

Marital Interference on Academic Activities of Adult and Non-Formal Education Learners

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Submitted: 2025-04-28. Revised: 2025-05-15. Accepted: 2025-07-10.

Abstract

Background – Despite the central role of women’s education in advancing social and economic development, gender disparity in education remains pronounced in Northern Nigeria. The unequal access to education for women and girls is influenced by a combination of cultural, social, and economic factors, including negative parental attitudes toward girl-child education, gender stereotyping, and early marriage. These factors contribute to high rates of illiteracy and school dropouts among married women, ultimately limiting their participation in lifelong learning programs such as Continuing Education Centres.

Research Urgency – Many married women who attempt to continue their education face significant challenges balancing marital and academic responsibilities. Limited time for study, domestic workloads, lack of spousal support, and social stigma hinder their academic engagement. Yet, there is a shortage of empirical data and intervention models addressing these dual-role challenges. Thus, an evidence-based understanding of how marital responsibilities affect academic performance is crucial for developing supportive strategies in adult and non-formal education programs.

Research Objectives – This study aims to examine the impact of marital responsibilities on the academic activities and performance of married women in Continuing Education Centres in North-west Nigeria, and to identify the specific academic challenges they face compared to unmarried women learners.

Research Method – The research employed a descriptive survey design. A total of 306 married women and 152 unmarried women were selected using systematic and stratified sampling techniques. Two instruments—the Marital Induced Academic Challenges Questionnaire (MIACQ) and End of Session Examination Scores—were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and t-tests to determine significant differences in academic performance.

Research Findings – The findings revealed that married women experienced various academic challenges, such as difficulty relating with peers, insufficient time to complete assignments, poor reading habits, and frequent absenteeism from tutorials. Moreover, unmarried women performed significantly better academically than their married counterparts. These findings highlight the impact of marital roles on academic engagement and success among adult learners.

Research Conclusion – The study concluded that marital responsibilities significantly hinder the academic performance of married women in Continuing Education Centres. The dual burden of domestic and academic duties often leads to fatigue, stress, and low achievement levels. Therefore, targeted support systems are needed to enhance their learning experiences and outcomes.

Research Novelty/Contribution – This research contributes new insights into gender and adult education by contextualizing how marital status influences learning outcomes in non-formal education settings. It underscores the need for institutional interventions such as regular orientation, counseling, and flexible learning schedules to support married women learners in balancing their marital and educational roles effectively.

Keywords: academic activities; marital interference; non-formal education learners; women centre.

How to Cite:

Akanbi Yusuf, M., & Okon Mkpa, I. (2025). Marital Interference on Academic Activities of Adult and Non-Formal Education Learners: A Study of Women Centres for Continuing Education in North-West. *Journal of Nonformal Education*, 11(2), 358-367. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jone.v11i2.3936>

INTRODUCTION

There exists a huge gender gap in education at the detriment of the female in the northern part of Nigeria, despite the imperative of women education to national development (Yusuf, et al., 2013; Yakubu, et al., 2014). In recent time Eboym, (2024) observe that despite the government's efforts to provide equal access to education for all, including the Universal Basic Education programme, there are still significant gender disparities in Nigeria's educational system. Based on the 2019 National Living Standards Survey (NLSS), a higher percentage of males (77.3%) aged 15-24 were literate in English compared to females (72.3%). Data from the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education indicates that female enrollment in adult/basic literacy education declined from 49.19% in 2019 to 45.92% in 2020 but slightly rose to 46.10% in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS), 2023).

In 2018, female enrollment in Junior Secondary School (JSS) was lower than male enrollment. However, female enrollment rates increased slightly from 2018 to 2019 but then declined slightly in 2020. Male enrollment remained consistently higher than average throughout the three years. Similarly, in Senior Secondary School (SSS), female enrollment was lower than male enrollment in both 2018 and 2019 (NBS, 2023). Studies (Nwosu, 2008; Yusuf, 2011; Yusuf, et al., 2013; Khan & Cheri, 2016; Omede & Agahiu, 2016; Jaiyeola & Choga, 2020; suggest that a significantly higher percentage of girls in Northern Nigeria struggle with basic literacy, such as reading a sentence, compared to their counterparts in the Southern regions and that Northwest Nigeria is the worst hit zone in terms of low women literacy rate. The zone has the lowest rate of female literacy of 29% in 2018 compared with the South West which had the highest rate of 80.6% (Varrela, 2020).

