

Assessment of Employed Women Participation and their Nature of Study on ODL Programme

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Abstract – The roles of women as wife, mother and income generator tends to be socially constructed. As a result, employed women often experience frustration with roles, conflicts, lack of time, energy, and generalized stress. It has been observed that domestic, educational and professional pressures impact on the way they study on the ODL programme. Using survey method, data were gathered using a structured questionnaire from one single mode ODL institution in Nigeria and a total of one hundred and fifty (150) employed female students from two study centres (Awa and Victoria Island) ranging from five different schools were sampled. The result of the hypotheses shows there was no significant relationship between women’s professional grouping and their nature of study on the ODL programme while there was a significant relationship between women’s employment status and their nature of study on the ODL programme. In conclusion, the result of the study shows that majority of the women used for this study find it hard to really concentrate and study conveniently without having anything to disturb them. It is recommended that course developers need to pay heed to the nature of study of women on the ODL programme by providing short study periods through means of short comprehensive cognitive hooks like summaries, overviews, use of diagrams and audio cassettes to provide an overview of a unit of concept.

Keywords – Distance Learning, Education, Open Learning Nature of Study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as central to sustainable, economic and social development. It enables individuals to make informed choices, broaden their horizons, opportunities and to have a voice in public decision making. Women have since independence in Nigeria, remained marginal beneficiaries of educational programmes. Not surprisingly, their high poverty status has deepened, especially, with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s. Despite its free education policy at all levels of schooling, access to education for all remained unattainable, more so for girls and women (UNICEF, 2002).

Gender disaggregated data on education has revealed that compared to their counterparts, women have, for the most part, attained only low levels of formal education. The above assertion is supported by UNESCO (2003), that in some states in Nigeria like Sokoto and Zamfara, the female literacy rate is as low as 12 percent when compared to 59% for boys. The statistics indicated a wider gender disparity with 65.5% of male being literate as against 39.5% literate females. The same period revealed that of the nearly 7.3million children of primary school age not in school about 62% were girls. Ofoegbu (2009) also argued that only about 33% and 28% of female children

respectively attend primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa.

Okebukola (2008) while corroborating the above assertion stated that gender differences in primary Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) rose from 7% in 1990 to 12% in 2001. He stressed further that in the Northern states, the gender gap averaged over 30% with some states as high as 48% and thus the gender disparity in basic education has no doubt contributed to the rating of Nigeria among countries unable to meet the MDGs of attaining gender parity by 2015. This could be generally as a result of negative challenges which include ineffective and insufficient implementation of the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) and reforms in the Nigerian education system, poor economy, poor management of scarce resources, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, culture and religious tenets, gender bias in content, teaching and learning process, poverty and unfriendly school environment. Other factors include issues of curriculum and curriculum delivery.

At the tertiary level, it is also obvious that the Nigerian traditional universities in totality cannot provide access to the number of applicants who intend to acquire university education in Nigeria. The fact still remains that the challenge of mass access to university education in Nigeria would continue to increase by the day as long as the higher education learning is tied only to admission into the four walls of the conventional universities, be it government or privately owned. Currently only 20 percent of Nigerian secondary school leavers have access to places at University in Nigeria, leaving many thousands without the chance to continue their education.

As far back as 2007, the Population Reference Bureau showed that 34% of Nigeria’s population put at 140 million are aged 10 to 24, about 47 million of the total number of secondary school leavers were expected to prepare for university admission between now and the next four to five years. Yet, for a period of one decade now, Nigerian universities had been able to take among themselves only 24% (in 1998) falling to 5% in 2002 and rising to 8% in 2004 of all applicants for placement in Nigeria universities. The proportion of women in all these admissions can thus be imagined.

The enactment of the Millennium Development goals through the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women has made many Nigerians to be in search for appropriate measures of expanding its education programmes to meet its population growth and the increasing demand for tertiary education. Various efforts include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1981 UN convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and

the 2000 World Forum on Education for All, especially the EFA 2015 goal. As one of the intervention to widen access to education, equality of basic educational opportunities as well as providing a second chance for women and girls who had never been or had once been in the system but had to dropout for one reason or the other. Also in line with its commitment to achieving gender equality in education by 2015 such that both males and females are assured full and equal access to good quality basic education, government is collaborating with stakeholders to promote programmes and activities towards elimination of gender gaps in education. Notable is the FGN/UNICEF/DFID Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria. The strategy aims at 15% reduction in disparities (especially gender), through an inter-sectoral response and enhanced linkages between programmes and directly addresses EFA (Okebukola, 2008). Another strategy government has laid down to bridge the gender gap is the promotion of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) which is the basis of this research.

