

Influence of Home and Career on the Academic Performance of Married Distance Learners in South-West, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the influence of Home and career on academic performance of married Distance Learners in South West, Nigeria. The study employed survey research design, one hundred and four (104) women and one hundred and thirty six (136) men were involved in the study, making a total of two hundred and forty married (240) Distance learners who were involved in the study. The sample for the study was selected using purposive sampling technique. The designed questionnaire was the instrument used with a reliability coefficient of 0.78. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that distance learners are faced with challenges which differed by gender. These challenges include financial constraints, lack of support from spouse; having too many stresses to cope with, taking care of children among others. The study however, showed that male distance learners receive more support from their spouse compared to female counterpart. Also, the support received by distance learners from their employers is not encouraging. The study recommended that distance learning institutions should improve the quality of learner support services to learners and frequently organize counselling programmes to assist them in overcoming challenges militating against their studies.

Keywords: Home, career, academic performance, challenges, support, distance learner.

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Introduction

Knowledge acquisition is a key factor for developing countries to acquire scientific, technological and economic development. For this reason, demands for educational opportunity have been on the increase among developing countries (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2013). This has led to the steep increase in the number of secondary school graduates who wish to further their studies and working adults who hunt for specialized training to improve on their careers (Ozoglu, 2009). Nigeria like other developing nations of the world, values education for her citizens and emphasizes quality education (Ogunsanmi & Owuamanam, 2014).

Distance learning institutions have created enormous opportunities for individuals and countries to engage and expand education opportunities, especially at the higher education levels. Individuals, who previously had been denied access to higher education for different reasons, now have opportunities to do so through open and distance education (Ozoglu, 2009). According to Pozdnyakova and Pozdnyakov (2016), distance learning is one of the most convenient forms of education for students who have priorities different from learning, such as work and family. Wikipedia defines distance education or long-distance learning as the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. That is, in distance learning programmes, learners and teachers need not to have physical contact for learning to take place. In most times, instructions are passed through print and media. It then becomes the responsibility of the learners to harvest the information and respond to it based on the instructions from the facilitator.

Distance learning is not new in Nigeria, it has been existing for long and has taken different forms for it to get to this present state. University of Lagos was the first tertiary institution to operate the dual mode system with its Distance Learning Institute in the year (1973) while National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), established formally in 2002 is the only single mode institution for distance learning in Nigeria today. Many other universities have been accredited to offer distance learning in Nigeria as dual mode institutions. These include; University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, University of Maiduguri, Ladake Akintola University of Technology Ogbomoso, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Nigeria Abuja, Modibbo Adama University of Technology Yola among others (Jegede, 2016).

A lot of Nigerians are taking advantage of the availability of distance learning to further their studies while engaging in other things. The study by Dileep and Subramaniam (2013), on work and schooling challenges of Open Distance Learning revealed the various reasons for people studying through Open Distance Learning, one of these reasons according to them is for the learners to improve their career and performance at their work places. Other reasons include; self-upgrade and improvement in terms of knowledge and skills, salary upgrade and self-esteem

The nature of distance learning programmes allow distance learners to combine studies with their jobs, learners are allowed to study at their pace and in the 'comfort' of their environment via print and electronic media. However, it has been observed that engaging in other activities aside academic activities may affect distance learners' academic performance. For instance, the results of a study by DeSimone (2008) on effect of paid employment on grades of full time students in Harvard College showed that an additional weekly work hour reduces current year GPA. The effects were stable across time, gender, class and age but varied by

maternal schooling, religious background and specifically race and ethnicity. Dileep and Subramaniam (2013), also found that time management has a constant source of constraint for distance learners as they struggle to cope with increasing demands at work and learning challenges of having to complete course work, assignment, projects, reading and examination.

Patrick and Iehejirika (2012), opined that, women with family responsibilities face pressure from their family, spouse, home and employers. This is in addition to the pressure already mounted by the nature and design of distance learning and the financial stress of studying a course. Ogunsanmi and Owuamanam (2014), in their study also discovered that married women in sandwich program (a form of distance learning), face break- down in health, pregnancies, giving birth and going for exams or test not long after, bringing new-born babies to lectures, breastfeeding and sometimes leaving young ones at home leading to emotional stress as they worry over their children's welfare.

