

ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning education has come of age in Nigeria. For over a decade, National Open University of Nigeria (N.O.U.N) remains the only one-mode university in Nigeria. Education is the bedrock of women empowerment, be it formal or informal education. Therefore has N.O.U.N- the only virtual university in Nigeria been able to impact on Nigerian women in term of women empowerment? The objectives of the study are to examine whether open and distance learning has an influence on women empowerment in Nigeria, to also examine whether the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable to Nigerian women that enrolled with N.O.U.N. However, this paper employed primary data of questionnaire analysis and chi-square statistical analysis as the estimation techniques. Consequently the study concludes that women empowerment is the development of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status. Finally, the paper recommends that Women should be encouraged through relevant ODL programmes that are designed to meet their needs. The cost of undergoing ODL should be reduced to encourage more women to enroll for the programmes.

Keywords: Open and Distance learning (ODL), Women empowerment, Skills, Self-actualization and Educational Institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education and women empowerment has for a longtime become a global issue, and in Nigeria inclusive. Women in Nigeria have had various challenges in order to obtain equal education. Education is a basic human right and has been accepted as such ever since 1948 approval of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. There exist a positive relationship between the enrollment of girls in primary school and the GDP and rise in life expectancy. As a result of this relationship, enrollment in schools epitomizes the largest element of the investment in human capital in a nation. Fast socio-economic advancement of a nation has been shown to be a function of the quality of women and their education in a nation. Education impacts on women, an outlook of a lifelong attainment of understanding, principles, attitudes; competence and abilities (Schultz, 2002).

In spite of Schultz submission, a large number of women still do not have access to education most especially at higher level of learning in Nigeria. A good instance is the 1999 UNICEF statistical figure quoted in Oniye (2000) that out of a total number of about 500,000 students that were admitted in all Nigeria higher institutions of leaning, female intake was only 34 percent. This gap in the number of male and female intake is more noticeable in the Polytechnics and in science and engineering disciplines in the Universities (NUCHEP, 2004). We can adduce a lot of reasons to while the female intake into higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has gone in this direction.

Allowing women to have access to good and qualitative education in Nigeria, would amount to empowering them. This, in a way; would lead to qualitative benefits such as fight against increased maternal and infant mortalities through enhanced nutrition; improved child nurturing skills; healthcare and prevention against killer diseases, economic power to enable them play their part effectively in family development, and a lot more. Oniye (2000) submits that, women empowerment can only be accomplished through the setting up of an acceptable and serviceable education to the women folk. However, Esere (2001) advocates for an educational system which will bring about self-realization and all that are required for the nation's complete advancement like mass literacy, economic empowerment [especially in women] etc. From these assertions, we can infer that access to education by women in Nigeria would emancipate and empower them.

However, ODL is seeing to be complementing the conventional system of education in the area of empowerment and capacity building. Hence, the objectives of this study are to investigate the impact Open and Distance Learning on women empowerment that is Self-actualization/Potential of women. This paper is sectionalized thus: section 2 is the literature review and theoretical frame work after introduction, while methodology is in section 3. However, data presentation and analysis is in section 4 and section 5 is dedicated to the recommendation while section six is the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The terms open and distance learning represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learner. Peratton, Robinson & Creed (2001) defined distance education as 'an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and/or time from the learners. Open Learning, in turn, is 'an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials. Constraints on study are minimized in terms of access, entry, or time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these. Thus, the concept of open and distance learning suggest an educational approach designed to reach learners in their homes/offices/shops etc, provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person. It also create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study. Hulsmann (1997) had approached the definition of the concept of open and distance learning from the characteristic point of view. He identified four crucial features of distance education as follows: The separation of the teacher and the learner in time or place, or in both time and place, Influence of an educational institution: necessity for institutional accreditation of programmes and courses. The use of technical media: involving mixed media courseware such as print, radio and television broadcasts, video and audiocassettes, computer band learning and telecommunications, The provision of two-way communication: allowing for interaction between learners and tutors either synchronously or asynchronously, as opposed to the passive receipt of broadcast signals.

