

## PSYCHOSOCIAL TUTOR INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE LONELINESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A Hadian Pratama Hamzah<sup>1</sup>, Zamroni<sup>2</sup>, Abdurrohimi<sup>3</sup>, Agustin Handayani<sup>4</sup>, and Joko Kuncoro<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup> Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

### Corresponding Author:

A Hadian Pratama Hamzah,  
Department of Psychology study program, Faculty of Psychology, Sultan Agung Islamic University.  
Jl. Raya Kaligawe Km. 4 PO Box 1054 Telp. 6583584 Fax. 6582455 Semarang, Indonesia  
Email: [hadi.dian@yahoo.com](mailto:hadi.dian@yahoo.com)

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the challenges faced by distance education students, particularly loneliness and difficulties in social adaptation due to limited interpersonal interaction. It also seeks to identify strategies that can reduce psychological distress and improve students' adaptation and participation in the distance learning environment. The study applies a narrative literature review approach. Data collection began with formulating research questions, followed by searching for relevant academic journals through electronic databases and credible reference sources. To strengthen the analysis, additional insights were obtained through interviews with groups of students from several open universities. The findings show that distance education students are vulnerable to loneliness, social maladaptation, and reduced learning performance due to limited interaction with peers and instructors. Difficulties in forming study groups and the absence of direct communication contribute to psychological and academic challenges. The study also finds a strong relationship between psychosocial support and reduced loneliness. Higher levels of social support from tutors and academic staff are associated with lower levels of loneliness and better student adaptation to the distance learning environment. The novelty of this research lies in emphasizing tutor-mediated psychosocial support as an integrated strategy to address loneliness and social maladaptation among distance learning students within the framework of open and distance education. The study implies that open universities should strengthen institutional support systems by integrating psychosocial assistance from tutors and academic officers into learning services to enhance student well-being, improve adaptation to distance learning culture, and increase academic success.

**Keywords:** Distance learning, Open University, Student Loneliness, Psychosocial Support, role of tutor



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## INTRODUCTION

Open and distance education is a method of learning at the higher education level that has long been recognized as a pivotal element in the development of individuals and communities across various ages and regions. This includes both urban and remote areas with limited access to education. Consequently, distance higher education institutions serve as an alternative educational service in numerous countries. Education is the key to unlocking various opportunities and achieving success. It is not surprising that many people choose to pursue education through distance learning models based on Learning Management Systems. As long as there is internet access and computer media, individuals, whether working or in their teenage years, can continue their education from secondary school levels to seek opportunities for acquiring education. This effort is aimed at achieving a better career and knowledge through the highest level of education. Students who are limited by their distance from educational facilities or who are employed typically participate in distant education.

One of the motivations for students to undertake distance education is the uneven quality of education across various regions in Indonesia. As reported by research (Nisa & Lestari, 2023), the Vice President of Indonesia acknowledged that the nation's higher education system's caliber is not uniform. Generally, students opt for distance education to gain access to the best educational institutions, such as state universities, to benefit from broader research and learning opportunities, and to expand their social networks despite the geographical distance from educational facilities. Many choose state open distance universities because they are perceived as more advanced in terms of remote learning with the advancement of information technology. Open and distance learning, or ODL, has gained popularity as a flexible option for students throughout the globe who are unable to attend traditional in-person classes. Students at open universities are free to study whenever and whenever they choose. Although this model has many benefits, one of the main issues that students frequently encounter is the sense of isolation and loneliness. When student enrolment in distance education programs at open universities, they often face challenges due to the lack of direct academic services, such as face-to-face meetings with advisors and discussions on complex case studies. This situation can lead to significant feelings of loneliness (Hager et al., 2022). Loneliness is defined as a state where individuals feel alone, apart, or removed from other people. It has been described as a discrepancy between desired and real social interactions.

