



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AND WOMEN ENROLMENT INTO POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN NORTH CENTRAL, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central, Nigeria. The population was drawn from students and staff from Universities in North Central Nigeria. The sample of the study was 306 respondents. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. A researchers' designed questionnaire tagged "Evaluation of Women Enrolment Rating Scale (EWERS)" was used for the study. The validity of the instrument was ascertained by three experts in Educational Administration and Planning and the reliability index of the instrument yielded 0.89 using test-retest method. Frequency count, percentage and mean scores were used to answer research questions. Findings of the study revealed that economic condition of family has a very high influence on women enrolment in postgraduate programmes in North Central, Nigeria. It also revealed that religious factor has very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in North Central States, Nigeria. The study concluded that. The study recommended that Federal Government of Nigeria and Non-Governmental Organizations should support enrolment of women in Postgraduate programmes through sponsorship, counseling and mentoring. It further recommended that Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with various religious groups such as Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Christian Association of Nigeria should orientate their adherents the true positions of their religion on Women Education.

Keywords: Women enrolment, economic condition, religious factors,

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st Century, there seem to be a steady growth in the number of postgraduate awarded in almost every country of the world. In any country, postgraduate holders represent an important element in its human capital resources. They contribute considerably to scientific and technological development in their country and are a part of the science and engineering labour force worldwide (Aliyu, 2018). Postgraduate study is the higher level of education which is provided after bachelor's degree. According to Abiddin and Ismaila (2013), postgraduate studies is a growth process by which students need to develop as scholars under the thoughtful support and guidance by the institution. Postgraduate students are those that are matured and building an academic career path after their Bachelor Degree or Higher Education. The population of postgraduate students worldwide is geometrically increasing every year. Like men, pursuing postgraduate programmes is very vital to career advancement of women.

Educational development of women is one of the tools in their career development and growth. The pursuit of higher education, particularly postgraduate studies, has become increasingly important for individuals, particularly women in North Central, Nigeria as they strive for professional advancement and personal development. Pursuing higher education gives women the opportunity to work outside the home and acquire diverse skills and useful ideas both from books and colleagues which are capable of strengthening their relationship with their families. However, women pursuing postgraduate programmes in education face unique challenges. In this regard, Behlo and Irfan (2016) noted that majority of married women are willing to continue with higher education after marriage but they face safety and security problems, travelling long distances to attend educational institutes, balancing workload with child rearing, family engagements, career and studies. This affects their ability to enhance family welfare, health and nutrition and their participation in reproductive decision-making within the home (Mason & King, 2017).

Enrolment into postgraduate refers to the number of students who are enlisted at postgraduate programme of higher institution and are considered as members of that institution. Over the years, there has been a general growth in enrollment and interest in postgraduate studies in Nigerian universities. It exists in three levels of Postgraduate Diploma or certificate, Master's degree and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. The provision of postgraduate education takes the form of course work or a combination of course work and thesis writing. In postgraduate



studies, the process of supervision culminates with the writing of the research project report, in the form of a project, dissertation or a thesis. In Nigeria, there exist a disparity between men and women enrolment into postgraduate programme. Girls Education Advocacy Research Network (2018) observed that despite efforts put up by Nigeria Government to ensure increase enrolment in women education, the country is still experiencing wide regional and gender disparity in basic education enrolment, retention and completion. According to Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) Gender Parity Index (GPI), the ratio of girls to boys at each level of education consistently shows fewer girls than boys enrolled in school while the majority of out-of-school children are girls (Adedigba, Edungbola & Ene, 2021).

Since the last century, various socio-cultural and social values have historically contributed to gender disparity in education, as women are said to be better at home and learn to tend to family instead of attending school (Nwobodo, 2018). There are many factors that contributed to poor enrolment of women into postgraduate programmes. One of such factor is economic factor. Economic factors are regarded as an outside influence that affects an organization or a society and it includes demand and supply. North Central Zone of Nigeria faces economic challenges which includes poverty and limited access to financial resources due to lack of industries for other side jobs. These factors may include costs such as wages, interest rates, governmental activity, laws, policies, tax rates, and unemployment. All of these factors heavily influence the value of the investment for the future (Bush, 2017). Research indicates that economic constraints significantly affect women's access to education in Nigeria. Studies have shown that financial insecurity can lead to increased dropout rates among female students in postgraduate programs (Ojo & Adebayo, 2023). Additionally, multitasking balancing studies with work and family responsibilities has been linked to heightened stress levels and diminished academic performance (Ojo & Olofin, 2022). Moreover, societal expectations often place additional burdens on women, leading to conflicts between academic pursuits and traditional roles (Ibrahim & Adebayo, 2021).