The ODL trainers' toolkit published jointly by the Commonwealth of Learning and the Asian Development Bank (2000) identified two additional features of distance education as: Possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials, learner-learner interaction (self-help study groups), library study, laboratory and practice sessions, Use of industrialized processes; that is, in large scale open and distance learning operations, labour is divided and tasks are assigned to various staff

working together in course development teams. However, Obanya (1999) reported that there exists a great insufficiency of opportunities in access to quality education in Nigeria today with low quality education and its frequently observed irrelevance. Moreover, this calls for a radical change in the approach to the educative process in Nigeria. UNESCO (2002) had stated that “in efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open and distance learning may be seen as an approach that is at least complementary and under certain circumstances, an appropriate substitute for the face-to-face methods that still dominates most educational systems”. The distance education alternative with all its palpable advantages of access and flexibility seems to be the solution to the problem.

More so, the open and distance learning scheme holds a number of potentials for various stakeholders in the education and development process. To the learner, ODL means more freedom of access and thereby, a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualification. It is often a cheaper means of attending school for the student since some people may not be able to leave their places of work to go to school full time. For employers, ODL offer the possibility of organizing in-service training for their staff without necessarily releasing them for long periods of productive time. With sufficient number of employees being trained, ODL is often the most cost-effective means. For the government and educational policy makers, the system is a panacea to the perennial problem of provision of equitable and accessible education at an affordable and cost effective way. According to Calvert (1986), he said that distance education helps extend the market for education to clientele who have not been previously served. The problem of unsatisfied demand for education versus actual supply of educational services contributed to the acceptance, growth, and implementation of distance education programmes in Nigeria as a means to bridge the gap between demand and supply.

On the other hand, the contemporary feminist theoretical framework can be classified into three different approaches, namely liberal, socialist and radical. These approaches are closely associated with the perspectives of existing social theories. Liberal feminism has to do with functionalism; human capital and modernisation theories; socialist feminism with conflict and Marxist theories and radical feminism with liberation theory. In terms of their orientation, liberal feminism has economic force, radical feminism has ideological force, and socialist feminism is the interconnection between ideological and economic force (Stromquist 1990a:146).

3. METHODOLOGY

The data used in this research study was basically primary data of questionnaire analysis that were distributed to the Students of National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos Study Centre. However, the study population comprises 120 Students of National Open University of Nigeria and it is made up of only the female Students of the Lagos Study Centre. More so, the population also has different material status from single to married. However, chi-squared analysis is adopted in this study, and chi-square referred to as chi-square test or χ^2 test, is any statistical hypothesis test in which the sampling distribution of the test statistic is a chi-squared distribution when the null hypothesis is true, or any in which this is asymptotically true, meaning that the sampling distribution (if the null hypothesis is true) can be made to approximate a chi-squared

distribution as closely as desired by making the sample size large enough. Mathematically Chi-Square analysis;

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum (O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where

O = Observed

E = Expected

3.1. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Null Hypothesis (Ho): Open and Distance Learning has no significant effect on Women empowerment in Nigeria.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Open and Distance Learning has a significant effect on Women empowerment in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Null Hypothesis (Ho): The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian women that enrolled with N.O.U.N.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable for Nigerian women that enrolled with N.O.U.N.

3.2. Data Presentation and Analysis of Questionnaire

Table 1 Marital Status: Question 1

Responses	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Single	28	28.0	23.33
Married	92	120.0	76.67
	120		100.0

Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013

From the result the result above, 28 out of 120 respondents are single and this gives 28% of the whole respondents and 92 out of 120 respondents are married and this represent 92% of the total respondents. By inference from the analysis above that there are more married respondents in the research study.

TABLE 2 Question 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Below 16-25 years	38	38.0	31.67
Between 26-35 years	44	82.0	36.67
Between 36-45 years	18	100.0	15.00
Between 46-55	12	112.0	10.00
56 Years and above	8	120.0	6.66
TOTAL	120		100.0

Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013

The Table 2 above revealed that 38 respondents are between 16-25 years of age and this represents 38% of the total respondents while 44 respondents are between 26-35 years of age and this gives 36.67% of the total respondents. However, 18 respondents are between 36-45 years of age and this gives 15% of the whole respondents while 12 respondents are between the age of 46-55 years of age and this constitutes 10% of the total respondents. More so, 8 respondents are between 56 years and above and this gives 6.66% of the whole respondents. Therefore, from the above analysis, there is likelihood to deduce that respondents between 26-35 years of age are more in the research study.