Feelings of loneliness can lead to various disruptive issues. As a research (Ramli et al., 2024) notes that loneliness during the learning process and student years can result in increased depression, poor sleep quality, impaired problem-solving abilities, early cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function, and immune system disturbances. These issues can adversely affect students' performance in completing their studies. Evidence shows that lonely individuals are more likely to feel hopeless and even entertain thoughts of ending their lives (Lyons et al., 2023). The emotional state of students who are also working professionally has a significant impact on their academic performance. Many students at open universities struggle with feelings of loneliness and the lack of opportunities to interact with others. Loneliness experienced by distance learners can diminish motivation, disrupt concentration, and ultimately affect academic achievement (Morris et al., 2022). This condition can be exacerbated by the lack of face-to-face interaction with peers and instructors, as well as limited access to campus activities that support socialization. Various issues faced by open university students, such as boredom, despair, dissatisfaction with the program, and school dropout, have been documented.

In the context of higher education, loneliness can adversely affect student performance. Evidence supporting this statement is found in the research by (Khairul Anam & Hitipeuw, 2022), which indicates that lonely students often perform poorly academically due to

diminished cognitive resources. Additionally, Anam (Khairul Anam & Hitipeuw, 2022) found a significant positive correlation between loneliness and academic procrastination among students. This research explains that students tend to delay completing academic tasks. Given the impact of loneliness, especially among distance education students at open universities across various countries, it is crucial for students to find ways to address and mitigate it. One effective approach is to build strong social relationships with those around them. Social relationships can provide social support, which helps reduce feelings of loneliness. According to (Lovell & Webber, 2024) social support includes comfort, attention, appreciation, and assistance received by an individual. Individuals with social support feel loved, cared for, and valued. Social support can come from those deemed significant, such as parents, siblings, partners, or close friends. When students study away from their families, their social support may decrease because they no longer have direct access to the support and attention from instructors or academic advisors they once received daily. This indirectly affects their experience of loneliness. Several studies show a negative correlation between social support and loneliness.

For instance, (Ousman, 2023) found a negative impact of social support on loneliness, demonstrating that better social support correlates with reduced loneliness. This finding is supported by (Zheng et al., 2023) who also observed a negative relationship between social support and loneliness. Given the impact of loneliness on academic performance, motivation, and overall educational experience, it is essential to research factors influencing these conditions, such as social support, in the success of students at open universities in various countries. Understanding the relationship between social support and loneliness can help identify strategies and interventions to assist distance education students at open universities in adapting by developing campus social support programs, social skills training, or establishing solid communities for students studying away from home. This study aims to explore assessments by students at open universities in 10 countries and identify factors contributing to their conditions and learning systems. By understanding the mental health dynamics among open university students, it is hoped that effective strategies and interventions can be developed to enhance their learning experience and well-being throughout their studies. Thus, this research can provide direct benefits to distance education students at open universities in various countries offering distance learning programs.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a narrative review approach, which involves the compilation and analysis of literature through interpretation of various studies and articles. A narrative review typically draws from journals, books, and relevant articles to gain knowledge and understanding of a specific research topic. Researchers then summarize and analyze the findings from the literature (Snyder, 2023). The data collection process in this narrative literature review begins with formulating the research question and then searching for journals through electronic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Knowledge E. Researchers establish inclusion criteria for the journals, including publication within the last 10 years, relevance to the study's content and objectives, availability in full PDF format, and publication in English or Indonesian. After screening the gathered journals, researchers proceed with data extraction and data analysis.

### *Research Design*

This study employs a qualitative research design using a narrative literature review combined with exploratory interview insights. The narrative review approach is used to analyze and synthesize existing scholarly literature related to loneliness, psychosocial support, and student adaptation in distance learning environments. This approach allows the researcher to

identify patterns, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings that explain the psychological and social challenges experienced by students in open and distance education systems. In addition, qualitative insights obtained from student interviews are used to complement the literature findings and provide contextual understanding of students' psychosocial experiences in several open universities across different countries.

### *Research Target/Subject*

The research targets distance education students who are enrolled in open universities in several countries. These students represent learners who study through distance learning systems characterized by limited face-to-face interaction with instructors and peers. Such conditions often create challenges related to loneliness, social adaptation, and collaboration in academic activities. In addition to students, this study indirectly highlights the role of tutors and academic officers who provide academic guidance and psychosocial support within the distance learning system. The students interviewed in this study represent individuals who experience challenges in building academic interaction, forming study groups, and adapting to the culture of distance learning.

