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Open Education Resources: Cultural Issues On Women In Nigeria.

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Abstract

The National Policy on Education (2004) emphasized the importance of the National Open University of Nigeria for those that ordinarily could have attended the conventional Universities. These are the socially disadvantaged people like women amongst others because of cultural issues they still face marginalization as students in the Open University which provides a flexible convenient distant education. This paper attempts to illustrate some impediments faced culturally by women which are early marriage and gender preference. The paper also looked at how such challenges or impediments can be solved. Recommendations were given that governments should establish more study centres in the Local Government Area Headquarters, need to sensitize the populace to lessen the marginalization on women who are motivated to learn through the Open Education Resources.

Keywords: open education, cultural issues.

In a developing country like Nigeria, education remains an important vehicle for her transformation leading to social, economical, technological and even cultural development. Okojie (2001) stated that education is used for promoting and improving the status of women which should sustain human development and if not, half of the race would remain ignorant and marginalized for them to fulfil their roles as full members of the society.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014) shows that the new global out- of -school figures produced by their Institute for Statistics (UIS) is that from the 43 percent of those out of school, 15 million are girls

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who would be women later in life. In Nigeria, the World Bank (2015) gave the illiteracy rate of adult female (15 years and above) as 49.81 percent which was last measured in 2009. Wedemeyer (1957:4; 1962:15-16) in Keegan (1993) stated that nobody should be denied the opportunity to learn because he is poor, geographically isolated, socially disadvantaged, in poor health, institutionalized or otherwise unable to place himself/herself within the institutions special educational process.

The educational process in the conventional university is where there is the face-to-face teaching which is done as fulltime. The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) emphasized the importance of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) for those that ordinarily could have attended the conventional universities. The Open Educational Resources (OER) according to Kamara (2005) has other names which include Open Learning, Correspondence Learning, Distance Education, On-Line Learning (E-Learning), and Life-Long Learning amongst others. In Nigeria it is the National Open University of Nigeria where Open Education Resources are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media assessing as well as for research purposes.

In Nigeria, many girls are withdrawn from especially the secondary schools that could have gone to tertiary institutions due to various family related and cultural reasons, Amadi (2013) stated that distance education tends to be regarded as a second best option, open to those who for whatever reasons cannot enroll in face-to-face institution. These include domestic burden, childbirth, raising children, cultural boundaries and socio-cultural values which place women behind and serve as factors hampering their education.

Okrigwe (1999) and Ojo (1999) both stated that there are socio-cultural factors that contributed to inhibit women to lack enthusiasm and active roles outside the home. Most of the affected women had early marriage and gender preference. Culture is not static and so each generation ought to make adjustment as the time dictates. Gelles and Levine (1999) expressed that culture can be seen as a product of social behavior which is created, maintained and reviewed through social interaction.

Concept of Open Educational Resources (OER)

The term "Open Educational Resources" was first adopted at UNESCO, 2002 forum on the impact of Open Course Ware for Higher Education in developing countries (Wikipedia, 2015). Furthermore, Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) defines Open Educational Resources as digitized methods offered freely and openly for educators, students, self learners and for research. The Open Education Declaration of Cape Town was released on 27th January 2008 using governments and publishers to make publicly founded educational materials available at no charge via the internet. UNESCO is taking a leading role in the assessing of quality education particularly when shared by many countries and higher educational institutions. Distance Education has come to play a leading role in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in promoting access, equity and quality education in driving development. Open Educational Resources is also used across all

education sectors especially on women who for cultural issues could not attend the conventional tertiary institutions.

