

Female Part Time Students' Perceptions of their Empowerment: A Case for Sustaining Womens' Opportunity to Acquire Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: Part time Education programmes in Teacher Education Institutions are designed to aid the achievement of Education for All (EFA) goals, especially in giving opportunity to those who experienced delay in enrolling in Tertiary Institutions. Studies have shown that the programmes usually attract more female students, who could not study in the full time mode especially in their earlier years of age. This study assessed the perception of the female students on the impact of their studies in empowering them for greater productivity in their families and society. The population of this study is made up of final year students in the four types of part time programmes of the College in the 20014/2015 session. The sample is made up of 146 students (out of 150) who were available at the time of data collection. The programmes are: the weekend Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE); the Weekend Degree; the Sandwich NCE and the Part time Degree. Their perceptions were obtained using a structured questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed using percentages and mean ratings (\bar{X}). The results showed that the female students perceived that their studies so far have imparted positively their capability, disposition, attitudes and aspirations in the following specific areas:

- Confidence to perform leadership roles in the society ($\bar{X} = 3.50$)
- Realization of the importance of early education of the girl child ($\bar{X} = 3.55$)
- Confidence to support equal education of both boys and girls in the family ($\bar{X} = 3.65$)
- Desire to study further if given the opportunity ($\bar{X} = 3.65$)
- Disposition that marriage should not disrupt the education of girls ($\bar{X} = 3.75$)
- Opportunity to support family income significantly ($\bar{X} = 3.75$)
- Understanding the limitation of females who are not educated from contributing their best in the society ($\bar{X} = 3.80$)
- Confidence to aspire for higher positions and jobs in the society ($\bar{X} = 3.95$)

These results which portray profound reality elucidate the potential of the part time programmes to enhance the self concept and productivity of women who dare to rise to the challenge of their low level of education. These female students formed 65% of the total number of students in that session, with 15% of them in the age range below 25years, 72% in the range (25-40years) while 13% are above 40years. Their perceptions imply that the experiences, knowledge and skills which they acquired during their studies could empower them to encourage the girl children in the families to enroll for and complete their higher education before marriage. Recommendations based on these result are focused on the ways to re-position these part-time programmes so as to sustain their potentials in empowering women for overall national development. One of such ways is to organize separate accreditation of the part time programmes so as to ensure their quality just as it is done for the full time mode.

Keywords: Empowerment, Females' perceptions, Part-time programmes.

Introduction

In 2004, all the head of state of African Union (AU) including that of Nigeria met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to adopt the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). They solemnly affirmed as follows: "Reaffirming our commitment to the principle of gender equality as enshrined in Article 4(i) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union as well as other existing commitments, principles, goals and actions set out in the various regional continental and international instruments on human and women's rights including the Dakar platform of Action (1994), the Beijing platform for Action (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the African plan of Action to Accelerate the implementation of Dakar and Beijing platforms for Action for the advancement of women (1999), the Outcome Document of The twenty-third session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, special session on the implementation of the Beijing platform for Action (2000), UN resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and the protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights, on the rights of women in Africa (2003). The adoption of SDGEA by AU in 2004 heralded a landmark commitment by African leaders to launch women into the mainstream of National Development, and this was closely followed by the launching of the African Women's Decade (AWD), 2010-2020 by AU in 2009.

Activities aimed at realizing the objectives for the decade are organized under the major theme: Grassroot Approach to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (FEMNET, 2016) [1]. Education remains the strongest instrument for empowering both male and females in any society to contribute to national development. The Education of women is central for the achievement of gender equality and women empowerment. However statistics show that in Nigeria, adult female literacy was 49.6% in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016 [2]. In the same vein female enrolment stands at 48.6% (at the primary school level), 45.7% (at the secondary school level) and 43.7% at the tertiary school level [2]. The completion rates at both primary and secondary school levels is not also satisfactory as the figures are 48.3% and 47.9% respectively [2]. These are improved indices with respect to past figures [2]. In addition to the poor female enrolment at the tertiary education, level (which is clearly shown to be male dominated), the completion rate for females is 38.4% [2]. These figures portray the state of women's access to Education despite concerted efforts which have been made towards women empowerment in the country. It is expected that the women who could not enroll in the conventional University will seize the opportunity of part time programmes to acquire higher Education.

