Contextual Challenges and Adaptive Strategies of ODL Learners at the Institute of Adult Education, Tanzania

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Abstract

In recent years, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a popular alternative mode of learning in higher learning institutions. Learners prefer the mode due to its flexible nature, which allows them to study while attending to their other socio-economic responsibilities. Its nature, however, leads to unique challenges that require learners to engage in various strategies to cope with the learning mode in their contexts. This study explores the experience of third-year learners pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Adult Education and Community Development through ODL at the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) in Tanzania. It investigates the contextual challenges learners face and the strategies they employ to cope with them. A mixed research approach was adopted using a questionnaire and interview methods to collect data from 36 learners. The study found several challenges, including financial constraints, limited time for classroom facilitation, insufficient study time, family responsibilities, inaccessibility to the IAE online library, and difficulties in attending face-to-face sessions. To cope with the emerging challenges, learners adopted various contextual strategies, including borrowing money for face-to-face sessions, using group discussions during these sessions, hiring tuition facilitators, conducting online group discussions, utilising Google resources, and departing home early in the morning to avoid heavy traffic on their way to the IAE face-to-face centre. The study suggests enhancing institutional support, improving digital literacy, and establishing upcountry face-to-face centres to foster a more flexible learning environment.

Introduction

In recent years, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a popular alternative mode of learning at higher learning institutions. Literature shows that students prefer ODL mode due to its flexible nature that allows them to study while attending their other socio-economic responsibilities (Amir et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2020; Muthuprasad et al., 2021). Practically, the traditional mode of learning requires learners to physically attend learning sessions in a classroom for the whole period of learning since facilitation, learning and assessment processes are conducted in a face-to-face environment. On the other hand, with the ODL mode, facilitation and learning processes are conducted not in a confined environment, hence, do not require learners and facilitators to convene sessions in physical classrooms.

In Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, and Ukraine, for instance, though there is still a need for traditional classes, students keep showing interest in ODL mode of learning (Fidalgo et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2020). A study by Muthuprasad et al. (2021) indicates that in India, students opted for the same mode of learning during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as it offered a flexible, conducive, and attractive learning environment. Also, other studies in Malaysia indicate that the use of ODL by various higher learning institutions has increased in recent years (Khairuddin et al., 2020; Mathew & Chung, 2020) and seemingly, traditional institutions like in Jordan, India and Turkey are gradually transforming themselves to dual mode due to the increasing demand and preference in ODL mode of learning (Almahasees et al., 2021; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Dhawan, 2020).

Likewise, in Malaysia, for instance, learners prefer learning through ODL and keep up with it as their best choice regardless of its associated challenges (Ag-Ahmad, 2020; Saidi et al., 2021). Elsewhere, such as at Florida State in America, learners prefer studying through a study-away programme, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Williams & Gaines, 2023). The trend is similar to several parts of the world, as experienced in Turkey, Korea and the United Kingdom (Gaba & Koo, 2007; Kadirhan & Sat, 2024; Kilinc et al., 2020).

In Africa, the situation is similar to the rest of the world. A study conducted by Tadesse and Muluye (2020) in Ethiopia indicates that distance learning remains a preferred mode of learning, especially after COVID-19. Furthermore, Anna &

Joshua (2023) report that many traditional higher learning institutions in South Africa are adopting ODL mode to address the increasing local and global needs. Similarly, in Tanzania, traditional higher learning institutions are shifting to a dual mode in addressing the existing demand of prospective students who prefer to study away from campuses (Bisanda, 2022; Mtebe et al., 2021).

In today's world of innovative technology, ODL has even become an easier mode of learning. Technology has made it more flexible, interactive and attractive to learners. It has transformed the mode into various levels, including online learning, e-learning, virtual learning, and currently, Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL). Such transformations and other factors like political instability, economic crisis and pandemics influenced the use of ODL mode in various parts of the world (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

In response to the growing demand and preference for ODL, IAE, a dual-mode higher learning institution in Tanzania, introduced its first Bachelor's Degree programme in Adult Education and Community Development in 2021/2022, offered through open and distance learning (BAECD–ODL programme). As such, learners of the first batch of the programme are currently in their third year of study. In this programme, self-instructional materials are designed and shared with learners via a learning management system for learners to access the study materials at their own time. The IAE also shares learning and assessment guidelines for learners to study and adhere to the requirements effectively. Currently, classroom facilitation is conducted at times of face-to-face sessions, conducted quarterly in a year, for a period of two weeks per session. It is during this time that assessments, such as tests, examinations, and assignments, are administered to learners. Based on the nature of the programme, learners are expected to engage in self-studying prior to the face-to-face sessions. The face-to-face sessions are therefore meant for classroom facilitation, famously referred to as module facilitation. The sessions are also meant for enhancing learner support services, interaction amongst learners and learner-facilitator interaction.

