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This issue is dedicated to the intWOJDE woman authors'  
for their valuable efforts for crowning intWOJDE

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**Dear intWOJDE Readers,**

**Welcome to the Volume 4 Number: 3 of intWOJDE;**

**In this issue, 4 articles of 5 authors from 4 different countries around the world have been published. These published articles are arrived to the intWOJDE from Canada, Nigeria, The Netherlands and USA.**

**The 1<sup>st</sup> article is written by Isiaka Tajudeen ONITADA, from NERDC, NIGERIA and titled as "FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST PARTICIPATION OF FEMALES WITH DISABILITIES IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING OYO STATE, NIGERIA. The study is adopted a descriptive survey research design and a purposive sampling technique was employed to select 60 female students with disabilities in Federal college of education Oyo special. Three research questions guided the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire tagged "Socio-cultural, economic and religious factors affecting females' education questionnaire (SCREFAFEQ)" with a reliability coefficient of 0.71.**

**The results revealed that socio-cultural affect the participation of females with disabilities as parent believe the education of females as a waste since they will end up in the kitchen. Lack of religious knowledge and issues of poverty also constitute their lower participation. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Enactment of legal policy against parents refusing educating of females with disabilities enrolment in schools to certification level; Religions should not be seen as a barrier to educate females with disabilities in any respect to cultural endowments in our society. Than open and distance learning can be solution for them.**

**In the 2<sup>nd</sup> article titled as "CANADA - INCLUSIVE DISTANCE EDUCATION: Experiences of Four Canadian Women", written by Christine VASKOVICS and Fiona L. SMITH. Both of them Athabasca University M.Ed, distance education student, CANADA. They emphasized that women's participation in higher education in Canada has changed over the past two decades and no longer is the gender gap in university attainment in favour of men. Today young women are graduating from university in higher numbers than are men. Even those women who, for one reason or other, are unable to attend traditional universities are also choosing to participate in higher education. Women not only make up the majority of university graduates they also make up the majority of distance education users.**

**Online and distance education enables many adult women, particularly those who assume multiple roles as mothers, professionals, caregivers and academics, to continue their formal learning. In this paper, framed within the context of feminism, we share with you the stories of four ambitious and successful professional Canadian women studying at a leading Canadian online university. A review of the literature is also conducted, largely from a US and Canadian view. Canada proves to be a country that values the complexity of the multiple roles that women assume daily and inclusively supports women's choice to pursue post-secondary education or graduate work. We examine the organization of tertiary education in Canada, consider the vast geography of one of the most richly diverse countries in the world, and factors that govern both a woman's decision to seek higher education and; assist in learner satisfaction and retention rates for women in tertiary education.**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> article is from USA, on "THE STATUS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH: For Women But Not For-Profits? written by Gail D. CARUTH, from Department of Educational Leadership, Texas A&M University, USA. At first she mention about the college and university administrators have been under increased pressured to explain how campus operations support student enrollment and the cost of higher education. Administrators have consequently been moving toward a data-informed decision process and have begun**

working in partnership with institutional research for decision support. Purpose of her paper was to examine the literature to determine the status of IR in higher education. This examination is important to higher education for meeting the increased pressure and demands for accountability from those it serves. The escalating amount of data and the capability for comparing data is unparalleled. Research has revealed two district findings about the evolution of IR professionals in the United States. First, women professionals in IR have grown from 25% to 62% (a 148% growth) in 30 years and second, only two percent of the IR professionals are from for-profit institutions.

The 4th and last article is again from NIGERIA. Written on "SOCIOLOGICAL IMPEDIMENTS THAT LEADS TO INACCESSIBILITY OF WOMEN ATTENDING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN), EKITI-STATE BRANCH" by Adebayo Lawrence OJO, from Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council. This paper meritoriously sets out to explore and provide an up-to-date picture on sociological impediments that lead to inaccessibility faced by women attending ODL in their quest to study, specifically at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Ekiti-State, Branch. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select three hundred (300) respondents from part 1-4 based on their physical appearance at the centre premises and their claims, evidence presented (Student Identification Card) that they were students of NOUN. The study adopted descriptive research design. Finding revealed that Institutional, Situational and ICT were significant to the sociological impediments that lead to women inaccessibility on ODL in the covered area of study, because all percentages was above 0.05 level of significance.

The findings of the study will be utilized instrumentally and theoretically in informing policy directives by public universities presently involved in ODL programmes at large.

In the "Republished" section we tried to give a place to the earlier published materials by receiving an official permission of the open access materials for to inform GLOKALde readers' once more if they escape for reaching this materials before which are cover really useful info. These are titled and written authors are here: The first is titled as "I am Different from Other Women in the World" THE EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI ARABIAN WOMEN STUDYING ONLINE IN INTERNATIONAL MASTER PROGRAMMES, written by Anna SZILAGYI, Laureate Online Education, The NETHERLANDS. And second one is written by Mohammad YAMIN from Faculty of Economics and administration, King Abdululaziz University, SAUDI ARABIA on "A SOCIO-CULTURAL OVERVIEW OF E-LEARNING IN SAUDI ARABIA which interested in woman and distance education in Saudi.

In the third "Success Stories" section we tried to give a place two success stories dealing with distance education field. The first one is well known story by distance educators which is the classic literature in film and theater, titled as "RITA". It tells love story between a girl who is distance learner and with her professor tutor. The second one is dealt with a woman whom her name is Havva KURTULUS, live in Sinop city and educated herself with distance education in Turkey. This interview realized by Gülay EKREN, Sinop University, she is MA distance education learner on distance education field.

Dear intWOJDE readers to receive further information and to send your suggests and recommendations and remarks, or to submit articles for consideration, please contact int.WOJDE Secretariat at the below address or e-mail to us at [intwojde@gmail.com](mailto:intwojde@gmail.com)



**Hope to stay in touch and wishing to meet in our next Issue on 1st of April, 2015.  
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**Cordially,**

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## **FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST PARTICIPATION OF FEMALES WITH DISABILITIES IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Despite efforts made by the Government to provide equal educational opportunities for all citizens, the level of women with disabilities participation in education is still low. This paper made an attempt to examine the factors militating against participation of females with disabilities in open distance learning with a view to finding out what can be done to redress the imbalance. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and a purposive sampling technique was employed to select 60 female students with disabilities in Federal college of education Oyo special. Three research questions guided the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire tagged "Socio-cultural, economic and religious factors affecting females' education questionnaire (SCREFAFEQ)" with a reliability coefficient of 0.71. The data collected were analyzed using simple mean and standard deviation.

The results revealed that socio-cultural affect the participation of females with disabilities as parent believe the education of females as a waste since they will end up in the kitchen. Lack of religious knowledge and issues of poverty also constitute their lower participation. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Enactment of legal policy against parents refusing educating of females with disabilities enrolment in schools to certification level; Religions should not be seen as a barrier to educate females with disabilities in any respect to cultural endowments in our society.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural factors, religious factors, economic factors, females with disabilities, women with disabilities, open distance learning.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of education to human beings cannot be over emphasized. Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human.

The relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development.

It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labor as well as bringing about empowerment (Abu et al 2012). This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to education.

It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education.

**In Nigeria, despite its free education policy (FGN, 2013) at some levels of schooling, access to education for all remains unattainable more so for girls and women with disabilities UNICEF: (2004).**

**Education for the women with disabilities through Open Distance education remains beyond the grasp of Nigeria and many developing countries of the world.**

**The concept of Open and Distance Learning meets the Capability Approach Theory which stresses any form of learning in which the provider enables the recipient to exercise choice of what they learn, how and where they learn and how quickly they learn to have their learning assessed.**

**It emphasizes freedom to carry on working and schooling as long as one is capable. UNESCO (2000), open distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education, and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web presenting 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 learners.**

**One of the constitutive aspects of open distance learning is essentially access to instruction and learning material by all students including those with disabilities and the disadvantaged. Issues of access and equity in open and distance education are critical in justifying the openness of distance education and the inclusion of students with disabilities (Sherry, 1996).**

**Thus, given that Open and Distance education has, historically, been advanced as both a major means of upgrading the quality of education and succor for those who missed access to the conventional schools in Nigeria, the revised National Policy on Education (2013) detailed that the goal of DE should be to:**

- **Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;**
- **Meet disabilities of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place;**
- **Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula;**
- **Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.**

**However, Education for women is very important and even more important for women with disabilities. It is generally accepted that women and girls with disabilities have less access to education, social services and employment opportunities than non-disabled women. For example, USAID reports that women with disabilities are at increased risk of being sicker, poorer and more socially isolated than man with disabilities or able-bodied women.**

**In terms of accessing education the UNDP reports the literacy rate for women with disabilities may be as low as 1% and UNICEF reports that women and children with disabilities receive 20% less rehabilitation services.**

**Finally in terms of access to employment opportunities studies on women with disabilities in rural areas of many countries have found that more than 80 percent of women with disabilities have no independent means of livelihood, and are totally dependent on others for their very existence.**

**Women with disabilities who are educated are more likely to apply their knowledge in other areas of their personal lives, such as making informed decisions about marriage relationships, and participation in employment and politics (Stromquist, 2006). Poverty remains the major reason for non-attendance to school for most people with disabilities. Education is expensive; families of children with disabilities may send their children to acquire basic education (primary school level), which may be free.**

**Although primary school is very important, it is not enough for self-sustenance of an individual. Secondary and tertiary levels or education are needed for empowerment of women with disabilities.**

**Most women with disabilities do not have family members that can support them financially for secondary and tertiary education. People with disabilities and their families remain the poorest of the poor in the Nigerian society.**

**The traditional practice that denies women with disabilities inheritance and property rights is one of the harmful traditional practices that disempowered and keep them in poverty (Veronica and Debra, 2014).**

**Cultural beliefs in Nigeria affect every aspects of the life of women with disabilities. Cultural beliefs and practices affect the interaction of the child with disability and her family. Families understand disability from their cultural worldview.**

**Therefore, culture affects the way girls and women with disabilities interact with their family and whether or not they participate in the community. The extended family system practice in Nigeria provides support for the welfare of the members of the family. Primarily, people with disabilities are supported by their families while the government does little in providing for them. Disability presents a burden on the family, thus, access to education is determined by resources of the family, and by literacy level of family members.**

**The likelihood that a woman with disabilities will be educated increases if the members of her immediate family are educated (Oniye, 2004 cited in Veronica and Debra, 2014). Women with disabilities are treated with pity and as unfortunate ones. Expectations on the ability of a person with disability to accomplish great things are very low (Veronica and Debra, 2014).**

**A woman with disability suffers more discrimination because traditionally women are given low status. Women with disabilities remained the poorest of the poor in Nigeria, because of the unprecedented level of poverty among this group, women with disabilities often become street beggars.**

**Ironically, since Nigerian society sees people with disabilities as objects of pity and charity, the society is comfortable with people with disabilities in this role and prefers giving them money on the streets to giving them jobs and shelter (Celine, 2010).**

**Religion can be seen as a contributing factor to the inequalities between men factor to the inequalities between men and women. Grace (2003), emphasized that the institution of Pudah, symbolized by the veil alienates Muslim women from the public eyes and reduces them to complete subordination therefore, as a result cultural and traditional environment Women with disabilities are deprived of basic rights using culture and tradition to justify the abuse with such practices.**

Women and, especially those with disabilities in Nigeria find themselves victimized by social, cultural, religion, environmental, and economic disadvantages that diminish their chances of realizing their maximum potential and of participating fully in education. Therefore, this study will investigate the factors militating against females with disabilities participation in Open Distance Learning Oyo State, Nigeria.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study includes;

- The socio-cultural factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning.
- The economic factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning
- The religion factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in open distance learning.
- Research Questions
- What are the socio-cultural factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning Oyo State?
- What are the economic factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning Oyo State?
- Does a religious factor affect participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning in Oyo State?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted the descriptive survey research type.

This design is suitable for the study because the study attempted a survey and description of the opinions of a large number of people on the factors affecting the participation of females with special need in Oyo state of Nigeria.

### **Participants**

The population for the study comprised all female students with disabilities in Federal College of education Oyo, out of which sixty (60) students were randomly selected from level one to three.

A simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting twenty (20) respondents from each level.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers.

The research instrument tagged "Socio-cultural, economic and religious factors affecting females' education questionnaire (SCREFAFEQ)" is designed by the researchers to get information from participants.

The reliability of the research instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and found to be reliable at 0.71.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics of simple mean and standard deviation; any item with a mean value of 2.5 and above was regarded as agreed while those items with a mean value below 2.5 were considered to be disagreed.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1:

What are the socio-cultural factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning Oyo State?

**Table 1.**  
**Socio-cultural factors perception of females with disabilities**

S/N	Items	Number	Mean(X)	StD	Decision
1	Females with disabilities are culturally meant for domestic works in that area	60	2.52	1.09	Agree
2	Lack of education among parents of females with disabilities	60	2.17	1.01	Disagree
3	Poor enforcement of social laws on females students with disabilities right	60	2.40	1.09	Disagree
4	Criticism of parents who support females education with disabilities	60	2.75	1.06	Agree
5	Negative attitude towards females education with disabilities	60	2.52	1.15	Agree
6	Cultural condemnation of mixing boys and girls with disabilities	60	2.18	0.89	Disagree
7	Poor family influence on females' education of students with disabilities	60	2.38	1.15	Disagree
8	Females with disabilities right abuses among parents	60	2.31	1.20	Disagree

Table I shows that some respondents tend to agree with the issues raised about socio-cultural factor as evident with the mean score above the 2.5 as the decision point which shows positive perception of socio-cultural while the majority of the respondents disagree with items 2,3,6,7, and 8 with a mean scored of less than 2.5.

This is an indication that majority of the participants believed that five out eight items identified does not significantly affect the participation of the females with disabilities in open distance learning in the Oyo state of Nigeria.

### Research Question 2:

What are the economic factors affecting participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning Oyo State?

The Table 2. below says us that for economics factor perception on females with disabilities towards Open distance learning.

**Table 2.**  
Economics factor perception on females with disabilities towards Open distance learning

S/N	Items	Number	Mean(X)	StD	Decision
1	Parents of females with disabilities see school fees payment as a burden	60	2.43	1.04	Disagree
2	Often, females with disabilities are made to act/guides as beggars thereby generating income	60	2.53	1.04	Agree
3	Schooling of females with disabilities are seen as non-money making venture	60	2.57	1.10	Agree
4	Schooling is seen as a venture that does not yield immediate benefit for parents of females with disabilities.	60	2.52	1.15	Agree
5	Socio-economic status of families inhibit females education with disabilities	60	2.51	1.08	Agree
6	Assigning of domestic work by parents often discourage the education of Females with disabilities	60	2.55	1.11	Agree
7	Lack of total free education discourages education of females with disabilities	60	2.54	1.03	Agree
8	The believe of parents that females with disabilities can't generate money for the family	60	2.25	.93	Disagree

Table 2. shows that majority of the participants agreed that all the economic factors identified affect the participation of females with disabilities in open distance learning. However, items 2 and 8 were disagreed with mean scored less than 2.5 as decision rule.

This implies that economic factors are one of the pivotal reasons while many families cannot afford educating their females' students with disabilities through open distance learning.

### Research Question 3:

Does religious factors affect participation of women with disabilities in Open distance learning in Oyo State? Table 3. revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that Western education is not religiously building on adherents of Islam and Christianity and Fear of exposure of girls to the public.

**Table 3.**  
**Religious factor perception on females with disabilities towards Open distance learning**

S/N	Items	Number	Mean(X)	StD	Decision
1	Western education is not religiously building on adherents of Islam and Christianity	60	2.60	1.09	Agreed
2	Fear of exposure of girls to the public	60	2.36	1.10	Agreed
3	Lack of religious obligation to western education of females with disabilities	60	2.45	1.17	Disagreed
4	Lack of religious obligation to western education of females with disabilities	60	2.31	1.08	Agreed
5	Females education with disabilities is morally condemned	60	2.38	.97	Disagreed
6	Lack of religious legal action against females education with disabilities	60	2.25	1.03	Disagreed
7	Absence of religious guidance on females education with disabilities	60	2.53	1.09	Agreed
8	Parents seem to be more committed to marital orientation of girls with disabilities	60	2.55	1.15	Agreed

They also agreed Lack of religious obligation to western education of females with disabilities and Absence of religious guidance on females' education with disabilities as well as parent seems to be more committed to marital orientation of girls.

The respondents disagreed Lack of religious legal action against females' education with disabilities and the morally condemnation of females education with disabilities. This means that religion is one of the strongest factors affecting participation of females' students with disabilities in open distance learning.

## DISCUSSION

### Table 1:

The finding of the study on the socio-cultural factors revealed that participants rated some of the socio-cultural items high.

This implies that participation of females with disabilities was very low as result of socio-cultural imbalance in our educational system. The above findings corroborated the conclusion of Federal Government of Nigeria (2006), World Bank (2001), UNESCO (2001), Abubakar (2003) and Eweniyi & Usman (2013), that there is a lot of disinterest and ignorance concerning the education of girls. They observed that many Nigerian girls suffer the society's neglect of their right to education; such children have become vulnerable to various ills in the society and mania jobs. A female with disabilities suffers more discrimination because traditionally women are given low status.

Women with disabilities are the poorest of the poor in Nigeria. Because of the unprecedented level of poverty among this group, oftentimes, becoming street beggars become an alternative.



**Table 2:**

Revealed that economic factors seriously affect the participation of females with disabilities in open distance learning as all participants agreed with majority of the items. However, among these items, females with disabilities are made to act/guides as beggars thereby generating income, Schooling also is seen as a venture that does not yield immediate benefit for parent of females with disabilities, Socio-economic status of families inhibit females education with disabilities, Assigning of domestic work by parents often discourage the education of Females with disabilities, Lack of total free education discourages education of females with disabilities and schooling of females with disabilities seem to be a money non-making venture.

The finding is in consonance with Abubakar (2003), Badejo (1991) that poverty remains the major reason for non-attendance to school for most people with disabilities. Education is expensive; families of women with disabilities may send their children to acquire basic education (primary school level), which may be free.

Although primary school is very important, it is not enough for self-sustenance of women with disabilities. Secondary and tertiary levels or education are needed for empowerment of women with disabilities.

Most females with disabilities do not have family members that can support them financially for secondary and tertiary education.

The traditional practice that deprives women with disabilities' inheritance and property rights is one of the harmful traditional practices that disempowered and keep them in poverty.

**Table 3:**

The study found out how religious factors grossly affect the participation of females with disabilities in open distance learning. All items were agreed on by respondents. The finding confirms with Grace (2013) and Eweniyi & Usman (2013) that many Muslim parents of females with disabilities in Nigeria do fear that the involvement of females in education might bring moral decadence.

Such may include females' promiscuity, exposure of female bodies, inducement by opposite sex, pre-marital pregnancy, and abortion or illegitimate children.

They also observed that females' education will threaten females' chances of legitimate, cultural and religious marriage which the parents believe should they were to be educated, their right will be known and this will deprive females' Islamic moral training and orientation.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges faced by women with disabilities in Nigeria are multiple, including social isolation, discrimination and stigma, denial of their human rights and chronic poverty.

Lack of access to education leads to disempowerment of women and affects personal and societal developmental efforts.