In Nigeria, Open and distance learning programme is used as a major vehicle to break the vectors- access, quality and cost that has constrained education in order to improve women's wellbeing, reduce their vulnerability and act as a starting point in their empowerment. Thus, the ODL has allowed many women from all works of life to seize the opportunity in order to improve their standards of living. However, despite the benefits accrued to the ODL, working and studying is demanding for both men and women on the ODL programme but the presence of women, their status within it and the time they can devote to it are a continual negotiation. Cultural factors and women's role in the society; child bearing, child upbringing, community commitment and societal perceptions tends to be socially constructed. Studying and working is demanding for women on the ODL programme because their multiple roles; as wife, mother and income generator is socially constructed. Thus, employed women often experience frustration with roles, conflicts, lack of time, energy, and generalized stress. The domestic, educational and professional pressures impact their participation on the ODL programme. Many studies have however addressed learner retention in online environments (Boschi, Eastman and Swift, 2004; Packman, Jones, Miller and Thomas, 2004; Zirkle, 2004). While some authors have identified the barriers women face when they enroll in online courses (Burge, 1998; Burke, 2001; Furst-Bowe and Dittmann, 2001). Feelings of isolation, lack of family and institutional support, time limitations, and concerns for cost are among the many hurdles online women learners encounter (Furst-Bowe and Dittmann, 2001; Kramarae, 2003). Nevertheless, there is scarcity of research on assessing employed women participation and their nature of study on ODL programme which this paper has sought to do.

II. CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)

Distance education as argued by Dhanaragan (2001), means taking the teacher to the student. It is a teaching and learning process in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher. It uses a variety of media and technologies to provide and improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners wherever they may be. A basic characteristic of distance learning is that it is learner centered since it shifts from conventional teaching and learning culture to one which employs a wide range of tools to effect learning outcomes. These tools which are recognized and designed for self learning are printed course units and readers, tutor and computer marked assignment and feedback systems, radio and television broadcasts, audio and video tapes, home kits and individualized counseling and help through telephone, facsimiles or electronic mail (Terhermba, 2008).

Distance education is therefore a combination of distance teaching and distance learning. Its basic elements as stated by Kegan (1993) are separation of teacher from learner, the influence of an education authority, the use of communication technologies to unite teacher and content and provide opportunity of two way communications. Whatever the mode of delivery, the objective is to increase access to education to those who have difficulty in accessing it within the mainstream. Jegede (2003) also stated that ODL is a valuable tool that typically meets the needs of people who cannot be removed from their houses or job places for a long time. It reaches people in communities in which they would otherwise be deprived opportunities to learn. It equally makes a significant contribution by increasing people access to education system and it also gives room for people to start applying what they have learned.

Open learning on the other hand refers to policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender or time constants and with recognition prior to learning (Glen, 2003). The goals of ODL as provided in the National Policy on Education (2004) are to:

- ❖ Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- ❖ Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place
- ❖ Encourage internalization especially of tertiary education curricula
- ❖ Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the flagship institution engaged in ODL activities along with distance learning centres of the University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan and University of Abuja (Okebukola, 2008). Though Nigeria is a new comer in open and distance learning, the

experiences of several open and distance learning institutions viz. Open University of United Kingdom (OUUK), Athabasca University (Canada's Open University) Open University of Hong Kong, India Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), University of South Africa (UNISA) etc have provided a baseline for takeoff of the only open university in Nigeria.

III. EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH ODL PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Women perform triple roles - reproductive, productive and societal/communal responsibilities. They are perceived by society as managers of home and child minders. Their biological make up make them responsible for carrying babies during pregnancy. Mothers who are not fortunate to have responsible husbands are left with the sole responsibility of ensuring the total upbringing of their children which gives them extra financial responsibilities. The socio-cultural and biological roles affect their ability to leave home management and child care responsibilities for school. Working mothers who dare to pursue academic laurels are effaced with the challenging task of combining work, home/child care and studies. These factors point to the need for alternative modes of delivery of education that will meet the lifestyle of all women. With ODL women who have been derived formal education because of one reason or the other to have benefited immensely. An empirical example can be found in the number of women who have been empowered through completion of one programme or the other. Records from distance learning institute of the University of Lagos, Nigeria indicates that of the major programmes offered by the institute as at 2001, 2874 students offering administration degrees were women while 164 of the women offered science degrees. As stresses by Baikie (2005) the National Teacher's Institute which trains teachers in order to improve the quality of nation's teaching force records that with the number of students enrolled for the NCE were 93,000 out of which 68,000 were women. For the Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate diploma programmes, the students enrolled were 8000 out of which 5000 were women; the Pivotal Teacher Training Pogramme (PTTP) which was last offered in 2003 had an enrollment of 29,000 and 21,000 were women (NTI Kaduna, 2000); and the grade two teachers' certificate (TCII) programme designed for teachers who do not possess the TC II had an enrolment of 103,000 students and of which 77,250 were women. Also at the National Open University of Nigeria, a single mode university which started her open distance learning academic activities in 2004 and have records of those who have completed a post- graduate diploma programmes in various disciplines amounting to 2,341 while those who have completed masters degree programmes were numbered to be 4,182. Amongst these graduated women, 5,034 of them were full time housewives from different religious backgrounds including Islam, Christianity and other traditional religion (Temitayo, 2012).

With these figures, it is obvious that women inspite of their condition could access education and get empowered through ODL since this mode of education allows them to learn from home as house wives and study for a programme of their choice without neglecting their marriages and also enables them to contribute to the development of their various localities.

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between women's professional grouping and their nature of study on the ODL programme.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between women's employment status and their nature of study of Study on the ODL programme.

Research Design

Descriptive survey in was used for the study. The basis for choosing this design is contingent upon the fact that descriptive survey enables the collection of data, describing them as they are without any manipulation.

Study Population and Sample

The study population of employed women from National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), in Ogun and Lagos State were used for the study. One hundred and fifty (150) students, specifically women from each of the five schools (Sciences, Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Engineering and Law) were accidentally sampled out of the population. The samples were selected in this order:

Table 1: Sample of respondents

Study centers	Sciences	Education	Engi neering	Arts & social sciences	Law
Awa Ogun State	05	25	05	20	05
Victoria Island	15	30	05	30	10
Total	20	55	10	50	15

Instrumentation

The instrument was a structured and open-ended questionnaire designed by the researchers were given to colleagues in other departments for further face validation. They made corrections and modifications where necessary. The instrument has three sections (A and B) covering demographic information (age, marital status, programme of study, occupational grouping and employment status) and nature of study on the ODL programme.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was tested by first administering them to twenty (20) students of NOUN. Then, the reliability coefficient of 0.81 was determined using Chronbach alpha method.

Data Collection Procedure

For easy collection of data from the two study centers, the questionnaire were given to the target students personally and also with the help of research assistants. The questionnaires were collected on the spot with minimal guidance since all the respondents are literate.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of variance (ANOVA). The SPSS package version 17 was used for the analysis.

IV. RESULTS

Based on the data pertinent answers were given to some of the research questions and two hypotheses were tested using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather data for the study.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 30	51	34
	30-39	60	40
	40-49	33	22
	50+	06	4
Marital Status	Single	48	30
	Married	72	48
	Divorced	15	10
	Widow	15	15
Programme of Study	Bachelor degree	102	68
	Masters degree	48	32
Occupational Grouping	Teaching	48	32
	Health worker	27	18
	Banker	21	14
	Self Employed	30	20
	Others	24	16
Employment status	Private	80	53.3
	Government	70	46.6
Professional grouping	Professional	120	80
	Non-professional	30	20

From the table above, the greater percentage of the women (36.7%) study during the weekends, one third (33.3%) of the population study late at night while 30% study during break at work. This implies that most of the women who study during weekends and late at night do so because of the little available time during these periods since they will not be able to do so on ordinarily working days because of the pressures in the work place.

