing retention in Open, Distance, and E-Learning (ODEL). By merging these elements, educational institutions will have grounds to come up with activities leading to improved retention rates and better educational outcomes. Each factor contributes uniquely to the learning experience, and when they are integrated, they create a more resilient and adaptive educational ecosystem. Mindset interventions can empower learners to overcome the challenges of distance education, institutional support can provide the scaffolding necessary for success, and recognizing and addressing the specific characteristics of ODEL learners ensures that interventions are targeted and effective. By addressing all three dimensions, ODEL programs can improve retention rates, leading to better educational outcomes for learners and increased sustainability for institutions.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no financial or personal conflict in this research. However, the author has professional experience in an institution that encountered the issues discussed in the study. Additionally, the institutions where the

author conducted these research shares similarities with the studied context. These factors have been acknowledged, and every effort has been made to ensure objectivity and academic integrity in the analysis and conclusions.

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