### *Research Procedure*

The research procedure was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher formulated research questions focusing on loneliness, psychosocial support, and student adaptation in distance learning environments. Second, relevant academic literature was identified and collected through electronic journal databases and credible reference sources such as books, academic reports, and scholarly publications related to distance education and psychological well-being. Third, the collected literature was reviewed, classified, and synthesized to identify key themes, conceptual frameworks, and previous research findings. Fourth, interviews were conducted with groups of students from several open universities to obtain contextual insights regarding their experiences in distance learning systems. Finally, the findings obtained from the literature review and interview insights were integrated to develop a comprehensive explanation of the role of tutor-mediated psychosocial support in reducing loneliness among distance education students.

### *Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques*

The Data were collected through two main techniques. First, document analysis was conducted on scholarly articles, books, and academic publications that discuss distance education, loneliness, psychosocial support, and student adaptation. Electronic databases were used to identify relevant and credible literature sources that provide theoretical and empirical perspectives related to the research topic. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with groups of distance education students. The interview guide served as the main research instrument to ensure that the discussions remained focused on students' psychosocial conditions, experiences of loneliness, interaction barriers, and their perceptions of institutional support. This combination of literature analysis and interviews enables the researcher to obtain both theoretical insights and contextual experiences from students.

### *Data Analysis Technique*

Data analysis in this study was conducted using qualitative narrative analysis. The collected literature was examined and categorized based on several thematic dimensions, including loneliness in distance learning, social adaptation, psychosocial support systems, and tutor support strategies. The information obtained from student interviews was then analyzed to identify recurring patterns and experiences related to social isolation, interaction barriers, and the role of academic support. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews were compared and integrated with the literature review results to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between psychosocial support and students' feelings of loneliness. Through this

synthesis process, the study explains how social and psychological support from tutors and academic officers contributes to reducing loneliness, improving social adaptation, and enhancing the academic success of students in distance learning environments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1.1 Study Case Open University in Malaysia

The impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on higher education in Malaysia is examined in the study “Learners’ Satisfaction and Academic Performance in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Universities in Malaysia” by Jegatheesan Rajadurai et al. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has significantly changed the educational landscape, giving students more access to education at any time and from any location. In the midst of this change, the study attempts to assess students’ academic performance and satisfaction levels in Malaysian ODL universities. 2,283 undergraduate students participated in the study and answered a questionnaire meant to gauge how satisfied they were with several facets of ODL. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine which factors most substantially affect academic success as determined by the Grade Point Average (GPA) (Rajadurai et al., 2018).

The study’s findings reveal a significant relationship between student satisfaction with assessment management and university services and their academic performance. Specifically, assessment management is positively correlated with student performance, while university services show a negative correlation, with service variables exhibiting the highest negative correlation with GPA ( $r = -0.055$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). To enhance students’ GPAs, universities should focus on improving assessment management and consider reducing the emphasis on service-related aspects. The use of learning materials, however, does not show a significant relationship with GPA scores. Additionally, student loneliness can exacerbate academic performance issues, as social isolation may decrease motivation and learning satisfaction. Effective assessment management and attention to students’ emotional well-being, including addressing loneliness, are crucial for improving academic performance among ODL students in Malaysia. Success in ODL requires a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing student performance within the context of rapidly evolving technology.

**Table 1.** Variable Coefficient

Model		Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.047		73.811	0.001
	Services	0.004	-0.055	-2.641	0.008
2	(Constant)	0.055		61.186	0.001***
	Services	0.004	-0.095	-3.600	0.001***
	Assessment Management	0.004	0.065	2.469	0.014*

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

### 1.2 Study Case Open University in Taiwan

The study conducted by Aminudin Zuhairi et al., titled “Empowering Lifelong Learning through Open Universities in Taiwan and Indonesia,” explores the significance of lifelong learning within the context of open universities in Taiwan and Indonesia. Both countries encounter challenges in facilitating lifelong learning through distance education, particularly given the rapid technological advancements and the growing demand for continuous education. The Open University in Taiwan (NOU) and the Open University in Indonesia (UT) play crucial roles in providing inclusive and high-quality educational access for all (Zuhairi et al., 2020). The research indicates that NOU and UT have implemented several effective practices to support lifelong learning. Both institutions have developed robust frameworks for online learning, provided adequate support for students with special needs, and employed various strategies to enhance student retention.

