



## **OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A CATALYST FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

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### **Abstract**

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Open and distance learning education has come of age in Nigeria. For over a decade, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) still remains the only one-mode university in Nigeria. Education is the bedrock of women empowerment, be it formal or informal. Women empowerment is an avenue for 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. The objectives of this paper is to examine whether open and distance learning has an influence on women empowerment in Nigeria and to also ascertain if the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable for Nigerian women that enrolled with NOUN. The paper made use of primary data of questionnaire analysis and chi-square statistical analysis was used as the estimation techniques. The findings showed that Open and Distance Learning has significant effects on Women empowerment in Nigeria and that the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian Women that enrolled with NOUN. Conclusively, it is recommended that women should be encouraged to undergo relevant ODL programmes that are designed to meet their needs. The cost of undergoing ODL should be reduced to encourage more women enrollment for the programmes.

**Keywords:** *Open and Distance learning (ODL), women empowerment, skills, self-actualisation and educational institutions.*

## **Introduction**

Education and women empowerment all over the world has for a long time become a global issue. Women in Nigeria have had various challenges in order to obtain equal education with their male counterpart. Education is a basic human right and has been accepted as such ever since 1948 approval of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. There is a positive relationship between the enrollment of girls in primary school and the Gross Domestic Product and rise in life expectancy. As a result of this relationship, enrollment in schools epitomises the largest element of the investment in human capital in a nation. According to Schultz (2002), 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 and that the impact of education on women, is an outlook of a lifelong attainment of understanding, principles, attitudes; competence and abilities.

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. To confirm this assertion, the 1999 UNICEF statistical figure quoted in Oniye (2000) indicates 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).

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 acceptable and serviceable education for the women folk. However, Esere (2001) advocates for an educational system which will bring about selfrealisation 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 for women in Nigeria would emancipate and empower them.

However, ODL is seen to be complementing the conventional system of education in the area of empowerment and capacity building. Hence, the objectives of this paper is to examine whether open and distance learning has an influence on women empowerment in Nigeria and to also ascertain if the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable for Nigerian women who enrolled with the National Open University of Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

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 (2002) 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 organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials'. Constraints on study are minimised 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 creates opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study. Hulsmann (1997) has 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: 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 industrialised 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) reports that there exists a great insufficiency of opportunities in access to quality education in Nigeria today with low quality education and it's frequently observed irrelevance. Moreover, this calls for a radical change in the approach to the educative process in Nigeria. UNESCO (2002) has 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. Consequently, ODL 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 organising 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. Gagu (2014) asserts that Women empowerment is generally understood as improvement of social and

economic status of a woman in family and society. In all microfinance studies, the expectation is that micro credits taken by women promote economic degree of women in family, and financially becoming freer. Hoque & Itohara, (2009) define empowerment as increasing welfare benefits, equality of access to resources such as educational opportunities, abolishment of institutional gender discrimination, women mobilisation and bargaining power with husbands. Garikipati (2012) states that selfemployment of women by credits empowers women. For Kabeer (2001) the empowerment is credit exacerbates or lessens violence against women, enables or fails to enable them to acquire independent assets, is associated with an increase in their living life standards. Haile, Bock & Folmer (2012) bring institutional perspective and define empowerment as expenditures, loan use, social networks and domestic conflicts. Pitt, Khandker & Cartwright (2003) also explains empowerment with gaining pure economic power and excluding patriarch and social norms. Goetz & Gupta (1996) understand the empowerment managerial and credit control over loans.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Feminist Theory**

The feminist theory is an outgrowth of the general movement to empower women worldwide and feminism can be defined as arecognition and critique of male supremacy combined with efforts to change it. The goals of feminism are: to demonstrate the importance of women, to reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men, to bring about gender equity. Feminists fight for the equality of women and argue that women should share equally in society's opportunities and scare resources. The origins of the feminist movement are found in the abolitionist movement of the 1830s, the Seneca Falls, New York is said to be the birthplace of American feminism. Moreover, the convention leads to the Declaration of Sentiments. The convention marked a 22 year battle to give women the right to vote in the United States. In 1920 women won the right to vote. According to Weber, women should be treated equally in the social institution of marriage, along with all the other social institutions and that marriage was between a man and a woman.