In support of the above result, one of our respondents said: *I am a working mother, doing course work is a sacrifice, I manage to read during the weekends, even some Saturdays you may not be able to do it, having other chores to do.*

Another Respondent Said

I teach during the day and I had a three and five year old kid that I need to take care of. Unfortunately for me, I couldn't have time to study my books until ten thirty at night, and by the time I finish the household chores coupled with getting my children in bed and preparing some stuffs for the next day, I would have been tired and exhausted.

That was why Kramarae (2003) opined that women often felt burdened by taking care of children and other family members at the same time as working and studying.

On where the women study, result shows that 12% study at kitchen tables, 14% study in the library, 2% study in the bedroom, 2% study through other means, 4% study in buses, 12% study during leisure hours while 18% study at work and 10.7% study through a combination of all the above study methods. On how they study, result reveals that majority study through printed materials given by NOUN and personal study (26.7% and 26%) respectively, 14% study through group discussions and the internet, 12% study through tutorials, 5.3% study through instructions on discs and 8.7% study through a combination of the above.

One of our respondent's statements was in support of the above result by stating that:

I go about with my books because it is not that easy for me to really sit down for hours reading my books without being distracted by my children or remembering some chores left undone. So most time I study at any available convenient place where there is little distraction, most especially in the company bus, leisure hours, in the bedroom etc.

Table 3: Percentage score of women's nature of study on the ODL programme.

Statements	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
When do you study?	During break time	45	30
	Late at night	50	33.3
	Weekends	55	36.7
Where do you study?	On kitchen tables	18	12
	Library	21	14
	Bedroom	03	2
	Other means	03	2
	Commercial bus	06	4
	Car	18	12
	Leisure Hours	18	12
	At work	27	18
	Study centers	30	20
	All of the Above	06	4
How do you Study? I study through:	Group Discussions	21	14
	Tutorial	18	12
	Personal Study	39	26
	Printed Materials	40	26.7
	Internet	21	14
	Instructions on Disc	8	5.3
	All of the above	03	2

Testing of Null Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using collective contribution of the independent variables: when to study, where to study and how to study.

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between women's professional grouping and their nature of study on the ODL programme

Table 4: Result of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on women’s professional grouping and their nature of study on the ODL programme.

Nature of study		Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
When do you Study?	Between groups	2.042	1	2.042	3.106	.080
	Within groups	97.292	148	.657		
	Total	99.333	149			
Where do you study?	Between groups	43.202	1	43.202	4.9998	.027
	Within groups	1279.258	148	8.644		
	Total	1322.460	149			
How do you Study?	Between groups	.735	1	.735	.332	.565
	Within groups	327.458	148	2.213		
	Total	328.193	149			

Table 4 above revealed the result of the analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on women’s professional grouping and their nature of study. The table therefore showed that the null hypothesis was not statistically significant with the nature of study of women and their professional grouping {f (1, 149) = 3.106, 4.9998, .332}; p > .05 respectively. This means that the professional grouping (professional or non professional) of the women does not affect the way they study on the ODL programme.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between women’s employment status and their nature of study on the ODL programme

Table 5: Result of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on women’s employment status and their nature of study on ODL programme.

Nature of study		Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
When do you Study?	Between groups	69.124	1	69.124	8.163	.005
	Within groups	1253.336	148	8.468		
	Total	1322.460	149			
Where do you study?	Between groups	20.208	1	20.208	9.711	.002
	Within groups	307.986	148	2.081		
	Total	328.193	149			
How do you Study?	Between groups	9.333	1	9.333	15.34	.000
	Within groups	90.000	148	.608		
	Total	99.333	149			

The table 5 therefore showed that the null hypothesis was statistically significant among nature of study of women and their employment status {f (1, 149) = 8.163, 9.711, 15.348}; p < .05. The implication of this is that

employment status (government or private) of the women affects the way they study on the ODL programme, indicating that the either the government workers do find time to study that those working in privately owned companies or vice versa.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the results of this study shows that majority of the women used for this study agreed that though ODL provide accessible education for them which is in support of Jegede (2003) and thus it is a promising and practical strategy to address the challenge of widening access and increasing the participation of women in higher education.

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