However, several challenges remain. There is a need for further improvement in online instructional design and the development of comprehensive quality assurance systems for online courses. Additionally, expanding the range and scope of fully online courses is necessary to meet growing demands. Addressing these challenges will strengthen the roles of NOU and UT in advancing lifelong learning through distance education. NOU and UT have successfully developed effective lifelong learning strategies and provided adequate support for students with special needs. However, they face challenges such as improving online instructional design and strategies, as well as implementing quality assurance systems for online courses. On the other hand, there are opportunities to leverage Open Educational Resources (OER) to enhance online learning experiences and develop MOOCs to promote comprehensive online education.

### 1.3. Study Case Open University in Turkish

In order to better understand the reasons behind student dropouts from open education and distance learning programs at a Turkish state university, Münevver Gündüz and Selçuk Karaman conducted a study titled “Open Education Faculty and Distance Education Students’ Dropout Reasons: The Case of a Turkish State University.” Distance education has grown in popularity as the usage of the internet and online resources in education becomes more common, particularly among adults who value flexibility and independence in their learning. However, distance education often presents challenges that can lead to dropout issues. Using a case study approach within a qualitative framework, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews with 25 students who had dropped out of the open and distance education programs at Atatürk University (Gündüz & Karaman, 2020).

### 1.4. Study Case Open University in Philippines

The notion of “openness” at the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) is examined in a study by Maria Fe Villamejor-Mendoza titled “The Openness of the University of the Philippines Open University: Issues and Prospects.” UPOU, being an open university and distance learning establishment, encounters difficulties in completely integrating the openness principles of admissions, curriculum, and open educational resources (OER) policies. Since the late 1980s, UPOU has undergone significant transformations and has become a pioneer in e-learning and distance education in the Philippines. Despite these advancements, there remain limitations in the aspects of open admissions and curriculum offerings that are not yet fully realized. The study examines UPOU’s academic perceptions of openness and highlights key challenges and potential solutions to achieving the status of a truly open university (Villamejor-Mendoza, 2013) UPOU remains in a transitional phase toward becoming a fully open university, with aspects of openness in admissions and curriculum not yet fully implemented. There is an awareness and commitment to enhancing the utilization and development of Open Educational Resources (OER). A paradigm shift is needed among the public, the University of the Philippines system, and relevant authorities to support open and distance education. UPOU has the option to adopt either a revolutionary or incremental approach in its efforts to achieve full openness.

### 1.5. Study Case Open University in Thailand

The goal of Thanyasinee Laosum’s research, “Development of Indicators of Happiness in Learning of Thai Open University Students,” is to create metrics by which undergraduate students at the Open University of Thailand can be assessed for their level of enjoyment while learning. For both academic performance and the general well-being of students, learning should be enjoyable. The goals of this study are to determine the variables that affect learning satisfaction and to create a reliable instrument for measuring these variables. A survey using a questionnaire created based on a review of the literature and expert validation is the methodology used. Students at the Open University of Thailand in a range of age groups make up the sample. To find and validate the markers of learning satisfaction, data were investigated

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using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Laosum, 2023)

The research reveals that happiness in learning comprises six main factors with a total of 34 indicators. Stasifically satisfaction with the learning environment, learning anxiety, satisfaction with the learning process, enthusiasm for learning, self-satisfaction, and readiness to learn. The analysis shows that all these factors have significant relationships with each other, except for learning anxiety, which exhibits a low correlation with the other factors. Additionally, student loneliness emerges as an important factor influencing learning happiness. Loneliness can negatively impact motivation and learning satisfaction, making it crucial to create a learning environment that fosters social interaction and emotional support. The discussion highlights the importance of these happiness factors in creating a positive and supportive learning environment. Satisfaction with the learning environment and enthusiasm for learning have high correlations, whereas reducing learning anxiety and addressing loneliness are deemed essential for achieving optimal learning happiness.

#### 1.6 Study Case Open University in Pakistan

The research conducted by Asaf Niwaz et al., titled “Students’ Assessment in Academics Matters: An Evaluation of Open and Distance Learning in Pakistan,” investigates the assessment system within open and distance learning at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan. Utilizing a qualitative approach with interviews as the primary tool, the study aims to identify issues in the exam selection and evaluation process and provide recommendations for improving the quality of the evaluation system (Niwaz et al., 2013).