The incident of no school attendance, low enrolment, high rate of school dropout are common features of young girls and women in the northern part of Nigeria especially in the northwest zone (Yakubu, et al., 2014; Jaiyeola & Choga, 2020). These features are attributed to several reasons, including poor and negative parental attitude towards the education of girls and women as well as stereotyping of girls in the society (Yakubu, et al., 2014), belief that women are sexual property, got as a booty in war, to be used by their fathers in economic bargaining, and as property owned by their husbands (Zanden, 1996; Nwosu, 2008), in addition to poverty and erroneous misinterpretation of religious injunctions. The implication of these is that most of the young girls and married women are either illiterates or school drop-outs, conditions that limit their potentials for personal and societal sustainable development. Because development can be elusive, given the exclusion of women from education, has led to the realization by governments in northern Nigeria to the need for Continuing Education as an important aspect of Adult and Non-formal Education, through the establishment of women centres for continuing education, with the aim of providing married women, divorcees, and young girls the opportunity of advancing their education, in the form of Basic and Secondary Education, Basic Literacy and vocational training in order to empower them.

Married women form a large chunk of candidates admitted into women centres for continuing education in the northern Nigeria (Yusuf & Alkali, 2022). Due to the demands of marriage, Akpotor (2018) argued that engaging in academic activities can sometimes be frustrating. In fact, reducing education gender gap and acquiring occupational skills for economic empowerment by married women is by no means easy. Many studies (Aronson, 2004; Lasode & Awotedu, 2014; Amos & Manieson, 2015; Akpotor, 2018; Shuvra, et al., 2019) have reported that married women cannot perform their academic activities effectively and satisfactorily as a result of marital demands, resulting in absenteeism, lateness to class, low participation in class presentation, late submission of assignment and poor academic performance. The concomitant effects include frustration or dropping out completely from learning centres. This threatens the essence of establishing women centres for continuing education and poses a risk to the attainment of gender equity in education.

Being a female married student is a delicate juggling act (Lee & Myers, 2005), as married female students have to strike a balance between home and academic responsibilities. Marital interference can engender academic distraction of women whose husbands always threaten them of divorce on grounds of unsatisfactory marital performance, which can lead to poor academic performance. Other researchers (Shuvra, et al., 2019) reported that married women perform poorer academically than their counterparts who are not married. A major challenge facing female students with marital responsibilities is time constraint (Aronson, 2004), class absenteeism (Hallman & Grant, 2004), lack of opportunities to participate in school activities or interact with mates and teachers, which can lead to self-isolation (Macari, et al., 2005). Thus, adjusting to academic setting can be difficult for all students, but it can be particularly very tedious and challenging for married female students (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014; Amos & Manieson, 2015).

Role Conflict Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966) is the theoretical framework of this study. The theory posits that conflict occurs when incompatible expectations are received from a single role, and the "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Kahn & Kahn, 1966). Therefore, women marital responsibilities can conflict with their academic activities resulting to difficulties in the discharge of their academic pursuits. The extent at which these scenario play out is the focus of this study.

The gender disparity in education is induced by a matrix of forces, ranging from poor and negative parental attitude towards the education of the girl child, to stereotyping of girls in the society, leading to high illiteracy among married women and huge school drop-outs. Inspired by the imperative to address the gender concerns, this study investigated the interference of marital responsibilities on the academic performance of non-formal education learners in Women Continuing Education Centres, in order to guide the policymakers to develop a framework for improving the academic activities of married women in Women Continuing Education Centres in North-West Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions and one hypothesis. The only hypothesis is: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of women with and without marital status in Women Centre for Continuing Education.

The findings will be suggestive of public policy targeted at increasing the level of female education in order to raise the level of empowerment, as a precursor to the development of North-West Nigeria in particular and the country (Nigeria) in general. The finding of this study will benefit married female students, teachers and administrative staff of Women Centre for Continuing Education, Ministry of Education, Agency for Mass Education and researchers as results may lead to organizing seminars and workshop on managing marital and academic challenges when combined. The finding will be beneficial because issues that constitute academic challenges from perspectives of married women and coping strategies adopted by them were explored with a view to suggesting coping strategies from perspectives of Adult and Non-formal Education for better results.

METHODS

Nigeria's North West, comprises seven states, i.e. Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. The region occupies 216,065 sq km equivalent to 25.75 per cent of the country's total Nigeria land mass, an area close to the size of the UK. The region total population was estimated to be 54, 020, 455.09 as at 2019. The female population accounted for 48.97% of the estimated total population (NPC, 2019). The region has a keen interest in Islamic scholarship but with great apathy and inadequate investment in formal education, which accounts for the low female literacy rate of 29.0% in the region (Varrela, 2020) and accounting for the highest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria (NBS, 2015).

