

Female Learners Expectations and Experiences in Open and Distance Learning: Case of the University of Lagos

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Abstract. The education of the female child has remained constant in the frontline of global discuss. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) contributions towards attaining the sustainable development goal five which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls cannot be overstated. ODL is an avenue to bridge the disparity of gender education through the open and flexible learning policy. Female enrolment into ODL programmes is globally on the increase. This study therefore aimed at investigating the expectations and experiences of female learners in ODL using Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos as the locale of the study. The objectives of the study were to examine issues affecting female learners in ODL, investigate the expectations of female learners when enrolling in ODL, to investigate their experiences and the process of meeting female learners' expectations. A descriptive survey was used to obtain the information. A validated structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from 380 sampled female learners of the 7,600 target population of female learners. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical method. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents were married and have one form of employment or the other though faced with a number of challenges that hinder their studies such as psychological and emotional stress for expectant mothers and lack of financial support. They also have great expectations such as acceptance and respect among peers, obtaining higher qualification to bridge the gap of gender

disparity in work places as well as raising the standard of living for their families. The study therefore recommends that government and all necessary stakeholders should provide incentives that would make the programme less stressful for the learners and grant bursary to female learners to alleviate their financial status.

Keywords: Education, Expectation, Female, Learners, Open Distance

1. Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) had been identified as an integral part of education to be used for socio-economic development of nations like Nigeria. Right from the onset of the 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria, ODL had been recognized as a distinct sector of education to be organized nationwide and given individual flexibility in the development of human resources towards national development. According to the 2004 edition of the NPE, it emphatically stated that maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence course, or open universities or part – time and work study programmes''. In effect, the NPE is simply saying that no one should be left behind in the quest to develop the nation through capacity building of its human resources.

Jegade (2003) observed that all nations of the world desirous of a cost-effective, convenient, conducive, efficient and comprehensive way to educate all its citizens have embraced ODL. Open and Distance Learning essentially means a form of instruction by a mode other than the face-to-face (conventional) method where there is physical separation between the teacher and the learner, and instruction takes place through a variety of media including print and modern information and communication technology (ICT). The concept of ODL is a scheme that affords a nation the opportunity to effectively transmit educational benefits to all its citizens cheaply and more effectively, especially those hitherto unreached or denied access on the basis of one social consideration or the other. Female in Nigeria undoubtedly fall within this category and this system of education affords them the opportunity to pursue the gift of knowledge without contradicting any societal dictates.

A study conducted by Ogunsanmi (2011) identified several factors that facilitate female learners into enrolling in ODL programmes foremost among which was self-improvement. This is very true because female learners especially need to do something important for a change in order to improve themselves for self-intelligence and also to set example for others. Besides self-improvement, Ogunsanmi identified other reasons that propel female learners to participate in ODL programmes. These include self-actualization, the need to engage in the right career and job, need to acquire a vocation, need to raise families' standard of living, social factors among others. Also, Janaki (2006) stated that ODL has emerged as a boon to female learners of all age equipping them intellectually through acquisition of knowledge, leading them to new radical methods of thinking and taking them out of abject poverty.

However, there are myriad of issues which confront female learners in their quest for higher education. Several researchers have deliberated on matters affecting female learners in ODL. Ogunsanmi and Owuamanam's (2014) study on female learners and stress showed that many undergraduates on the programme appear to

experience stress, as married women they experience personal, social, psychological, mental and financial problems as undergraduates. A Department of International development, DFID (1997) report had earlier noted that communities have long relied upon women to perform domestic tasks, nurture men, rare children, care for the sick and elderly, visit the poor and maintain kin ties. When women think about devoting energy to other pursuits, including those which are personal and private, the society notices selfishness and excessive individualism with fresh interests.

In addition, Prummer (2000) stated different factors influencing female learners who are currently undergoing distance education in higher learning, she argues that apart from factors such as distance, health or employment there are other factors which influence female learners access and participation in distance education. These factors include social-economic factor, personal and cultural factors. Though these varied due to circumstances of the female learner, all these give female learners the impetus to engage in ODL.