The government of Nigeria has done very little to address the needs of this population (Women with disabilities).

The Nigerian educational system requires a reform that will take into account the needs of people with disabilities, especially females with special needs. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made;

- Enactment of legal policy against parents refusing educating of females with disabilities enrolment in schools (to certification level).
- Professional counselors and social workers should be use to create national awareness on females education with disabilities (including adult education) through public awareness campaigns, rallies, and seminars on importance of education of females with disabilities
- Education of female students with disabilities should be made free at all level of education system in Nigeria so as to serve as a yardstick for education for all.
- Religion should not be seen as a barrier to educate females with disabilities in any respect to cultural endowments in our society.
- Parents of females with disabilities should be encouraged to send girls to school so as to be educated, certificated, be skilful and have sources of income for sustainability and development.

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## **CANADA - INCLUSIVE DISTANCE EDUCATION: Experiences of Four Canadian Women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Women's participation in higher education in Canada has changed over the past two decades and no longer is the gender gap in university attainment in favour of men. Today young women are graduating from university in higher numbers than are men. Even those women who, for one reason or other, are unable to attend traditional universities are also choosing to participate in higher education. Women not only make up the majority of university graduates they also make up the majority of distance education users. Online and distance education enables many adult women, particularly those who assume multiple roles as mothers, professionals, caregivers and academics, to continue their formal learning. In this paper, framed within the context of feminism, we share with you the stories of four ambitious and successful professional Canadian women studying at a leading Canadian online university.**

**A review of the literature is also conducted, largely from a US and Canadian view. Canada proves to be a country that values the complexity of the multiple roles that women assume daily and inclusively supports women's choice to pursue post-secondary education or graduate work. We examine the organization of tertiary education in Canada, consider the vast geography of one of the most richly diverse countries in the world, and factors that govern both a woman's decision to seek higher education and; assist in learner satisfaction and retention rates for women in tertiary education. Four experiences of graduate women confirm that Canada's inclusive approach creates satisfied life-long learners.**

**Keywords:** Women and higher education, online and distance education, Canada.

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Distance Education (DE) is a delivery and receiving means of education chosen by more and more Canadian women. It is chosen for a variety of factors (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2011, p. 342). Where otherwise marginalized women may not be able to access or regularly attend education, DE provides desired learner interaction, builds a sense of community, fosters 'out of the box thinking' and often removes otherwise existing barriers to learning. Hara & Kling (1999) cite Johnstone and Krauth (1996) in positing that learner satisfaction and achievement "is not significantly different" whether in a DE or traditional classroom learning (p. 4), but the Canadian women in our case studies would argue that without distance education, their education and self-betterment may not or would not be possible.**

**In a country as large and as diverse as Canada, distance education is capable of providing borderless, asynchronous, and flexible education opportunities. Distance education is capable of bringing classes, courses, diplomas and degrees to demographics that might not otherwise be served. We study Canada's role in inclusiveness in distance education**

with four productive Canadian women whose experiences as graduate distance education learners illustrate the power of inclusivity in education.

This study is framed within a Postmodernist-Feminist context as identified by Baily, Leo-Rhynie and Morris (1996) where assumptions are not made about “coherent realit[ies] to which women’s experience can be added, rather they assume there are multiple realities and experiences” such as “race, class, culture, and sexual orientation” (p. 14).

Additionally, “these experiences and their influence on the generation of knowledge [i]s fluid, contingent, diverse, and historically and culturally specific” (p. 14). The four women studied come from varied Canadian cultural, racial, socio-economic backgrounds and experiences. In each case, their histories, online learning experiences (positive and negative) and perceptions of male to female representation or ratios in the DE classroom are explored as well as the gender gap in tertiary education.

### **TERTIARY EDUCATION IN CANADA**

Canada is located in the northern part of the continent of North America. It has ten provinces, three territories and is the second largest country in the world encompassing almost 10 million square kilometres. There are slightly more than 35 and a half million people living in Canada today, two thirds of which live within 100 kilometres of the southern border of Canada that is shared with the United States (Statistics Canada, 2015; Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015).

Canada is a very diverse country. Population growth in Canada is due in large part to its immigration policies.

In 2011 Canada's foreign born population was estimated at 20.6% of the total population, the highest proportion among all G8 countries with the largest group coming from Asia (including the Middle East) the Caribbean and Central and South America, Africa and Oceania and other regions (National Household Survey, 2011).

Education in Canada is not a federal responsibility and as such the delivery, organization and assessment of education at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary level is the responsibility of the departments and ministries of education at the provincial or territorial level. Public primary and secondary education in Canada is government funded and tuition free (Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015).

Canada has recognized publicly as well as privately funded post secondary institutions. A recognized postsecondary institution is a private or publicly funded institution that has received full authority to grant degrees, diplomas, and other credentials through a private or public act of the respected provincial or territorial legislature, or through a government mandated quality assurance mechanism (Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015).

Canada supports its female and disabled learners by asking them to clearly, but voluntarily, identifies them.

In Canada, women are not overtly penalized for wishing to return to school and there are loans and grants (Provincial and Federal) to assist with such endeavours. Single mothers, new immigrant mothers, Indigenous, disabled or otherwise potentially marginalized women are provided additional financial and (sometimes free) education supports, along with tax breaks, to make tertiary education accessible and affordable should they feel motivated to continue learning. The more marginalized a woman is, the more supports her (and her family) may be able to access - if they know about them.

Community colleges in Canada are government regulated post secondary institutions that are primarily focused on career training and trades training. Colleges in Canada often go by different names including institute, institute of technology, technical college, regional college, cégep (in Quebec) and university college. Although not always, the entrance requirement to a college is not as high as it is to a university. Colleges offer one, two and sometimes three year programs that lead to a certificate or diploma. Colleges can also offer apprenticeships and sometimes in partnership with a university are able to grant degrees and diplomas (Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015). There are over 130 colleges in Canada. Colleges and Institutes Canada (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2015) is a national voluntary membership organization that represents colleges, institutes, polytechnics, cégeps and universities with a college mandate (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2015).

Universities in Canada are government regulated post secondary academic institutions that are primarily focused on theoretical learning. Universities have undergraduate/bachelor's degrees and many also have graduate/master's and doctoral degree programs.

The Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (2015) is a national level non-profit organization that coordinates university policies, guidance and directions. Currently there are 97 public and private not for profit Canadian Universities and university degree-level colleges registered with this association (Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, 2015).

Public post secondary education in Canada is also government funded however students also pay tuition (Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015). In the academic year 2007/2008 annual tuition costs for Canadian students at universities averaged around \$4,524 and at colleges and institutes it was \$2,400.

In Quebec the residents do not pay tuition at the college level. Education is also funded through government transfer payments to individual students through loans, grants and education tax credits (Statistics Canada, 2015).

#### **ONLINE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN CANADA**

There are many definitions of distance education and few will argue the main goal of distance education is to make higher education more accessible and flexible for adult learners (Moisey & Hughes, 2008; (Parker, 2008; Simonson, et al., 2011). Moore and Kearsley (2005) define distance education as: "Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies and special organizational and administrative arrangements" (p.2).

Today most public universities in Canada offer a variety of distance education courses and many universities focus entirely on adult online distance education. There are however, six universities in Canada that focus on distance education and online learning:

Royal Roads University, Thompson Rivers University, Athabasca University, Memorial University, TÉLUQ, and Centre collégial de formation à distance (Bates, 2012).

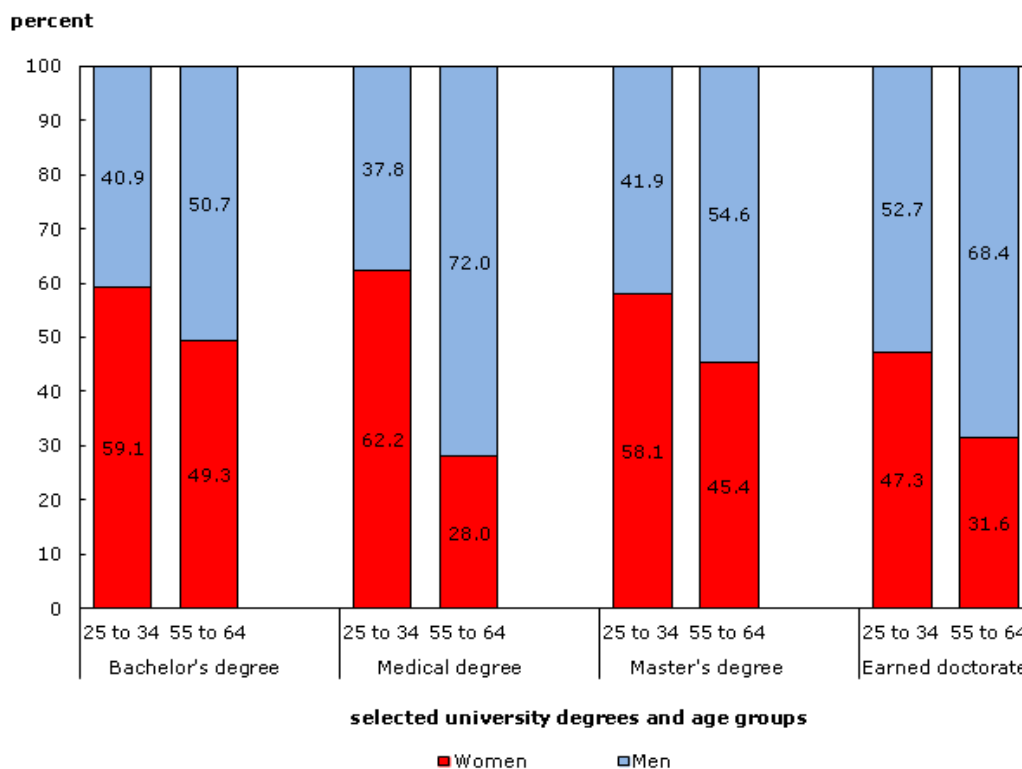
#### **GENDER GAP IN TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Twenty years ago the gender gap in tertiary education attainment in Canada leaned in favour of men (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011).

National Household Survey shows that 25.9% of all Canadians held a university degree and 21.3% held a college diploma. Of the university degree holders aged 25 to 64, women accounted for 53.7%; and of the university degree holders aged 25 to 34, women accounted for just fewer than 60%.

Today in Canada the gender gap in tertiary education attainment leans in favour of women (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the “level of education attainment by sex and age group” with respect to selected university degrees as concluded through statistical analysis. The numbers speak clearly: in 2011, other than women aged 55-64 pursuing doctorates or a medical degree, Canadian women participate almost equally to the numbers of men in erudition pursuits and successes. Such statistics are encouraging and at one Canadian university, Athabasca University, women in 2012, made up 60% of the student body and most often succeed in completing their distance education courses (Simonson, 2012, p. 72).

Figure 1  
Proportion of selected university degrees as the highest level of educational attainment by sex and age group, Canada, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Canada is not alone. According to data published by The Conference Board of Canada in 2013, 2010 statistics comparing Canada to 15 other countries showed Canada as well as Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Australia, Belgium, U.S. and France, all had gender gap imbalances in tertiary education attainment leaning in favour of women in the 25 - 64 age cohort (Gender Gap in Tertiary Education, 2013).

In Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands, U.K., and Japan however, the gender gap in this same age cohort leaned in favour of men (Gender Gap in Tertiary Education, 2013).

In the younger age group of 25 to 34 year olds however, almost all 15 countries surveyed displayed a gender gap in tertiary education attainment leans in favour of women (Gender Gap in Tertiary Education, 2013).

If Jenkin's (1995) perspective that distance education amplifies any existing imbalances "in participation between sexes [that] occurs in certain disciplines in conventional education" (p. 21), this may suggest that in younger age groups, more and more women are seeking and attaining postsecondary education in general - which is bolstering.

However, in some parts of the globe, further encouragement, supports and access to distance education may be required so as to shrink still existing extensive gender gaps in tertiary education.

Especially when we consider, that "For decades, researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners have attempted unsuccessfully to ensure women's full and active participation in all areas of tertiary education (Stalker, 2001, p. 288).

### **WOMEN AND ONLINE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN CANADA**

Women tend to make up the majority of online distance education students in North America (Furst-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001; Kramarae, 2003; Muller, 2008).

At Athabasca University, for example, women comprise 67% of the undergraduate student population and 70.5% of the graduate student population (Open Magazine, Spring/Summer 2015) with almost all (96.8%) students residing in Canada (Open Magazine, spring summer 2015).

Of the undergraduate level students, 47.% are under the age of 25, 32.9% are aged 25 to 34 and 13.6% are aged 35 to 44 with 5.0% aged 45 to 54. Of the graduate level students, only 2.7% are less than 25, 37.7% aged 25 to 34, 33.6% aged 35 to 44, 21.2% aged 45 to 54 and just less than 5% over 55 (Open Magazine, 2015).

### **FOUR WOMEN STUDYING AT ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY**

Below are the personal stories of four ambitious and successful professional Canadian women studying at a leading Canadian online university? Two of the women are enrolled in a Master's degree program and two in a Doctorate degree program. They share with us why they chose online study and what they like and do not like about it.

#### **Participant 1:**

*Jennifer* is 50, unmarried, and lives with her teenager. Jennifer, for various reasons was not able to begin university studies until later in life when her child reached grade school. Right now Jennifer is nearing the end of her Master's degree and she has completed all of her courses online.

As an undergraduate student, Jennifer took part in a blended learning situation where some of her undergraduate courses were taken online and some face-to-face at a local university. Jennifer chose online study initially so she did not have to pay for a sitter and spend time travelling to school.

Once Jennifer's child was old enough to be left alone she continued with online study because of the flexibility and convenience of this mode of learning. In addition to being a parent, Jennifer also works full time. As a result, time is a premium, as she devotes many of her evenings and weekends to her studies.



### Online Learning Experience

Overall Jennifer's online study experience is very positive. She likes online study because of the flexibility; she can study from home and does not have to travel to a class on a specific day and time.

Jennifer finds her classes with the highest levels of interaction are the most engaging and it is in these classes she feels most connected with the instructor and other classmates.

When asked what she doesn't like about online classes Jennifer responds with "absent or unresponsive instructors". When asked what would improve her online learning experience, Jennifer responds with "I would like to see more of the latest synchronous and asynchronous communication tools used".

### Gender Composition of Classes

Jennifer thinks men and women learn differently in an online course because she has noticed the women in her classes share personal information in their discussion posts whereas the men do not. She also thinks there are more women than men in her class.

### Participant 2:

*Guylaine* is 62, married and all of her children are grown. Guylaine began post secondary studies a year after completing high school. Guylaine completed her Master's degree online and is currently enrolled in a Doctorate program of study at Athabasca University.

Guylaine chose to study online rather than at a traditional university because the mode allowed her to continue working and looking after her family without relocating. Guylaine is a professional as well as an academic.

### Online Learning Experience

Guylaine is very pleased with her online learning experience. She has travelled a lot throughout her current program and regardless of her global position has been able to attend the synchronous sessions with an Internet connection.

Guylaine likes that with online courses she is able to think about her responses before commenting. Guylaine's most positive online learning experience was when she interned in a master's level online course as part of her doctoral program.

When asked what she dislikes about online classes Guylaine responds with inattentive tutors/instructors who fail to respond to classes or students in a timely way. When asked what would improve her online experience, Guylaine suggests the inclusion of both synchronous and asynchronous activities and to have online courses designed and lead by online teaching specialists

### Gender Composition of Classes

Guylaine does not think men and women have similar experiences in an online class and her perception is there are more women than men in her online classes, something she can tell from the interactions online.

### Participant 3:

*Karen* is 39, married, and has two small children under five. Karen proceeded to post secondary studies immediately after high school. She has two Master's degrees, which she earned through the online mode of education and she is currently working towards a Doctorate in Education.

Karen likes online classes more than traditional classes because it gives her control over her study schedule that allows her to manage her studies around work and family



obligations. Additionally, Karen is often required to relocate due to her work and with this mode of learning it does not matter where she lives. Karen spends most evenings after her children go to bed studying as well as some vacation time and weekends. Karen is a professional as well as an academic.

### Online Learning Experience

Karen is very happy with her online learning experience. Karen likes that she is able to build meaningful relationships with her fellow students through online synchronous and asynchronous communication technologies. She also likes that she is able to formulate her responses before posting - something not possible in a face-to-face classroom. Her most memorable online learning experience occurred during a debate on learning styles in an asynchronous group project. When asked what she doesn't like about online learning, Karen cited a time when she had disconnect with an instructor where the instructor's feedback was not clear and was not received in a timely fashion.

### Gender Composition of Classes

Karen's perception is that there are more women than men in online classes, however in her current program of study she feels that the gender composition is about half and half.

### Participant 4:

*Vanessa* is 45, married and has two teenage children. Vanessa proceeded directly to post secondary studies after graduating from high school. Vanessa is currently enrolled in a Master's program of study and this is her first online degree program. Vanessa chose online study out of necessity because of an illness that prevents her from attending a traditional face-to-face university.

Vanessa likes online learning because it allows her to study at home or at the hospital; online study provides a great deal of flexibility so that Vanessa can complete her courses.

### Online Learning Experience

Vanessa is very happy with her online learning experience. Vanessa is often fearful that her illness will interfere with her learning schedule; however, this has happily proved not to be the case. Vanessa was ill for two weeks while enrolled in a course and she was pleasantly surprised with the accommodations Athabasca University granted her. Vanessa praises her university's policy on providing flexible learning programs because without the flexibility she would not be able to participate in higher education. When asked what she would like to change in her online courses Vanessa comments she would like to remove the collaborative assignments simply so that no one else is ever let down by unpredictable illness flares that affect Vanessa's function, which then affects her collaborative partner/s. However, Vanessa has enjoyed the closeness garnered in the friendships and intellectual pursuits together through collaborative assignments so she isn't completely sold in their total removal.

### Gender Composition of Classes

Vanessa's perception is that there is a large female demographic in her online courses. She notices the difference in the way men and women communicate in forum discussions; women are more likely to share experiences more fully in their posts where men's posts tend to be shorter and less contextual.

### Common Participant Experiences

When asked about negative experiences in online learning courses three of the women surveyed made comments about disengaged and unresponsive instructors/facilitators. Instructors either disappeared for prolonged periods or did not provide clear and timely feedback on assignments. For one student in particular an instructor provided feedback on a first assignment a day prior to the submission of the second assignment. According

to Ustati and Hassan (2013), the success of distance education rests in "Teacher's competency in addressing the students' needs" (p. 293) and cites the research of Fox, 2003; Rosenberg, 2001; Sampson, 2003; Shearer, 2010; Starr-Glass, 2012 in supporting the argument that teachers play a central role in reducing attrition rates and affecting student retention.

### **ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS & THE FUTURE**

Women, especially those women who assume multiple roles as mother, spouse, professional and academic, often choose online and distance education because of its flexibility. A study conducted on women distance learners by J. Furst-Bowe and W. Dittmann (2001) found that, of the women surveyed, nearly 73% of the women had at least one child at home and nearly 64% were employed full time outside the home (p. 407). Juggling the many demands of children, home, work and education can be extremely demanding so it is for this reason that many women seem to gravitate towards distance education (2001, p. 410; Mhehe, 2001, p. 106; Jenkins, 1995, p.6).