TABLE 3 Questions 3: EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Responses	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Employed	88	28.0	73.33
Unemployed	32	120.0	26.67
	120		100.0

Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013

The Table 3 above shows that 88 respondents are married and this represent 73.33% of the total respondents while 32 respondents are unemployed and this gives 26.67% of the whole respondents. Therefore, the research conclude that there more employed students in the study.

TABLE 4 RESULT OF GENERAL QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED TO THE RESPONDENTS

Questions	Response Column	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage (%)
4. Through Open and Distance learning, higher Education has been brought to your doorstep.	SA	90.00	90.00	75.00
	SD	10.00	100.00	8.33
	A	5.00	105.00	4.17
	D	15.00	120.00	12.50
5. National Open University of Nigeria has contributed immensely to the empowerment of Nigerian students that are denied admission by the conventional Universities.	SA	80.00	80.00	66.67
	SD	20.00	100.00	16.67
	A	10.00	110.00	8.33
	D	10.00	120.00	8.33
6. The Contents of the Course materials given to you by NOUN are relevant and adequate compared to lectures given in the Conventional Universities.	SA	22.00	22.00	18.33
	SD	65.00	87.00	54.17
	A	28.00	115.00	23.33
	D	5.00	120.00	4.17
7. Open and Distance Learning Programmes offered by NOUN in Nigeria is a way of attending to the increasing demand for higher education.	SA	107.00	107.00	89.17
	SD	13.00	120.00	10.83
	A	-	-	-
	D	-	-	-
8. As a woman, Open and Distance Learning as offered by NOUN has helped you to have access to higher education you desired.	SA	78.00	78.00	65.0
	SD	18.00	96.00	15.0
	A	24.00	120.00	20.0
	D	-	-	-

9. Open and Distance Learning is a means through which women can achieve Self-actualization/Potential.	SA	66.00	66.00	55.00
	SD	52.00	118.00	43.33
	A	-	-	-
	D	2.00	120.00	1.67
10. Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religion barriers to women education in Nigeria.	SA	103.00	103.00	85.83
	SD	-	-	-
	A	17.00	120.00	14.17
	D	-	-	-
11. The Challenge of acquisition of ICT (e.g. computer) gadgets for accessing information on NOUN activities is discouraging.	SA	118.00	118.00	98.33
	SD	-	-	-
	A	2.00	120.00	1.67
	D	-	-	-
12. The fees charged in Open and Distance Learning is minima/moderate compared to fees charged in Conventional Universities.	SA	115.00	115.00	95.83
	SD	-	-	-
	A	-	120.00	4.17
	D	5.00	-	-
13. The cost of transportation one incurred in running Open and Distance Learning programme is high.	SA	104.00	104.00	86.67
	SD	-	-	-
	A	16.00	120.00	13.33
	D	-	-	-
Total		120		100.0

Source: Authors' Research Survey 2012

Where SA- Strongly Agree, SD- Strongly Disagree, A- Agree, D- Disagree.

3.3 TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis One

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Open and Distance Learning has no significant effect on Self-actualization/Potential women.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): Open and Distance Learning has a significant effect on Self-actualization/Potential of women.

DECISION RULE: If Chi-square Calculated is greater than Tabulated Chi-square, we accept the alternative hypothesis (H₁) and the null hypothesis (H₀) may be rejected. However, if Tabulated Chi-square is greater than the Chi-square calculated, we may have to accept the null hypothesis (H₀) and reject the alternative hypothesis (H₁). In testing this hypothesis, attention is drawn to questions 9.

Table 5 **CHI-SQUARE RESULT**

****Chi-Square SPSS table**

****Population: 120**

****Scale: 4**

****Date: 7/28/2013**

**Pearson Chi-Square	**DF	*F
18.78^a	6	120

SOURCE: SPSS PACKAGE

From the result above, the Chi-Square Calculated is given as 18.78, the degree of freedom is 6 and the total number of respondents is 120. However, using 5% level of significant at 6 degree of freedom, the Tabulated Chi-Square is 12.5916. Therefore, since the Chi-Square Calculated is greater than the Tabulated Chi-Square, we accept the alternative hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. Consequently, there is the likelihood to conclude that Open and Distance Learning has a significant effect on Self-actualization/Potential on women in national Open University of Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Null Hypothesis (H₀): The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian Women enrolled with N.O.U.N.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable for Nigerian Women enrolled with N.O.U.N.