Since the nature of distance learning allows for learners to study at their pace, many adult learners are involved in distance learning programmes. Most of these learners are married and working, these makes them to have additional responsibilities apart from their academic work. The ability to successfully manage these responsibilities connotes the learner's success or failure at both ends. For instance, a study carried out in University of Jordan, revealed that female undergraduate students consistently outperform male undergraduate students in their GPAs .However, the reverse seems to be the case for married female learners. The study of Egwuatu and Umeora (2007) on home effects and academic performance of the Nigerian female medical students concluded that the academic performance of married female learners was consistently low compares with those who are not married and their married male counterpart. In addition, Pozdnyakova and Pozdnyakov (2016) , discovered that much learning is to be done at home in distance learning programmes, so obviously, conditions at home can have a very great impact on the academic performance of distance learners. Little or no work has been done on how home and career of married male learners affect their academic performance, most of the previous research work focused only on married female learners. This work will therefore be the first of its kind in Nigeria to study how family and career affects married males. Hence, this work is on the effects of Home and Career on married Mathematics and Science Distance Learners' academic performance in South West Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to determine to which extent, home and career responsibilities affect the academic performance of distance learners. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Find out how home of married distance learners affects their academic performance
- ii. Examine if the level of support from spouse of the distance learners influence their academic performance
- iii. Examine if there is any difference in the ranking of home challenges faced by married distance learners based on gender.
- iv. Determine if the level of support from employers of distance learners have any effect on their academic performance

Research Questions

- i. Do home responsibilities of married distance learners affect their academic performance?
- ii. How does the level of support from spouse of the distance learners influence their academic performance?
- iii. Is there be any significant difference in the ranking of home challenges faced by married distance learners based on gender?
- iv. To what extent does the level of support from employers of distance learners influence their academic performance?

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts the use of a descriptive survey research design. A survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the status of the population with respect to one or more variables. The survey design was used to explore and evaluate in depth, the influence of home and career on the academic performance of Mathematics and Science Distance Learners in South West Nigeria.

Research instrument

The instrument for data collection was a 32 items researcher design questionnaire with 4-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by two experts in Test and Measurements, at the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test- retest method and reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained.

Population

The population of the study comprised of married Mathematics and Science students at Distance Learning Institute (DLI), University of Lagos, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan (DLC).

Sample and sampling

Purposive sampling technique was employed because the research involved only married Science and Mathematics Distance Learners in the selected institutions who are working. A sample size of 240 was involved in the study. Eighty (80) learners from each Distance Learning Institute were involved in the study.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, mean and standard deviation and Binomial Test. A mean value of 2.5 was considered as agreed upon by the respondents which is criterion mean value for a four-point Likert scale. To calculate the Binomial Test, the responses were dichotomized into agree and not agree. That is, strongly agree and agree are categorized as agree while strongly disagree and disagree are categorized as disagree. This allows for the binomial distribution in the non-parametric form to be considered suitable for the analysis. The p-values were used to establish whether the responses of the participants were related.

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Data Analysis and Results

Research Question 1

Do home responsibilities of married distance learners affect their academic performance?

Table 1

Mean of Respondents' opinion on influence of Home responsibilities on academic performance of Distance Learners

S/N	Home of married distance learners and academic performance	Mean	Std	P-Values
1	Distractions at home hinder my concentration and commitment to academic work	3.5135	.89103	0.0000
2	Having too many things to do at home reduces my hour of studies	3.2207	.94698	0.0000
3	When my family is down financially, I find it difficult to think of any other thing not even academics	2.9775	1.10303	0.037
4	Combining my career, house chores and academic work together has made me less effective academically	2.5450	.88489	0.018
5	Bad internet network, erratic power supply and cost of internet inhibit my studies at home	3.3829	.81960	0.0000
	Grand mean	3.1279	.89072	0.055

Note: Mean ≥ 2.5 implies 'Agreed'

As can be seen from table 1 above, the mean responses were in agreement with all the items on the influence of home on academic performance of distance learners. The mean ranged from 2.51 to 3.38 and the overall mean of 3.1279 and standard deviation of .89072 show that homes of married distance learners is a key factor in their academic performance. This implies that home environment of distance learners has significant effects on distance learners in their academic performance. In addition, in items 1 to 5, $p < .05$ suggested that Home responsibilities has significant impact on academic performance of Distance Learners.

Research Question 2

How does the level of support from spouse of the distance learners influence their academic performance?

Table 2

Mean Responses of Relationship between the level of support from spouse of the distance learners and their academic performance

SN	Spousal support and academic performance	Mean	Std	P- values
1	Lack of support from spouse make academic exercise unnecessarily tiring	3.3739	.83468	0.000
2	spousal emotional support encourages full concentration and effective academic performance distance learner	3.1532	.97663	0.000
3	Spouse moral support makes home environment conducive for studying	3.0000	.71822	0.001
4	Household chores should be for both husband and wife	2.2315	.83823	0.004
5	My spouse understands when I don't pay attention at home because I have to study or do assignments and projects	2.1712	.99007	0.069
	Grand mean	2.8058	.98140	0.074

Table 2 revealed the mean response of distance learners on relationship between the level of support from spouse of the distance learners and their academic performance. The mean response on the items on relationship between the level of support from spouse of the distance learners and their academic performance was more than 2.5 except the item which states that house hold chores should be for both husband and wife to aid academic performance (mean=2.23) and spouse will understands when their partners don't pay attention at home because they have to study or do assignments and projects (mean=2.17). This implies that spousal support is necessary for academic success of distance learners. However, the mean response shows that house hold chores is for a particular sex and not for both husband and wife, it also revealed that academic engagement should not be used as excuse for husband and wife not paying attention to each other at home. Also, $p < .05$ in items 1 to 4, indicated that support from spouse of the distance learners is paramount to their academic performance. The p-value above 0.05 observed in item 5 above shows the existence of an insignificant difference between the participants that agree and those that disagree on why spouse do not pay attention at home because of academic commitment.