Learning through ODL mode presents unique challenges, as it requires learners to engage in independent learning and maintain high levels of self-discipline due to its flexible nature that allows learning at one's own pace as opposed to conventional classroom learning (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Some of the known challenges include: unreliable internet services, inaccessibility to ICT facilities, family responsibilities interference, digital illiteracy, inaccessibility to learning materials, quality assessment and feedback mechanism, an unconducive learning environment and fewer support services (see Segbenya & Aning, 2023). The challenges are often

found to cause dropouts at the early stages of studying, as learners struggle to cope with them (Appavoo et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2023; Manase, 2025). Reports from IAE show that, despite the existing known challenges, the first batch of BAECD–ODL learners successfully continued their studies from the first year to the third year. According to IAE (2023), the institute enrolled 43 learners of the first batch in the 2021/2022 academic year. Of the enrolled learners, forty (40) are now in their third year, the final year of study (IAE, 2024), connoting a 93% retention rate, which is very promising compared to that of its conventional counterpart programme of BAECD that stands at 35%. The enrolment of BAECD's conventional programme was 242 students in the 2021/2022 academic year (IAE, 2023). Currently, the batch has 85 students in their third year, the final year of study (IAE, 2024). In other words, it was expected that the ODL programme would have an alarming dropout rate, but the statistics depict a different outcome. Thus, based on the scenario registered among students of the ongoing programme, the current study explores experiences of the third-year BAECD–ODL learners in pursuing their studies with particular focus on challenges and adaptive strategies. Specifically, the study addresses two research questions: first, what are the contextual challenges facing the BAECD-ODL learners at IAE, and second, what adaptive strategies are adopted by the learners to cope with these challenges. Findings from the study will eventually help other learners studying in the same mode at IAE and other institutions in the country to adopt the best practices for effective learning and success. Also, the experiences drawn by the learners will help IAE and other Higher Learning Institutions operating in a similar context to make evidence-based decisions in improving their current and future programmes.

Methodology

This study employed a case study design, involving the third-year learners undertaking the BAECD programme through ODL mode at the IAE in the 2023/2024 academic year. It used a mixed research approach, applying questionnaire and interview methods to collect data from study participants. The researcher used the two as complementary methods to ensure the reliability of the data.

Consequently, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire composed of open and closed-ended questions in a Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and unsure. Also, the researcher developed an interview guide to capture in-depth information from participants. To enhance the reliability of data, the researcher conducted cognitive interviews while administering the

questionnaires to assess participants' understanding and improve response accuracy. Prior to the data collection process, the researcher engaged experienced colleagues to review the prepared interview guide and questionnaire. The peer review of the data collection tools was meant for expert validation to ensure the instruments' validity and reliability.

Given the small number of third-year learners, the researcher administered questionnaires to all BAECD-ODL learners. The learners had attended a face-to-face session conducted at IAE Headquarters; thus, the researcher had a chance to meet with them in a classroom and brief them about the purpose of the current study. Luckily, all learners (36 out of 40), available at the time, agreed to participate in the study voluntarily and responded to the questionnaires. After pre-analysis of the questionnaire responses, the researcher conducted online interviews to reach the respondents, as they had already completed the face-to-face session and gone back home. In minimising bias, the researcher reached out to the class representative, who selected a class member as the first respondent. The rest of the respondents were reached through the snowball sampling technique. Upon saturation of data, four respondents had been interviewed. For anonymity reasons, the researcher used pseudonyms of Kudu, Mawiri, Kamba, and Ipfuna to represent the learners interviewed.