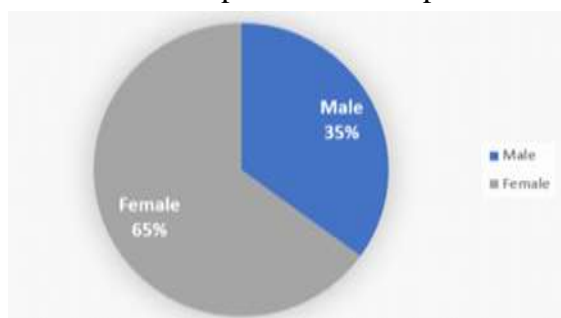
The study reveals several deficiencies in the exam evaluator selection process, including inadequate qualifications, lack of experience, the high number of papers to be assessed daily, and suboptimal seating arrangements. These issues contribute to a low quality of paper checking. The research recommends implementing a quality assurance system similar to that used by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education as a solution to enhance evaluation standards. Improvements in the evaluator selection process at AIOU are necessary due to these shortcomings, which negatively impact the quality of paper checking. Additionally, seating arrangements and the number of papers assessed daily affect evaluation quality. By adopting a quality assurance system like the one used by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, the quality of evaluation at AIOU could be significantly improved.

#### 1.7 Study Case Open University in Sri Lanka

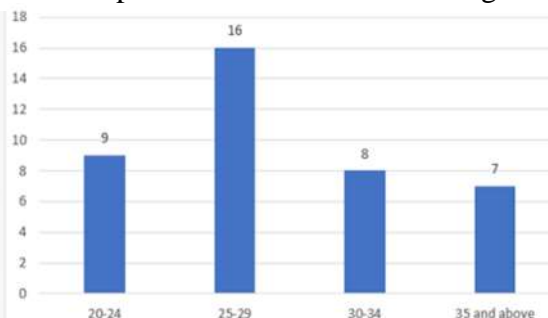
The influence of job stress on academic performance among undergraduate students at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is examined in a study by Gayan Wijesooriya titled “Effect of Job Stress on Academic Performance Among Undergraduate Students of The Open University of Sri Lanka.” Many OUSL students are also employed, and they encounter difficulties juggling the demands of their jobs with their education. The purpose of this study is to pinpoint the precise causes of workplace stress in the context of OUSL and offer workable solutions to lessen its detrimental impacts. It involves 40 undergraduate students who are both working and studying in the field of Social Sciences. Data were collected through a questionnaire, which included sections on participant profiles, perceived stress levels, and stress factors (Wijesooriya, 2024).

The results indicate that 35% of the respondents are male and 65% are female, with the majority being between the ages of 20 and 40. Most students pursue their degrees to improve job prospects (58%), while others seek knowledge and skills (30%) or personal fulfillment (43%). Additionally, 50% of respondents reported difficulties attending classes due to job stress, and 62% experienced challenges in studying or completing assignments outside of class. Job stress significantly affects academic performance, leading to difficulties in focusing on academic tasks and decreasing concentration and motivation. Furthermore, loneliness also impacts the students’ learning experience, with a lack of social support potentially exacerbating

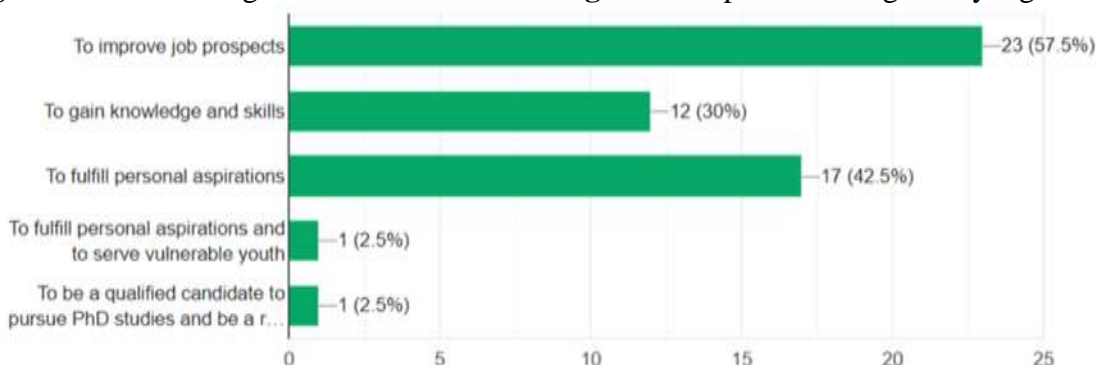
existing emotional burdens and stress. Educational institutions need to provide comprehensive support, not only to manage job stress but also to address students' loneliness, to help them balance academic and professional responsibilities and improve their overall well-being.