Women in North America return to school to further their education for both career related reasons and personal growth and fulfillment (Muller, 2008; Cragg et al., 2005). Indeed this mode of higher education is not without its barriers, it does provide a flexibility not available in traditional modes of higher education and this flexibility provides many women the opportunity to participate in higher education while meeting the demands of family and work obligations (Furst-Bowe and Dittmann, 2001; Kramarae, 2003; Sullivan, 2001). Learners often stay in distance education learning and complete their programs because there is a sense of achievement and learner satisfaction (Ustati & Hassan, 2013). Moisey and Hughes (2008) posit it's a DE program's "smooth administrative processes" that assist in achieving such retention and success (p. 424) while Hyo-Jeong So and A. Thomas (2008) propose that "high levels of collaborative learning" plus;

- course structure,
- emotional support, and
- communication medium" are "critical factors associated with student perceptions of collaborative learning, social presence, and satisfaction" (p. 318).

What is evident in the literature, and in our survey of four Canadian women, is that in Canada, distance education is highly effective because students are supported - if not by their families and cultures (although many are); then by their province and their nation.

Citing Rosenberg (1990) and Stalker (2001), Gouthro (2005) reports, in women, "feelings of lesser self-worth" that is directly related to what he notes is "the unequal distribution of power between men and women" because "in many relationships places women at a disadvantage" (p. 15).

It has been proven that women and men communicate differently in online learning environments. Gunn et al. (2003) mentioned that there are gender differences in styles of participation and contribution in computer mediated communication and they found that women posted and read more messages than their male counterparts on the course bulletin board. Also, a study conducted by Price (2006) has proven that women prefer higher levels of interaction and social connection with fellow students and instructors. Ustati and Hassan (2013) and Simonson (2012) concur. And yet in another study by Machado (2001) it was shown that female students, more than male students, like the social interaction that discussion boards have to offer. There is no arguing female online students are academically engaged, confident independent learners who enjoy the social interaction of online discussion boards.

There are many research studies supporting the importance of instructor presence in online studies. A study conducted by J. Furst-Bowe and W. Dittmann (2001) found that the quality of the course and the learning experience was largely dependent on the instructor. This study cited interaction with instructors as key to the learning experience (p. 406).

Another study conducted by Getzlaf et al. (2009) confirmed that "effective feedback is a crucial aspect of the 'direct instruction' component of teaching presence of online instructors" and that students need the feedback for two reasons; to make improvements in future assignments and to apply to practical situations in their daily lives (Getzlaf et al, 2009).

As Ladyshwesky (2013) concludes in his study, *Instructor Presence in Online Courses and Student Satisfaction*, "there is a relationship between instructor presence and perceived student satisfaction with their online course experience" (p. 2) and goes as far as to postulate, as do others, that rather than student demographics or course design, that course quality depends more on the teacher than how the class is delivered (p. 18; Ustati & Hassan, 2013, p. 293).

## CONCLUSION

Our survey concludes with, overall, very satisfied Canadian women distance education experiences. Canada has seen an increase in the presence of women in distance education classrooms, both synchronous and asynchronous. The four Canadian women in article that were surveyed, are satisfied, overall with their distance education experiences in Canada. The survey and this article takes a postmodern feminist approach, as defined by Baily, Leo-Rynie & Morris (1996) in that, it is inclusive of "women's experience" based on "race, class, culture and sexual orientation" (p. 14).

In countries like Canada that celebrate cultural and personal diversity, such factors provide inclusiveness rather than manifesting as misogynistic maligning of women. While research continues to conclude that student outcomes show "no significant difference among student outcomes based on mode of course delivery" (Caplan, 2008, p. 246), distance education offers women the flexibility and accessibility that they may require to balance busy professional with familial and personal lives.

The Canadian university that the women surveyed attend provides many of the supports, services and flexibility that Canadian women require to succeed in tertiary education. Distance education permits education to occur where for some, it may otherwise prove impossible.

In fact, according to data from Athabasca University, in Alberta, Canada, "a greater percentage of women passed distance education courses" (Simonson, et. al., 2012, p. 72). There is an increase in women's participation in online education because there is an increase in online higher education in general (men and women) – however, the growth rate in online higher education is higher than the growth rate in traditional higher education (Barnard, Lan, To, Osland, Paton & Lai, 2009, p.1). This suggests that distance education has a vital role to play in educating Canadian women.

Distance education in Canada has a proven track record of barrier removal, learner success, low attrition rates, and gender inclusiveness. With the United Nations identifying women as "the world's largest excluded group" (Jenkins, 1995, p.6), Canada is providing such inclusiveness in its approach to educating its women and girls - recognizing them as

valued and valuable contributing members of society, in whom education is worth investing.

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She is a freelance Writer with over 20+ years ESL (Japan & Canada), Theatre and English teaching experience. Fiona assists Canadian women apply or appeal for long term disability benefits. As well, Fiona is a proud alumnus of the University Of Manitoba And The Black Hole Theatre Company. She believes that education assists women (our global "sisters") build better tomorrows for themselves, their families and this earth.

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## **THE STATUS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH: For Women But Not For-Profits?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

College and university administrators have been under increased pressured to explain how campus operations support student enrollment and the cost of higher education. Administrators have consequently been moving toward a data-informed decision process and have begun working in partnership with institutional research for decision support.

The purpose of this paper was to examine the literature to determine the status of IR in higher education. This examination is important to higher education for meeting the increased pressure and demands for accountability from those it serves. The escalating amount of data and the capability for comparing data is unparalleled.

Consequently the role of institutional research has been evolving since its inception as a distinct function in higher education for over 50 years and varies from institution to institution globally. However, the fundamental role of gathering, examining, and distributing data for planning, policy formulation, and decision support has remained consistent. Research has revealed two district findings about the evolution of IR professionals in the United States. First, women professionals in IR have grown from 25% to 62% (a 148% growth) in 30 years and second, only two percent of the IR professionals are from for-profit institutions.

**Keywords:** Institutional research, characteristics of institutional research, history of institutional research, the role of institutional research.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The academy has come under increased accountability. Colleges and universities have been pressured to explain how campus operations support student enrollment and the cost of higher education.

Institutional research (IR) is answering these requests by presenting data supporting strategic decisions enabling administrators to assess the benefits of cost on classroom and non-classroom activities (Knight & Leimer, 2010; McLaughlin, McLaughlin, & Kennedy-Phillips, 2005; Middaugh, Kelly, & Walters, 2008; Trainer, 2008; Voorhees, 2008; Webber, 2012). The burgeoning amount of data and the capacity for comparative data available to IR and administrators is unparalleled. Undeniably, in this age of information and the Internet the academy is saturated with data, some helpful and some not so helpful (Trainer, 2008).

The typical key performance indicators that have been useful in the past have also been inflexible for narrating the complete story and generating all the data necessitated by the multifaceted non-classroom activities of flourishing colleges and universities. Furthermore, the data needed to support strategic decisions may not be located in all institutional databases. Administrators are expected to demonstrate, for example, how expenses for non-classroom, non-athletic student activities contribute to successful



learning processes or how they contribute to the overall success of academic programs (McLaughlin et al., 2005).

As a result, college and university administrators that have been pressured to explain how campus operations support student enrollment and the cost of higher education have been moving toward a data-informed decision process. Administrators have begun working in partnership with IR for decision support. According to McLaughlin and Kennedy-Phillips (2005), college and university administrators who work in partnership with IR will be able to “sustain” (p. 3) the future of the academy.

Moreover, colleges and universities that have organized and centralized their institutional data experience a benefit in strategic planning and decision making. At the core of support for decision making, accountability, planning, and demonstrating effectiveness to all internal and external stakeholders is the growing prominence and value of IR (Voorhees, 2008). Consequently, experts in the field of IR experience the value of the role in collecting, examining, and distributing data and converting data into necessary information for planning and decision making purposes (Voorhees).

IR exists on a number of college and university campuses to create standard reports required by state, federal, and accreditation agencies. While this is an important role, the institution fails to take advantage of opportunities if generating reports continues to be the only role performed by the office of IR. According to Voorhees (2008), IR offices that consume the greater part of their time engaged in reporting generally experience minimal enthusiasm in attempts to discover new opportunities where their distinct expertise can be of benefit to their institutions.

The purpose of this paper was to examine the literature to determine the status of IR in higher education. This examination is important to higher education for meeting the increased pressure and demands for accountability from those it serves.

A review of the literature presents a compilation of research, peer-reviewed journals, and non-peer reviewed journals on IR. The academic databases used were from the online library of Texas A&M University-Commerce and included, but were not limited to, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, Education Research Complete, Eric, ProQuest, and Sage Publications.

The key descriptive terms used for this research were insitutional research, characteristics of institutional research, history of institutional research, and the role of institutional research.

## **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

“What is IR? How old is IR? Why has IR been introduced in hundreds of universities globally?” (Chirikov, 2013, p. 457).

IR, an important function for any college or university and referred to as “organizational intelligence” (Chirikov, 2013, p. 458), varies from institution to institution and its role in the institution continues to evolve over time. The station of IR in higher education typically depends on the location of the institution and is impacted by the governing bodies, students, technology, processes for decision making, the location of the office within the institution, among other factors (Chirikov, 2013; Sapp & Temares, 1996).

Contemporary offices of IR are over 50 years old and entrenched in almost every college and university in the United States as well as many other institutions globally. Often

working behind-the-scenes, IR supports administrators with campus-wide decision making and strategic planning. These decision making and strategic planning support functions include research support to senior academic leaders, admissions, financial aid, curriculum design, enrollment management, staffing, student life, finance, facilities, athletics, alumni relations, as well as many other programs. In addition to the support provided for data-informed decision making, institutional researchers utilize data for reporting and comparing with other institutions. In short, a majority of the important decisions made in the academy concerning programs and responsibilities are based on data created by IR (Association for Institutional Research, n.d.).

## **THE EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH**

The evolution of IR has faced numerous discrete and confusing questions of concern. First are questions of identity. IR does not have the benefit of a long history being a relatively new function in American higher education. Second are questions of organization. Recently there has been a focus of separation of IR from the institutional research of scholarship and publication functions.

Third are questions of location and scope within the institutional structure. The location of IR within in the institutional structure affects the ability of IR to function effectively, influences the nature of IR activities, and shapes the decision support role.

Fourth are questions of involvement in the assessment of student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness processes. Some have suggested that IR should be involved significantly in the assessment of student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness processes in spite of the fact that research reveals that this is not the case. This finding may be the result of limited resources of IR, as suggested by Sapp and Temares (1996).

The United States is breaking new ground in the evolution of IR. Some researchers date the beginning of IR in American universities to the eighteenth century (Chirikov, 2013; Sapp & Temares, 1996). The gathering, examining, and distributing of data first occurred between Harvard and the establishment of Yale in 1701 (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

As such, the evolution of the function of IR actually spans over three centuries. The identification of IR as a distinct function, however, began in the United States in the 1920s. During that period of time, Bureaus of IR were established in a number of universities. The 1960s was a time of major development for IR. It was during this time that national gatherings, local meetings, and seminars took place.

The Association for Institutional Research (AIR) was organized in Michigan in 1965 as a 501c (3) non-profit organization. AIR is the world's largest professional association for IR professionals.

AIR affords educational resources, best practices, and professional development opportunities for its growing membership of over 4,000. AIR's purpose is to assist with the gathering, examining and translating of data to support decision making in higher education (Association for Institutional Research, n.d.).

The role of IR during the 1960s was to produce descriptive statistics and factbooks for college university administrators and stakeholders. IR later began the functions of examining and analyzing, strategic planning, and reviewing academic programs.

Today, the role of IR in academic institutions in the United States is:

- reporting and policy analysis;
- strategic planning, enrollment, and financial management; and
- outcome analysis, program reviews, accountability, accreditation, and institutional effectiveness (Chirikov, 2013).

Mathies and Välimaa (2013) claimed that institutions in the United States have a routine of examining their internal individual processes while European institutions have been a part of the whole and with no need to examine their internal individual processes.

However, higher education institutions are becoming autonomous and are therefore beginning to examine their internal processes as well.

Mathies and Välimaa suggested that IR offices may be as effective in Europe as they have been effective in United States institutions. Lange, Saavedra, and Romano (2013) emphasized that higher education accreditation in the United States has existed for over 100 years while different methods of quality assurance has only existed in Europe 30 years and even less in developing countries. It is this type of quality assurance in higher education that increased the need to know, the need to provide data, and the need for IR in the academy.

The evolution of IR began during the second half of the twentieth century in Western Europe. IR in the United Kingdom and Sweden grew out of committees of inquiry created by the government to focus on the growing need for higher education. An awareness of the role of IR began specifically in France, Italy, and Spain 20 years ago.

This awareness was prompted by efforts to link higher education and government. IR is distinct in Europe from IR in the United States. For example, IR is more scholarly in America while IR focuses more on policy and management in European universities. IR in the United States is generally a joint responsibility of university administrators rather than a distinct function. The AIR includes many junior analysts and institutional researchers while its European counterpart, the European Association of Institutional Research (EAIR, established in 1979) is more of an association of administrators and governmental policy analysts (Chirikov, 2013).

Australian universities initiated IR during the early 1970s. During this time the Australian government sought greater institutional accountability and looked to students, employees, and financial data.

Today, a number of Australian universities have distinct IR offices that focus on strategic planning, quality assurance, managing student life-cycle surveys, statistical analysis for internal and external reporting, resource allocation and planning, in addition to other areas of responsibility.

The Australasian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) was founded in 1988. Later New Zealand universities developed the IR function as a result of attention to performance and accountability in the 1990s (Chirikov, 2013).

The last ten years has seen a significant growth in IR globally. The growth has primarily been in the planning and decision making functions. The establishment of a number of professional associations is a sign of the growing respect IR is experiencing. Some of the most noticeable associations include the Southern African Association for Institutional Research (established in 1994), the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association (established in 1994), the Higher Education Research and Policy Network based in Nigeria (established in 2000), the South East Asian Association for Institutional

Research (established in 2001), and the Middle East and North Africa Association for Institutional Research (MENA-AIR, established in 2009). Each of these associations is affiliated with AIR which focuses on promoting the role of IR in higher education (Chirikov, 2013).

A fundamental role of IR can be observed in a number of other countries. Latin American universities reveal some functions of IR, Chinese universities started initial practices of IR during the 1990s and remain in the early stages, and Russian universities have revealed the beginnings of IR with a few having a distinct IR office gathering data, reporting, and accreditation.

The evolution of the role of IR demonstrates that it is a global trend, which indicates that there must be a number of driving forces in colleges and universities that assists IR, as suggested by Chirikov (2013).

Lange, Saavedra, and Romano (2013) predicted that the need for information and accountability will increase for all institutions of higher education around the world. Furthermore, institutional standing, national aspirations, and the quest for institutional performance yardsticks pressure colleges and universities to compete for global rankings as well as international projects requiring the uniformity of data across the academy.

Two examples of these projects are the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO). Calderon and Mathies (2013) cautioned that it will become critical for IR professionals to discover ways to become fundamental in support of their individual institutional missions.

To fall short will provide opportunities for other departments to begin to undertake the roles and responsibilities that were previously performed by IR offices.

Sapp and Temares (1996) offered the following six suggestions for IR offices;

- make available IR services,
- customize data for reports requested by administration, c) customize data also for smaller units for use and uniformity across the institution,
- consider how focus groups can have more impact than traditional analyses, e) identify key issues and proactively develop reports that deal with these issues, and
- invest time interpreting data for clients to enhance IR support.

These six suggestions should increase the worth of IR to the college or university communities and boost the visibility of the office, as claimed by Sapp and Temares.

Calderon and Mathies also maintained that a single IR office staffed with a wide range of capabilities will increase the reputation of the office within the institution in making data-informed decisions.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH**

IR in America has been called "institutional studies, institutional analysis, and institutional planning" (Sapp & Temares, 1996, p. 3). The role of gathering, examining,

and distributing data for planning, policy formulation, and decision support has remained consistent however (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

Research has suggested that approximately 50% of the IR departments are managed by individuals with doctoral degrees (Lindquist, 1999; Sapp & Temares, 1996). Of the doctoral degrees, 40% are in education or the social sciences, 30 % are in humanities and fine arts, 10 to 15 % are in the physical sciences including mathematics and computer science, and 10 to 15 % are in business (Lindquist, 1999). IR professionals with doctoral degrees typically have limited teaching responsibilities (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

The majority of IR professionals have master's degrees in the fields of social sciences or education with less than six years of IR experience.

Research has also suggested that the full-time equivalent size of an institution is correlated with the size of the IR office.

The larger the IR staff, the greater the chance that IR professionals will have doctoral degrees and IR experience (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

Lindquist (1999) reported on the results of five national surveys conducted between 1981 and 1998 on AIR membership.

Results revealed that approximately 60% have six or more years in the profession, 40 % have 11 plus years, and 10% has 20 or more years experience in IR.

While many IR professionals are inexperienced they tend to remain in the profession, as claimed by Lindquist. The demographics of IR professionals are as follows:

- 88% in the late 1980s to 86% in the late 1990s (Lindquist, 1999) to 84% in the early 2000s (Knight & Leimer, 2010) are white/Caucasian and people of color represent the remaining IR professionals (which includes 4 to 5 % African Americans, 3 to 5 % Asian American or Pacific Islander, 3% Hispanic, 1 % American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2 % are "other;"
- 26% are in their 30s or younger, 36 % are in their 40s, and 38 % are 50 or older; and,
- women in the field of IR have increased from 25% in the late 1980s to 48% during the late 1990s (Lindquist, 1999) to 62% in the early 2000s (Knight & Leimer, 2010). Hence, Lindquist (1999) maintained that this suggests that IR is a young, growingly diverse, and feminine field.

Of the total of IR professionals, 63% are from public universities, 35% are from private not for-profit universities, and 2% are from for-profit universities (Knight & Leimer, 2010).

About 60% of IR professionals are from four-year colleges or universities, 20% are from two-year colleges, 4 to 10% are from government agencies or system offices, 3 to 5% are from graduate, professional, or upper-division institutions, and 1 to 3% are from private business.

Of the colleges and universities, 26% are from research universities; 9% are from doctoral degree granting universities; 22% are from comprehensive colleges and universities; 10% are from liberal arts colleges; 20% are from two-year community,

junior, and technical colleges; 4% are from other institutions, and 10% are not from postsecondary institutions (Lindquist, 1999).

About 20 to 25% are small institutions, with five thousand or fewer students; 30 to 45% are from moderate-size institutions, with five thousand to twenty thousand students; and 25 to 35% are from large institutions, with over twenty thousand students. The majority of IR professionals are from one-person or small offices, having two or fewer professional staff; 20 to 25 % are from medium-size offices, with three or four professional staff; and 20 % are from large offices, with five or more professional staff. Close to 60% are from academic affairs, 38% from academic services divisions, or 26% from departments reporting to the president or chancellor with 70% from an IR office that reports to a vice president or the president (Lindquist, 1999).

According to Knight and Leimer (2010), experienced IR professionals are not easy to locate and training IR professionals requires significant time and effort. There is not an official educational track that particularly grooms IR professionals other than a handful of newly created certification programs. Even recently hired experienced IR professionals need time to become acquainted with their employers' folkways. Generally IR offices have one to two staff members and the loss of one employee can cripple IR operations. As a result, turnover costs are significant when IR professionals terminate their employment.

