

**CHALLENGES OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN
CONTINUING HIGHER EDUCATION
PROGRAMME:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT WOMEN
COUNSELLING AND EDUCATION**

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Abstract

This paper investigated the challenges or constraints of women in continuing higher education programme with particular focus on the B.Ed part-time programme of the University of Lagos. A simple survey research design was employed to explore the issue. A 15 item questionnaire supplemented with oral interview sessions provided the data used for the study. The study involved 150 randomly selected women in B.Ed part-time programme of the University of Lagos. The sample was drawn from across three Departments in the Faculty. The data collected were analyzed using mean score, frequency count and simple percentages. The findings of the study showed that the major constraints or challenges of women participants in the programme include time constraints, increasing marital demand, poor economic or financial base, poor learning environment, lack of encouragement from employers and spouse, increasing social pressure and poor psychological disposition. The implications of study for women's counselling and education were highlighted. Based on the findings, recommendations were also proffered.

Keywords: Challenges, Women's participation, Continuing higher education, Implication, Counselling and Education.

Introduction

Education is believed to provide knowledge and resources that hold potentials for economic empowerment for better livelihood and social development. For this reason access to education has been the prime objective of everyone. This also explains why education is seen as a fundamental human right. According to Mbagwu and Ekwelum (2006), the increased need for higher education was first expressed during the oil boom era of the 1970s in Nigeria which led to the establishment of many universities in the country. Interest in continuing higher education or part time programme is accentuated by the desire to acquire knowledge, skills and values that would enable recipient cope with every day changes in the environment or social milieu in which the individual finds himself or herself.

The goal of establishing continuing higher education according to Eldered and Johnson cited in Kazeem (1998), includes the provision of an alternative form of higher education. According to Egunyomi (2009), higher continuing education seeks to build highly individualized and flexible programmes of learning and makes use of largely untapped resources for teaching and learning. It moves towards a new faith in the student and his capacity for learning on his own, while at the same time, providing close and continuing contact between the students and teacher. Thus, continuing higher education can be viewed as a means of acquiring knowledge that will enable the individual keep up with the rapid social, cultural, economic, political, industrial and technological changes taking place in the environment in which the individual finds himself (Kazeem, 1998; Olomukoro, 2005). This type of education, Anyanwu, Omole and Akintayo (1988), opine is aimed at remedying the deficiencies which are multiplied daily because of advancement in every aspects of human existence. In the same vein, Omoruyi and Omiunu (2006), observed that continuing education is geared towards ensuring the continued relevance of the individuals in the society, the provision or access to education for all citizens. It is geared towards meeting the need of individual who must seek to update his knowledge and feel he needs the education for his cultural and personal development. Thus, the idea of continuing higher education is to provide formal instruction to a large group of people who are generally more matured than students who are regular in colleges and whose studies are somewhat irregular and held at unconventional times and places (Kazeem, 1988; Egunyomi, 2001). Omoruyi and Omiunu (2006) corroborated this and stressed further "that the programme serves as a recipe for satisfying the academic needs of

people and as a means of reducing the level of unsatisfied demand for higher education in the country". This means that it provides avenue for people to meet or satisfy variety of needs.

However, mass involvement of women in continuing higher education is a recent development. Before the turn of the twentieth century, only a handful or few women were granted access to education (Osunde and Omoruyi, 2003). The number of illiterate women was subsequently increasing since they had no access to education or sent to school. This was because at the time, women were victim of all sort of cultural and social constraints. They were subjected to all forms of discrimination and marginalization by the existing cultural and social practices existing in the society, especially in traditional African culture. They were denied access to education at the expense of their most fortunate brothers who were most preferred.

Recent global events led to a shift in the marginalization of women. There is evidence of an increase in the number of women pursuing meaningful educational programme at all levels both in the formal and non-formal education settings. This is due principally to the realization and recognition in contemporary times that women constitute a great asset in nation building and so, increasing women access to education will enable them develop their rich human potential with which they are endowed by nature and maximize their contributions to nation building. Besides, as major home managers, having access to further education, will ensue better child care, nutrition, smooth family norms and a better learning climate on a continuous basis. These developments have enhanced the chances of many women to pursue further education up to university level. This has been accentuated by the development of women's movement or feminism involving all those organizations, structures and network organized around women's concerns. They include clubs, friendship societies, associations, philanthropic organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have been vigorously involved in addressing women and their issues. They have been instrumental in pursuing a better deal for women in terms of enhanced access to education for them. In addition, changing career expectation, obsolescence of ideas, changing technologies coupled with knowledge exploitation and increasing awareness regarding quality of life have also helped to fuel interest and desire for further education up to University level. Women's participation in higher education or interest in seeking further higher education is seen as a means of ensuring career

enhancement, personal enrichment and a medium of transformation (i.e. liberation and full empowerment).