Concept of Cultural Issues

Culture is a way of life (Wikipedia, 2015), especially the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time. It is also used to denote the complex networks of practices and accumulated knowledge and ideas that are transmitted through social interaction. Jekayinfa (1999) stated that culture is the totality of ways of life of a society, while Harries (1971) in Jekayinfa (1999) defined culture as abstraction that summarises the pattern and ways in which the member of a population thinks, feels and behaves. Onwuejeogwu (1994) cited in Jekayinfa (1999) saw culture as all material objects made by man ranging from stone implement to atomic energy and looking at non-material things throughout and institutionalized by man ranging from values and norms to ideas like marriage, economy, politics, religion, music, drama, dance and language. And Olorunnipa (1992) in Jekayinfa (1999) stated that culture is learned and shared which is transmitted from generation and in the process it is modified, renewed or dropped since it is both static and dynamic. Sociologists begin from the assumption that human behaviour is largely directed and determined by culture (Haralombos and Heald, 2001) which are the norms, values and roles that are socially transmitted. There are many cultural factors that make many women get into a second chance education in the Open Educational Resources which include early marriage and gender preference. The education of women could assist the nation in the achievement of all aspects of nation building in Nigeria.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

The Federal Government established National Open University of Nigeria on the 22nd of July, 1983, but its operations were suspended by General Muhammadu Buhari on April 25th 1984 due to budgetary pronouncement (Blue Print and Implementation of NOUN, 2002). The launch of the university was on the 1st of October 2002 by former President Olusegun Obasanjo as the nation celebrated her 42nd independence anniversary. This was to bring teaching nearer to a number of people who would otherwise not have had a chance to undertake tertiary education. National Open University of Nigeria is also to assist students that were in the Outreach and Satellite campuses that mushroomed all over Nigeria that were closed down. It also services the growing demand for higher education for eligible candidates deprived admission into the conventional tertiary institutions.

Early Marriage

Early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years in accordance to Article 1 of the Convention of the Right of the Child (UNICEF, 2015). The Foundation for Women Health, Research and Development- FORWARD (n.d) stated that importance is placed on family honour and high value is placed on a girl's virginity. It is considered a shame if the girl married without being a virgin and so they are married out earlier in order to ensure that. The education of girls in most times is

hampered by early marriage in the Nigerian society which stop the furtherance of their education. This is so because parents seem to be very anxious to get their daughters married as early as possible in especially the northern part of Nigeria. Okeke (2000) identified early marriage as one of the factors inhibiting effective women education. Women and Gender Equality (United Nations,2005) highlighted early marriage as a factor militating against female education which is important in the social and cultural life of many African communities in which Nigeria is also a part. Similarly, Nwimo and Egwu (2015) stated that early marriage dangerously denies girls of school age their right to education thereby undermining the Millennium Developmental Goals 3, Target 4 which is focused at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015. When women had been deprived of education due to early marriage, they can still have a chance with motivation to continue their tertiary education through National Open University of Nigeria.

Gender Preference

In developing countries, one of the most considered basic causes of gender-stratification is male preference according to Akman (2002). And in most Nigerian communities, the male child is clearly an important object of huge social and emotional investment. He is valued more than the female child as stated by Izugbara (2005). Usman (1990) in Izugbara (2005) reports that among the Anaguta of Plateau state in Nigeria, a woman who gives birth to a female child undergoes a purification rite to cleanse her from the pollution and ill-luck associated with female children. The male children are socialized to see themselves as future heads of households while the females are taught that good women must be obedient, submissive, meek and humble housekeepers. This leads to parents' discrimination with many preferring to educate the sons since they will remain in the family to help in its development and perpetuate the family name. While a highly educated girl is a loss since she will marry out and benefit her new family as pointed out by Okojie, Chiegwu and Okpokuru (1996).

Agee (1996) described patrilineal system as a factor that marginalizes women attributing it as a silent but effective means of contributing to the system of descent in which generations are reckoned through males because of the necessity to preserve the family name. This confers special attention to the male children physically, mentally and psychologically in development which goes a long way in preparing them for adulthood while parents think the females do not need education since they would be married off. Similarly patriarchy and gender equality as stated by Nnamani (2005) are the injustices and maltreatment that women suffer in the Nigerian society which are due to male preference and observed that this situation exposes many women to various forms of dehumanizing imposition of guilt and that many men erroneously blame their wives for the misfortune of not getting a male child and punish them for a thing which they (men) are directly responsible for. This could lead to women having too many children with the hope of having a male child. In a study, Okezie (1999) in Izugbara (2005) found out that 85 percent adolescents of multi-ethnic society would want their first child to be male, 45 percent would want both their first and second children to be male. Then 2percent of the sample prefer remaining childless than having all female

children. The female children that were not trained are eligible for Open Resource Education in Nigeria.