The method used for this research is quantitative design of descriptive survey. This design is a type of research design that aims to describe and summarize data in a numerical form. This method is often used to answer questions about the characteristics of a population or phenomenon and test hypotheses. The adoption of this design allows the researchers to answer the research questions with the use of frequency and percentages as well as testing the hypothesis with the use of inferential statistics of t-test. It's a relatively efficient method for collecting and analyzing data, especially when dealing with large sample sizes. The design gives the researchers the ability to apply statistical techniques allows for a deeper understanding of the data, such as identifying trends and differences. This was adopted to describe the marital responsibilities induced academic challenges, the effects of these challenges on academic activities, coping strategies applied by married women and academic performance difference between women with and without marital status in Women Centres for Continuing Education in North-West, Nigeria. The use of descriptive survey is based on the concerns of the study to obtain data on the opinion and views of a sample of the learners in Women Centres for Continuing Education (Fowler, 2008; Creswell, 2014) as well as allowing the researchers to apply appropriate statistical tools in the description of the phenomenon under the study.

The population of the Senior Secondary School learners in the Centres under the study was 2,012. This population is the total number of women who are in Senior Secondary School status in all the seven (7) centres across the 7 states of Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa of North-west, Nigeria. The choice of Senior Secondary School learners of the Centres was based on the serious learning that take place at this stage of education in the centres as majority of the learners fall within this level of education. The population of the married women among the whole population is estimated to be 1,762 (87.6%). A sample size of 306 married women and 152 women without marital status was selected. Systematic and stratified sampling techniques were adopted. Since each state having a Women Continuing Education Centre (WCCE), first, the

total population in each of the WCCE located in each state was stratified into two groups; married and non-married women. Using probability proportional to size sampling technique, appropriate numbers of women from both groups (306 for married and 152 for non-married women) were selected using Research Advisors, 2006, based on 5% error limit. Students' enrolments in each of the WCCE served as the sample frame for the study.

This study utilized two instruments for data collection; the structured questionnaire and Academic Performance Scores. The structured questionnaire was titled Marital Induced Academic Challenges Questionnaire (MIACQ) and it has 26 items measured in 4 likekits scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The MAICQ was used to obtain quantitative data on marital induced academic challenges, effects of marital challenges on academic activities and academic coping strategies. The Questionnaire has three sections. Items in Sections 1 and 2 were adapted from the study of (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014) while items in Section 3 were adapted from the study of (Zuhara, et al., 2017). To measure students' academic performance the researcher collected end of session examination scores of the students in three major general subjects of Mathematics, English and Biology from the Centres. The instruments were face and content validated by experts in Adult Education, Guidance and Counseling and Test and Measurement from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. A pilot study was undertaken prior to validate the instruments of data collection before the study proper. The pilot study selected one of the WCCE located within Sokoto state as its study area. In the present sample, Cronbach alpha coefficient for MAICQ was found to be 0.831 which proved that the instrument is valid.

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentages and the only hypothesis was tested using t-test. The choice of frequency and percentages is based on the fact that it allows the researchers to provide a concise summary of the data concerning the opinion of the respondents about the issues raised in the research questions. While the t-test was used to test only hypothesis that was formulated, because the researchers were interested in seeing if marital status has impact on academic performance between married and not married learners in the centres.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the academic challenges induced by marital responsibilities of women in Women Centre for continuing Education? This question was answered using frequency and percentage and the result was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Marital induced academic challenges

Academic Challenges	SA/A	%	D/SD	%	Total	%	Decision
I experience inability to relate easily with other learners at centres as a result of marital responsibilities.	268	87.6	38	2.4	306	100	Agree
I do not find adequate time to do home work without interruption as a married woman	296	96.7	10	3.3	306	100	Agree
I do not have sufficient time for personal activities as a married woman learner	187	61.1	119	38.9	306	100	Agree
Managing multiple roles at a time is difficult as a married woman learner	302	98.7	4	1.3	306	100	Agree
No financial support from husbands as a married woman learner	247	80.7	59	19.3	306	100	Agree
No sufficient support from family members as a married woman learner	142	46.4	164	53.6	306	100	Disagree
I have poor reading skills as a married woman learner	286	93.5	20	6.5	306	100	Agree
I do not have time to attend tutorials with peers as a married woman learner	293	95.8	13	4.2	306	100	Agree
Children health poses threats to my lesson attendance as a married woman learner	297	97.1	9	2.9	306	100	Agree
Children care hinders my punctuality to women centres	291	95.1	15	4.9	306	100	Agree