The mounting interest of women in further education in the form of continuing education must be sustained and nurtured. This will enable them maximize the benefits of participating in such programme. This by implication means that efforts must be made to identify any major challenges they are likely to encounter in the process and evolve measures aimed at mitigating them or institute a measure that can help them overcome the challenges. This constitutes the major focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Women's involvement in continuing education or their interest in pursuing further education is not without its challenges. In spite of the fact that there has been a remarkable increase in the participation of young girls and married women in educational pursuit and had continued to exhibit their desire or yearning for higher education, their efforts have continued to be limited by social norms and dictates (Marim and Greenberger cited in Kazeem 1998; Osunde and Omoruyi 2003). Studies according to the authors have also shown that the poor socio-economic status of women has a relatively greater effect on the educational aspiration or desire to seek further education. Therefore, women who enlist in educational programme, are daily confronted with challenges that tend to undermine their efforts. The increasing interest in women education and its importance to nation building and development of individual woman demand that the challenges they face be exploited and identified with a view to helping to evolve measures that would enable women deal with them. In this regard, this study seeks to make its contribution by examining the challenges women face in continuing higher education and the implications it has for the design of counselling and educational programme for adult women. The ultimate aim is to assist in developing a counselling programme that would help women deal with the problems and cope with their education adequately.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to determine the major challenges which confront women in continuing higher education with particular reference to University of Lagos Sandwich Programme. It also seeks to tease out the implications it has for evolving an adequate counselling programme for

women that would assist them deal with the challenges and for ensuring proper education of the women.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following researcher questions were generated

1. Do women in continuing higher education actually witness any major challenges in the course of their learning?
2. What are the major challenges confronting women in the programme?
3. Does the content of the programme meet with the academic aspirations or interest of women?
4. How do the women perceive these problems or challenges?

This study is considered significant for a number of reasons.

In the first instance, it will help unravel the major challenges confronting women in continuing education programme. The data generated will therefore, assist in evolving appropriate measures and alternative policy option that will enable the programme providers combat these problems and make learning and teaching more effective and fruitful.

In addition, the data generated will also help to expand the frontiers of knowledge or add to existing literature in the area.

It is also hoped that the findings will serve as feedback to managers in higher education on the challenges their women participants face and help them develop appropriate strategies and possibilities for improved performance and enhanced participation of more women in the programme.

Finally, it is hoped that the outcome of the study will aid in the formulation of appropriate counselling strategy or programme that would help women cope with challenges confronting them so as to successfully complete their education

Methodology

This study employed the descriptive survey research design utilizing expost facto method. The method was chosen because, the study was only concerned with examining or identifying the challenges as already experienced by the women or as they have occurred through their views and opinions.

The population of the study consists of all women involved in the University of Lagos sandwich programme in the 2009/2010 academic session. There were an estimated women population of about two hundred and ninety-eight registered women according to the B.Ed. part-time programme official record.

A sample size of 150 women randomly selected using simple random sampling procedure was used to collect data for the study. A sample size of 50 women was selected each through the use of table of random numbers from the three departments of educational foundation, human kinetics and health education and Adult education.

A 15-item questionnaire to explore the opinion or view of women on the challenges they face in the programme was designed by the researchers. The instrument titled "Challenges of Women in Higher Education Questionnaire" (CHHEQ) adopted the Likert rating scale pattern. In this regard, the respondents were requested to record their responses on a four-points continuum of the scale ranging from strongly agree to 'strongly disagree', with a weighted point of 4 to 1 respectively. The instrument has two sections: Section A and B. The section A focused on demographic data of the respondents such as age, department, course of study, level among others, while section B deals with issues relating to the research questions raised for the study. It was a new instrument designed for the purpose of this study by the researchers with the aid of two experts in the Faculties of Education at both the University of Lagos and Benin. Their choice was based on their expertise in test construction and development and experience as seasoned researchers.

The validity of the instrument was determined through the use of content or experts judgement approach. In this wise, some colleagues in the Faculties of Education; University of Lagos and Benin, were given specimens of the instrument to scrutinize and make comments as appropriate on the construct and content. Their comments and suggestions led to the modification of some of the items raised initially and the addition of a few other items.

To determine the stability level of the instrument in generating the needed data, the test retest procedure was employed. In this regard, copies of the instrument were administered on a group of 30 respondents drawn from the target population twice within an interval of two weeks. The responses were collated and correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistical formula. The result produced a reliability index of 0.68. This shows that the instrument was reliable. The group used for this pilot study was excluded from the final study.

In analyzing the data gathered, simple mean, frequency count and simple percentage were utilized.

Results

The results that emerged from the investigation in relation to all the issues examined as stated in the research question are presented in the tables below.