Challenges Faced by Women in Open Education Resources(OER).

Mensa, Ahiatrogah and Deku (2008) stated that there was increase in female enrolment in the Distance Education Programme in the University of Cape Coast. Then they noted that there was a sharp decrease for some years of female students and stated that several reasons were given including spouse interference that threatened marriages especially in the case of married women.

In the Nigerian culture, a woman needs her husband's permission to do whatever she wants to do including studying. If women would be allowed to take decisions for themselves, there would be more women in the OpenUniversity system to better their lives. Mhehe (2005) reported that as she travelled to various centres of Open and Distance Education in Tanzania, she interviewed many women and got first hand information on the constraints of women who are students. These same factors are being faced by women in Nigeria.

A female that had paid her fee in the Open University in Tanzania and registered would not start because her husband had refused to give her permission to do so. When the husband was contacted, he said that if the wife starts the programme she would not have time for family matters. In another study centre, a woman complained of how the husband would turn off the light when she would be studying at night claiming that the electricity bills were too high and demanded that she study in the daytime. A regional director of the OpenUniversity also stated how men picked up their wives study materials and not allowing them participate in the learning activities. Another constraint is where women employees have to take permission from their bosses (usually males) to attend to their tests and examinations. Many women stated that their male bosses demand "personal" favours as a condition to giving permission for their absence. The period they would be away from family and work cause difficulty for them psychologically. It was found by Mhehe (2005) that more than half of the women were widows, single parents, Catholic sisters, unmarried women in their late 30's and early 40's and women with retired husbands. Ironically, these women with these life circumstances and free from male control are the ones in majority in the Open University. Women that were not trained by their parents because of cultural issues and decided to continue in the Open University still face challenges from the home and their office.`

Development and Expansion of Open Education Resources.

UNESCO (2015) stated that in the last ten years, there had been increase in the use of Open Education Resources in developing countries so that there would be fundamental changes in learning and teaching habits. It is further stated that the skill levels required in the labour market are high and all societies face the challenges of raising their educational performance.

In Nigeria, a process of social transformation is taking place as more and more individuals are striving to become part of an emerging "learning society", a society that

needs education at the grassroots level through the Open Learning initiatives. There is reiteration that education of women has been linked to have positive relationship with national development. The purpose of adopting Open Distance Learning as a policy option is to increase access to higher education especially by non-traditional learners like women.

There is an expansion of National Open University of Nigeria as some special study centres were opened for uniformed men and women, inmates of the Abuja Prisons and for Road Transport Workers. It is possible now to access the internet for Open University while some study centres, have radio stations that the teachers and students use and so Information Communication Technology (ICT), and high enrolment have made the National Open University of Nigeria a developing and expanding institution for especially women.

Conclusion

The Open Educational Resources is seen as a reliable means of providing education to people in individualized instruction to especially women that could not attend the conventional institutions due to cultural issues amongst which are early marriage and gender preference. In effect women who had undergone National Open University of Nigeria gain more authority in the home and greater control over resources in addition to having more say in family decisions and so, they will not allow their daughters to marry early and also will try to educate them without gender preference. The women would also benefit from Open Educational Resources in the form of access to information, economic and political influence in the interest of developing Nigeria.

Recommendations

When women are deprived from being educated due to cultural issues amongst early marriage and gender preference, it is recommended as follows: That:

1. There is need for the sensitization of the public against early marriage of the girl-child who becomes the woman of tomorrow by government, non-governmental organisations and religious clerics.
2. The same should be done as above for gender preference in sensitizing the public that both female and male children need to be educated so that they can build up the nation together and lessen the marginalization on women who are motivated to learn through National Open University Education.
3. Efforts should be made by the government to fund National Open University Education so that it can expand to the Local Government Areas for the rural people to benefit from the Open Educational Resources, which would prevent cultural issues against women.

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