Table 1 clearly showed the academic challenges that are induced as a result of marital responsibilities of married women in women centres for continuing education across the north-west Nigeria. In all the ten (10) items that advanced the challenges only one is considered not to be a problem (i.e no sufficient support from family members as a married woman learner). The married women agreed that inability to relate easily with other learners at centres as a result of marital responsibilities, no adequate time to do home work without interruption as a married woman, no sufficient time for personal activities as a married woman learner, managing multiple roles at a time is difficult as a married woman learner and no financial support from husbands as a married woman learner are some of the academic challenges induced as a result of their marital responsibilities. Others challenges agreed to by the respondents are poor reading skills, no time to attend tutorials with learning peers, children health and care.

Research Question 2: What are the general effects of marital responsibilities on academic activities of women in Women Centre for Continuing Education? This research question was answered using frequency and percentage and the results were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Effects of marital responsibilities on academic activities of married women

Effects of marital responsibilities on academic activities	SA/A	%	D/SD	%	Total	%	Decision
Not having enough time to study as a married woman leads to poor academic performance	301	98.4	5	1.6	306	100	Agree
I feel guilty of not having enough time to take care of my children as a result of my schooling	298	97.4	8	2.6	306	100	Agree
Combining marital responsibilities with schooling gives me little or no free time to care of myself	290	94.8	16	5.2	306	100	Agree
I sometimes feel inferior to my colleagues as I am not as free as they are as a married woman	291	95.1	15	4.9	306	100	Agree
Combining work commitments, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress.	284	92.8	22	7.2	306	100	Agree

Table 2 showed effects of marital responsibilities on academic activities of married women in Women Centres for Continuing Education in North-west, Nigeria. The respondents consented that not having enough time to study as a married woman leads to poor academic performance and they felt guilty of not having enough time to take care of their children as a result of their schooling. The respondents agreed that combining marital responsibilities with schooling gives them little or no free time to care of themselves. And that they sometimes feel inferior to their colleagues as combining work commitments, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress to them.

Research Question Three: What are the coping strategies adopted by women in Women Centre for Continuing Education to mitigate the impact of marital responsibilities on their academic activities? The research question was answered using frequency and percentages and the results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Coping strategies adopted by married women

Married Women Learners' Coping Strategies	SA/A	%	D/SD	%	Total	%	Decision
Making plans and implementing effective actions to complete academic and household tasks	173	56.5	133	43.5	306	100	Agree
Doing something to make the atmosphere at home and at women centre better and more enjoyable	164	53.6	142	46.4	306	100	Agree
Trying my best to solve problems that arise both at home and at women centre	192	62.7	114	37.3	306	100	Agree
Follow religious activities, pray or worship	298	97.4	8	2.6	306	100	Agree
Joke with family or friends to relieve anxiety	254	83	52	7	306	100	Agree
Accept the current situation as a consequence of continuing lessons, and learning to live with the problems at hand	279	91.2	27	8.8	306	100	Agree

Table 3 above shows the strategies adopted by married women in coping with academic activities and marital responsibilities. Specifically, the respondents agreed that they do have a plan of action in which they wanted to complete academic activities and marital responsibilities. They are also agreeing that they do something to make atmosphere of home and women centre better and more enjoyable. They are used to solving problems that arise both at home and at women centre. Other strategies used to cope with the interference of marital responsibilities with academic activities are following religious activities and resulting to prayers, joking with family and friends to relieve stress and anxiety and sometimes resign to faith.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of women with and without marital status in Women Centre for Continuing Education in North-west Nigeria. The hypothesis was tested using t-test statistics and the results were presented in Table 4.

Table 4. t-test summary of academic performance difference between married (n=306) and not married (n=152) women learners

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	P-value
With marital status	306	62.21	8.56	456	8.189	.001
Without marital status	152	70.00	11.39			

Table 4 shows that on average, women learners without marital (mean =11.39) did better than the women learners with marital status (mean = 62.21) in their academic performance. This difference was significant at t-value (8.189), p-value (.001) < .05 significant level at 456 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis that states there is significant difference between the academic performance of women with and without marital status in Women Centre for Continuing Education in North-west Nigeria was rejected. This implies that women without marital status performed significantly better in academic performance than those with marital status.