Research Question 1: Do women in continuing higher education actually witness any serious challenges in the course of their learning?

The responses obtained on the issue were analyzed using simple percentage and the finding is presented in the Table 1

Table 1: Data on whether women actually experience any challenge in the programme

| Level of Response | Frequencies | Percentages |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Yes | 146 | 97.33 |
| No | 4 | 2.67 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

The result presented in Table 1 show that 146 or 97.33 per cent of those sampled indicated that they actually encounter challenges. Only 4 representing 2.67 per cent indicate they don't actually have challenges. This means that women actually encounter challenges in the course of their participation in continuing education programme.

Research Question 2: What are the major challenges confronting women in the programme?

This research question was designed to find out the major challenges confronting women. The responses supplied in relation to the issue were analyzed and the findings are as presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Data on major challenges confronting women in continuing higher education programme.

| S/N | Items/Challenges | Weighted Mean | Mean Score | Remark |
|-----|---|---------------|------------|----------|
| 1 | Time constraints | 520 | 3.46 | Accepted |
| 2 | Increasing marital demand | 560 | 3.73 | " |
| 3 | Poor economic or financial base | 580 | 3.86 | " |
| 4 | Poor learning environment | 500 | 3.33 | " |
| 5 | Lack of encouragement from spouse and employers | 560 | 3.73 | " |

The data presented in the Table 2 reveal that all the identified items were considered major challenges of women participants by those sampled for the study. All of the items met the criterion means score of 2.50. This implies that the challenges women participants face in continuing higher education include time constraint, increasing marital demand, poor economic or financial base, poor learning environment, lack of encouragement from spouse and employers, increasing social demand/pressure, poor psychological disposition toward learning, problem of improper work organization, and the short duration of lecture time or programme contact.

Research Question 3

This question sought to determine if the content of the programme meet the academic aspirations of women

| Level of Response | Frequencies | Percentages |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Yes | 80 | 53.33 |
| No | 70 | 46.67 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

The results presented in Table 3 reveal that 80 of the sampled women stated that the content meet with their academic aspiration and interest. This represents 53.33 per cent of those sampled. Only 70 or 46.67% of sampled population indicated that the content do not meet up with their academic aspiration or interest. This means that the content of programme is meeting with their academic aspiration slightly.

The last research question was meant to determine how the women perceive these challenges confronting them. The responses obtained and analyzed produced the results shown in Table 4

Table 4: Data on Women Perception of the Challenges that confront them

| S/N | Items/Variable | Weighted Mean | Mean Score | Remark |
|-----|---|---------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 | Expected but not overwhelming | 560 | 3.73 | Accepted |
| 2 | Expected and overwhelming | 370 | 2.46 | Not accepted |
| 3 | Though major challenges but not overwhelming and insurmountable | 660 | 4.40 | Accepted |
| 4 | Unexpected and major challenges | 360 | 2.40 | Not accepted |

The data presented in Table 4 show that the women respondents perceive the challenges they face as expected but not overwhelming, they also indicated that though very serious, the challenges were not insurmountable. This implies that they are coping with the situation. It was also agreed that the challenges were very serious ones but not insurmountable. However, a few of them considered the challenges as unexpected but very serious. In the same vein, some also indicated that the challenges were unexpected and overwhelming. Only items no. 2 and 4 did not meet the criterion mean score of 2.50. This means that the challenges were perceived as expected, unexpected and serious but not overwhelming and insurmountable.

Discussion of Results

The results of this investigation have been quite revealing and instructive. The analysis of the data collected revealed that women participants in continuing higher education actually experience a number of challenges in the programme. These challenges were listed to include time constraints; increasing mental demands, poor economic or financial base, poor learning environment and lack of encouragement from spouse and employers.

Other constraints include increasing social demand/pressure, poor psychological disposition, and problem of improper work organization and the short duration of the programme contact in terms of lectures.

The challenge of time constraint, it must be remarked, was seen by the respondents in terms of the crash nature of programme which makes