Research question 3

Is there any significant difference in the home challenges faced by married distance learners based on gender?

Table 3

Rankings of home challenges face by married distance learners based on gender

SN	Home Challenges	Female ranking	Male ranking
1	Meeting necessary financial obligations	12	1
2	Combining house chores with academic works	2	11
3	Lack of emotional support from spouse	3	8
4	Lack of financial support from spouse	11	2
5	Having too many stresses to cope with	6	3
6	Taking care of children	1	10
7	Lack of enough time to study because of home pressure	5	4
8	My spouse does not see the need for my academic pursue	8	12
9	Meeting assignment deadline	7	7
10	Coping with extended family members	4	9
11	No one around to help me attend to difficult assignment	10	5
12	Lack of moral support from spouse	9	6

From table 3, it is observed that there is a significant difference in the ranking of challenges faced by married distance learners based on gender. For instance, while meeting necessary financial obligations was ranked 1 by the male learners, it was however ranked 12th by the female learners. Combining house chores with academic works was ranked 2nd by the female learners while it was rated 11th by the male learners. Lack of emotional support was ranked 3rd by the female learners but was ranked 8th by the male learners. However, item 7 got the same ranking from both the male and female. Hence, both gender faced different challenges but these challenges differ as can be seen from table three. In addition, the respondents' rankings of items 3 and 8 shows that male Distance learners do not view spouse emotional support as important in comparison with their female counterpart.

Research Question 4

To what extent does the level of support from employers of distance learners influence their academic-- performance?

Table 4

Mean responses of influences level of support from employers on distance learner's academic performance

SN	Support from employers and academic performance	Mean	Std	P-values
1	My employer is aware that I am in distance learning.	3.1937	1.04788	0.000
2	My employer supports my decision to be in distance learning.	3.3514	.80887	0.000
3	I am usually granted complete leave for study and examinations.	2.7027	1.18509	0.157
4	My employer complains that my studies affect my work negatively.	2.8919	.96875	0.000
5	I have good relationship with my employer.	3.0586	1.17331	0.000
6	Support from employer helps distance learners to perform well academically	3.5766	.87240	0.004
7	Lack of frequent permission to attend to my studies affects my performance.	2.9505	.95712	0.000
8	I would have performed better academically if not for pressure from work.	2.8514	.85112	0.000
	Grand mean	3.0721	1.07652	0.166

Table 4 revealed the sampled students mean responses on the level of support from employers of distance learners and effects on academic performance. The mean responses of the respondent revealed that they were in agreement with all the eight (8) items on the level of support from employers of distance learners and effects on academic performance. The mean ranged from 2.70 to 3.58 and the overall mean was 3.0721 with standard deviation of 1.0765. This showed

that level of support from employers of distance learners have significant effect on their academic performance. Also, $p < .05$ in items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 indicated that the quality of level of support from employers of distance learners is required for effective academic performance. On the other hand, $p > .05$ in item 5 signified that an insignificant difference exists between the respondents that agree and those that disagree that their employers usually give them leave during examination.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that home environment of distance learners has significant effects on their academic performance. This observation is in agreement with that of Arko (2013) who carried out a study on the effects of home environment on academic performance of married female distance learners and found that home environment of female distance learners has impact on their academic performance

In addition, the study showed a significant relationship exists between the level of support from spouse of the distance learners and their academic performance. This study is in line with the findings of Arko (2013) who again found that husbands' positive interest, support and motivation have significant impact on academic performance of their wives. The study also revealed that both married male and female distance learners face challenges but there is a significant difference in the ranking of challenges faced by married distance learners based on gender. This is similar to the findings of Akinyi (2016) and Khwaileh & Haidar (2011) who discovered that married women faced a lot of challenges from their decision to enroll in distance learning and their spouse's lack of support. Though, his study was just on married female learners.

Also, the study revealed that the level of support from employers of distance learners have significant effect on their academic performance. This finding corroborates that of De Simeon (2008) who discovered that increase in number of office work hours per week decreases students' GPA consistently.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the homes of distance learners have significant impact on their academic performance. It was also discovered that the level of support from employers of distance learners have significant effect on their academic performance. Findings also revealed that, both male and female distance learners faced different challenges which have adverse effect on their academic performance and these challenges differ by gender. It was therefore, shown from the results of this study, that male distance learners perceived that support from spouses are less important compared to their female counterparts.

The study therefore recommends that distance learning institutions should improve the quality of learner support services offered to learners and frequently organize counselling programs that can assist them in overcoming some of the challenges militating against their studies.

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