Furthermore, the contemporary feminism movement began in the 1960s. More so, the contemporary feminism belief that; free love helped escape the

sexual double standard, divorce became common place, women were "happy housewives" no more and that higher level employment and fulfillment outside the home were becoming the norm. All people are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender. Liberal Feminists focus their efforts on social change through the construction of legislation and regulation of employment practices. However, the liberal feminism also belief that inequality stems from the denial of equal rights and the primary obstacle to equality is sexism. Liberal feminism has to do with functionalism; human capital and modernisation theories and liberal feminism has economic force.

The Marxist feminism is based on division of labour and is related to gender role expectations. The Marxist belief that females give birth and males left to support family and bourgeoisie are men while proletariat are women but division of labour is related to gender role expectations.

The radical feminism belief that male power and privilege is the basis of social relations and sexism is the ultimate tool used by men to keep women oppressed while the women are the first oppressed group.

However, women's oppression is the most widespread; women's oppression is the deepest, women's oppression causes the most suffering, women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.

Socialist feminism views women's oppression as stemming from their work in the family and the economy and women's inferior position is the result of class-based capitalism. Socialist beliefs that history can be made in the private sphere (home) not just the public sphere (work). They argued that an increased emphasis on the private sphere and the role of women in the household and equal opportunities for women in the public sphere.

Postmodern feminism attempts to criticise the dominant order and that all theory is socially constructed. They reject the claim that only rational, abstract thought and scientific methodology can lead to valid knowledge. The basic idea is that looking to the past is no longer the way to go. We are a global economic world highlighted by technology. Looking to the past no longer applies.

## **How Empowerment is measured**

Methods of measurement of women empowerment are based on how women empowerment has been defined. Methodology is not a technical term in empowerment studies; it also addresses the background of studies. Because methodology is like glass which depends on author's perspective and different type of methods can illustrate different results from same sample. However, measuring empowerment is a complex problem. The measurement of empowerment has basically been done by looking at the credit pathway alone. Pitt, Khandker & Cartwright (2003) measures with bargaining power of women with husbands, control over loans, management of loans, decision making in family. Hoque & Itohara (2009) develops five indicators which are welfare, access, awareness-raising, participation and control.

Goetz & Gupta (1996) specifically focus on the degree of control over loans while measuring empowerment. Garikipati (2012) contributes to the existing literature by focusing on one specific outcome of credit intervention. Garikipati (2012) examines the impact of microcredit on male and female time allocation decisions. The focus is on how both men and women respond to credit intervention, hence how they are impacted upon. Selinger (2008) brings a broader criterion to empowerment measurement; he contends that the loan recipients should be understood as embodied subjects who are embedded in conditions in which relations of independence and dependence exist simultaneously. Selinger also demonstrates that the phenomenological approach to "lived experience" can shed crucial light on the culturally- contingent, value-laden form of the labour that a particular group of Bangladeshi women routinely engage in. Vonderlack & Navarro (2010) have similar empowerment measurement with previous studies. They develop domestic violence, control of loans, decision-making and expenditures. Though it may seem as reductionist perspective, this study's institutional perspective and results will show deeper analysis in women empowerment issue, definitions and measurements.

## **Methodology**

The paper made use of primary data and questionnaire were distributed to the female Students of National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos Study Centre. However, the study population comprises 120 students (females only). It has 92 married and 28 single women. Chi-square statistics was used

to analyse the data collected.

Where

O=Observed

E=Expected

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 NOUN.

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

## **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 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 the analysis shows that most of the respondents were married women.

**Table 2: Question 2: Age Distribution**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
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
<b>Totals</b>	<b>120</b>		<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013**

The table 2 above revealed that 38 respondents were between 16-25 years of age and this represents 38% of the total respondents while 44 respondents were between 26-35 years of age and this gives 36.67% of the total respondents. However, 18 respondents were 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 were between 56 years and above and this represents 6.66% of the whole respondents. Therefore, from the analysis above, we can deduce that respondents between ages of 26-35 years were more in the research study.