Knight and Leimer (2010) claimed that 22% of IR professionals intend to leave their employer and 31% intend to leave in the near future. Opportunities for advancement, job appreciation, and compensation are of significant value to IR professionals. Opportunities for advancement, appreciation, and compensation also impact directly and indirectly intention to look for other employment.

IR professionals have to leave their employers and look elsewhere for better opportunities for advancement, appreciation, and compensation because IR offices generally have so few employees. Knight and Leimer also claimed that "non-monetary rewards and recognition can be instrumental in creating an environment in which institutional researchers feel supported and choose to stay at their job" (p. 126). Consequently, the role IR has in an institution has an effect on intention to stay with an employer.

#### **THE ROLES OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH**

The roles of IR are broad and varied among institutions. The greater the experience and higher the educational degrees of the staff, the more complicated and high-level are the roles of IR (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

Research has indicated that student enrollment management, gathering data from surveys and questionnaires, creating institutional factbooks, peer institutional data exchange, and student related reporting and projection are the more frequent roles performed by IR (Lindquist, 1999; Sapp & Temares, 1996). The roles that are performed less frequently include budget development, revenue projection, academic program review, student evaluation, space allocation and utilization, and academic research resource development statistics.

An important role of IR is the gathering and examining of data as well as the translation of data useful to decision makers. In addition, IR performs the role of alerting decision makers of imminent problems (Sapp & Temares, 1996).



According to Webber (2012), IR often serves in partnership with coworkers requesting help with survey design, statistical analysis, and assessment and institutional review as a result of their knowledge of higher education assessment, organizational theory, and research design. IR is *au fait* that the data narrates “the story” (Brittingham, O'Brien, & Alig, 2008, p. 70) about the institution.

The data can also help the researcher in identifying which data are most valuable for telling the story and how the data could be presented most appropriately. Furthermore, accrediting bodies typically request that standard data be provided in a manner so that all involved are working with consistent information.

Communicating up front to all involved that someone working in IR is the point person can facilitate the accreditation process, as suggested by Brittingham et al. This is particularly true for colleges and universities with more than one accrediting body. Professionals in the field of IR will be able to facilitate discussions regarding the data that are needed and the correct forms to be completed in a timely manner, as further suggested by Brittingham et al.

There exists a common misconception that institutional data must be computerized and available to anyone who knows the correct button to click to submit for a report. According to Voorhees (2008) however, IR has spent a considerable amount of time collecting, examining, and distributing data to create the reports requested.

It is this considerable amount of time that has been spent working with data that makes the role of IR distinct and valuable to the institution.

Successful strategic planning utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

IR can add value to an institution's strategic planning processes. IR offices are generally the gatekeepers of so many “pieces of the planning puzzle” (Watt, Chrestman, & Johnston, 2001, p. 2) and are therefore most capable for responding to requests for data (Hall & Baldwin, 1998).

For example, the College of Engineering at the University of Miami, a major southeast private research university, was in critical condition as maintained by Sapp and Temares (1996). The College was experiencing a 25 million dollar full-cost deficit, enrollments declined from 1,200 students in the 1980s to only 703 students in fall 1996, its graduates were experiencing a shift in the job market, and faculty research productivity was low. As a result, several members of the Board of Trustees and senior administration were recommending that the College close its doors.

A committee was organized including the dean of the College who was also the vice president for information resources. Consequently he was knowledgeable about the types of reports, analyses, and support services IR could make available to the committee given that the director of planning and IR reported directly to him. The office of planning and IR was able to provide the collection, examination, and distribution of the following data:

- student and faculty demographics
- prediction models, c) student survey results,
- focus groups,
- credit hour and financial data examinations. Furthermore, the director of planning and IR assisted with data selection, analysis, interpretation, and support for the strategic planning process (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

Ultimately, the dean of the College and vice president for information resources recommended that the College remain open.

This decision was supported by the data provided by IR. In addition, the department of planning and IR examinations suggested ways in which the College could accomplish some of the objectives recognized through the strategic planning process as well as update the committee regarding the status of the College so that they could make a more informed decision regarding the future of the College (Sapp & Temares, 1996).

According to Nichols (1990), as IR or outcome assessment becomes more established in colleges and universities, the question of what opportunities this presents to researchers aspiring to move beyond mere reporting to more advanced roles becomes the focus. Some potential roles surface such as implementation team coordinator, institutional planner, departmental activity facilitator; and assessment data gatherer. Each role differs in its appeal in supporting professional development and what is generally expected from these roles.

Consequently, Matier, Sidle, and Hurst (1994) argued for a more vigorous and broader perception of the responsibility and purpose for IR in colleges and universities. Specifically, this perception focuses on how decisions are being made in institutions of higher education. Those employed in IR can no longer merely gather, examine, and distribute data to assist with making decisions.

IR must be "planners" (p. 6) because planning is the "heart" (p. 7) of decision making. IR must continue to be the traditional decision making support by collecting, examining, and distributing information. However, IR must also be the "information architects, the change agents, and the consultants of choice" (p. 4) in their individual colleges or universities.

Counelis (1993) recommended a role for IR. He maintained that in light of the dearth of empirical data on college and university ethical conduct is a grave shortcoming. Through inventive IR planning two innovative objectives can be dealt with.

The first objective for IR is to make available data on the ethical behavior of university personnel. Colleges and universities will be able to develop policies to achieve knowledgeable moral guidance.

The second objective for IR is to make available data to support decision making for guiding institutional ethical behavior. The institution's well-being and the IR role in the research of the ethical behavior would consequently be intertwined.

The academy is in a constant state of evolution, as claimed by Matier et al. (1994). Higher education is changing and emerging into a more multifaceted entity.

The strain from change and complexity is exacerbated by the growing financial restrictions confronting higher education, the proliferation of technology, and mounting expectations from the society higher education serves.

Colleges and universities have to continually do more with less. Colleges and universities also have to improve without growing. These requirements of doing more with less and improving without growing encourages a transition from past guarded and dictatorial decision making processes to a more transparent process.

As an alternative, decisions made in institutions of higher education have become a more open, mutual, and inclusive process.



**Administrators are still charged with, compensated for, and responsible for making decisions. Frequently they are becoming aware of their individual limitations in making wide-spread institutional decisions.**

**Those in the role of administration in higher education have always required support for decision making however, the manner of the support is transforming the decision making and planning processes. The role of IR in colleges and universities is more than decision support.**

**The role of IR should include the role of information architects, as maintained by Matier et al. (1994).**

**After all, it is the IR office that is the “consumers and users” (p. 14) rather than “owners or responsible administrators” (p. 14) of the information. Matier et al. also alleged that IR should be the change agents or the “catalysts” (p. 16) of change to support the decisions of administration.**

**In addition, Matier et al. asserted that IR should be the consultants of choice because of their skill in the area of research, data collection, examination, and distribution.**

**Some maintain that IR is vital for decision making in the academy. Moreover, the increasing competition, mounting costs, the call for cost restraints, demand for accountability, reporting requirements, and declining enrollment and graduation rates have expanded the need for IR. Across higher education, IR is being asked to serve vital roles supporting decision making, strategic planning, and policy development. While many administrators in higher education realize the need for IR, some have not established offices of IR within their respective institutions.**

**The worth of IR to college and university planning and policy development has been well acknowledged in the research (Delaney, 1996).**

**Findings from a research study of 243 New England colleges and universities conducted by Delaney (1996) resulted in the following six recommendations for institutional administrators;**

- **to enhance the capacity of IR to conducting more complex research studies,**
- **to develop inventive ways to transfer the focus from simply reporting to researching, c) to increase the capacity for conducting IR,**
- **to create and support high level audiences for IR studies,**
- **to increase IR involvement in academic areas, and**
- **to expand the focus of IR to include relevant factors and trends outside if the institution.**

**These six recommendations should promote critical thinking and open discussions concerning the role of IR in the future as it continues to evolve.**

**In summary, an examination of the literature revealed that the evolution of IR is in progress. IR professionals tend to be: young, have graduate degrees, from 4-year colleges or universities, and inexperienced but remain in the profession.**

**IR professionals are gradually becoming more diverse, are rapidly becoming feminized, are from public universities, and are from medium to large-size institutions.**

The role of IR is varied according to insitutional type and size. Typical responsibilities of IR offices include student retention, student needs assessments, program evaluations, financial planning, economic impact studies; peer institutional studies; factbook preparation, enrollment management, and faculty and employee related topics.

## CONCLUSIONS

The academy has responded to the call for increased accountability. Colleges and universities have been coming under pressure to explain the cost of higher education. IR has been responding to this pressure by presenting data to support strategic decisions. The burgeoning amounts of data and the capability for comparing data is unparalleled. Consequently, the role of IR has been evolving since its inception as a distinct function in higher education for over 50 years and varies from institution to institution globally. However, the fundamental role of gathering, examining, and distributing data for planning, policy formulation, and decision support has remained consistent.

IR is an evolving field as evidenced by its global growth. Research has revealed two distict findings about the evolution of IR professionals in the United States. First, women professionals in IR have grown from 25% to 62% in 30 years. That represents an increase of 148%. Second, with students enrolling in online courses, only two percent of the IR professionals are from for-profit insitutions. For-profit universities have not kept up with the overall growth of IR in American universities. One could assume from this finding that there is no profit in IR.

## IMPLICATIONS

The implications from this research for higher education are numerous. This examination is important to higher education to be able to continue to meet the increased pressure and demands for accountability from those it serves. This examination is also important to IR offices to be able to compare the roles, characteristics, and evolution of their individual offices with other institutional offices locally as well as globally.

In addition, this examination is important to IR professionals for individual opportunities for advancement, job appreciation, and compensation which are of significant value to IR professionals. The implications from this research encourage critical thinking and open discussions concerning the roles and characteristics of IR professionals in the future as it continues to evolve.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that additional research be conducted to determine if similar findings are revealed.

Additional studies could also be conducted on why only two percent of IR professionals are from for-profit institutions, if IR professionals are continuing to become more diverse over time, if IR professionals are more experienced over time, and why women constitute the majority of IR professionals.

It is also recommended that ongoing research be conducted to monitor the continual evolution of IR in higher education.

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## **SOCIOLOGICAL IMPEDIMENTS THAT LEADS TO INACCESSIBILITY OF WOMEN ATTENDING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN), EKITI-STATE BRANCH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper meritoriously sets out to explore and provide an up-to-date picture on sociological impediments that lead to inaccessibility faced by women attending ODL in their quest to study, specifically at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Ekiti-State, Branch. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select three hundred (300) respondents from part 1-4 based on their physical appearance at the centre premises and their claims, evidence presented (Student Identification Card) that they were students of NOUN. The study adopted descriptive research design.

The main data collection technique used for the study were questionnaire and structured by researcher titled "Sociological Impediments on Inaccessibility of Women Attending Open Distance Learning Questionnaire (SIIWAODLQ)" and validated by experts at Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti and experts in Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, Abuja for vetting and clarity. The response from that vetting (both parties) became the basis for restructuring and reviewing questions that provided useful answers to the study. Reliability coefficient of 0.78 was derived after using Spearman Brown prophecy formula technique. Tables, frequencies and simple percentage were the key descriptive statistics used to analyse demographic information and Research question 1. Mean score of 2.50 above was used to analyse Research question 2 and present the findings while linear regression (SPSS) was used to test the Hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Finding revealed that Institutional, Situational and ICT were significant to the sociological impediments that lead to women inaccessibility on ODL in the covered area of study, because all were above 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study will be utilized instrumentally and theoretically in informing policy directives by public universities presently involved in ODL programmes at large.

**Keywords:** Open Distance Learning, institutional, situational, women, ICT, Education, NOUN.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education plays an important role in economic and social development. Therefore, many governments, Nigeria included, value basic education and equal educational opportunity. Basic education equips recipients with skills and knowledge that can enable them to deal with problems at a personal and a national level.

In developing countries, governments have enthusiastically embraced distance learning as an affordable solution to address problems of equity and access to education. The various researchers use the term distance education and distance learning interchangeably so also will this article do. Considering the global challenges of higher education, it is not surprising that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is an important strategy towards resolving problems of access, quality and equity (UNESCO, 2004). Adopting ODL in Universities is

**both the matter of responding to global demands and providing opportunities to individual who wish to fulfil their education potential.**

**Distance education has been conceptualized in numerous ways, but in simple terms distance education refers to a planned and regular educational provision where there is distance between the instructor and the learner. Eastmond, (1995); Kerka, (1996) cited by Ohene and Essuman, (2014) define distance education as the use of print or electronic communications media to deliver instruction when teachers and learners are separated in place and/or time. The Commonwealth of Learning defines distance education as that which refers to situations where learners are physically separated from the educational provider, communicating in writing, (using letter, mail, email, fax or computer conferencing; verbally (by telephone, audio conferencing, video conferencing); or in face-to-face tutorial sessions' (COL, 2003). Distance education or learning is an approach used by providers of education for students who study when and where it suits them best. There is continuous learning by students in this mode of education, which usually suits students who fulfil other commitments such as work, family and community.**

**Women represent half of the world's population and could represent half of the total productive labour force, we endorse the United Nations Development Program assertion that "it is necessary to seek cultural and educational institutions to train, prepare, and give full opportunity for woman to participate with thought and experience and practice" to develop themselves and the nations in which they live (UNDP, 2007). In addition to advancement, education provides a means for women to protect themselves from exploitation. I can optimistic that distance education, especially the use of e-learning, will move educational systems forward, especially in the most influential aspects that touch the women lives, and especially for disadvantaged or marginalized women who are otherwise denied formal education and developmental opportunities.**

**National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was initially established on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1983 as springboard for Open Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria. The university, at present, has 47 study centres spread across Nigeria and operates its Administrative Headquarters located in Lagos, Nigeria.**

**From the take-off of the university, pioneer student enrolment stands at 32,400 with over 50 programmes and 750 courses, stair casing through from certificate to diploma and degree level, and maintain a strong commitment to internationalization. The establishment of Open and Distance Learning institutions around the world is to address the education and re-educational needs of individual learners and workforce (Pierrakeas et al., 2004).**

**NOUN in particular, typically develop educational activities underpinned by an educational philosophy fundamentally different from those held by conventional educational systems. The main aspect of this philosophy is to promote "lifelong education" and to provide an individual with the best alternative mode of accessing higher education (Keegan, 1996) cited by (Raymond, 2012). NOUN is located along Are-Afao Road, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti-State, Nigeria with population over 4000 students offer different courses.**

**Institutional impediments are those caused by organisational set-up, it may be both physical and non-physical. The physical may include such things as nearness to classroom, road net-work and other academic resources such as the library. Stringent admission requirements, high tuition fees and the mode of paying these fees constitute some of the non-physical. NOUN is an institution running ODL programmes in Nigeria including Ekiti-State Branch face some impediments of serving student population which is diverse in terms of enrolment, demography, location and level of advanced knowledge prior to enrolment into programmes. Currently, ODL students are the fastest growing segment of tertiary education in the country, in NOUN, women students, who enrol on distance education programmes, it is believed, do so for several reasons, including convenience.**



**Distance education students who are mainly adult workers may be time-bound due to work or location-bound due to geographic or family responsibilities (Galusha, 2012).**

**Situational impediments are persistent and pertain to the women individual's to a particular situation. It includes process of socialization, cultural, family responsibilities, lack of support from the husband, not being taken seriously, campus climate, lack of network support for coping, time conflicts, and lack of mobility.**

**Thus, the ability to handle these situational impediments by women will determine ones participation in distance programmes. The individual's situation may refer to her responsibilities at home, place of work or community. Many distance women learners are within the working class bracket and are married adult learners taking care of the family.**

**Therefore, they need to possess the ability to balance their time for the different roles and responsibilities. Galusha (2012) asserts that students' age, type of work and marital status, lack of adequate money to cover the cost of the programme constitute an important aspect of situational impediment for women. The level of one's salary, access to loan and the desire to improve one's self for a better future may determine the urge to go for a loan to pursue further education.**

**There is universal recognition of the need to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education as the era of globalization began, where the free flow of information via satellite and the internet holds sway in global information dissemination of knowledge. Braimoh and Osiki (2008) raise concern about this approach of restoring the teaching learning transaction in Africa because of the low development of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector.**

**It is further argued that the use of ICT in distance education poses a lot of challenges due to uneven and unequal access to computers and the internet and most importantly the fact that power supply is unstable. ODL at NOUN in Ekiti- State is presently facing impediment in information dissemination because of instability of power supply that decline the women to have access to immediate information through the internet. Two types of skills are involved, namely, technical competence and information literacy (Mossberger et al., 2003) that people need in order to have effective access to contemporary ICT is a problem to distance learners. Accordingly, technical competence refers to the skills needed to operate the hardware and software of ICT, including the skills of using networked systems to access and share information.**

**Collectively, these skills have been referred to as "computer literacy" (Warschauner, 2003). Lack of these skills is a critical impediment as learner may fail to use the various physical, digital and human resources involved ICT.**

**The potential benefits of ODL related to its flexibility, accessibility, affordability and life based education are numerous. ODL could enable an expansion of tertiary enrolments at less cost per student than under the traditional residential campus system (Pityana, 2004), since it allows the training of more people. Greater flexibility enables ODL courses to adapt to specific student needs or work requirements, thereby enabling greater relevance. ODL also accommodates the growing demand for lifelong learning more easily than do residential programmes. Moreover, ODL can effectively reach those learners who have been denied access to higher education, for example, women who are unable to attend traditional educational programs because of household responsibilities or cultural constraints, economically marginalized groups, and the imprisoned (Rumble, 2000). Despite the expanding growth of ODL and its perceived benefits, students who enrol with ODL have been shown to face many impediments related to individual, institutional and ICT (Cosmas and Mbwette, 2009; Mbukusa, 2009).**

## ABOUT the STUDY

### Statement of the Problem

Open Distance Learning (ODL) has greater flexibility, relevance and its ability to accommodate the growing demand of lifelong learning education (Daniel, 2005; Pityana, 2004), and is a perseverance avenue to those who have previously one way or the other denied access to higher education to earn their degrees. Yet, studies reported that ODL students facing some impediments which lead to the high drop-out and late completion of their studies (Allen and Seaman, 2010; Zirnkle, 2004). Whereas there is an agreement on the benefits of distance learning, controversy persists with regard to certain fundamental issues among the women attending distance learning such as limited use of technology; lack of awareness of quality parameters of delivery systems among staff, general inefficiency of administrative systems and high attrition rates.

It's on this note that investigating the sociological impediments that leads to inaccessibility of women attending Open Distance Learning (ODL) in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Ekiti-State Branch became necessary.

### Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the sociological impediments that lead to inaccessibility of women attending Open Distance Learning (ODL) in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Ekiti-State Branch.

### Objective of The Study

The objective of this study was to examine impediments related to Institutional, Situational and ICT levels facing women attending distance learning in NOUN, Ekiti-State Branch.

### Research Questions

The study seeks to find answers to the under listed research questions:

- What are the impediments facing women attending distance learning in NOUN
- What are the perceptions' of women attending distance learning in NOUN

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested for the study:

- Institutional impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN.
- Situational impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN.
- ICT impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN.

### Significance Of The Study

It was the belief of my (researcher) that this research work would meet a certain expectations, findings would be beneficial to the ODL stakeholders and public at large. It will help to explain the impediments facing women attending ODL that would be the steppingstone towards its solutions.