the workload in terms of subjects or courses studied heavy on them and occupying all the available time to them. Further analyses revealed that the household chores which they have to cater for alongside their studies further reduce the time available for them to study adequately. This makes learning very difficult or cumbersome. The poor psychological disposition is as a result of the mental and social demands or pressure on them. The stress or trauma which they have to go through makes them feel psychologically ill-disposed towards the programme. This has led some of their colleagues to drop out of the programme. As mothers, they are bothered about their children. In addition, some have to contend with pregnancy while others nurse their new born babies alongside their studies. Some have had to put to bed in the course of their studies or even during examinations. This further increases their burden and has made some to fail their exams while some have had to even abandon their examinations. Some come late for lectures because of their marital demands or even stay away from lectures for a reasonable period as a result of home pressure or demand. All these affect their learning and level of achievement. The non-conducive learning environment even makes matter worse for them coupled with the very poor student-teacher relationship. Women in continuing higher education also experience harassment, intimidation and lack of encouragement like their counterparts in the regular higher education programme. Equally more instructive was the fact that majority of them expected these challenges and believe they were not insurmountable. This probably provided the succour or solace to many and helped them to continually evolve measures for coping with the situation. Otherwise, considering the magnitude of the challenges, the dropout rate would have been very high and be on the increase continuously too. The wastage level had probably remained low due to the fact that curricular content was adjudged to be in harmony with the academic aspirations and interest of the women. The various findings of the study corroborated that of Kazeem (1988) who reported that women in continuing higher education face the problems of marital demands, finance, health/psychology, school and organization/work and loan.

Implications for Adult Women Counselling and Education

The challenges women encounter can undoubtedly affect their attitude towards learning since the low achievement of some of them is traceable to these challenges. It is obvious that the individual finds pleasure and meaning of life when they make progress in terms of achieving their goals and desires. The challenges women face demand for a kind of intervention that would enable them maximize their participation and achieve the desired goal or objectives. From this understanding, it will not be difficult for adult education facilitators and counsellors to make smooth achievement in terms of helping their clients (i.e. the women) achieve their objectives of participating in continuing higher education programme.

The counsellors and teachers are expected to understand the challenges of women and the prevailing situations which may, influence the attitude of the women towards learning and level of achievement. This is very important because if there is variance between the real challenges and the perceived challenges by the teachers and adults counsellor, certainly it will be difficult to design an appropriate counselling intervention programme.. In fact, adult counsellors must appreciate the position of these challenges in the learning cycle of the adult women before they can achieve their counselling goals and objectives.

The place of relevance of content as a factor in attitude formation is quite significant in adult education programme (continuing higher education inclusive) as well as their counselling needs. Relevance of content of learned materials is very crucial in promoting adult learning as shown in this study. It should be noted that positive attitude among adult learners and between adult learners towards adult educators or facilitators constitute major influence in helping adult learners to realize their educational goals and objectives. It is therefore, necessary for counsellors of adult learners to exploit and help to improve on their attitude towards learning and their facilitators. To facilitate the attainment of this counselling goal, the counsellors must organize their activities in the language that is common to their adult women learners.

Learning and training effects are fundamental in the development of positive attitude towards learning among individuals. If proper learning and training have been acquired counsellors of adults should engage in promoting their interests and inclinations along positive dimensions. In all, there is the need for the counsellors to endeavour to

help the women stimulate and sustain positive attitude towards their learning. Of course, counselling of the learners should not be done in a vacuum. That is, the adult counsellors must also appreciate the level of educational achievement of the women so that he/she can determine appropriate approaches, and techniques that will enhance their learning outcome and the realization of his/her counselling objectives. Based on the peculiarities or prevailing circumstance, the counsellor must seek to achieve a high level of cognitive affective and instrumental relations with the women, so that they can easily understand and appreciate the nature of their circumstances and the influence acquired. In this way it will be very easy to organize programmes that would be used of systematically modify the behaviour or attitude they have developed towards their learning and education. It will also help the counsellor select appropriate counselling theories such as Behaviour Modification Theory, Rationale Emotional Therapy etc for helping the women handle their cases or problems.

Conclusion

The results of this study have helped to throw light on the challenges of women in continuing higher education. The analysis of the data collected has proved that the women face very serious challenges in the course of their studies, but these problems are not insurmountable. The implication of this is that the programme must be refocused and strengthened for better performance and patronage from the target audience. In his regard, we wish to offer the following suggestions.

In the first place, the procedure must be modified to suit the peculiarities of the women. They must be seen as adults and treated as such. Procedure should be built on the principle of Andragogy which gives due recognition to adult learners as self-directed learners. This demands for a modification of the relationship with them in a way that promotes their positive image as adult learners and helps them to surmount their personal/individual challenges that can undermine their efforts in seeking to acquire higher education.

In addition, investigation should be carried out on how best to help women manage the house affairs with learning activities. The women should also be tutored on time management strategies. This can be incorporated into their programme as a means of helping them manage effectively the time available to them. There is also the need to encourage and instigate these women through whatever means of assisting them to cope effectively with their learning.

Finally the counsellor should help the women to profit positively from very important mass media programme that would help them not only to develop positive attitude toward learning but acquire the desired interest, sustain it and cope with learning challenges. In this regard, Television, Radio, Computer assisted learning etc. should be utilized to enhance learners positive attitude and mitigate the problem of physical appearance and time constraints. Such materials will not only motivate adult women interests in learning but would also stimulate the development of their imaginary and cognitive disposition towards effective learning.

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