Kramarae (2001) noted that female who enroll in ODL face two major challenges of combining their studies with home management and the lack of adequate computer skills. Balancing study and family is a major hurdle for working class and even for full time housewives. Hence, family responsibility influence education and career choices of women. Lack of family support often takes the form of delaying child care assistance, destruction of study material, escalation of bid for attention or refusing to set up space and time aside in the household for study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Historically, women have occupied a very significant proportion of the human society. The Federal Government of Nigeria census figure reveals that women constitute over forty-nine percent (49%) of the nation's population (National Bureau of Statistic, 2016). This figure reveals that the country cannot experience any meaningful development without the support of

the women. According to Haruna (2011) women are perceived by the society as managers of home and child minders. The socio-cultural and biological roles affect their ability to leave home management and child care responsibilities for school. In the words of Onyebu and Okanume-Onah (2014) for a nation like Nigeria to actually realize its potentials, education of women is the most important factor in bringing about changes in their roles status. Women participate better and more actively in the affairs of the society. Despite the expectations of the female in acquiring skills and knowledge for a better life, she experiences a lot of huddles to obtain the desired medal. According to Burton and Goldsmith (2002), experiences can be positive or negative because they reflect attitudinal factors related to things such as likes, dislikes, self-confidence of self-efficacy and ideas about the worth of a course.

Given the aforementioned socio-economic, personal, political and cultural factors affecting female learners in the enrollment and completion of their desired programmes on the ODL platforms, this study is therefore, geared towards female learners varied experiences and expectations in relation to the learning object on the online learning platform.

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the issues affecting female learners in ODL?
- What are the expectations of a female learner when enrolling in ODL?
- What are the experiences of being a female learner in ODL institutions?
- How can ODL be enhanced to meet the expectations of the female learner?

3. Results

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents

Age	Frequency	Programme	Frequency
21 – 30	107 (28.16)	Accounting	76 (20)
31 – 40	111 (29.21)	Business Administration	76 (20)
41 – 50	89 (23.42)	Economics	76 (20)
Over 50 years	73 (19.21)	Public Administration	76 (20)
Total	380	Science Education	76 (20)
		Total	380
Marital status		Occupation	
Single	151 (39.74)	Civil servant	80 (21.05)

2. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Osuala (2005) survey research helps researcher to identify present conditions, present needs as well as information on which to base sound decisions. The author further stated that survey research focuses on people, the vital facts of people, and their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivation and behavior. Survey design is therefore considered the most appropriate for this study because it seeks opinions of respondents on the subject matter.

The quantitative data was analyzed using *SPSS 23.0 for Windows*. The target population for the study referred to all female learners who have enrolled in Distance Learning Institute (DLI) University of Lagos with a total population of 7,600. Seventy-six female learners were randomly selected from each of the five programmes in the three departments of the Institute making a total of 380 participants in all. A structured questionnaire titled ‘Assessment of female learners’ experiences and expectations in ODL was used to gather data. The questionnaire was made up of two parts. Part one solicited for information on personal data while part two comprised of 25 items which were structured into four sections on the experiences and expectations of female learners. The questionnaire was subject to face validation by three experts. The validity and reliability of the instrument were ascertained through test-retest method. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

Married	178 (46.84)	Self – employed	147 (38.68)
Divorced	28 (7.37)	Unemployed	43 (11.31)
Widowed	23 (6.05)	Private sector	110 (28.94)
Total	380	Total	380

Note: Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Table 1 shows that ODL is the preferred mode of study is open to all age group as there is no age barrier in the mode of learning. A high number of the female learners in the study are married (46.84%) which shows that the ODL mode is an opportunity to acquire higher education. There is an indication that majority of the female learners are self-employed some of who could afford to pay for their studies though quite a significant number of the female learners are unemployed.

Research Question 1: What are the issues affecting female learners in ODL?

Table 2: Assessment on issues affecting female learners in Open Distance Learning

S/N	Variables	Agreed	Disagreed	Undecided	Total	Mean	S.D
1	Increased responsibilities as mother, wife and learner.	364 (95.78)	8 (2.11)	8 (2.11)	380(100)	2.94	0.319
2	Limited study time	306 (80.57)	27(7.07)	47(12.36)	380(100)	2.68	0.682
3	Emotional and psychological stress.	296 (78.90)	36(9.47)	48(12.48)	380(100)	2.65	0.693
4	Intimidated from the male learners	178 (46.85)	118(31.04)	84(22.11)	380(100)	2.25	0.794
5	Lack of moral and financial supports	230(60.52)	89(23.43)	61(16.05)	380(100)	2.44	0.758
Means (M) and SD of the sum variable: M = 2.59; SD = 0.71							