It would also provide useful information to policy maker and ODL planners, that would be useful for formulating actionable ODL policies on women in the nation.

It would contribute to the exiting body of knowledge and better understanding on impediments facing women attending ODL in general.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a scientific method, which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. It is used to obtain information concerning the status of the phenomena to describe, "what exists" with respect to variables or conditions in a situation.

### Population

The study population refers to members, individuals, groups or elements involved in the study. The population of this study consisted of all women attending ODL in NOUN Ekiti-State Branch and it focus on 1500 (One thousand five hundred) respondents respectively.

### Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample for this study was three hundred (300) women selected from NOUN study centre Ekiti-State, Branch. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select them from part 1-4 based on their physical appearance in the centre premises and their claims, evidence presented (Student Identification Card) that they were students of NOUN.

### Ethical Issues

The researcher requested clearance and approval letters from Director study centre (NOUN, Ekiti-State, Branch) respectively before meeting the respondents.

Prior to the main study, all respondents were informed about the purpose and process of the study and were assured that confidentiality will be maintained and that information collected was for academic purpose only.

### Instrumentation

Questionnaire was the only instrument used for this study duly designed by the researcher in line with identified variables titled "Sociological Impediments on Inaccessibility of Women Attending Open Distance Learning Questionnaire (SIIWAODLQ)" and it was divided into two sections.

Demographic information of the respondents was focused in section A while section B based on independent variables involved.

### Validity

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are (Golafshani, 2003). It implies that the researcher want to measure what he/she is supposed to measure. The researcher structured questionnaire were subjected to an experts at Ekiti-State University, Ado-Ekiti and experts in Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, Abuja for vetting and clarity. The response from that vetting (both parties) became the basis for restructuring and reviewing questions that provided useful answers.

### Reliability

Reliability addresses the question of consistence of the research procedures and results. It implies the research process and its ultimate outcomes and it is the degree of consistence demonstrated in a study. In order to ensure reliability for this study, the instrument was also estimated by test-retest method and analyzed using Spearman Brown prophecy formula technique and a coefficient of 0.78 was got indicating that the instrument is reliable.

### **Data Collection**

Three hundred (300) copies of the questionnaire were distributed and administered over a period of 6 weeks, all the completed questionnaire were retrieved immediately and a coding guide was developed to facilitate data analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data was analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0 to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance and descriptive statistics of simple percentage was used for demographic information and research question 1 while mean score of 2.50 above was also used for research question 2 respectively.

**Results and Discussions.**

## **FINDINGS**

### **SECTION A**

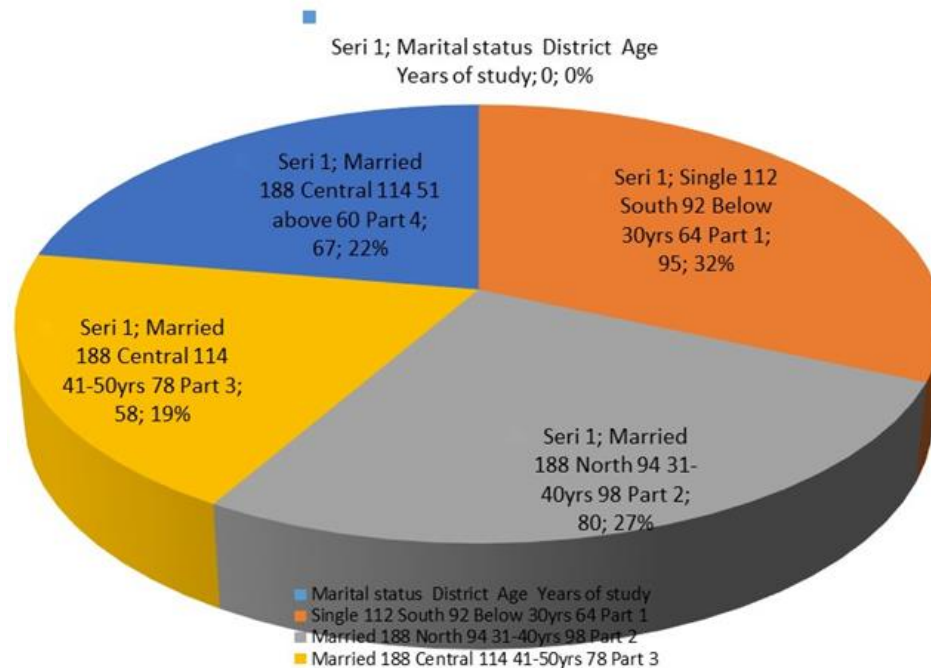
#### **Demographic Information**

Data collected in respect of demographic information on marital status of the respondents shows that single were 112 (37.3%), married were 188 (62.7%). District of the state shows that 74 (24.7%) were from south, 68 (22.7%) were from north and 158 (52.6%) were also from central, these disparity became imperative because the study centre was located at the central district of the state that gives them the privilege.

Age of the respondents pointed out that 64 (21.3%) were below 30 years, 98 (32.7%) were between 31-40 years, 78 (26%) were between 41-50 years, and 60 (20%) were 51 years above. It shows that most of the respondents whose education has been interrupted by one thing or other were involved in distance learning and those that want to elevate herself academically. Mbukusa (2009) found that most of the distance learning students are within 35 to 50 years of age and some are more or less.

In contrast, Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, (2005) and Dabbagh (2007) documented that, the profile of the distance learner population is changing to one that is dynamic, tentative, younger, and responsive to rapid technological changes.

While Years of study reviewed that 95 (31.7%) were part 1; 80 (26.7%) were part 2; 58 (19.3%) were part 3 and 67 (22.3%) were part 4 respectively, these disproportion were reviewed, it simply because most of them were been denied on admission into direct university and they discovered that distance learning is an alternative access to education.



**Figure 1:**  
Demographic information of the respondents

## SECTION B

### Research question 1:

#### Impediments facing women attending distance learning in NOUN

Table 1. below shows result on different types of impediment facing women attending ODL in general.

Huge cost of education was the greatest impediments to continuing a formal education as showed in the table above with (69%), this was not only on cost of tuition and books but includes the cost of lost income from going to school rather than working. And also includes a complex set of substitution costs of not being available to do non-financially rewarding work that a full-time housewife and mother would do to support the family, such as producing food and cooking, caring for children and other dependents, making clothes etc., all as part of supporting other family members who are working to produce an income to support the family group.

Early marriage was (66%); having new born babies was (62%); in supportive by spouse was (40%). These impediments go hand in hand because they are all migrating from one to another. An early marriage for girls is associated with ignorance about birth control, which results in a larger family unit and spouse in supportive because of domestics responsibilities. Parental rejection (56%); occupational stress (27%); in conducive environment (25%); Preference of the family to educate boys only (31%). These may be related to the fact that most parents fear their daughters leaving the house alone; some parents even do not see any importance for college education, especially for a woman; and some believe that women should only be full-time house wives. The results was supported by findings of the report on the National Committee for Women on the lack of awareness of the importance of education for girls (National Committee for Women, 2005).

**Table 1:  
Different Types of Impediment with percentages**

No/s	Different Types of Impediment	Frequency	Percentage
1	Huge cost of the study for women	208	69%
2	Early marriage of the women	198	66%
3	Having new babies during the programme	186	62%
4	In-supportive by the husband/spouse.	120	40%
5	Parental rejection of the programme	168	56%
6	Occupational stress with the house work	80	27%
7	In conducive environment for the study by women	75	25%
8	Preference of the family to educate boys only	92	31%
9	Time allocation for the programme	66	22%
10	Distance covered before getting to programme Centre	70	23%
11	Spinsterhood rejection of the programme	64	21%
12	Parents refused education outside work for woman	56	19%
13	Deficiency in the general secondary exams of the women	50	17%
14	Limited disciplines by the universities on ODL programme	48	16%
15	Work condition for the women	40	13%
16	Health problems of the women	38	13%
17	Others	34	11%

According to Mushi (2001); Pierrakes and Xenos (2004); Mbukusa, (2009), unfavourable home learning environment is among the barriers that have routinely impeded ODL students. Time allocation (22%); distance cover (23%); Spinsterhood rejection (21%); Parents refused education outside work for woman (19%); Deficiency in the general secondary exams (17%); Limited disciplines by the universities on ODL (16%); work condition (13%); health problems (13%) and others (11%). Time and distance can be seen as absence from home. Mushi (2001) reported problems of transport and greater distance to regional centre as among the challenges facing ODL students. This was in line with Vergids and Penagiotakououlos (2002) at Hellenic Open University in Greece found that, fluctuations in the time available for study affected by changes in work and family environments, coupled with an underestimation of the actual effort and time necessary for studies made many students (47%) abandon their studies. Most of the respondents admitted that deficiency in their secondary exams prompt them to enrol in ODL for further education, no discipline incurred by the authority in respect of ODL is concern and other impediments confronted by women see ODL as alternative for their education uplifting in nature. Whereas Diran and Yoon, (2009) in Jordan found similar results; they documented that students failure to balance time for studying and other family and job obligations is a single most cited barrier by distance learners. Moreover, lack of time as a challenge facing ODL students is a key theme which emerged from other studies conducted elsewhere in Africa such as Mbukusa, (2009) in Namibia, Ojo and Olakulehin, (2006) in Nigeria, and Basaza et al, (2010) in Uganda.

Taking the above literature into consideration, it is obvious that ODL students fail to appreciate the fact that, studying by distance mode demands equal time as traditional mode if not more.



**Research question 2:  
Perceptions' of women attending distance learning in NOUN**

**Table 2:  
Perceptions' of women attending distance learning in NOUN**

No/s	Items	N	Mean	Decision
1	Do you think ODL programme is a quickest way of been fully educated by women whose education was interrupted?	300	2.78	Agree
2	Do you prefer ODL programme than regular programme?	300	1.98	Disagree
3	Online internet-based course is more preferable to women?	300	2.54	Agree
4	Do you see poor internet connectivity as a major setback for ODL programme?	300	2.62	Agree
5	Do you think face-to-face interaction of teaching is valuable than computer interaction?	300	2.51	Agree
6	Poor computer knowledge among the women make the ODL miserable?	300	2.53	Agree
7	Do you think printed materials are better than internet conversion on ODL study for women?	300	2.71	Agree
8	Do you think there is age limit for ODL among the women?	300	2.36	Disagree
9	Do you think all the women attending ODL can defend their certificate acquired?	300	2.88	Agree
10	Do you think women are not hiring machinery to do some of their course work and exams?	300	2.50	Agree
11	Can you encourage women to continue participating in ODL programme?	300	2.82	Agree

Table 2. reviewed result on perceptions' of women attending ODL to their level of understanding. All the respondents (women) agree with ODL programme as quickest way of getting educated, online internet-based course, poor internet connectivity, face-to-face interaction of teaching, poor computer knowledge, printed materials, defend their certificate, hiring machinery to do some work and exams, continue participating in ODL programme while preferable ODL programme than regular and age limit for ODL was totally disagree.

From these result, it can be emphatically said that women attending ODL was profitable because they saw it as an alternative for them to be duly educated for one reason that their education has been early instructed. This result was corroborated with a study by Ukpo (2005) in Nigeria showed that teachers enrolled in the ODL face challenges related to failure of trainees to receive training materials on time, students engagement in other economic activities to supplement their family incomes, and poor learner support services especially where study centre are under resourced and overstretched.

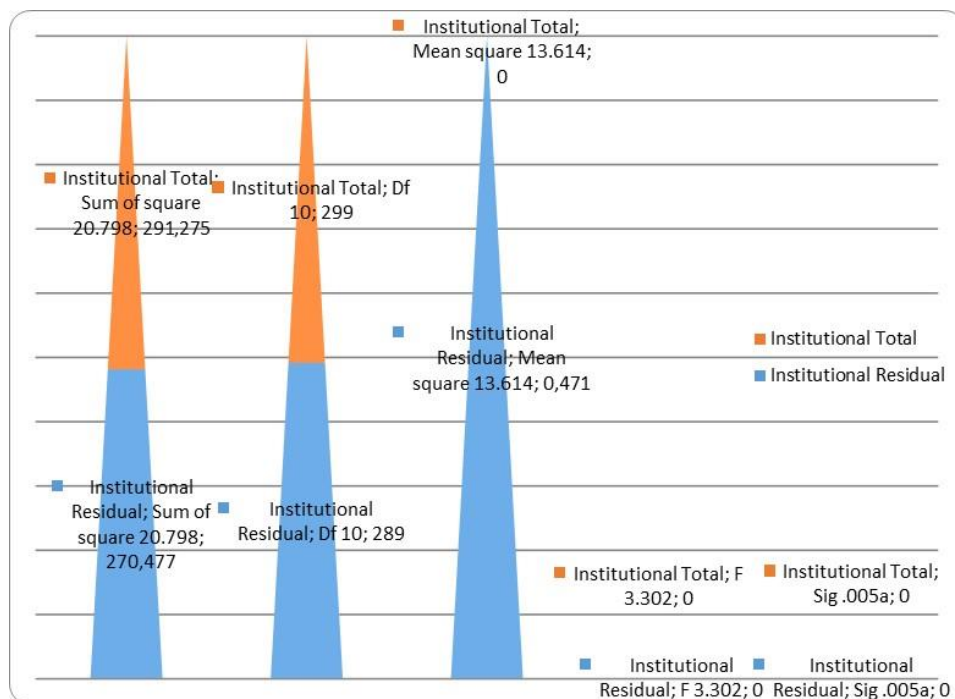
Likewise, Kamau (2007) in Kenya found that, without an effective learners, support services system that provides on-site face -to-face, timely feedback on student performance and access to library services, student achievement will inevitably be undermined and drop-out rates and procrastination will increase, while the advantages of distance education including cost effectiveness, will be undermined.



The fact remain that face-to-face should provide opportunities to students to talk to their tutors and peers around content that seems difficult for them while on their own. Such contact times create many opportunities for students to learn and obtain encouragement from their peers (Mbukusa, 2009). Therefore, face-to-face sessions are unique opportunity for isolated learners to be engaged physically in teaching and learning. Basaza et al, (2010); Juma, (2005); Senanayake and Dadigamua, (2005) suggested that, students often have difficulty when they do not have direct and ongoing contact with academic advising services from their instructors.

**Hypothesis 1:**

**Institutional impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN**



**Figure 2:**  
Linear regression analysis result on institutional impediments.

The above figure 2 shows result on institutional impediments on women attending ODL in NOUN, Ekiti-State branch. The hypothesis that say institutional impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL was accepted due to the fact that 3.302 were above the level of significance 0.05 respectively.

Women viewed that institutional impediments gives them uncomfortable stress which include poor logistics system or a lack of appropriate advising; hence women may be more likely to experience isolation and alienation from the institution due to the lack of proper organizational support.

This result was in line with a research report submitted by some researchers across the globe. Daniel, (2005) viewed that all effective distance-learning programs depend upon the "three legs" of good learning materials, effective student support, and efficient logistics. Principally, the distance learning institution should engineer all these "three legs" for effective students learning.

However, there is evidence from research that the ODL may be causing, or at least contributing, to their own students' sense of burden (Tresman, 2002, Carnwell, 2000). Institutional impediments are constructed by educational institutions with or sometime without their knowledge (Zirnkle, 2004). This include difficulty in registering and paying for classes or a lack of appropriate advice provided under the umbrella of students services support (Bruening et al., 2001).

Pierrakeas et al., (2004); Tresman, (2002) reported that institutional related factors facing distance education student in some region is general higher lack of guidance and information prior to enrolment. Students reported that the course in which they enrolled took more time, or it was too dense in terms of the pace of programmes, than they had expected.

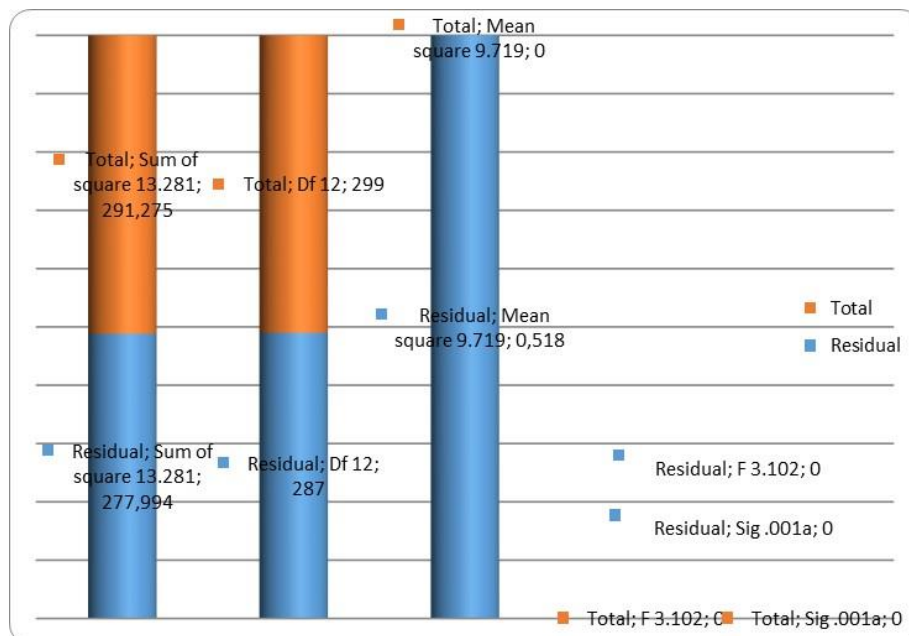
Many students enrol to distance learning with preconceived ideas and expectations, which may be based on prior educational experiences. Thus, guidance and information can be seen as a way to help students reframe their expectations, attitudes, and feelings about the next step in their educational journey (Moxley et al., 2001).

Ineffective feedback has effects on students as they are likely to develop fear that they will not finish their programmes on time (Zirnkle, 2004).

This fear of unknown or that which they do not comprehend makes students perform poorly in exams, school and even in real life (Mbukusa, 2009).

Although up to-date NOUN management has put many efforts to make ODL a reality in Nigeria, still students face institutional impediments. Logistics problems such as delayed study materials at regional centre, poor record keeping and inadequate provision of other students' administrative support.

**Hypothesis 2:**  
**Situational impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN**



**Figure 3:**  
**Linear regression analysis result on situational impediments.**

Figure 3 above reviewed analysis result on situational impediments on women attending ODL. It was noted that the hypothesis that says situational impediments will be a significant to ODL was therefore accepted. This was followed by calculated F-ratio that higher than level of significance that is 3.102; 0.05.

Women opinionated reaffirmed that situational impediments characterized all the condition disallowed them to accomplish their desire in ODL. This situational condition occurred in different perspectives such as physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, behavioural, cultural, political, family responsibilities, lack of support from the family, not being taken seriously, campus climate, lack of network support for coping, time conflicts, lack of mobility and unidentifiable condition as shown by regression result.

This result was pipeline with a research on an ethnographic study conducted by Garland (2007) identified some situational impediments for students to persistence in distance learning. These include poor learning environment and lack of time, for example, students felt that the course took more time than anticipated because they failed to judge the demands of work, home and school.