Part time programmes in tertiary (or higher) educational institutions have been in existence as one of the dual modes of delivery of Education recommended, by the Ashby Commission at that level (Imakpokpomwan and Adeyemi, 2016) [3]. The purpose was to enable workers upgrade their qualifications, and a bid to make higher education accessible to more persons. Initially part time programmes in higher education formed a demarcation between two groups of students living on campus (full time) and those living off campus (part time). As the quest for higher education increased and pressure was mounted on the limited number of tertiary, institutions with increased population, more types of part time programmes emerged for various courses at different levels of tertiary institutions. They included the sandwich, the weekend and regular part time. For the Education courses, the Universities found outlet into the Colleges of Education which have resource persons with relevant qualifications to teach the students. The Colleges of Education mounted part time courses in both sandwich and weekend modes for (NCE) level. There are the distance learning Education and the information and technology driven National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) versions of part time programmes. This paper focuses on the part time programmes in Education courses for a first degree in Education and NCE Part-time programmes were so proliferated that the National Universities Commission (NUC) suspended the ones in the Universities in 2012 so as to streamline that mode of learning and ensure standard delivery NUC (2012) [4]

Studies showed that the part time Education programmes attracted annual growth rate of 8.6% in some Universities between 2000/2001 – 2007/2008 session [3], female enrolment is consistently higher than male enrolment (Ali & Muhammad 2013) [5], Agu & Omenyi [6], Olaogun et al [7]. But in the full-time mode of studies and in the NOUN, male, enrolment is higher ([6], Ojo (2006) [8]). Various reasons have been adduced for this trend, ranging from flexibility of the part time programmes, enabling students to work while studying to better psychological feeling of studying with fellow matured men and women (Chukwumerie (2013)) [9]: However, Part-time mode of study is associated, with peculiar challenges which females have identified, such as discouragement from employers, poor financial base and marital pressure (Egenti and Omoruyi 2011) [10]. Despite these challenges, females persevere on the programmes because they perceive that they meet their aspirations [10]. The ban on part time programmes in the Universities has been lifted and stringent guidelines released for compliance so as to maintain standard. But the programmes is yet to be approved for many Universities (NUC, 2017) [11]. This study assessed the perception of

the female students on the impact of their studies in the part time Education programmes in empowering them for greater productivity in their families and society. It is expected that the results of this study will aid the sustainability of the programmes so as to provide opportunity for women to acquire higher Education.

Methodology

A simple survey research design was employed to explore the perceptions of the students. The population is made up of final year female students in the four types of part time programmes in the college of Education, Agbor, in the 2014/2015 session. The College hosts the sandwich Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme, the weekend (NCE), the weekend degree and the part time degree which are typical of Education courses in the part time mode. It is judged that in their final year, they have perceived the reality of the gains (or otherwise), the programme has offered them. The sample is made up of the students who were available at the time of data collection. 146 out of the 150 students in the four programmes responded to the questionnaires.

Fifteen item questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, termed Female Students' Perception of Empowerment (FESPEPE) is used to collect data. The draft questionnaire was given to three colleagues who are specialists in Measurement and Evaluation, to determine the validity. Their comments are used to modify some of the items, some were discarded others were retained. To determine the stability level of the questionnaire, the split-half reliability coefficient, using (Cronbach alpha) is determined. This was administered to 40 students from the target population who are in another campus. Their responses were collated and the coefficient was calculated using computer programme. The result produced reliability index of 0.751, which is judged as high value for the instrument to be used. The group used for the calculation were not part of the final study.

The instrument was personally administered to the sample of the study who responded to the items while anonymity was maintained to ensure confidentiality and unbiased. Their responses were analysed by computing the weighted mean and mean for each of the perceptions. Then the percentage of the students in each age range and that of the total female students were calculated also. If the mean is less than 2.50, the perception is negative (or not significant). If it is more than 2.50 then, it is positive.

Their perceptions were sought in the following specific areas which relate to gender equality and disposition to be more productive resource persons in the society.

Table 1: Perceptions of Part Time Female Students

S/NO.	ITEM/VARIABLE	WEIGHTED MEAN	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
1	Confidence to perform leadership roles	511	3.50	*
2	Importance of early Education of girl child	518	3.55	*
3	Support equal Education of boys and girls in the family	533	3.65	*
4	Marriage should not disrupt education of girls	548	3.75	*
5	Aspiration for further Education if opportuned	533	3.65	*
6	Females who are not Educated are limited in contributing their best in the society	555	3.80	*
7	Aspiring for higher positions and jobs in the society	577	3.95	*
8	Opportunity to support family income	548	3.75	*

* Mean is greater than the criterion mean (2.50)

Table 2. Description of the Sample of Study

S/NO	STUDY GROUP	NO. OF STUDENTS	NO. OF FEMALE STUDENTS	% FEMALE
1	Weekend NCE	46	37	80
2	Sandwich NCE	42	25	59
3	Weekend Degree	59	44	75
4	Sandwich Degree	78	40	51
	TOTAL	225	146	65%

Table 3: Age Range of the Students

S/NO	AGE RANGE	NO OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Below 25	22	15
2	25-40	104	72
3	Above 40	19	13
	Total	145	100

* One person did not fill the age range.