Religion plays an important role in the life of people. Majority of people in Northern Nigeria practice Islam. Islamic ideology is not influenced by ancient civilizations, and it has granted equal rights to women in education as well as other departments of life. They were recognized as integral part of society and educated about their right of education, respect, ownership and empowerment. The impact made by women from the Northern States is always silent due the way concept of western education has been conceived where women are always termed to be full dependents on men. Therefore, the forum for women, right from the inception of the western education to be educated has not being fully accepted in the Northern part of the country because



it was brought by the western missionaries who were Christians, and in the North, Islam has been embedded in the minds of the people.

In North Central, Nigeria, it was observed by the researchers that women can ascend to and excel in their educational career up to Ph.D level in an environment that enables them to do so. Unfortunately, the conflict between career advancement and family roles hinders the career development of most Nigerian women (Eze, 2017). Findings from Varrella (2021) revealed that in 2018/2019 academic year, the enrolment into postgraduate programs in Nigerian universities was 242,333 students and only 38 percent of were female. This is also evident in the data collected from institutions running postgraduate programme in the study area which indicated that female enrolment was only 34%. This figure was far below average expectation and therefore a challenge that need to be nip from its bud. The general problem is that despite the increase in girl's enrolment after awareness by different agencies in the country, there have being challenges that hinder the growth of women education at tertiary level, particularly postgraduate education. It was against this backdrop that this study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central, Nigeria.

2.1. Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were set to guide the study:

1. examine the influence of economic condition on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in North Central, Nigeria; and
2. find-out the influence of religious factors on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in North Central, Nigeria.

2.2. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the level of influence of economic condition on women enrolment in postgraduate programmes in North Central, Nigeria?
2. How does Religious factor influence women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria?



3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive survey research design. This design, according to Charles and Aligba (2017), is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing. Since the study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors on women enrolment into postgraduate programme, the researchers considered it appropriate to use descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 1,770 individuals; which comprised 380 Female Teachers, 1,345 Postgraduate Female Students, 25 Staff of Postgraduate Schools and 20 Staff of Education Departments from Universities in North Central, Nigeria. 306 respondents were used as sample size for the study based on the recommendation of Researcher Advisors (2006) Table for selection of sample size. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study.

The researchers' designed questionnaire tagged "Evaluation of Women Enrolment Rating Scale (EWERS)" was used as instrument data collection. The instrument has 20 items and was scored with five point scales as Very High Influence (VHI)= 5.0 = 70-100%, High Influence (HI) = 4.0 = 60-69%, Moderate Influence (MI) = 3.0 = 50-59%, Low Influence (LI)= 2.0 = 40-49% and Very Low Influence (VLI)=1.0 = 0-39%. The cut off point for agreement was 3.0 and above while below 3.0 was disagreement. The validity of the instrument was ascertained by three experts in Educational Administration and Planning and the reliability index of the instrument yielded 0.89 using test-retest method. Frequency, percentage and mean scores were used to answer research questions.

4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of influence of economic condition on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central, Nigeria?



Table 1: Influence of Economic Condition on Women Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

S/n	Statements	Freq Rating		\bar{x} Decision	
1	I cannot save from my meager income to further my educational career	300	98%	5.0	VHI
2	The cost associated with schooling for women is higher than for men	306	100%	5.0	VHI
3	I sponsor my education even during undergraduate	198	65%	4.0	HI
4	I have another source of income supplementing my salary	300	98%	5.0	VHI
5	I could not access loan or over draft from my salary to sponsor myself for postgraduate programme	200	65%	4.0	HI
6	When decisions on financial constraint are made, women are more likely than men to be held back or withdrawn from studies.	300	98%	5.0	VHI
7	I do share cost responsibilities with my husband on my children education	106	35%	1.0	VLI
8	Low level of income and difficult social setting has greatest barriers restricting women participation in higher education.	250	82%	5.0	VHI
9	Women education is related to those who can afford the rising cost of higher education	300	98%	5.0	VHI
10	Educated woman is well empowered which in turn implies more earnings for the family as whole, as well as improved children well-being.	200	65%	4.0	HI
Average		246	80%	5.0	VHI

VHI = Very High Influence; HI = High Influence; MI= Moderate Influence: LI= Low Influence; VLI = Very Low Influence

Table 1 revealed that could not save from income(98%),cost associating with school(100%), other source of income(98%), decision on financial constraint(98%), low level of income and rising cost higher education(82%) has very high level of influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central, Nigeria. Sponsoring self-education (65%), not accessing loan for studies (65%) and educated women are well empowered (65%) has



high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

Research Question 1: How does Religious factor influence women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria?