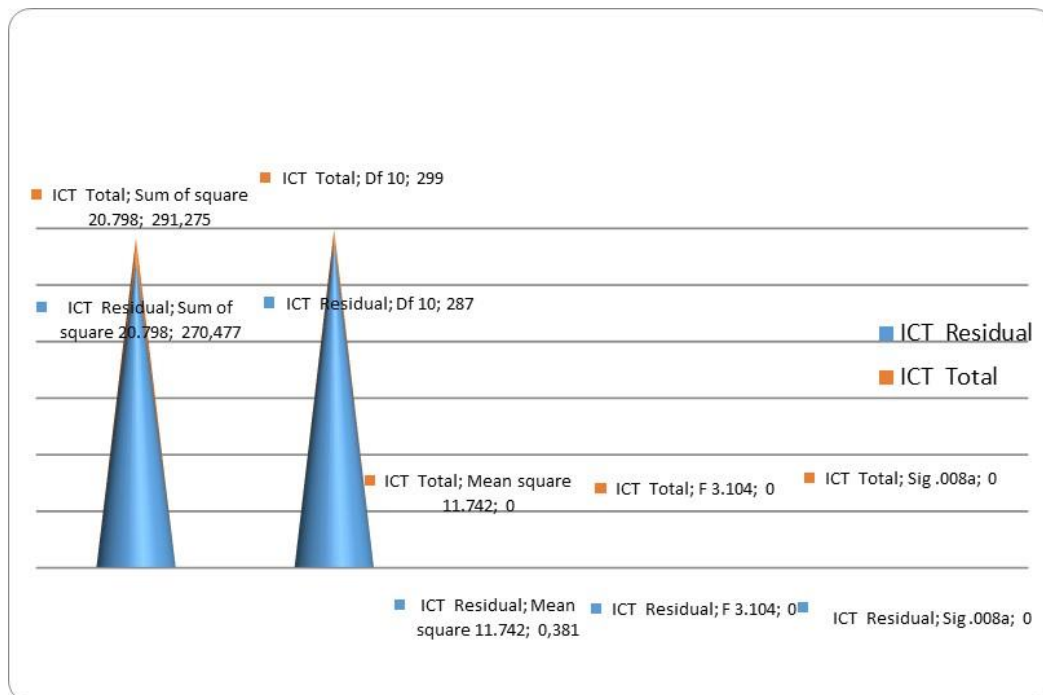
Previously, Kember (1989) cited by Jakani, (2014) argued that poor time management leads to challenges such as learners inability to integrate the demands of off campus study with family, work and social commitments. Bourlova (2005) showed that adult students were seeking educational opportunities that were more appropriate for their circumstances so that they can reconcile their work life with family obligations.

Despite the lack of desire to return to the traditional school, they found a solution in ODL.

The finding was coincidence with Bourlova (2005) that highlights some of the impediments that facing women in continuing their education and found themselves in ODL such as: work comes first, high financial costs, having young children, and health problems.

Mhehe (2002) also lists the obstacles and type of impediments facing women in Tanzania, and includes financial problems, lack of support from family or spouse, the work of women and their inability to reconcile their responsibilities at home and field, and the burdens of studying.

**Hypothesis 3:  
ICT impediments will be a significant to women attending ODL in NOUN**



**Figure 4:  
Linear regression analysis result on ICT impediments.**

Above figure 4 shows result on ICT impediments in relation to women attending ODL in NOUN, Ekiti-State Branch. This hypothesis was significant impediments with calculated F-ratio 3.104 and is higher than level of significance which is 0.05. However, the hypothesis was totally accepted as sociological impediments that lead to inaccessibility of women attending ODL in NOUN, Ekiti-State Branch.

This result was corroborated with Warschauner, (2003) that lack of these ICT skills is a critical challenge as learner may fail to use the various physical, digital and human resources involved ICT. Mossberger et al, (2003) replicated that to distance learners who are not well versed with technical competence and skills of information literacy, the use of an electronic medium in distance learning can inadvertently exclude them or be problematic in their education undertakings.

It is therefore fair to anticipate that, though under circumstances some students are unable to access ICT facilities offered by the university, others might be lagging behind time simply because are reluctant to change.

Howell et al, (2003) submitted that many educational institutions especially in developed countries are shifting from purely a campus-centred model of higher education to ODL model using information and communication technologies.

Cosmas and Mbvette, (2009) shows that, lack of or limited knowledge of ICT by academic staff, students and the high workload of staff at University level claimed to have proliferated the problems on how to manage students records.

Maguire (2001) points out in her study entitled "Gender, information technology, and developing countries" that women's access to technology and training is one of the most important requirements for the participation of women in the global knowledge economy.

Therefore, attention should be given to encouraging women to deal with technology and to provide opportunities for them.

She also notes that women in the developing countries in particular face some problems in accessing technology, and so it is important to provide opportunities for them to deal with the technology, as providing enormous potential will improve the status of women.

Information and communication technology has an effect on women's development (Alfrih, 2005) through "a change in ways of thinking and dealing with the modern means of communication, which gives women a broad educational dimension, particularly as they were able to keep pace with technology" (Khalil, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is an important objective in the development of higher education and has great potential to balance opportunities and take higher education to the door steps of women. It is expected that this ODL will lead to empowerment of women especially among rural and tribal women.

Further the National Open University of Nigeria Scheme seeks to open the avenues of education to school dropouts, women entrepreneurs and artists, among others, who wish to enhance their natural expertise and aptitudes through formal learning.

Above all, concerning financial constraints, it was expected, because most of the distance learners are adults with family obligations that need money, financial constraints in their studies would be obvious. Almost, all respondents reported being self-financing their studies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

- Women attending ODL should be stimulated and skilled to use ICT for faster and easier learning.
- Centres for study with library facilities should be opened in each village to smooth the progress of women.
- Certificate discrimination should stop for ODL degrees among the educational institutions, employers and in the society at large.
- Contact programmes in ODL should be elastic to suit to the timing of working women in urban and rural areas.
- Courses for women in ODL should be application oriented so that it will help them in their money-making and community empowerment.

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**"I am Different from Other Women in the World"**  
**THE EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI ARABIAN WOMEN STUDYING  
ONLINE IN INTERNATIONAL MASTER PROGRAMMES**

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study that investigated seven female Saudi Arabian students of the University of Liverpool's online Masters Programmes. Qualitative, first-person research methods and hermeneutic phenomenology were chosen for the analysis and interpretation of transcripts (Langeveld, 1983; van Manen, 1997; Creswell, 2007, Roth, 2012). The principles of cultural anthropology (Hall & du Gay, 1996; Hannerz, 1992; Lull, 2001; Coleman, 2010) were used to take a snapshot of the interviewees' particular world to provide an overview of the Saudi Arabian culture where the role of women is at the centre of academic, political, religious and social debate. These findings reflect the participants' everyday lives, identities, values and beliefs, presented in a self-reflective, personal 'life-world' story of one single Saudi Arabian woman.

The findings demonstrate that the primary motivators in choosing online international education to further study are existing limitations of travelling to a university campus and customary gender-segregated education in Saudi Arabia. As a contrast, international online education offers the opportunity to gain up-to-date research-based knowledge in their chosen profession, learn critical thinking and problem solving skills and communicate with male and female students from different cultures.

**Keywords:** Gender-based segregation, international online education, adult learning, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, Saudi Arabia

### INTRODUCTION

**"There was no possibility of taking a walk that day."**  
(Brontë, C., 1847, *Jane Eyre*, p. 9.)

Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter referred to as KSA) is segregated in all levels. The education system is controlled by religious authorities that restrict women's access to education and limit their participation in certain professions. Therefore, women's choices are limited to certain professions or employment. They are not allowed to study engineering, journalism, pharmacy or architecture, as these professions are traditionally considered male activities (Cordesman, 2003). Women study mainly in the fields of health care, education, and public administration (AlMunajjed, 1997; Baki, 2004).

Structure and content of education in KSA is heavily influenced by the *ulama*, Muslim scholars who have decision making power primarily on religious questions, which controls culture, educational curriculum and structure of the educational system. The *ulama* have particularly strong control over the education of women and their role in the society (Prokop, 2003, Jamjoom, 2010).

Although this authority resists the increasing presence of women in the labour market, more and more women are pursuing graduate studies. In fact, more than 63 percent of students in Saudi Arabian universities are female. This number indicates the government's long term strategy to invest in female higher education despite of the

cultural restrictions: except one university in the country, each institution has facilities for segregated education where women are allowed to study, but the subjects in their programmes are more limited than those dedicated to men (Hamdan, 2005).

Most of these women are enrolled in education, humanities or social sciences and live mostly in Jeddah and the Western Provinces, which are more exposed to globalization and international education (Doumato, 1992; Prokop, 2003; Onsman, 2011).

This article will present the particular 'life-world' of seven female, emancipated Saudi Arabian students who are eager to learn and actively participate to change the status-quo of women in the Saudi Arabian society by pursuing alternative higher education. Online learning lifts the restrictions on their physical mobility and alleviates their forced segregation in the Saudi Arabian society.

The life of a Saudi Arabian female student, studying in an online, Western European University, uncovers new dimensions in her experience with new paradigms to help find her own way to succeed.

### WOMEN AND GENDER-BASED SEGREGATION IN KSA

In the Arab world, KSA is one of the most conservative Muslim countries, considered the keeper of the Islamic religion (Baki, 2004). Islamic studies are a core component of the educational curricula, in which male and female students learn their rights, obligations and duties (Denman & Hilal, 2011, Jamjoom, 2010).

This religious education treats genders differently due to the different roles men and women assume in the Saudi Arabian society: boys are traditionally taught about male activities, girls about their role as mothers and housewives (Baki, 2004). The traditional interpretation of the role of women in the Saudi Arabian society is based on the *Qur'an*, and the *Wahabi* interpretation of Islam, which is one of the most orthodox religious authorities within the Islamic religion.

"The *Qur'an* gave women equal but not identical rights with men on personal, civil, social and political levels [...] and warned that the mixing of sexes could lead to seduction and evil consequences that might follow". (Baki, 2004, p.2)

In terms of clothing, the *Wahabi* interpretation calls for modest clothing for women including covering the face.

The *Qur'an* also mentions modest clothing of women; although there is no indication about covering the face (Yamani, 1996; Almunajed, 1997; Baki, 2004).

Female seclusion was intended originally to protect women, but the orthodox interpretation of the *Holy Qur'an* created a "socially extreme concept of female modesty" (Onsman, 2011, p.223). The segregation of women is applied everywhere in the society. Whilst men are free to go anywhere, women are not allowed to travel within the country or abroad without the written permission of their close male relatives. Women are not allowed to drive or use public transportation without the presence of a male guardian.

If they use public transportation, they have a separate entrance and can only use the designated seats at the back of the vehicle (Baki, 2004). The source of segregation and restriction in clothing lies in the strong belief that the chastity of a woman and the honor of the family are inseparable. (Baki, 2004; Prokop, 2003) The social structure reinforces this belief by keeping women in limitations in order to prevent them losing the family honor (Mackey, 2002). Although today the Saudi Arabian educational system offers

female education from primary to doctoral level, the restrictions in mobility create a significant obstacle for women to freely access higher education, since in order to attend a class on campus or go to a public (segregated) library, they need to employ a chauffeur or ask a close male family member to drive them to and from the institution (Baki, 2004).

The first university exclusively for women (Princess Noura Bint Abdul Rahman University) was founded in Riyadh in 2010. Although the opening of new institutions exclusively for female students (and staff) facilitates women's access to higher education, it also continues to reinforce gender segregation. Despite international academia remains critical about gender segregation in Saudi Arabian higher education, Saudi Arabian society is unlikely to support gender de-segregation due to its "religious inappropriateness" (Onsman, 2011, p.524).

KSA is facing the challenge of achieving international recognition and a competitive edge in higher education, while keeping conservative cultural norms. In order to maintain the international ranking and elevate the international status of Saudi Arabian higher education, the Ministry of Education approved the first mixed-gender private university (King Abdullah University for Science and Technology) in 2009. The religious police has no power at this institution, women are allowed to study together with men, as well as drive and uncover their head on campus grounds (Onsman, 2011).

#### **ONLINE EDUCATION IN KSA**

A major challenge of the Saudi Arabian educational system is to meet the demands of the growing student population and provide higher educational services though the institutions cannot absorb the number of students applying for studies. Internet has been publicly available in the country since 1999; the number of users increased dramatically from 200,000 in 2000 to 6.4 million in 2007 (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Hamdan, 2014).

For this reason, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education is promoting the use of online and blended learning methods at their universities: the National Plan for Information Technology was established in order to finance the National E-learning and Distance Learning Centre founded in 2006. This centre provides technical support for the development of online delivery methods and content for higher education in KSA (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010).

Responding to women's demand for de-segregation, Saudi Arabian universities have attempted to facilitate women's access to higher education since the '90's by using online delivery methods.

Videoconferencing at King Saud University has allowed Saudi Arabian female students to attend a male class without meeting face-to-face or having any conversation with male peers (Nakshabandi, 1993; Mackey, 2002).

This method of learning, however, has not particularly been successful due to the lack of group discussion and female participation (Baki, 2004).

An increasing number of Saudi Arabian institutions use learning management systems, such as Blackboard, WebCT, Tandarus (an Arabic learning management system) to facilitate online learning (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010).

King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah was the first university to offer online Bachelor's degree programmes and in 2007, Imam Muhamed Bin Saud University offered the first distance learning programmes with instructions entirely online (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010). By 2013, most of the higher educational institutions included online or blended

learning components in their curricula (Hamdan, 2014). International institutions and local branches of foreign universities in KSA offer online or blended courses in undergraduate levels in English (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Onsman, 2011).

Al-Fahad's study (2010) conducted on female learners' satisfaction regarding online learning at King Saud University confirmed that although students felt more isolated, they appreciated the flexibility that e-learning provided, i.e. not having to travel to the institution.

They also liked that the online course was focused on the interests of learners, something they have not experienced in the traditional Saudi Arabian learning environment. As of 2011, more than 20,000 Saudi Arabian students are enrolled in online BA or MA programmes (Hamdan, 2014).

In the first quarter of 2015 the total number of Saudi Arabian students enrolled in Saudi Arabian universities are 669,271, from which 248,343 are male and 420,928 are female (Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education, 2015).

As the educational system experiences change, the position of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education is ambiguous in relation to international online programmes: it does not fully accept qualifications from purely online programmes due to concerns about the quality of the online programme (Hamdan, 2014). On the one hand, KSA promotes the development of online or blended learning methods and English teaching in order to sponsor the education of skilled Saudi Arabian citizens with English proficiency (Moores-Abdool, Yahya & Unzueta, 2009). On the other hand it also recognises the culturally invasive power of low cost mass media (internet, satellite television, social media) and that native English teachers in international programmes may pose cultural challenges for Saudi Arabian students due to their different ways of thinking and interacting (Onsman, 2011). One of the challenges in implementing online or blended learning is that Saudi Arabian public universities are used to the traditional didactic, lecture-based, teacher-centred education. Their curricula are often out-dated or irrelevant to students' career paths.

In addition, they continue to use memorization and passive learning practices (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Hamdan, 2014). Hamdan's study (2014, p.312.) describes that in the Saudi Arabian school system, knowledge and truth are fixed concepts and "what is taught in school is unquestionable", which does not facilitate the development of critical thinking skills or the appreciation of diversity.

As opposed to this, online learners in KSA have free access to educational resources, online libraries, online forums that facilitate intercultural communication between students from all over the world and with the other gender as well.

"This unprecedented openness to new educational resources and cultural perspectives is leading KSA's younger generations to become less traditional and strict in their views" (Hamdan, 2014, p.310).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The findings are part of a wider research project that focuses on the online learning experience of Saudi Arabian students and follows phenomenological principles (van Manen, 1997; Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2012; Roth, 2012) in the research design.

For this particular article, the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven Saudi Arabian female students were used to enable the investigation of their 'life-world' (Langeveld, 1967, 1983).



Hermeneutic phenomenology, which is oriented towards life experience by interpreting the 'texts' of life was used to interpret the narratives of the interview participants (van Manen, 1997). The rigour of phenomenological and first-person research methods did not allow me to create or add any new texts to what the participants had actually said. Derida's "there-is-no-outside-text"-approach was strictly followed when describing the phenomena (Derida in Roth, 2012, p.5).

The data generation process provided in-depth narratives, monologues and self-reflections of Saudi Arabian women about their everyday lives; rich textual descriptions about the phenomenon, which led to deeper reflection and multi-layered understanding of their online learning experience (Smith, 1997, Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

The chosen research method helped to understand the intimate world of adult women living in KSA.

The interviewees were all enrolled in or graduated from the online master programmes of the University of Liverpool delivered by Laureate Online Education. The selected students were all Saudi Arabian citizens and had at least one year of learning experience in the online programme.

A group of female students was selected, with a range of passing grades, to understand their views of learning online in a global environment. After the researcher had received the ethical approval from the University of Liverpool, students were asked to sign a consent form which informed them about the aims and objectives of the research, the structure of the interview and that their answers would be recorded.

They were asked to choose whether they preferred to be interviewed by a male or female researcher. They all preferred to talk to a female interviewer. The semi-structured interviews were organized either face-to-face or via Skype. Participants were between 25 and 49 years of age; their religion is Islam. Most of them have had some educational experience in America or Western European countries; one has also experienced online education in a US university. Table 1 presents further details about the interview participants.

**Table 1.**  
**Data of interview participants**

Student	Residency	Age	Programme	Previous studies in higher education
Student 1	Riyadh	33	MSc in Human Resource Management	American University, US, Associated Degree in Health Promotion
Student 2	Makkah	47	MSc in International Management	College of Education in Makkah, Bachelor of Arts & Education, English Language and Literature
Student 3	Khobar	27	MSc in International Management (Health Specialization)	Lakehurst University, BA in Management Information System
Student 4	Riyadh	47	MSc in International Management (Health Specialization)	King Saud University, BA in Nursing
Student 5	Jeddah	25	MSc in Human Resource Management	King Abdul Aziz University, BA in Business Administration
Student 6	Jeddah	49	MSc, in International Management	King Abdul Aziz University, BA in Business Administration
Student 7	Jeddah	32	MSc in Human Resource Management	King Abdul Aziz University, BA in English Language and Literature



The interview structure focused on three main topics: cultural values at home, online learning experience (MA level) and face-to-face learning experience in the Saudi Arabian segregated higher educational system (BA level). The interview protocol covered a set of questions that invited students to reflect upon their culture and online learning challenges. The interviews were transcribed and analysed with rigorous phenomenological and first-person research methods (Langeveld, 1983; Hycner, 1985; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Roth, 2012).

The transcripts were coded in NVivo and the eventual bracketing phase started with the identification of units of meanings categorized in themes and sub-themes.

Following Langeveld's (1967, 1983) 'life-world' studies, the findings are narrated in first person singular to present the inner world of these seven female, Saudi Arabian students linked in one single narrative as if it was the self-exploratory journey of one single Saudi Arabian woman.

Nothing has been changed or added to their original narratives, only stylistic and grammar mistakes were corrected in order to make the story more coherent. Continuous self-reflection, cultural self-awareness, regular consultation with experienced researchers in phenomenology and cultural studies as well as frequent cross-checks with the critical literature ensured faithfulness to the data.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Limitations on Accessibility**

"Women don't drive here, so we use drivers or a male family member has to drive us (Student 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)"

My name is Layla, I am from Saudi Arabia and it was not possible for me to 'take a walk that day'. There is no possibility of driving for women in this country. Saudi Arabia is one of the developing countries...so we still aren't like...people who live in London or the US or any other place.