**Table 3: Questions 3: Employment Status**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Employed	88	28.0	<b>73.33</b>
Unemployed	32	120.0	26.67
	<b>120</b>		<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013**

Table 3 above shows that 88 respondents were employed and this represent 73.33% of the total numbers while 32 of them were unemployed and it represents 26.67% of the total respondents. Therefore, the research concludes that there were more employed students in the study.

**Table 4: Analysis of the Items in the Distributed Questionnaires**

Questions	Response Column	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage (%)
4. Through Open and Distance learning, higher Education has been brought to your doorstep.	SA	>0.00	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. You are able to have an in-depth knowledge of Contents of the Course materials given to you by NOUN for better understanding in the course of your study.	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	SA	66.00	66.00	55.00
	SD	52.00	118.00	43.33
achieve self actualisation/potential. What about men?	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 Challenges of acquisition of ICT (e.g. computer) gadgets for an Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religious barriers to women education in Nigeria	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 minimal/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	16.00	120.00	13.33
	A	-	-	-
	D	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>120</b>		<b>100.0</b>

Source: Authors' Research Survey 2013

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

### Test of Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis One

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

**Alternative Hypothesis (H1):** Open and Distance Learning has a significant effect on self-actualisation/potential of women.

**Table 5: Chi-Square Result**

◆◆Pearson Chi-Square	**DF	*F
18.78	6	120

Source: SPSS Package

\*\*Chi-Square SPSS table

◆◆Population: 120

◆◆Scale: 4

◆◆Date: 7/28/2013

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-actualisation/potential on women in National Open University of Nigeria.

### Hypothesis Two

**Null Hypothesis (Ho):** The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian Women enrolled with NOUN.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H1):** The cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is affordable for Nigerian women enrolled with NOUN.

**Table 6: Chi-Square Result**

	<b>**DF</b>	<b>*F</b>
<b>**Pearson Chi - Square</b>		
<b>14.17"</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>120</b>

**Source: SPSS Package**

**\*\*Chi-Square SPSS**

**\*\*Population: 120**

**\*\*Scale: 4**

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

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 conclude that the null hypothesis is not rejected which then means that the cost of undergoing ODL in Nigeria is not affordable for Nigerian Women that enrolled with NOUN.

### Discussion

Based on the analysis above, it is observed that from the questionnaire, there were more married women in the study while majority of the respondents were between ages of 26 to 35 years and also more of the women were

employed in one job or the other. From the analysis, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that through ODL higher education is made accessible to them. 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 they have an indepth knowledge of contents of the course materials given to them by NOUN in their chosen course of study.

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% agreed 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- actualisation/potential. More so, majority of the respondents agreed that Open and Distance Learning has helped to the overcome cultural and religious barriers which inhibit women education in Nigeria. Besides, 85.83% of the respondents said that Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religious barriers to women education in Nigeria.

98.33% of the total respondents strongly agreed that the challenge of acquisition of ICT (e.g. computer) gadgets for an Open and Distance Learning has overcome cultural and religion barriers to women education in Nigeria. Ninety-five percent (95.53%) of the whole respondent strongly agreed that the fees charged in open and distance learning is minimal/moderate compared to those charged in conventional Universities and finally 86.67 strongly agreed that the cost of transportation incurs in the running of Open and Distance Learning programme is on the high side.

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

## **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-actualisation/potential in the society.

1. Various programmes such as tailoring, catering, weaving, hairdressing, etc., should be introduced into the curriculum of NOUN in order to help in women empowerment.
2. The quality of the course materials given to the students by NOUN should still be enhanced and adequate for more understanding by the students.
3. More vocational courses should be introduced into NOUN curriculum to enhance women empowerment in the society.
4. Examination should be made online to reach students irrespective of their location. Especially women in purdah should be able to learn in spite of their religious belief.
5. Students should be trained on ICT programme from time to time
6. The school fees should be reduced to allow for more women participation in NOUN programmes.
7. More awareness should be created for ODL programmes operated by NOUN as an educational institution in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Open and Distance education is an important programme in the development of education and the empowerment of women for self-actualisation/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 ongoing to deliver a better one. In conclusion, ODL is a necessary condition for women empowerment in the form of self-actualisation/potentials in the society.

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