Table 2: Influence of Religion Factor on Women Enrolment into Postgraduate Programmes in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

S/n	Statements	Freq Rating		\bar{x}	Decision
1	Influence of religious factors affects my postgraduate studies.	250	82%	5.0	VHI
2	If well educated, my children will be guided very well in both religious and western ways of life	300	98%	5.0	VHI
3	Women will be more respected if highly educated and religious conscious by my family members and the environment I live	306	100%	5.0	VHI
4	Religion encourages women to seek for more knowledge	198	65%	4.0	HI
5	Religious practices in my village discriminate against women	300	98%	5.0	VHI
6	Restriction of women of their economic activities to the downstream sphere also increases women economic dependence on their husbands.	200	65%	4.0	HI
7	The life circumstances and pattern of socialization of Hausa women reflect the inter play between Islam and local indigenous Hausa culture.	250	82%	5.0	VHI
8	Religious influence marginalization and women seclusion deprives women from participation in public life.	198	65%	4.0	HI
9	Islam always advocates on seeking for more knowledge by both sex and age.	300	98%	5.0	VHI
10	In my community, most highly educated women are of Christian religion	200	65%	4.0	HI
Average		250	82%	5.0	VHI
VHI = Very High Influence; HI = High Influence; MI = Moderate Influence LI = Low Influence; VLI = Very Low Influence					



While sharing of children cost responsibilities with husband has very low influence (35%) on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central, Nigeria. However, Table 6 shows that the characteristic of Economic factors has very high influence (80%) on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in Universities in North Central States, Nigeria. Hence 246 of the respondents agreed to the fact that economic factors have very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in Universities in North Central, Nigeria.

Table 2 revealed that influence of religious factors(82%), if well educated, my children and they will be guided very well in both religious and western ways of life(98%),women will be more respected if highly educated and religious conscious by my family members and the environment they live(100%),religious practices in their villages discriminate against women enrolment(98%),that life circumstances and pattern of socialization of Hausa women reflect the inter play between Islam and local indigenous Hausa culture(82%) and Islam always advocates on seeking for more knowledge by both sex and age(92%)has very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria. While religion encourages them to seek for more knowledge (65%), restriction of women of their economic activities to the downstream sphere also increases women economic dependence on their husbands(65%), religious influence marginalization and women seclusion deprives women from participation in public life(65%) and communities most highly educated women are of Christian religion(65%) has high level of influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in Universities in North Central, Nigeria. More so, the table shows that the characteristic religious factor has very high influence (82%) on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria. Hence 250 of the respondents agreed that religious factor have very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programs in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

4.2. Discussions of the Findings

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the finding of the study revealed that economic condition of family has a very high influence on women enrolment in postgraduate programmes in North Central States, Nigeria. Postgraduate programmes requires a lot of resources and as result hinder women from enrolling into advance studies in North Central, Nigeria. In line with this finding, Uddin, Khan and Ghani (2021) found that majority of women in Chitral believes



that parents allocate more resources to boys than girls for higher education. The majority of the participants believe that culture-related norms restrict higher education for girls in Chitral. Also, Khan, Khan, and Khan (2020) found that most of the students who opted post-graduation i.e., 72.9% belonged to the rural background while 27.1% were from the urban background.

The data has also revealed that students who belonged to the rural setup feel more pressure while opting post-graduation, and students who belonged to the rural setup were more physically and emotionally pursued to stop education than students who belonged to urban setup, while psychologically both were pursued almost same. In addition, Akinwumi (2013) study gender issues that have become a crucial scholarly debate in both developmental and academic discourse. This is as a result of unequal access to resources and opportunities among males and females.

The finding of the study revealed that religious factor has very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in North Central States, Nigeria. Religious misconception on education of women in pursuing high qualification discourages most men in allowing them to enroll in postgraduate programmes in North Central Zone, Nigeria. It also revealed that misconception about religious practices discriminate against women and restriction of women of their economic activities to the downstream sphere also increases women economic dependence on their husbands. In line with this finding, Biftu (2016) found that major barriers to female students' college education in classroom participation of formal education were both the cultural and traditional values and their prospects for educational opportunities. Traditional beliefs, practices and proverbs perpetuate gender imbalance in terms of educational achievements and classroom performance.

Also, Osagiobare, Oronsaye and Ekwukoma (2015) examined the influence of religious and cultural beliefs on girl-child educational aspiration in Nigeria and found that that early marriage and early pregnancy impede girl-child education; that girl-child education is negatively affected by the belief that if a woman is educated, she will dominate her husband, and that misunderstanding of the position of Islam on the education of girls impedes girl-child education especially in the Northern Nigeria.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5.0. Conclusion

Postgraduate programme requires a lot of resources and as result hinder women from enrolling into advance studies. In view of this, the study concluded that economic condition of family has a very high influence on women enrolment in postgraduate programmes in North Central States, Nigeria. It also concluded that religious factor has very high influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programmes in North Central States, Nigeria. Religious misconception on education of women in pursuing high qualification discourages most men in allowing them to enroll in postgraduate programmes.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommended that:

- 1 Federal Government of Nigeria and Non-Governmental Organizations should support enrolment of women in Postgraduate programmes through sponsorship, counseling and mentoring.
- 2 Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with various religious groups such as Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Christian Association of Nigeria should orientate their adherents the true positions of their religion on Women Education. The religious practices that discriminate against women education should be discouraged.

Competing Interest

The authors declared that no conflicting interest exist in this paper.

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