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

Table 2 shows the responses of the female learners on issues affecting them in ODL. As the results indicate, issues affecting female learners in ODL is high (M = 2.59, S.D 0.71). From the Table, the percentage of female learners who indicated that there is increased responsibility as a woman, wife and learner is 95.78%. Also, 60.52% agreed that they lack financial and moral support in the pursuit for academic prowess while 46.85% stated that they are intimidated by the male counterpart. A high percentage of 80.57% submitted that there is limited time for effective study.

Research Question 2: What are the expectations of a female learner when enrolling in ODL?

Table 3: Response on expectations of female learners in enrolling for ODL programmes

S/N	Variables	Agreed	Disagreed	Undecided	Total	Mean	S.D
1	Acceptance and respect among peers.	323(84.99)	21(5.54)	36 (9.47)	380(100)	2.76	0.613
2	To bridge the gap of gender disparity in work places.	304 (80.00)	26(6.85)	50 (13.15)	380(100)	2.67	0.697
3	Create opportunity for a better standard of living	280(73.71)	45(11.82)	55 (14.47)	380(100)	2.59	0.730
4	Self-improvement	292(76.84)	53(13.94)	35 (9.21)	380(100)	2.68	0.636
Means (M) and SD of the sum variable: M = 2.67; SD = 0.67							

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

Table 3 shows that though there is need for literacy improvement, the female learners have certain expectations in enrolling for an ODL programme. As the results indicates, female students' expectations in enrolling for ODL programmes (M = 2.67, S.D = 0.67) is quite high. The result shows 84.99% agreed that acquiring a degree will lead to acceptance and respect among their peers while 80% agreed that a higher degree will help bridge the gender disparity in the work place. This indicates that majority of the female learners respectively agreed that acquiring a degree brings acceptance and a better position among

peers and in gender mainstreaming. Also, 76.84% sees the acquisition of a degree as a way for self-improvement.

Research Question 3: What are the experiences of being a female learner in ODL institution?

Table 4: Experiences of female learners in ODL programmes

S/N	Variables	Agreed	Disagreed	Undecided	Total	Mean	S.D
1	Time management	321(84.48)	30(7.89)	29(7.63)	380(100)	2.77	0.574
2	Improved computer literacy	313(82.37)	19(5.00)	48(12.63)	380(100)	2.70	0.682
3	Flexibility of the programme	299(78.68)	43(11.12)	38(10.00)	380(100)	2.69	0.645
4	Developed self-efficiency	260(68.43)	55(14.46)	65(17.11)	380(100)	2.51	0.770
5	Geographical isolation	221(58.16)	91(23.64)	68(17.90)	380(100)	2.40	0.775
Means (M) and SD of the sum variable: M = 2.61; S.D = 0.71							

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

Table 4 depicts the experiences of female learners in running an ODL programme. Generally, the result showed that the experiences of M=2.67, S.D = 0.67 are quite high. 84.48% of the respondents agreed that enrollment as a learner has helped to improve their time management between work schedule and study hour. This clearly indicates that majority of female learners’ time management skill has improved. Also, 82.37% of the respondents agreed that their computer and research skills has improved during the programme while 12.63% were indecisive on the level of their computer literacy. There were a 78.68% agreement to the flexibility of the ODL programme which has enhanced their learning ability and helped in harmonizing work, family and study. However, 58.16% felt isolated from the facilitators and fellow learners as a result of geographical barrier which hinders face-to-face communication.

Research Question 4: How can ODL be enhanced to meet the expectations of the female learner?

Table 5: Enhancing the ODL platform for female learners’ satisfaction

S/N	Variables	Agreed	Disagreed	Undecided	Total	Mean	S.D
1	Use of multimedia to improves learning	322(84.74)	28(7.36)	30(7.90)	380(100)	2.77	0.580
2	Interactive course materials	282(74.21)	30(7.90)	68(17.89)	380(100)	2.41	0.871
3	Enhanced learner’s support services	271(71.31)	34(8.95)	75(19.74)	380(100)	2.42	0.860
4	Financial support through bursary	278(73.16)	42(11.05)	60(15.79)	380(100)	2.44	0.837
5	Prompt feedback mechanism	252(66.32)	85(22.36)	43(11.32)	380(100)	2.55	0.689
Means (M) and SD of the sum variable: M = 2.52; S.D = 0.78							

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

Generally, results in this section indicates a relatively high response (M = 2.52, S.D = 0.78) to the factors that can enhance the ODL platform to meet female learners’ expectations. Results showed that 84.74% where of the opinion that interaction through multimedia facilities will promote the completion of the programme while 73.16% agreed that financial support will assist the female learners in completion their programme which will also encourage enrollment of more female learners.