It is all about people and how they think about women driving a car. I think this is not a religious but a political issue. "(Student 1)

"The University had a bus service for female students, but my father didn't want me to use it. There is no public transportation for women; it is only for men. Mainly non-Saudi citizens use it, because they don't have a car.

Most of the Saudis have their own cars. It's not common to use the public transportation; it is not really good for ladies at all. Sometimes we feel scared, and it is not appropriate for us. We could use taxi, but taxis are not safe either, not all the taxi drivers are good people." (Student 5)

"Women cannot move freely because if they do so, they might be under threat or sexual harassment." (Student 6)

"Women don't drive here, so we use drivers or a male family member has to drive us. Women here usually have three different ways to find someone to drive them. Either it is one of the male family members, like brother, husband, father or nephew who can drive or they have their private drivers with contract. Private drivers are usually from Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines." (Student 4)

"That day I ended up using our private driver. I am privileged because my family can afford a private driver. I don't feel good about this. It seems that things are slowly

changing and I hope that within the upcoming five years I will have the chance to drive.” (Student 5)

“The doors of the University are locked once you are in.” (Student 4)

“When I studied on campus during my graduate studies, my dad used to drive me to the University. My first class started at 7 am. He could not come to pick me up before 5 pm, due to his work commitments. I was not allowed to go out before the end of the academic day, even if I had no classes in between. The doors of the University are locked once you are in. At the beginning this was very strange for me, but then I got used to it.

That day the library was closed for female students. We shared the library with the male University and it was available for us only on specific days. Since then the schedule has changed and the library is more available for ladies now, but that time I wished I had an online library without restricted hours for women.

In fact, during my online studies, I liked the online library: I could get there any time, day or night. I found it very easy and handy to have the online library, because whenever I needed it, I just logged in and searched for articles or the subjects I needed.” (Student 4)

“That day I spent most of the time in the canteen of the University. I tried to study for the next day without too much success, as I left at home most of my books. I felt a bit intimidated after this first class; the professor was quite formal and not so helpful.” (Student 5)

“When I studied in the US for a short time, the instructor was always on the spot to help when I asked a question. It was a long day, but I understood there is no way out of here. My father came at 5 pm to pick me up: he showed his ID and said that he came for me. I was called to prepare to leave and the door was suddenly open. That was the first time we had a conversation about finding more suitable ways of learning for me.” (Student 1)

### **Social Restrictions**

“I am different than other women in the world” (Student 3)

“I am different than other women in the world. I’m getting knowledge, I join companies to work but still I am treated differently and I have fewer rights than other women. The Saudi culture is very strict and conservative; a religion-based culture. It is a man-dominant society. There are a lot of things that are not allowed for women.

I don’t have the same opportunities and I am not allowed to be myself, because the culture is not supporting women. When making decisions, a woman has to check first how it is acceptable and permitted by the religion. It does not matter how educated, broad-minded and intelligent you are, as a female. In fact, officially I can’t make decisions on my own; I have to go back to my father or husband to help me making a decision.

In reality I make quite a lot of decisions on my own: I am leading a female unit in a hospital and my experience as a manager for ladies so far, has been a smooth journey without too many troubles. I think that the most challenging is to be a leader for a male team, because Saudi men don’t accept women to manage or lead them.” (Student 3)

“When I had to decide my career path, I had to take into account that there are specific professions I cannot study, such as engineering. There was a time when women’s job applications were rejected purely due to their gender: there were very strict rules about accepting women in companies and in non-medical fields. Employers did not care about the knowledge or experience applicant women had; they were not accepted because the

company thought, extra fees are involved in employing women and they had the belief that women did not know how to work. Things are slowly changing and now I am more accepted based on my education and knowledge. But it is still a struggle.” (Student 3)  
“It’s a struggle to work as a woman” (Student 4)

“Usually women in Saudi Arabia choose to be teachers or nurses. Recently, we can work in ‘female’ banks, or in the airport, in the female sections only. For example, when a nurse graduates, she is given the choice to work in paediatric units, where she deals with babies and their mothers only, or in mixed area, where she takes care of men and women. Most of the nurses will choose to work with women or children only.

I finished my graduate studies in nursery, which I’ve completed partly in the US and in Saudi Arabia. I am enrolled in the MSc in International Management programme of the University of Liverpool, in Health specialization, and I have just completed my dissertation. I work now as a supervisor in a hospital, in Paediatrics and my unit consists in female nurses. I couldn’t manage male staff: they cannot tolerate having a woman as a supervisor.

It’s a struggle to prove myself because I have to show constantly that women can do as much as men do. Even if professionals accepted this fact and they worked with me as an equal, it’s difficult for the parents. Sometimes they come and say: ‘Can we talk to a man? Do you have a man here that we can talk with?’

They don’t want to feel that a woman gives them the information, and makes the decision for them. Usually they are the decision makers, without the help of a woman. It is difficult to deal with them, as sometimes we have very conservative and religious parents.

When I communicate difficult news to a mother, normally I close the door of the office to have some more privacy; I sit close to the mother, hold her hands, touch her shoulder and hug her if she is very emotional. But I can’t do this with a man, of course. I am conscious that I cannot just close the door and be alone with the father only. If I need privacy, I have to close the door, and I need a third person sitting with me in the same room. I have to sit in a certain distance from the father, use specific tone of voice, so he will not feel offended or perceive that I give orders to him. I cannot talk to him in my usual tone of voice, which is a bit higher; I can’t smile, I can’t put make-up because I know men look at these things.

When I had less experience, a parent complained about me. He said that ‘I was not respectable because of the way I talked and because I was sitting too close to him’. I was focusing on delivering more information about the child care and provide as much support as I could in an emotionally difficult situation. As there was no one else in the room, no one believed me: it was only my word against his. At the end I’ve got an official warning. After all, I started to have doubts about my own judgement: everyone in my environment told me that I should have not behaved disrespectfully, even though they were not in the room and did not hear the conversation. I’ve started to believe that I was indeed disrespectful, but I did not notice at that time.” (Student 4)

“I learnt that no matter what my intentions are, parents’ opinion is more important. I have to be conservative as far as my appearance and behavior.” (Student 1) “Now I am prepared that when I talk to a father, I have to ask a staff member to witness the conversation, change the way I sit, my posture, my body language, my tone of voice, even the way I think. It is so difficult... I am trying my best to behave differently, because I know this is the only way that I can provide good care to my patients and to their parents. I don’t mind doing the extra miles just to make them feel comfortable, safe and secured with me.” (Student 4)

**"I don't feel bad when I cover my hair" (Student 5)**

**"Being a Muslim woman it means that I have to wear my hijab. It is a restriction of my religion. In our religion women are different than men, not in a bad way, as we are equal. Using the scarf in Saudi Arabia, which we call hijab means protection and that I can express my religion better than anywhere else. I have to cover myself, my body and my head when I go out. As we are Muslims we believe that women, who cover themselves in this life, will reach the paradise in their next life. So this is a good encouragement for me, it's a good incentive. Actually I feel very good and proud of being a Muslim woman, wearing hijab, because I feel protected and I know I gain benefits for my next life.**

**If you see a man without hair, you can accept his face and you don't care about the hair. But if you asked a man, what is the first thing he looks at a woman, he would say: 'if the woman doesn't have hair, I don't look at her'.**

**Our God asks us to cover our hair...in order to protect us." (Student 5) "We believe that covering the hair will not make us very appealing to men and that we have a very conservative religion that we protect. We always cover the hair and wear conservative clothing, no arm can be shown, no legs can be shown, so it becomes less appealing to men." (Student 1)**

**"This is our belief about cover and this is how you protect yourself and you protect also men, from not seeing you actually." (Student 1 and Student 5)**

**"I have a lot of friends who are better Muslim than I am and they put their veil also abroad. We are very proud to put our veil because we love to express our thoughts, our opinion, and our religion. It does not distract us from learning, from riding a car; it does not distract us from anything. Why didn't I put it, when I lived in America? I'm a lazy Muslim. I'm raised in a bit more open family: covering wasn't so strict. So that makes me lazy to put it on. But I didn't wear, for instance, bathing suit when I went to swim in the US. I swam with long pants. Why is that? Because my culture tells me that I should not wear short bathing suit when I swim." (Student 1)**

**When I was younger and not married, as a Muslim girl I was not allowed to have a boyfriend.**

**"Any man who was not my uncle, my father or my brother, was a foreign man for me. I believe that if a man looks at me, when I'm covering my hair and wearing good and covered clothes, he cannot think about me in a bad way. He has to respect me and this is the point. Respect means he cannot think about me in a sexual way. The first thing they think about all the time is sex. In our religion men have to cut their imagination when they start to think about these things. I don't think they do, but I am not so sure actually about this area. They have to fight with themselves, which is not easy at all. Even for woman it is not easy, but we try.**

**Not all the Saudis are the same. As my family is less conservative sometimes they allowed me to go out with my male friends. My relationship with my male friends was formal. We were not allowed to talk about everything as I did with my girlfriends and my parents always had to give their approval, when I went out with a male friend."(Student 5)**

### **Impact of Gender Status on Learning**

**"I could not communicate with male students face-to-face, but I could use network communication" (Student 5)**

**"During my bachelor studies in Saudi Arabia male students were separated in other classes. I could not communicate with them face-to-face, but I could use network communication. I used to communicate with them during my studies. This way of communication is not so different than communicating with men in the online master programme: you don't see them, but you can see them interact by exchanging messages and words." (Student 5)**

**I treated the online classroom, as if there was no actual communication with men, there were only responses on the subject. I read their answers for the discussion question and I wrote a response, but usually there were no emails, there was no further connection. (Student 7)**

**There were situations when there was disagreement in the online class, but it wasn't difficult for me to deal with it. I just posted my opinion and discussed it with them back and forth. Whenever I discussed it, of course, we never talked outside the class because we're not at that level of relation. (Student 5)**

**"I didn't feel connected with online students" (Student 4)**

**"I didn't have close relationship with my classmates. I only imagined them. I didn't see them in real life." (Student 5) "The time I spent online was enough for my own learning, but did not increase my relationship with my classmates." (Student 1) "Even if we had the opportunity to exchange emails or occasionally called each other, still the face-to-face relation was not there, and I always felt there was something missing. I read their posts and got the idea but their expressions and feelings were missing." (Student 4) "In the online class you were given materials and all depended on you. In contrast, in the face-to-face university I was more dependent on the instructor and not on myself, because I could ask him on the spot." (Student 3)**

**"I wanted to change the way I was educated: I wanted to open my mind to other cultures, experience research-based learning and increase my knowledge" (Student 1, 2, 3, 4)**

**"When my family moved to the US due to my father's work, I studied a year on campus in the US. It was active learning because I met different people every day and talked with them regularly. We expressed our thoughts verbally, not only by writing. It gave me a lot of motivation." (Student 1) "In the US, we had open communication with the instructors on spot, and they explained the subject in the classroom, if there were questions." (Student 3)**

**"Then we moved back to Saudi Arabia and I wanted to continue with my studies in master level. Saudi universities would accept some credits for courses that I took in the US. But the educational system here is very difficult: it is the old and traditional way of teaching and learning. Professors have formal relationship with students and sometimes I avoided them because I didn't like their way of teaching." (Student 5) "Students were not dependent on themselves, everything was ready for them. I remember that when I had a Biology class during my BA studies, the professor came with notes that were ready for us, we read them, completed the assignment, passed the exam and that was it. There was nothing about teaching students how to use their brains, search in the library for extra books and articles. This is exactly what is happening in other Universities outside Saudi Arabia. I am used to the American style of education and the Arabic education wouldn't be satisfactory for me. This is why I wanted to change the way I was educated." (Student 1, 2, 4)**

**"I chose the online master programme of the University of Liverpool because I wanted to open my mind to other cultures, experience research-based learning and increase my knowledge." (Student 1, 2, 3, 4) "Online learning gave me the opportunity to meet people from different cultures, with different beliefs and knowledge." (Student 3)**

**"In the online class we were free to speak" (Student 4)**

**"I had experience with other online courses at an American online university. At the time there were lots of political issues between the Middle East and the States after 9/11 and I felt discriminated in the class. I was the only student from the Middle East and the professors were really against me. They were irrational and very critical about my postings, so I had to quit.**

**My experience with the University of Liverpool is totally different. I really liked studying here and I've recommended the University for many people. There was respect towards students and between students. No one commented on anything that might hurt or make others uncomfortable in the class. In my culture, usually we don't discuss things openly, but in the online classes we were free to speak.**

**No one joked about whatever I posted or said." (Student 4) "I didn't feel I was judged by my background or my religion. It was very easy and comfortable to express my thoughts on religion, education and my cultural background. It was a respectful environment." (Student 1) "That is something really good about Liverpool." (Student 4)**

## **DISCUSSION**

**The constructed "story" of a Saudi Arabian woman provides a snapshot of the transforming reality of female Saudi Arabian students. It portrays the everyday difficulties of travelling back and forth to the campus of the university or to a public library due to customary limitations on women's mobility.**

**It also demonstrates how Saudi Arabian women view gender segregation, the essence of modest clothing or covering their hair, and also sheds light on culturally acceptable ways of communicating with the other gender.**

**The struggle of how women learn to communicate with men in order to be accepted and appreciated in their own cultural milieu is evident from their recounts. In the world of Saudi Arabian women, restrictions are completely acceptable and justified, as they were created to protect them. Yet, the interviewees are evidently ambitious Saudi Arabian women who are aware of how differently other women are treated in other parts of the world. They have similar career aspirations and dreams of self-fulfillment which motivate them to look for different ways of learning.**

**Online education provides a way to lift cultural limitations. Female students enjoy that they are free to talk and communicate with male students within the classroom, although most of them would not initiate further discussion with them outside of the class.**

**This alternative was commonly accepted by the participants. They felt that online learning not only gave them a chance to increase their knowledge about different cultures, but also helped them to use different methods of learning in order to develop critical thinking skills and adapt new problem solving methods. Similarly to Hamdan's (2014) studies the findings demonstrated that online learning helped students become self-disciplined, self-motivated, engaged and autonomous learners who own their learning process. This is significantly different from the use of passive learning or memorization techniques practiced in the local universities within the constraints of segregated education. Hamdan (2014) and Moores-Abdool et al (2009) and Al-Fahad**



(2010) also confirm that Saudi Arabian female students appreciate international online or blended education because of these features. Through online learning female students become more independent and active in search of alternatives ways of learning that are more suitable for their individual needs.

Online course developers, policy makers, instructors and study counsellors, who develop and deliver online courses for culturally diverse groups of students, should be aware of the different cultural needs of their diverse student population and may require constant cultural training to keep up-to-date their cultural knowledge about their students. Similarly to other researches conducted in this field, the findings of this paper suggest that Saudi Arabian female students may need more training than their Western peers to adjust to the progressive, constructivist educational methods applied in international online programmes (Hamdan, 2014; Moores-Abdool et al, 2009; Al-Fahad, 2010).

Due to their unfamiliarity with interactive learning in online, multicultural classrooms with mixed genders, they need clear guidelines regarding the code of conduct in class including rules of communication with peers and instructors and Western academic integrity norms.

They will benefit from more support in developing their time management, self-study and critical thinking skills. Additional technical support and culturally sensitive university policies need to be implemented that respect the social restrictions in their local environment and their limitations on class or internet accessibility.

Culturally sensitive approaches applied in each level of their studies will keep these students engaged long term in the online international programmes.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this paper demonstrated the awareness of female Saudi Arabian students of their ambiguous role as women in the Saudi Arabian society: on the one hand they are trying to fulfil the cultural expectations of the conservative Saudi Arabian society, whereas on the other hand, they are eager to take an active role in their education and career choices.

This paper demonstrated culture and country specific motivational factors, leading them to look for alternative learning methods and it also shed light on the limitations that determine their everyday lives and learning experiences.

These women choose online learning in international programmes because it eliminates cultural and physical boundaries, opens a new horizon, allows free communication between male and female students from different cultures and also provides a way to gain up-to-date knowledge in specific professions.

The internationalization of education is a widespread and irreversible process generated by globalization. (Al-Fahad, 2010; Hamdan, 2014) It has led to the emergence of young, female professionals within KSA who are hungry for social recognition in their cultural milieu, and are willing to take an active role in the socio-cultural and political changes, protesting against the restrictions imposed on them within their own country.

The surrounding Muslim society insists on the practice of gender segregation; women's appearance in the male sphere is deemed provocative and offensive and women are restricted to "spend most of their lives in veil and in the four walls of their house" (Syed, 2010, p. 151).

There are still relatively few studies conducted on the effects of international online education that enters 'their house' and at the same time, opens up virtually the whole



world at least for the duration of their studies. The present paper highlights that more research is needed in this area and also suggests that policy makers in KSA should take action in order to create more clarity in what is considered a role model for today's women in KSA. The serious potential of highly educated women, who are just as skilled as their male colleagues, should also be recognized in the Saudi Arabian labour market.

The ambitious goal of the KSA to elevate the international status quo of its higher education continuously opens up the debate on gender-based segregation, which still remains unresolved and contested (Prokop, 2003; Baki, 2004; Osman, 2011).

In the course of their emancipation, the female Saudi Arabian society has to compete with foreigners in the labour market, having up-to-date knowledge and excellent English language skills, and also, with the Saudi Arabian male population. They have to face conservative political forces that insist on the idea of gender segregation in order to secure employment opportunities for the members of the male society (Doumato, 1992; Prokop, 2003).

Therefore, the question remains: how are these ambitious and skilled female students going to find suitable jobs (given their degrees) in the male-dominant Saudi Arabian society, where the same limitations that forced them to choose online learning in international programmes as opposed to in-country face-to-face education still exist and determine the everyday life of a working woman? Will they ever be treated just like their male colleagues, i.e. as equals?

This study does not aim to answer this rhetorical question, as the educational, religious and socio-political debates around the role of women in the Saudi Arabian society are yet to crystallize.

It does, however, intend to raise awareness regarding the ambiguous situation of educated Saudi Arabian women:

"as students they learn the way *"other women"* (Student 4) learn in Western societies, but their life is connected to a socio-cultural milieu that resists giving them equal human rights".

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and motivation. The current article related to Saudi Arabian female student's online learning experiences is part of this research.

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## **A SOCIO-CULTURAL OVERVIEW OF E-LEARNING IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Many regard Saudi Arabia as a conservative and religious nation with a perception of some degree of neglect or discrimination towards its female population. This deters many to realize the kind of revolution this nation is going through, especially in the field of education. Many might not realize that the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has state of art educational institutions with best possible equipment and infrastructure in the world.

In addition, the government is providing very lucrative scholarships to hundreds of thousands of its man and women to study abroad in a country of their choice to acquire the best possible education in their field of study. A very high degree of emphasis is laid on the education of its female section of the society. In this article, we look at socio-cultural issues and their influence on education.

**Keywords:** E-learning, open and distance learning, female education, tertiary education, religious, cultural, social, political.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Saudi Arabia, one the twenty richest countries in the world, is currently undergoing an educational revolution. Many world class universities have started during the last decade. Hundreds of thousands of Saudi Arabian students have been provided generous state scholarships to peruse higher education in many developed countries of the world led by the US, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Universities at home have been offering lucrative pay packets to attract international educationalists from around the globe. For example the number of overseas students and staff at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is much greater than the locals. One may be surprised to see the developments of educational infrastructure in the middle of the desert. Given the speed with which the educational developments are shaping, the kingdom is heading to become a well-educated country in the near future.