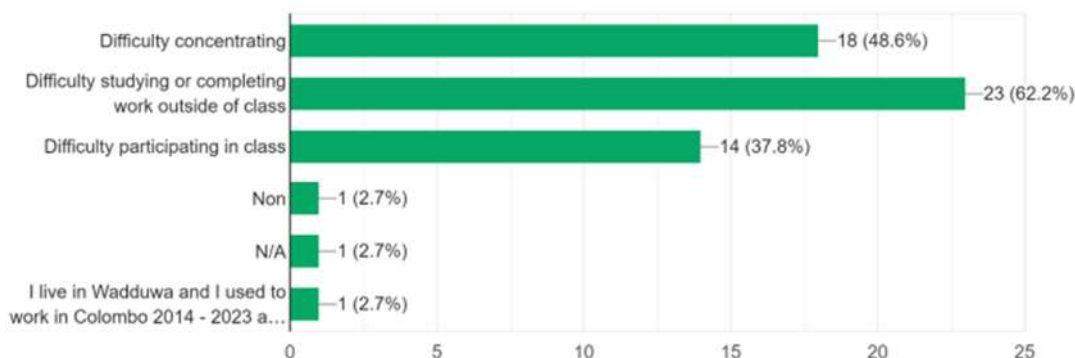
**Figure 1:** Gender Diagram



**Figure 2:** Population Diagram by Age



**Figure 3.** Main Reasons for Pursuing a Bachelor's Degree at the Open University of Sri Lanka



**Figure 4.** How work pressure affects student attendance in class

### 1.8 Study Case Open University in India

The research conducted by M. A. Sikandar, titled "Open Distance Learning System: A Critical Reflection on the Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities of Open and Dual Mode Universities in India," explores the open distance learning (ODL) system and dual-mode universities in India, highlighting the various challenges, issues, and opportunities faced by these educational institutions within the context of national policies and higher education needs. The study assesses the significance of ODL in enhancing access to higher education, particularly for individuals impeded by work or geographical constraints from participating in conventional education.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Program of Action (PoA) emphasize the critical role of distance and open education in providing educational opportunities for various segments of society, including industrial workers, professionals, minorities, and women. Open universities such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) play a significant role in improving the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER). Reports from the Higher Education Working Group and the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) acknowledge distance education as a vital method in meeting the growing demand for higher

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education. The research indicates that the ODL system, including IGNOU and several State Open Universities, has made substantial contributions to the development of the educational structure in India by providing opportunities for students who are unable to attend regular classes.

#### 1.9 Study Case Open University in South Korea

The research conducted by Duck-Jay Park and Sung-Soo Kim, titled “Challenges Facing The Open University: The Case Of The Korea National Open University,” has examined various challenges despite the university’s history of success. The main challenges include a sharp decline in the number of applicants and students, a downward trend in the acceptance rate of new students, feminization and aging of the student population, and an increasing number of academic departments with student enrollments below quota. To address these issues, Korea National Open University (KNOU) needs to maintain student numbers within a reasonable range and continue to improve the quality of education (Bek, 2017)

The decline in the number of applicants and students has been attributed to demographic changes, an increase in the number of students attending conventional universities, and KNOU’s policies that have historically prioritized student numbers. Additionally, the trends of decreasing enrollment rates and retention rates have affected the total student count. The student composition has shifted, with a higher proportion of female students and an increase in the average age of students. KNOU also faces challenges in maintaining student numbers across various academic departments, leading to significant disparities between the enrollment in popular and less popular departments.