The researcher manually analysed the quantitative data by tallying each response from the raw data and computed percentages to facilitate easier interpretation and understanding for targeted readers. Subsequently, the researcher presented the analysed data in a table as per the Likert scale used. For qualitative data, the researcher transcribed interviews to ease analysis and interpretation. Consequently, the researcher used thematic analysis to reveal response patterns and themes obtained from the raw data. Also, direct quotes from the interviews were extracted and presented in the findings.

Findings

Findings of the current study are presented in three sections addressing the contextual challenges faced by the BAECD-ODL learners and adaptive strategies undertaken to overcome the challenges. The researcher presents the quantitative data in Tables and the qualitative data in quotes and paraphrased statements.

Contextual challenges facing BAECD-ODL learners at IAE

Aiming at ensuring better understanding, findings are presented in three categories: first, challenges experienced during the face-to-face facilitation process, second,

challenges experienced during the learners' learning process, and third, challenges experienced in accessing the IAE online library services.

Challenges experienced during the face-to-face facilitation process

The first research question focused on what contextual challenges the BAECD-ODL learners experienced when pursuing their studies with IAE. Table 1 presents challenges learners experienced during the face-to-face facilitation process. It highlights challenges of financial constraints, permit denial from employers, road traffic, and inadequate time for classroom facilitation.

Table 1: Challenges Experienced in Times of Face-to-face   **N = 36**

Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	US
Financial constraints in attending face-to-face sessions	33%	42%	17%	8%	0%
Employers' permit denial to learner employees attending face-to-face sessions	25%	42%	25%	3%	5%
Heavy traffic from home to IAE affects my class attendance during face-to-face sessions	31%	33%	19%	17%	0%
Inadequate time for classroom facilitation during face-to-face sessions	40%	25%	13%	22%	0%

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, US = Unsure

Findings in Table 1 indicate that a lack of financial resources to attend face-to-face sessions at IAE in Dar es Salaam City is a significant challenge facing the BAECD-ODL learners. As such, 75% (33% + 42%) agree that the challenge faces learners, while 25% (17% + 8%) disagree. These findings were also revealed through interviews and confirmed by the interviewed learners. One of them, known as Kudu, had the following to say:

During face-to-face sessions, some of us had to travel from various parts of the country to attend the sessions in Dar es Salaam city. As a result, we had to secure accommodation in the city where we would stay for four weeks of the face-to-face session. In addition, we had to board buses and sometimes hire motorcycle taxis daily to attend face-to-face sessions at IAE, which is a costly expense.

Kudu narrated the above, trying to show the magnitude of the financial constraint challenges facing them when attending face-to-face sessions. Adding to his narrative, Kudu said that the challenges not only affected their participation in face-to-face sessions but also threatened their studies as a whole. This was evident as

some learners had difficulties in settling their tuition fee dues, hence they were barred from sitting examinations conducted at the time.

Another learner, "Kamba", said that learners face financial constraints because they attend the sessions from distant upcountry regions. They spend the whole day travelling to the IAE campus in Dar es Salaam. The findings suggest that it is evident that with the existing costs associated with attending the face-to-face sessions, learners experienced difficult moments. It also connotes that although learners prepare themselves for the costs associated with their studies, the city environment subjects them to unexpected challenges.

Learners also pointed out inadequate time for classroom facilitation during face-to-face sessions as another major challenge facing them. A significant percentage, 65% (40 + 25) of respondents, as indicated in Table 1, indicated the time factor as a challenge. The findings suggest that the allocated time for face-to-face sessions is insufficient, thereby impacting learners' learning process. Furthermore, findings from Table 1 indicate that 67% (25 + 42) of respondents attended sessions without their employers' permission, and an additional 64% (31 + 33) encountered difficulties attending face-to-face sessions due to heavy traffic in Dar es Salaam city. While the former shows learners' strong commitment to self-professional development, the latter portrays the obstacles faced in accomplishing their dreams. Adding to the findings, one of the interviewed learners had the following to say.

Usually, face-to-face sessions are conducted at IAE in Dar es Salaam Campus during school holidays, as most of us, BAECD-ODL learners, are teachers working in schools. Due to the nature of our study programme, we usually arrange to arrive at the campus a few days before the sessions begin for individual preparations such as discussions, finalising assignments, printing, self-study, etc. To make this possible, one typically makes an informal arrangement at work to get permission to leave the office a week or more before the holidays. However, some of us fail to get permission due to responsibilities tied to the school calendar (Mawiri).