It is not hidden that the Saudi Arabia is a highly religious (conservative for some) country. It is well know that an internationally acclaimed city Makkah (Mecca), which houses Kaaba, (which marks the direction of prayers for the faithful) (Qibla, 2013), (Yamin, & Ades, 2009) and (Yamin, 2008).

Internationally well-known pilgrimage known as Hajj (Hajj. (2013), (Yamin, M. & Ades, (2009) and (Yamin, 2008). Performed by millions every year, also takes place in and around Makkah. A detailed account of pilgrimage to Makka and the surrounding areas can is provided by Yamin in (Yamin, & Ades, (2009) and Yamin, M. (2008).

Saudi Arabia may perhaps be regarded as a seat of Islam, Makkah having somewhat similar prominence as the Vatican City, the seat of Catholicism. The Saudi government and the people of the kingdom are well known for their generosity.

## **FEMALE EDUCATION**

Given the religious credentials of the country, one may wonder about the plight of the females, especially when it comes to education.

It is true that women are not allowed to drive motor vehicles and are highly encouraged to cover their bodies including faces in the public. Most marriages are arranged by relatives, generally with mutual consent. The family life however enjoys a very high degree of respect in the social and business circles.

There are many shopping malls, sporting facilities and business entities designed either exclusively for females or families. Of course there is adequate number of female-only educational institutions in the country in basic as well as higher educational fields. Saudi Arabia has a unique system of co-education education at the tertiary level.

Nora University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is the largest female-only university in the world. It has about fifty thousand students and has state of art facilities including a mono rail serving the students and staff in the university. To fulfill the needs of the other female population, all Saudi universities have a female section of academic and administrative units that their male counterparts have. When it comes to teaching of female students by a male instructor is concerned it is usually accomplished by means of a video link arrangement.

A male instructor may teach a section of male students face to face in a class together with a female section receiving instructions in a specially designed classroom in the women's campus, under the supervision of an assistant female instructor. Female section receives the lecture via one-way video link, whereby they can see the instructor but the instructor can only receive the audio from the female side making it possible for females to ask questions during his lecture. This method of education has been approved by well-known international accreditation bodies like the Association of MBAs and EPAS administered by the European Foundation of Management Development (European Foundation of Management Development (2013).

## **DISTANCE LEARNING IN SAUDI ARABIA**

E-learning or distance learning in Saudi Arabia in the recent years has gained a lot of popularity, especially amongst the young married females who otherwise find it difficult to continue their education.

Given the initiatives of the government, demand for distance learning programs is likely to grow in the near future. Emphasis on education in Saudi Arabia now is all time high, specially due to a very generous government scholarship program; the conventional methods of Learning and Teaching (L&T) are not going to be sufficient for the Saudi society.

Special categories of people like full time employees, those living far away from university campuses, old age and people with disabilities, and a large chunk of females find it convenient to continue their education in distance learning modes as opposed to the conventional face to face and interactive mode of L&T. Indeed, for these and other classes of people, Distance Learning is one of the effective and affordable methods of educating themselves.



**With the stabilization and proliferation of the electronic technology, all leading universities of the world have introduced distance learning programs along with the conventional methods. Even in the conventional methods, all progressive universities of the world have made it mandatory for instructors to adapt to certain practices of Distance Learning. For example many universities require their teachers to provide teaching material and facilitate bulletin boards on the university intranet. The impact of technological advancement is so massive that a vast majority of students is opting for distance learning with the help of web and multimedia. Nevertheless even the best methodologies need reviewing and fine tuning on a continuous basis. A successful institution needs to assess the impact of its offerings.**

**Therefore the success of the Distance Learning programs run by different institutions must undergo a rigorous quality assurance program based on continuous input from all stockholders including the teachers and students. The King Abdulaziz University (KAU) started Distance Learning Program in 2006. The university has established a deanship for this purpose.**

**Currently there are about 1000 students enrolled in this program. Only two faculties namely, Economics and Business Administration and the faculty of Arts and Humanities are offering some of their degree programs through Distance Learning. The Deanship of the Distance Learning has secured in-house course development programs and is in a position to support L&T material and services for up to 10,000 students. The Deanship has also done an excellent work in tailoring the Learning Management System that it uses.**

**Currently, there are many young people and mature age people enrolled in KAU's distance learning program. The other categories of people enrolled in the program are people with disabilities, mature age people and the people living far away from university campuses or living in remote areas.**

**The distance learning programs throughout the world has gained significant recognition and popularity. Distance Learning is also known by other names like Distributed Learning, Open Learning, Online Learning and E-Learning.**

**The need and demand for distance learning courses is rising in the kingdom. At the King Abdulaziz University, distance learning courses, specially offered by the faculty of Economics and Business Administration, and are gaining a lot of recognition and popularity.**

**As the demand grows, the need to prepare modern curriculum and continuously upgrade the excising teaching material also grows. No progressive institution can afford to ignore the need to review and fine-tune its curricula on a regular basis. If the curricula weren't regularly reviewed and updated, the program wouldn't grow as much we would like it to see it grow and prosper. Keeping this in mind, through this proposal, we are offering to conduct a comprehensive feedback study from the students and teachers in order to determine the satisfaction levels in the areas of teaching contents, policies, technologies and methodologies.**

**Our research, if warranted, would suggest ways to make improvements in the course material offered in the Distance Learning program as well as policies and methodologies used by the program. These suggestions may be systemic, administrative and/or academic. The aim of the project is to ensure that KAU's Distance Learning program is comparable with those of the leading universities of the world and leads the way for the universities in the Arabian Peninsula. We have been assured by the deanship of the**



Distance Learning that our report and recommendation would be studied and suitable actions would be taken.

### **DISTANCE LEARNING AND WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA**

Distance learning provides a unique opportunity for the women in Saudi Arabia. Strictly speaking, there is no minimum age for marriage in the kingdom and as a general rule once a person, specially a young girl attains the age of puberty can be married. This coupled with social traditions; many young girls get married before entering a tertiary institution of education. Naturally, many of these women are keen to carry on with their education well beyond their marriage. Of course they can attend universities and actually many do but a large number of them find it very difficult to attend face to face classes. For, the eLearning or distance education becomes very crucial.

Indeed Saudi government has facilitated all educational institutions to provide for the distance learning program. When it comes to technology and means, the kingdom is well ahead of its neighbors' and the entire Arab world. For example, Saudi Arabia has ensured availability of high speed internet through Fiber Optics. New developments of Cloud Computing, (Yamin, 2013) are making it even easier to expand the base of eLearning and many universities and private educational institutions are taking the advantage of this new trend and technology.

In particular, the cloud computing platform as a Service (PaaS) and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) are very useful to ensure smooth delivery of the distance learning.

The awareness about e-learning in Saudi Arabia is picking up slowly. Historically speaking, in the beginning there has been is a low degree of public awareness of ICT and e-learning in Saudi Arabia, which may be connected to the other challenges facing the country's learners. a 2007 nationwide survey with 7,500 respondents concluded that a large portion of society remains unfamiliar with e-learning technical advancements and concepts (Abdullah & Siti, 2013)

Historical developments in the field of distance including, an account of plight of female education learning, can be found in (e.g. Ministry of Higher Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (MOHE), Quraishi, and Mirza, A. A. & Al-Abdulkareem, M.).

An overview of e-learning in Saudi Arabia can also be found in (Mirza & Al-Abdulkareem, 2011) Their study mentions a number of issues like internet problems, lack of support and advertising, cultural, religious and traditional barriers including some discussion on women's education. By the passage of time, most of these issues have dissipated.

Currently no woman is prevented from receiving modern education. In fact they are highly encouraged to attain higher scientific education. Not only Saudi Arabia has the largest female-only university in the world but it also has thousands of females studying medicine, science, economics and all other disciplines in all government and private educational institutions. In the field of communication, especially the provision of stable internet, the Saudi government has not been instrumental in providing broadband internet connections but has recently enabled provision of fiber optics internet connections.

These high speed internet connections are going to revolutionize the delivery of education, particularly the distance education or e-learning. For details of the Saudi government initiatives, refer to (Government Initiative to endorse eLearning In Saudi Arabia)

## CONCLUSIONS

Saudi Arabia is a nation on move as far as the education is concerned. Hundreds of thousands of its young man and woman are receiving state of art education at home and abroad in many advanced countries. Educational institutions in the kingdom are of high quality and standard.

Many university courses of a number of universities are accredited by the well-known US and European accreditation programs.

Female education is on the rise. Distance Education is providing opportunities and is filling the gender gap in tertiary education. As usual, to reap the full benefits, the Distance or E-Learning program requires ongoing quality assessments based on well informed surveys from stakeholders.

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**Mohammad YAMIN** completed his PhD in 1983 from the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. He is now a full professor at the Department of Management Information Systems of the King Abdulaziz University, listed in the top 300 universities of World and located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Professor Yamin also holds an Adjunct position at the Australian National University. He has over thirty years of research and teaching experience in many international universities including the Australian National University and the University of Canberra in Australia. Dr Yamin has published about fifty research articles in refereed journals and conference proceedings

including a number of them in Thompson & Reuters IP & Science indexed journals. He has also served the Australian federal government working in the provision of E-government solutions for over four years. Mohammad's teaching and research areas include Database Management, Modelling, Semantic Analysis, Hajj and Crowd Management, BPR, Cloud Computing, E-Business, E-Government and E-Learning, specially dealing with education of women.

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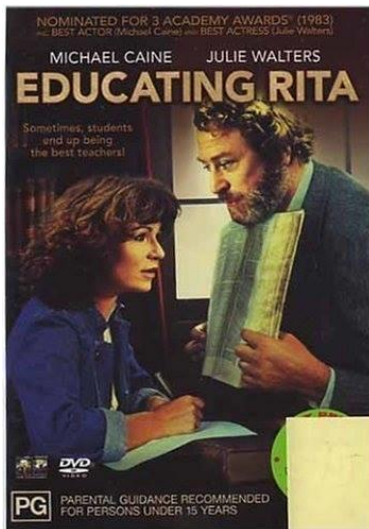
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## EDUCATING RITA (1983)



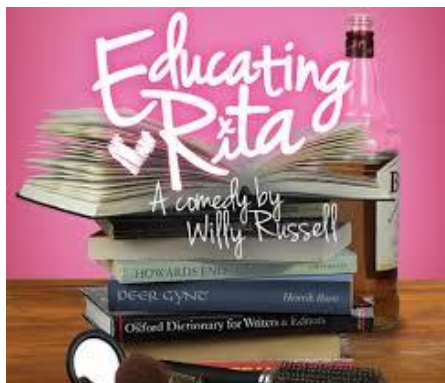
Educating Rita is a British 1983 drama/comedy film directed by Lewis Gilbert with a screenplay by Willy Russell based on Russell's stage play. The film stars Michael Caine, Julie Walters, and Maureen Lipman. It won

multiple major awards for best actor and best actress and was nominated for three Oscars.



The film focuses on Rita's unhappiness with her life in her blue-collar, working-class environment including her husband, who wants her to have children and stop with this university stuff, as well as her struggles to fit into a new educated middle-class existence in academia, while seeking a "better song to sing". Rita's original preconceptions that the educated classes have better lives and are happier people are brought into question throughout the film through Frank's failing social life and alcoholism and her flatmate Trish's attempted suicide. Rita, her search, and her search's meaning for her, all evolve as she adapts to academia and grows as a person.

A young wife decides to complete her education and take her exams. She meets a professor who teaches her to value her own insights while still being able to beat the exams. The change in her status causes friction between her and her husband.-Written by John Vogel



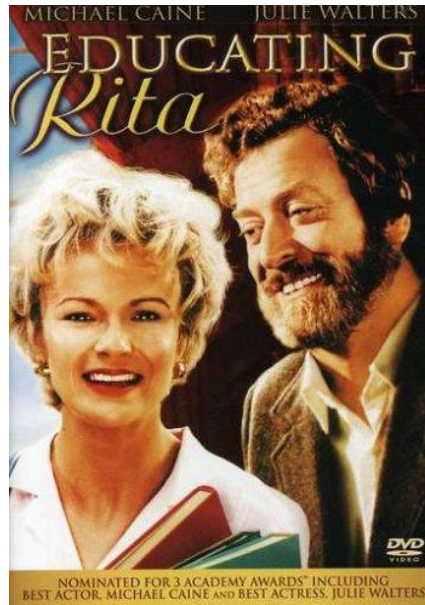
Bored with teaching undergraduates English literature, Frank Bryant morosely reflects through a whisky glass on his failed marriage and his attempt at becoming a poet. His world is turned upside down by the arrival of Rita, a hairdresser who has decided to find herself by taking an Open University course. Excited by her freewheeling and acute observations, and - let's be honest - by Rita herself, Frank also feels a deep sadness as he watches her warm impulsive reactions being replaced by the sort of cold analytical approach he so much loathes in other students and colleagues. - Written by Jeremy Perkins {J-26}

Rita crashes into Dr. Frank Bryant's life wanting an education, although she has no idea what it is that she's asking. Her brash sincerity earns the respect of the doctor who has previously resigned himself to a life of empty lectures and booze. Rita's character is a breath of fresh air for Bryant and he begins to care about someone, or something for that matter, for the first time since his wife left him.

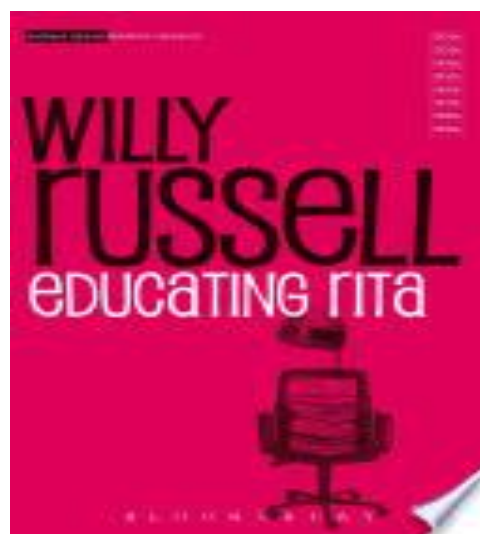
As each begins to wake up to life in their own way, the story comes to a close as an inspiring tale of self discovery and of the power choice that comes through education. Written by Kristoff

### Synopsis

An English working class girl wants to better herself by studying literature. Her assigned Open University...



Please click below link for Full Movie Educating Rita  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo\\_BICo50kc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo_BICo50kc)

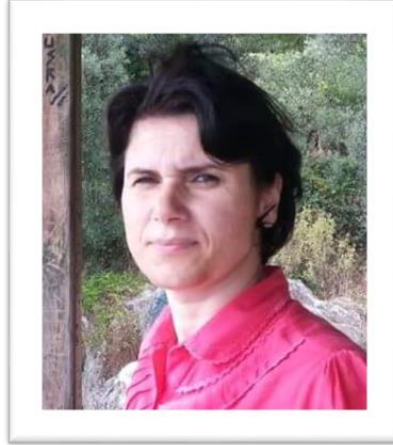


Please click below link for more details the book of Educating Rita  
<http://www.amazon.com/Educating-Rita-Michael-Caine/dp/B000C20VSW>



## SUCCESS STORY OF HAVVA KURTULUS

Interviewed by **Gülay EKREN**  
Sinop University, **TURKEY**



She was born in Ayancık/Sinop/Turkey in 1971. Her father is a farmer and mother is an housewife. She has two sisters and three brothers, she is the oldest of her sisters. They were living in the village. She studied at the Primary School of Hatip Village where her family is still living.

She was a successful student at school and her primary teacher said her father that she must continue her education.

Since of financial impossibilities and also belief of people in the village that it is unnecessary further education for girls because duty of girls are looking after babies, cooking and doing houseworks; studying or making money is for boys.



She said "One day my father got permission from my teacher to be worked in the field, he was in need of more workers in those days. But I was up with the lark and run away to school. This was not for swinging to lead, I was dying for school."

She also added "Our school was far away nearly 10-15 minutes walking distance from village so especially in winter days our shoes got muddy and we didn't let in to school, first we cleaned down our shoes with freezing cold water of fountain in the school garden and then was allowed to enter the school. Today there are better opportunities for youth to study but most of them don't want to study like us."

"When I was a young lady, it was raised a new school in the center of village. Our men; fathers and brothers, went to the stone quarry for making money so I and the other young ladies (nearly 15-16 years old) in the village worked like a construction workers for digging a foundation of this building. Afterwards, our brothers and sisters studied in this school."

She was married when she was eighteen years old in 1989. She went to Austria with her husband because her husband was a guest worker there. After two years she had a baby, named Duygu. In 1994, they came to Istanbul. She had a second baby in 1997, named Hikmet.

In 2006, she divorced and came back to her village. Her daughters had to go to school therefore she settled to town (Ayancık) and got a job.

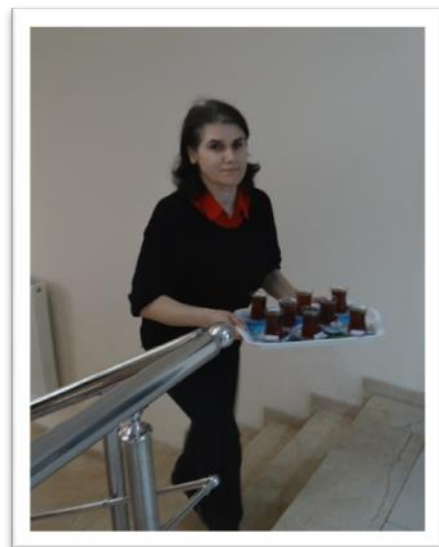
She started to work in a kindergarden in Ayancık. Her daughters started the school. She worked there nearly 4 years.

Then she started to work in Sinop University as a contracted personnel. This work was more guaranteed employment for her. Under these conditions, no longer she had to wait for her education.

It is time to pick up where she left off. She feels regretful about her education. She attended to Open Elementary School of Ministry of National Education in 2006.

She graduated from secondary school in 2009 and then she wants to continue Open High School but her older daughter Duygu was preparing for university exams and had to go preparatory school, so she had not enough money for Open High School.

First priority is her daughter's education, so she waited for attending Open High School for three years.



Then in 2012, when her daughter was in her second year in school of business administration in the university, she attended Open High School.

According to her, learning knows no age limit, and added "I always want to set a good example for my daughters. If I hadn't studied primary school, I wouldn't be brave enough to go out of the village or to go far away from my family. Getting education taught me making decision of myself and not getting on someone top of myself. I had further self-confidence by force of education."

"Everyone has right to education. Going to any school was impossible for me after I have married and have childs. But for distance education or open schools, and it was always stayed within my heart through all my life. How can I go to school when I have to make money? Thanks for everyone who are working for distance education or open schools or everyone who give me these opportunities."





**Now, Havva Kurtulus is continuing her education in Open High School of Ministry of National Education and working as a cleaning staff member in the Sinop University.**

**Her older daughter was graduated and started to go out to work. Her little daughter entered university exams this year.**

**Havva Kurtulus wants to do her level of best for herself and her daughters with more self-reliance and more braveness.**

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