The current study has established that there are academic challenges that were triggered as a result of marital responsibilities of married women learners in Women Centres for Continuing

Education in the study area. The respondents advanced that married women have problem to relate easily with other learners at centres as a result of their marital responsibilities. Similarly they have no adequate time to do home work without interruption as well as no sufficient time for personal activities and managing multiple roles at a time is difficult for them as married women learners. They equally consented that they had no financial support from their husbands. All of these challenges were attributed to their status as married women and learners. Others challenges agreed to by the respondents are poor reading skills, no time to attend tutorials with learning peers as well as children health and care.

This finding is in line with the theory of Role Conflict by Katz and Kahn (1966) that posits that conflict occurs when incompatible expectations are received from a single role, and the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other. This implies that marital responsibilities have created conflicts that resulted to difficulties in the discharge of women academic activities. Similarly, findings such as Aronson, (2004), Lasode and Awotedu (2014), Amos and Manieson, (2015), Akpotor (2018), Shuvra, et al., (2019) have all testified that married women cannot perform their academic activities effectively and satisfactorily as a result of marital demands, resulting in absenteeism, lateness to class, low participation in class presentation, late submission of assignment and poor academic performance.

Regarding the finding from research question two the study showed that marital responsibilities have telling effects on the academic activities as married women hardly have enough time to study. This situation according to the married women learners leads to poor academic performance. In fact they felt guilty of not having enough time to take care of their children as a result of their schooling. The married women complained that combining marital responsibilities with schooling gives them little or no free time to care of themselves and that they sometimes feel inferior to their colleagues as combining work commitments, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress to them. This result is supported by the findings of Egan (2004) which revealed that no doubt, combining work commitment, family responsibilities, and school activities may be very difficult and this according to Lasode and Awotedu (2014) have serious implications on married women learners.

For research question three, the finding showed that married women do have plan of actions in which they wanted to complete academic activities and marital responsibilities. This shows that married women are organized and good at planning than younger learners as reported by Richardson and King (1998). As a sign of maturity in handling conflict situation adult learners such as the subjects of this study reported that they usually do something to make atmosphere of home and women centre better and more enjoyable. They also used to solving problems that arise both at home and at women centre with care. This finding is in line with the finding of Zuhara, et al., (2017) that reported married female students doing something to make the atmosphere at home and on campus better and more enjoyable, and trying their best to solve problems that arise both at home and on campus.

Other strategies used to cope with the interference of marital responsibilities with academic activities are following religious activities and resulting to prayers, joking with family and friends to relieve stress and anxiety and sometimes resign to faith. It is very clear that married women understand the importance of coping strategies in reducing the effects of combining academic activities with marital responsibilities. This understanding underscores the problem-solving ability of married women learners. This finding is supported of the finding of Reily (2014) that problem-solving ability is one of the important factors in coping strategy. And when a learner understands what to be done to solve problems it is means that he has been able to overcome one source of stress Zuhara, et al., (2017) which might have trigger as a result of need to perform multiple roles simultaneously.

Based on the result of t-test it is clear that marital responsibilities have negative effect on the academic performance of married women in the study area. The result showed that women adult learners without marital status performed significantly better than women with marital status. This indicates that marital responsibilities have impacted negatively on the academic performance of

married women across the women centres for continuing education in North-west, Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the findings of Beard and Langlais (2018) which revealed that marital status is negatively associated with cumulative grade point average (GPA) and perception of GPA.

Similarly, the finding is in line with the posit of role conflict theory that conflict occurs when incompatible expectations are received from a single role, and the "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Kahn & Kahn, 1966). Therefore, women marital responsibilities can conflict with their academic activities resulting to difficulties in the discharge of their academic pursuits which the results of the study have depicted. The finding of Darwish et al. (2021) is two in one because the finding concluded that marriage does not affect academic performance although one of the factors that contribute to having a worsened academic performance is having and caring for children which are parts of the marital responsibilities of married women.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum alignment is a very important activity in helping Principals to facilitate the adaptation process to curriculum changes that occur both in terms of policy and implementation. This PAUD curriculum alignment management guide is one of the guide models that can be used by Principals during the process. The ADDIE method used with a coherent and mature process structure provides a positive contribution to the preparation of guidelines in terms of substance, language and appearance. The results of the discussion stated that the validation of expert tests both in terms of language and practitioners obtained good results, this shows that this guide is ready to be tested and implemented. The results of the trial implementation by the principal received a good response with the testing of this alignment management guide. The score obtained showed that the trial by the Principal was well received. So it can be concluded that the PAUD curriculum alignment management guide can be used as a reference, especially for schools that are minimally accredited and schools that have not been accredited to implement each stage of curriculum adaptation. Facilitate the Principal to prepare programs and invite all teachers to work together to adjust changes so as to get good and maximum results

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