#### 1.10 Study Case Open University in Hongkong

The research conducted by Oliver Tat-Sheung Au et al., titled “Student Persistence In Open And Distance Learning: Success Factors And Challenges,” addresses the challenges faced in maintaining the quality of education and student satisfaction. Since its establishment in 1989 and becoming a university in 1997, the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) has evolved into an institution offering both full-time and part-time study programs. This study aims to enhance student persistence by conducting focus group interviews with 135 students from two advanced-level courses, categorized based on their final outcomes. The interview data were classified according to focus groups to identify factors contributing to persistence and challenges faced by students (Au et al., 2019) The results of the focus group interviews indicate that advanced-level students are generally motivated by academic goals and employ effective success strategies, such as good time management and efficient study skills. In contrast, intermediate and lower-level students face more challenges and are less motivated. Lower-level students often find the study material boring and are more likely to consider dropping out. Additionally, loneliness is a significant factor, with students frequently feeling isolated from their peers and lacking necessary social support. Commonly identified challenges include an excessive workload, lack of material sharing among tutors, and a user-unfriendly course registration system, all of which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and negatively impact student motivation and academic success.

Based on the discussion of various studies presented, it can be concluded that there is a negative correlation between social support and loneliness, particularly among open university students. The research by (Hysing et al., 2020) and (Yang & Swekwi, 2021) found that the relationship between social support and loneliness is highly significant, whereas other studies only indicate a connection between the two variables. Additionally, the study by (Dinu et al., 2022)) revealed that peer social support contributes more to reducing loneliness compared to support from family. Furthermore, academic managers and tutors who assist students in their studies, despite being remote, can boost students’ motivation to complete their studies by 60%. To address the issue of loneliness among distance students, universities are encouraged to establish programs such as specialized orientation for distance education students and provide dedicated support centre for remote learners. Students are also advised to take proactive steps

to interact with their peers on campus by joining organizations aligned with their interests, regularly communicating with family and friends via phone or messaging, and forming study groups. Loneliness experienced by students in open universities using distance learning methods can negatively impact their motivation to complete their studies. The lack of interaction between the university and students, particularly in the delivery of offline curricula that conflicts with the principles of distance learning, contributes to decreased GPA and can even lead to some students dropping out

Strategies that can help address student loneliness include increasing social interaction and personal support and developing learning materials that support a variety of learning styles.

- a. Enhancing Technological Support (Turkey): Providing technical support and technology training to maximize the use of digital tools in learning.
- b. Increasing Interaction (Turkey): Facilitating more interaction between instructors and students through face-to-face sessions and online platforms.
- c. Personal and Career Support (Turkey): Offering career consultation and personal support to aid academic and professional achievement.
- d. Flexible Scheduling (Turkey): Providing flexible scheduling options for students with work and household responsibilities.
- e. New Student Orientation (Taiwan): Implementing orientation programs with mentoring systems and remote learning skills training.
- f. Technological Support (Taiwan): Investing in new technologies to support students with special needs.
- g. Orientation Programs (Taiwan): Establishing mentoring systems and skills training to help new students adapt.
- h. Flexible Scheduling (Turkey & India): Offering flexible study schedules to accommodate students' other commitments.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the psychosocial challenges experienced by students in open and distance learning systems, particularly the prevalence of loneliness and difficulties in social adaptation due to limited interpersonal interaction with peers and instructors. The findings indicate that the absence of direct communication, limited opportunities for collaboration, and barriers in forming study groups can negatively affect students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Through a narrative literature review supported by interview insights, the study confirms that distance education students are vulnerable to social isolation and reduced learning engagement. Importantly, the research demonstrates that psychosocial support provided by tutors and academic staff plays a significant role in reducing students' feelings of loneliness. Institutional support in the form of tutor-mediated guidance, emotional encouragement, and structured academic interaction contributes to improving students' sense of belonging and their ability to adapt to the culture of distance learning. Therefore, strengthening integrated psychosocial support systems within open universities is essential to enhance student well-being and academic success. By prioritizing tutor involvement and supportive learning environments, distance education institutions can better address students' psychological needs and foster more effective participation and completion in open and distance learning programs.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Supervision; Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editin.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation, Methodology

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Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Writing - original draft.

Author 5: Validation.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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