DECISION RULE: If Chi-square Calculated is greater than Chi-square Tabulated, this research may accept the alternative hypothesis (H₁) and reject the null hypothesis (H₀) but if Chi-square Tabulated is greater Chi-square calculated, it may accept the null hypothesis (H₀) and reject the alternative hypothesis (H₁). In testing this hypothesis, attention is drawn to questions 12 and 13.

Table 6**CHI-SQUARE RESULT******Chi-Square SPSS******Population: 120******Scale: 4******Date: 7/28/2013**

**Pearson Chi-Square	**DF	*F
14.17^a	8	120

SOURCE: SPSS PACKAGE

The result above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square is 14.17, and the degree of freedom is 8 with 120 women that are students of NOUN. However, using 5% level of significance at 8 degree of freedom, Tabulated Chi-Square is 15.5073 and is less than the Chi-Square Calculated; we accept the alternative hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis then conclude that the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian Women that enrolled with N.O.U.N.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis above, it was observed from the questionnaire that there are more married women in the study while majority of the respondents are between 26 to 35 years old and also more of the women are employed in one job to the other. More so, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that through ODL higher Education has been brought to your doorstep. However, 66.67% of the total respondents strongly agree that National Open University of Nigeria has contributed immensely to the empowerment of Nigerian students that are denied admission by the conventional Universities. In the same vein, 54.17% said that the Contents of the Course materials given to them by NOUN are not too relevant and adequate enough compared to lectures given in the Conventional Universities.

Moreover, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Open and Distance Learning Programmes offered by NOUN in Nigeria is a way of attending to the increasing demand for higher education while 65% said that as a woman, Open and Distance Learning offered by NOUN, has helped them to have access to higher education they desired. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the whole respondents strongly agreed that Open and Distance Learning is a means through which women can achieve Self-actualization/Potential. More so, majority of the respondents agreed that Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religion barriers to women education in Nigeria. Besides, 85.83% of the respondents said that Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religion barriers to women education in Nigeria. Furthermore, it was also revealed from the questionnaire that 98.33% of the total respondents strongly agreed that the Challenge of acquisition of ICT (e.g. computer) gadgets for a Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religion barriers to women education in Nigeria accessing information on NOUN activities is discouraging. Ninety-five percent (95.53%) of the whole respondent strongly agreed that the fees charged in Open and Distance Learning is minima/moderate compared to fees charged in Conventional Universities and finally 86.67 strongly agreed that the cost of transportation one incurred in running Open and Distance Learning programme is high.

Finally, the Chi-Square test result vividly shows that for the two hypotheses that ODL has a lot of influence on self-actualization/potential on women in NOUN and the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigeria women that enrolled with NOUN.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Open and Distance learning is a panacea for educational development in any country and is a step forward for achieving the millennium development goal of women empowerment in Nigeria. Therefore the following recommendations would be relevant in making ODL an instrument in influencing the women to have self actualization/potential in the society.

1. Various Programmes for women on ODL should be encouraged into the curriculum of NOUN in other to help in empowering them.
2. More courses should be introduced in NOUN to accommodate some of the students that are denied admission by the conventional Universities.
3. The contents of the course materials given to the students by NOUN should be enhanced and adequate.
4. More vocational courses should be introduced in NOUN to empower some of the women in the society.
5. Examination should be made online for all the students especially the cultural or religion women that cannot go out of their domain.
6. Students should be trained on ICT programme from time to time
7. Cost of the school fees and course materials should be reduced by NOUN to enable more women that are poor to benefit from NOUN programmes.
8. More awareness should be given to the ODL programmes operated by NOUN as educational institution in Nigeria.

6. CONCLUSION

Open and Distance education is an important programme in the development of education and the empowering of women for self actualization/potential in the society. However, NOUN has brought education to the door step of people in Nigeria and beyond. Although, there are still some little problems in the delivery of quality course materials as pointed out by some students but improvement is on going to deliver a better one. In conclusion, ODL is a necessary condition for women empowerment in form of self actualization/potentials in the society.

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