The quote highlights the complexity involved in studying through ODL while working, especially in schools, as most of the BAECD-ODL learners are professional teachers. The situation becomes a challenge that needs self-motivation and discipline to ensure success. As such, the findings show that at some point, some learners fail to cope and drop out.

Challenges experienced during the learning process

Table 2 presents the challenges learners experienced in learning from home or in face-to-face sessions. It categorically presents difficulties learners face in terms of time to study, family responsibilities, family support, and experience in ODL.

Table 2: Challenges experienced during the learning process   N = 36

Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	US
There is not enough time to study	53%	28%	8%	5%	6%
Family responsibilities interfere with learning	47%	36%	8%	3%	6%
I lack support from my family members.	19%	19%	28%	34%	0%
I have no experience in learning through the ODL mode	17%	17%	28%	30%	8%

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, US = Unsure

As in Table 2, findings indicate that the majority, 81%, either strongly agree or agree that they do not have enough time to study. This suggests that time management and external commitments are significant obstacles to their learning process. Only a small percentage, 13% disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting that for a few, time is not a significant issue. A minority (6%) are unsure about the time they have for studying. Consequently, a vast majority 83% strongly agree or agree that family responsibilities interfere with their learning, highlighting that balancing family duties and educational pursuits is a significant challenge for most respondents. Only 11% disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting that for a minority, family responsibilities are not a significant issue. When reacting to the issue of time constraint and family interference, one of the learners, "Kamba", said the following:

As primary school teachers, we lack time to study during work hours, especially in rural areas where we teach 30 periods of 40 minutes each week. This averages six periods per day, plus lesson preparation, marking, and administrative tasks. This workload makes it impossible to study at work. Additionally, after work, family responsibilities leave us too exhausted to study.

For the challenges related to a lack of support from family members and a lack of experience in learning through ODL, the responses indicate that these are not significant issues for most respondents. On average, around 60% feel that they have family support and some experience with ODL. However, 34% strongly agree or agree that they lack experience in ODL, and 28% strongly agree or agree that they

lack family support. While these challenges are less prevalent compared to others, they are still significant and noteworthy.

Challenges experienced in accessing the IAE online library services

Table 3 presents the challenges associated with accessing the IAE online library services, as reported by study participants. The data illustrate various difficulties faced by learners, including issues of accessibility, skills, and awareness.

Table 3: Challenges in accessing the IAE online library services   **N = 36**

Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	US
Inaccessibility of the IAE online library services	33%	20%	11%	11%	25%
Accessible, but I have no skills to access it	16%	25%	17%	25%	17%
Learners have limited access to the library	19%	31%	11%	8%	31%
The online library services are not known to learners	22%	33%	22%	3%	20%

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, US = Unsure

Findings in Table 3 show that a significant portion of respondents (53%) strongly agree or agree that the IAE online library services are not accessible. This suggests that over half of the learners encounter difficulties in accessing the library services. Additionally, 22% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that a smaller group does not share this inaccessibility issue. A notable 25% are unsure, reflecting some uncertainty or lack of awareness about the accessibility of the online library. Nonetheless, findings from the table show that 41% strongly agree or agree that they lack the necessary skills, an equal percentage (42%) disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that about half of the respondents feel competent in accessing the library. The remaining 17% are unsure, which may highlight a gap in skill assessment or training.

Table 3 also shows that half of the respondents (50%) strongly agree or agree that learner access to the online library is limited, pointing to potential barriers that restrict usage. Conversely, 19% disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting a smaller proportion finds the access satisfactory. The 31% who do not know indicates a significant level of uncertainty or lack of information among learners about their access rights or capabilities.

A considerable number of respondents (55%) strongly agree or agree that the online library services are not well-known among learners, indicating less awareness. Meanwhile, 25% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that a quarter of the learners are aware of the services. The remaining 20% are unsure, which again

entails a lack of awareness among learners. Responding to the online library issue, learners said they had never heard of the IAE online library services. One of the learners said, "…it is my first time I hear about the library, we were never told before" (Mawiri). Similarly, another learner, "Kudu", said they always use the module provided by IAE and search for information on the Internet using the Google search engine. This indicates that learners are not aware of the IAE online library services, which are primarily intended for their use.