4. Discussion of findings

The study assessed the expectations and experiences of female learners in the ODL mode of education. Analysis of demographic data revealed that there is no barrier in age of females in ODL and a large percentage are self-employed. This could be due to the fact that they lack the right qualification that could fetch them a better job hence the need for enrolment into ODL mode.

Analysis of research question one showed that there was increased responsibility as a mother, wife and learner. Time dedicated for study was limited in addition to facing financial constrain as female learners. Care and Udod, (2000);

Kramarae (2001) echoed the same sentiment when they stated that women face barriers such as costs, time demands, family demands and accreditation by participating in ODL. On the issue of lack of moral and financial support, according to Akomolafe (2006) female learners rarely leave their homes for further studies for fear of losing their jobs and their education meet with resistance in terms of financial and moral support from their husbands.

In response to research question two, the responses clearly showed that female learners had various expectations while enrolling in ODL programme. This include acceptance and respect among peers, bridging gender disparity in work places as well as raising the standard of living for their families. These findings are in consonance with Emmanuel, Williams-Oladapo and Tijani (2015) who concluded that distance education enables women to achieve economic empowerment in terms of promotions, new jobs and increased salaries. Vaskovics (2015) also stated that there are larger numbers of women who study in preparation for (re-)entering the labor market after a period of being full-time housewives and mothers. The empowerment will also help them to think deeply about themselves, make sense of their experience and consider strategies for redefining their relationship with men in ways which will change the distribution of power and oppression to one of equality and respect.

Also, result from research question three clearly shows that majority of the respondents agreed that their experience as female learners in ODL has helped to increase their computer competence and skill of accessing the internet. This finding is in consonance with Baath (1982) whose report on the preliminary research in the use of computers compared to traditional correspondence study courses showed that online computers study students started submitting assignments to a greater extent, completed courses to greater extent, adopted more favorable attitudes towards the courses and completed courses in a shorter time.

Furthermore, result from research question four indicates that the ODL mode of learning can be enhanced using different forms of media such as

print, audio, video, interactive course materials for learning, collaborative activities with other learners as well as prompt assessment on feedback. According to Sethy (2008) the use of synchronous forms of education such as the live-broadcasting of lectures and video conferencing opens the door to new didactical arrangements that could help with learning in a new improved way. Hyland (2001) noted that feedback is very important to distance learners as it may be “their only opportunity to get information on their performance”. This is in agreement with the findings of this study that provision of prompt feedback will enhance study in ODL.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The study aimed assessing the expectations and experiences of female learners in enrolling in ODL programme. On issues affecting female learners (socio-economic factors) it was found out that majority of the female learners who enrolled in ODL institutions were influenced by the need to raise their educational qualification and also to raise the standard of living for their families. Even though the female learners are faced with financial constraints they are determined to complete the programme. They were also enrolled in order to bridge the gap and eliminate gender inequality in work places. Learning in ODL can be enhanced by providing bursary to indigent female learners, using multimedia platforms for learning and making course materials interactive.

This study concludes that there are issues faced by female learners in ODL but they can improve on their standard of living and better their chances in attaining greatness by completing their studies. Lastly, Information Communication Technology using multimedia plays a big role in ODL programmes as emerging technologies, such as wireless networking, internet, and mobile communications (screen phones, PDAs, smart phones, wireless (WAP) phones), go a long way to enhance connectivity amongst female learners.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study the following recommendations are made:

- The University should subsidize or grant bursary to female learners so that majority of these female learners would be able to complete their studies.
- More female need to be educated to improve the quality of life of the families and the nation as a whole.
- More facilitators and e-tutors need to be engaged to assist the female learners meet their expectations.
- The learners' support unit should be improved to meet learners needs in the area of feedback and assessment.

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