

Factors influencing participation of women in Distance Education: A case of Kenya Methodist University

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

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- The concepts of girls and women in relation to issues of education have been met with a lot of resistance for a long time in history.
- Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1779), believed that women were created to entertain and take care of men . His theories were concerned with promoting the interest of men. To him, women were dependent, declined to learn, silly and should be given little opportunity of independence. (Fiona and Collette 2002)

- Chege and Sifuna (2006) a general misplaced perception that girls have to be socialized to be wives, homemakers, dependants and secretaries, while boys are to be husbands, bread winner, defenders and pilots.
- The gender gap exists is as a result of stereotypes in both the society and the school.
- However, Mezirow (1994) - Transformative adult learning is a process of freeing women from forces that limit their options and thus perpetuate control over women's lives.
- Freire (1997)- Education is a double-edged sword which can be used to reinforce or to question prevailing social forces that make learners passive and dependent.

Gross Enrollment Statistics in Kenya in 2007

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Boys/Men

- Primary level – 108%
- Sec level - 52%
- Public university - 62%
- Science courses - 90%
- Arts courses - 1:1
- Cont' Edu - 28.7%

Girls/Women

- 52%
- 48%
- 37%
- less than 10%
- 1:1
- 71.3%

Statement of the Problem

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- Distance Education is seen as an alternative to offer access to education which is in great demand especially by women because of its flexibility.
- Due to many benefits and conveniences of distance learning mode, women have participated in large numbers. Therefore there was need to investigate the factors influencing participation of women in open and distance education as compared to their male counterparts in programs offered at Kenya Methodist University.

Objectives

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The study was carried out with the following objectives in mind:

- To investigate the social cultural factors Influencing women participation in Distance Education at KeMU.
- To identify the family related challenges that women encounter as they participate in Distance Education programs at KeMU
- To establish administrative factors influencing women's participation in Distance Education at KeMU.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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The literature was reviewed under the following headings;

- Social Cultural factors and its influence on women's education
- family factors influencing women participation in education
- Administrative factors influencing participation of women in distance education.
- Guided by critical social learning theory.

METHODOLOGY

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- The researcher used a descriptive survey research design.
- The study focused on students of Kenya Methodist University enrolled in the ODL mode of study. The study sample was selected using stratified random sampling and comprised of 108 respondents(male and Females)
- Questionnaires were used to collect the data. Data was coded and analyzed.
- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.
- The results were presented in tables

RESULTS

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- Majority of the respondents were between 30 and 40 years.
- 76% were married and with families.
- 49.5% were enrolled for bachelors, 43.4% for diploma, 6.1% were enrolled for masters and 1.0% other programs.
- At 35.4% it was established that majority were enrolled for bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Business Administration at 21.2%) nursing, 9.1% and others 21.2%
- Thus Education and BBA courses were more preferred in DLM program.

Social Cultural factors

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- 88.9 %, of the respondents, agreed that many communities gave preference to educating men instead of women
- 90% of the respondents agreed to the fact that women cannot pursue education without permission and support from the husbands while their male counterparts do not need to consult any body.
- 83.8% the respondents agreed it is cultural requirement for men to own family property leaving no property that women can use as collateral security for loans and other investments that can boost their education.

Family Factors

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- 89.9% agreed that the role of a mother and wife create more barriers and strain to women in pursuing education than their male counterparts.
- Another 93.9% agreed that women have the burden of taking care of children and extended family which affects women's education and that more women are interrupted from the program due to family demands e.g. maternity leave.
- 48.5% strongly agreed and 35.4% agreed that women have no access to loan facilities due to lack of collateral security, and so lack adequate finances to support their education. Some married women miss education opportunity due to lack of support from their spouses at response rate of 64.6%.

Administrative factors

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- At 99.9% that many colleges and universities have not availed facilities to care for nursing mothers as they pursue their education without missing exams.
- 58.6% strongly agreed and 41.4% just agreed that the affirmative action has not been implemented and therefore admission requirement remains the same for both men and women.
- Another 63.7% agreed that DLM men have promotion chances than women in the job arena.
- 86.9% agreed that more men have ICT skills than women.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

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- Program enrolled factor was measured and there was an indication that majority are enrolled for bachelor's degree program in Education and Business Administration. This is agreeing with the study of Prummer (2000), who noted that in universities such as Canadian Athabasca University, they had higher percentage of women students presumably because of the kinds of degrees programs they offered.

- Prummer further points out that 2/3 of students were women a totally different situation from Germany Fernuniversitat (FeU) where vast majority of students were men. The under representation of women was due to limited range of subjects available for study and they offered subject areas which were traditionally male-oriented.
- Many universities have not availed facilities to care for nursing mothers as they pursue their education without missing exams

- Prummer (2000) suggested that the only option open for increasing the participation of women in distance education is to introduce non traditional subject career and measures to help women students to combine their studies with their duties as full time mothers and home makers by offering child-minding facilities during face to face meetings.

- Many men could enjoy the benefits of e-learning and majority agreed that more men have ICT skills than women.
- Computer based instruction is one of the most important distance education approaches. It offers opportunities for individualizing instruction, offers education to learners at various locations and it provides learning opportunities to people who would have difficulties participating in distance education programs. (Omwenga et al, 2006)

CONCLUSION

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- The environment in which women operate and seek higher levels of education is influenced by socio-cultural factors.
- It is also influenced by family factors such as interruptions women face due to families responsibilities as mothers' wives and lack of support from their husbands.
- Administrative factor also influence women education in that there are inadequate facilities to cater for nursing mothers as they pursue their education especially during face to face tutorials and examination periods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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- The government, institutions and individuals must embrace women learners and restructure work in a way to allow for greater flexibility of learning including agreed career breaks, improved arrangement for the support of women learners and enhancing training and development.
- Girls should be guided and counseled early enough on science and mathematics and choice of career so as to enable them to take mathematics and science subject and related courses.
- The enforcement of existing statutory laws prohibiting discrimination against women is weak and should be strengthened. The statutes (policies) therefore need to be revised.

- Modern information technology presents and provides opportunities for learning at a distance and most especially for women. This is because of its usefulness for women due to their multiple roles and its impact on their learning styles. Distance teaching institutions should therefore enhance ICT policy in their institutions.

THANK YOU