Adaptive Strategies Adopted by BAECD-ODL Learners to Cope with Challenges

The second research question focused on what adaptive strategies were adopted by the BAECD-ODL learners to cope with the challenges experienced. It sought to explore contextual adaptive strategies by the learners. Table 4 presents data on the contextual adaptive strategies adopted by the BAECD–ODL learners to navigate various challenges experienced when studying with IAE. The data reflects the learners' narrative voices on a range of strategies, starting from financial solutions to study habits.

Table 4: Contextual adaptive strategies adopted by learners to overcome ODL challenges N = 36

Means	SA	A	D	SD	US
I borrow money for my transport during face-to-face sessions	23%	32%	17%	28%	0%
I decided to keep on attending the face-to-face sessions, though without permission from my employer	22%	39%	28%	11%	0%
During face-to-face sessions, I depart from home early in the morning to avoid heavy traffic	33%	56%	8%	3%	0%
During face-to-face sessions, I hire transport to arrive early at IAE	36%	30%	15%	19%	0%
We hire tuition facilitators	30%	29%	17%	17%	7%
I study hard using the learning modules provided	56%	40%	0%	0%	4%
We study in groups at our places	28%	35%	17%	15%	5%
I frequently ask for downloaded materials from friends	22%	37%	22%	14%	5%
We study in groups during face-to-face sessions	42%	47%	6%	5%	0%
I Google to access learning content	44%	39%	3%	6%	8%

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, US = Unsure

Findings as in Table 4 indicate that a slight majority (55%) agree technically (strongly agree and agree) that they borrow money for transport to attend face-to-face sessions, indicating a significant reliance on external financial support. However, the strategy is not universal among all learners since 45% do not practice it. Also, the findings show that the majority (61%) strongly agree or agree that they attend face-to-face sessions without their employer's permission, highlighting a significant commitment to their education despite potential job-related risks. Again, this is not a common strategy among all learners since 39% do not practice the same. Additionally, a large majority (89%) of the learners depart from home early in the morning to avoid heavy traffic on their way to face-to-face venues at IAE. The findings reflect strong commitment and determination among learners. Other learners (66%) indicated that they hire transport to arrive early at IAE, showing a willingness to incur additional costs for punctuality. However, 34% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that this method is not feasible for everyone. When interviewed about the strategies, one learner had this to say:

> During face-to-face sessions, especially during examinations, we work very early, sometimes at 4:00 or 5:00 am, depending on one's location, to ensure punctuality. The strategy helps avoid other costs, such as hiring motorcycle taxis in case of traffic jams, since roads in Dar es Salaam are clear during early mornings (Kamba).

The findings from Table 4 also show that a vast majority (96%) cope with challenges facing them by studying hard using the IAE learning modules provided to them. The findings signify the level of maturity and commitment among learners. Consequently, the majority (59%) hire tuition facilitators to help them with their learning modules, which again signals the level of commitment. The interviews indicate that learners find the hiring of facilitators helpful, as most of them do not have time to study while away from campus. Hence, they end up having a lot to study in a short period during face-to-face sessions. Additionally, one of the learners said:

> Most of us, if not all, are primary school teachers who use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in our schools. Also, we miss a strong English language background. Hence, we hire facilitators to help us understand the topics since they are in English (Kite).

Nonetheless, findings indicate that the majority (63%) study in groups at their home or workplaces, signifying the strength of collaborative learning in mitigating ODL challenges. Again, a significant majority (89%) strongly agree or agree that they study in groups during face-to-face sessions, showing emphasis on collaborative learning not only while away from campus but also on campus. Adding to the

findings, an interviewed learner, "Ipfuna", said they usually organise a call conference and convene online to discuss particular topics. According to Ipfuna, "learners conduct discussions during evenings after work, housework and other family responsibilities…it can take one to two hours on average".

Moreover, findings from Table 4 show that the majority (59%) strongly agree or agree that they frequently ask friends for downloaded materials, highlighting a reliance on peer support for resources. However, a large majority (83%) strongly agree or agree that they use Google to access learning content. The findings collectively signal a reliance on an alternative solution to address the challenge of lacking access to IAE library services. It also shows that there are learners who rely on both downloaded materials from friends and their access to Google. Adding to the findings, one of the learners, Mawiri, said, "I always Google when in need of additional information on the modules…some of us use Google to find meanings and translations of difficult words".