Table 4: Other Perceptions of the Students

S/NO	ITEM/VARIABLE	WEIGHT MEAN	MEAN(x) —
1	Educated women could outperform men in their jobs	365	2.50
2	My studies could have been easier if done at earlier age	387	2.65 *

* Mean is greater than the criterion, 2.50.

Analysis

The results are shown in the tables 1-4 above. The Results are summarized as follows from the full statements of the items in the questionnaire. They are arranged in an ascending order of the strength of their perceptions

1. They perceived that they have confidence to perform leadership roles in the society
2. They realize in greater depth the importance of early education of the girls child
3. They have confidence to support equal education of both boys and girls in the family
4. Desire to study further if given the opportunity
5. They have the disposition that marriage should not disrupt the education of girls
6. They perceived that they will be able to support family income significantly
7. They have a greater understanding that females who are not Educated cannot contribute their best in the society
8. They have confidence to aspire for their positions and jobs in the society

Discussion of the Results

From experience these results portray reality, as these students are usually zealous of attendance to lectures more than the full time students who are younger. As teacher in the programme we see an exhibition of desire to make up for what they have seemingly lost-early acquisition of higher Education, some of these students come to study with their babies and nannies to attend lectures and Examinations. They are daring to obtain the qualifications despite their challenges.

The results support the findings of Egenti and Omoruyi [10] and Ojo [8] who obtained results that part time students were satisfied within the training they obtained and had positive perceptions of their capacity to compete favourably with those who studied in the full time mode.

The determination they exhibited in overcoming the challenges of the part time program attests to their perception that they realize in greater depth the importance of early Education of the girl child. At the age range of 25-40 years, they should have completed their higher education if they were in course.

The respondents could neither perceive that women could perform better than men on their similar jobs, nor otherwise.

However, they perceived that their studies could have been easier if done earlier. This corroborates their view that they would support early Education of girls.

The implication of these result is that the Part-time programme has potential for helping to bridge the gender disparity in Education in Nigeria. It is a welcome development that NUC has re-vamped the Part-time programmes in Universities.

Gender imbalance is noticeable in enrolment in different disciplines in disfavor of women (wajiuba, 2011 [2]). And this is attributed partly to the low literacy level of many parents in Nigeria. With perception that these part time students will confidently support equal Education of boys and girls, these imbalances will begin to be eliminated. Such parents will hardly support the disruption of the girls Education because of marriage as observed in the traditional society in Nigeria [12].

The issue of gender imbalance in the academia [7] is part of the vicious circle of gender inequality in the access to Education right from the primary school level. As the part time programme attracts more women, and they perceive of their confidence to aspire for higher Education, take up higher jobs in the society, some of them may join the academia and encourage their girl children to do so. The following recommendations are stated so as to sustaining womens' opportunity to access higher Education through the part time programmes.

Recommendations

- The guidelines stated by the NUC [11] should be adhered to by all stakeholders so as to assure quality part time programmes in Nigeria. One of them is that the programmes should be subjected to NUC accreditation as done for the full time students.
- However, the limitation of part time programmes to main University Campus should be re-viewed since, part time students find it easier to study near their families and work places and the spread of University Campuses in Nigeria is not yet highly localised.
- All Colleges of Education hosting degree programmes should also host the Part-time equivalent of courses approved for them, since both are subjected to accreditation of NUC.
- Part time programmes should be encouraged especially in the sandwich and weekend mode since they attract more females than the open distance learning mode which uses higher level information and communication technology (ICT).

Conclusion

From the results of this study which corroborates that of previous similar studies the part time programme is a veritable tool in bridging the gender imbalance in access to higher education in Nigeria. The empowerment of women which the country is committed to achieving could be significantly pursued through part time programmes. If basic literacy is necessary to improve participation of women in national development, the acquisition of higher Education through part time programmes will have more influence in enhancing their productivity in Nigeria.

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