Discussion

The findings suggest that managing time and balancing family responsibilities are the primary challenges facing the ODL learners at IAE. This aligns with Ag-Ahmad (2020), who suggests that some ODL learners fail to cope due to family responsibilities interfering with their studies. While a majority of learners are comfortable with the ODL mode and receive support from their families, there remains a significant portion that do not. The lack of experience with ODL can hinder learners' ability to navigate the unique demands of the learning mode (Khairuddin et al., 2020), which requires a different set of skills and self-discipline compared to traditional classroom learning mode. This is because students, particularly in Tanzania, are accustomed to the traditional mode of learning, characterised by physical interaction between students and teachers throughout the learning process. Hence, fitting into the ODL mode requires adaptive strategies to cope.

Moreover, insufficient family support exacerbates challenges faced by learners, as emotional and logistical support from family members is crucial in managing the demands of both study and personal responsibilities (Zhu et al., 2022). The geographical diversity of learners, many of whom attend face-to-face sessions from upcountry areas, exacerbates financial challenges since learners have to bear the additional burden of transport and accommodation costs (Ag-Ahmad, 2020). ODL is intended to provide flexible and accessible learning opportunities. With ODL, students are not expected to struggle to access learning. Thus, accessible and

affordable solutions like decentralised support centres and accessible digital resources are necessary in supporting learners from upcountry areas.

Nonetheless, as indicated in the findings, inaccessibility and lack of awareness are the primary challenges in using the IAE online library services. Learners struggle to access the library and lack the skills to use it effectively. Additionally, many learners are either unaware of the services or find their access to be limited. The findings tally with those of Mubofu and Andrew (2021), who recommend increasing resource and service accessibility to learners to address the issues. Nevertheless, to enhance effective use of the online library resources, deliberate efforts like orientations, user training, effective communication, and learner support services are inevitable (Segbenya & Aning, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings highlight a diverse range of adaptive strategies employed by learners to manage their learning and face-to-face session challenges. Strategies like departing from home in early mornings to avoid traffic, using motorcycle taxis, and studying diligently using provided materials are widely adopted. The findings align with those of Rotas & Cahapay (2020), who identified similar adaptive strategies among learners, including borrowing learning materials, peer support, and effective time management. Moreover, findings indicated that collaborative learning through group studies, both at home and during face-to-face sessions, is prevalent. Such a learning initiative underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in learning through ODL. However, the initiative requires self-determination and collaboration skills in using technology, particularly because, in ODL, learners are physically separated except during the face-to-face sessions.

Findings also indicate that adaptive strategies such as borrowing money for transport and hiring tuition facilitators are applied, while the use of online resources like Google is almost universally applied by all learners--findings that are also supported by Segbenya and Aning (2023). According to Sebgenya and Aning, ODL learners utilise online resources for self-learning and discussions, which in turn leads to active learning and success. However, the practice could be limited where Internet services are inaccessible or unreliable, as seen in the case of ODL learners at IAE (see also Mariki, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study shows that learners studying through ODL at IAE can successfully study by adopting various strategies to cope with the challenges they face during learning and face-to-face facilitation processes. However, the study findings suggest a critical need for a more flexible and sufficient scheduling of face-

to-face sessions, and greater institutional and employer support to enhance the learning experience and success of ODL learners at the institute. Addressing the suggestions will be essential in alleviating or minimising the challenges faced by learners and promoting a more conducive learning environment. Additionally, fostering a supportive community that encourages collaborative learning and providing resources to improve learners' digital literacy and access to online tools will further empower them to succeed in their educational pursuits. Also, awareness creation, training and communication are necessary measures to ensure access to IAE online library services, reduce dependence on tuition facilitators and improve learning. While BAECD-ODL learners demonstrate commendable resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming the challenges they face, there is a clear need for targeted support and improvements in the programme's infrastructure to facilitate their educational journey better. As such, establishing face-to-face centres upcountry could alleviate several challenges facing the learners and ensure the sustainability of ODL programmes at IAE.

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