ISSUES AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING MUSLIM STUDENT-MOTHERS IN GOMBE STATE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS (A CASE STUDY OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF KASHERE, GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA)

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Introduction

Education in Islamic perspectives is believed to provide knowledge and resources that hold potentials for economic empowerment for better livelihood and social development of all genders. According to Islamic point of view, education is one of the most far-reaching requirements for development, alleviating poverty, improving health outcomes and quality of life, reducing gender and social disparities and enhancing economic productivity (Patricia M. A. and Esther M. 2015). Education contributes to economic growth and productivity as well as sustains livelihood for national development (Rogers, 1997).

The mounting interest of women in further education in the form of continuity in tertiary

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to identify the domestic and academic challenges that are confronting Muslim student-mothers in Gombe state tertiary institutions. A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 respondents from a group of Muslim student-mothers in Federal University of Kashere. It was

education must be continuous and nurtured. This will enable them to maximize the benefits of societa l participation. However, mass involvement of women in continuing higher education is a recent development more especially in African communities. Before the twentieth century, just a small number of females were granted access to tertiary education in underdeveloped countries. The number of illiterate women was subsequently increasing since they had no access to formal education or were not sent to school. This was because, at that time, women were victims of all sorts of cultural and social constraints. They were subjected to all forms of discrimination and marginalization by the existing cultural and social practice, especially in traditional African culture where Islamic Shari'ah was not properly practice. Women were denied access to education at the expense of their most fortunate brothers who were most preferred (Becker, 2000).

During the forty-first session of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, the United Nations Commission on the status of women recommended further action to be taken to improve women's access to

observed that difficulty in caring for their family members at home due to school activities was their major domestic challenge and loaded academic work that had to be accomplished within a short time frame was their major academic challenge. The causes of these challenges were identified as financial constraints and the performance of their marital responsibilities at home as married women. The respondents expressed that these challenges led to low concentration during lectures and low academic performance at the end of school year. The research suggests that minimizing the pressure from their households, issue of gender discrimination and reducing the number of programs that had to be covered at the University can help them cope with the situation.

Keywords: Challenges, Domestic, Academic, Muslims, student-mothers, institutions, Nigeria.

education, including the mainstreaming of gender perspective in all policies and programs in the educational sector. This is not a new policy in Islam because since fourteen centuries ago were all Muslims was urged to seek knowledge for better practice of worship and daily life affairs. Over the past twenty 20 years in Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria, there has been significant progress with regards to women's access to tertiary education. This has expanded significantly and women's enrolment including the married and unmarried has increased considerably (Ubale H. 2020).

Concept of Education in Islam

Islam attaches great importance to Islamic education in particular and education in general. Seeking knowledge is commanded by Allah in the Holy Qur'an and is supported by the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Apparently, there are evidences from both the Holy Qur'an and Hadith that lay emphasis on seeking knowledge, acts of meaningful reading and writing as well as effective listening and speaking. It is therefore, not a sheer co-incidence that the first five verses ever revealed to the Noble Prophet of Islam dwells on Allah's command to be knowledgeable. The first Qur'anic revelation enjoined Muslim to read in the name of Allah, where Allah the almighty said:

> *Recite in the name of your lord who created. Created man*
> *from a clinging substance, Recite and your lord is the most*
> *Generous. Who taught by the pen, Taught man that which*
> *he knew not (chapter 96 verses 1-5).*

The above verses commanded the prophet (PBUH) to read in the name of Allah. This doesn't enjoin only the prophet (PBUH) but rather all Muslims men and women, married and unmarried. The above Qur'anic verses show the virtue of education and its significance to the society. In another verse Allah said:

> *Say is those who know equal to those who do not know?*
> *Only they will remember who are people of understanding.*
> *(Chapter 49, verse 9).*

Moreover, the prophetic Hadith shows the position of knowledge in Islam. Bukhari and Muslim reported that:

> *When Allah wishes someone with good he should make Him to understand the religion (Imam an-Nawawi-Riyadussaliheen).*

This indicates that the best thing for a person in his life is to seek for knowledge in order to understand the religion. Historically the prophet (PBUH) was the first teacher who taught not only the Islamic education but rather all aspect of life like economic, politics, Military strategies, social life etc. This is usually indicated that since the beginning of Islamic education there was a balancing between religion and the secular education. Indeed, even among the *sahaba* (companions) there are those learned not only the religious aspect of education but rather they went further to learn languages such as Hebrew, for instance the prophet (SAW) encourage his companion Zaid bin Thabit who was good in hand writing and easy language acquisition to learn Hebrew language (cited in Abubakar, A. L 2014, p. 31).

It is in keeping with this teaching that Muslims pursue the path of knowledge and scholarship in all its facets and ramifications. This is manifested in the establishment, development and spread of schools and scholars in all parts of the Muslim world throughout history and further engendered the generation and development of tremendous and overwhelming communication system in administration and economic transactions, and above all the establishment of great centres of learning throughout the Muslim world (Shehu, 2003).

Challenges faced by Muslim student-mothers and their effects on their school performance

Lee & Myers (2005) postulated that being a student-mother is a delicate juggling act. According to the authors it takes time, patience and boundless energy. In addition to filling the role prescribed to them as students, they also have to schedule their lives around a growing child's need. According to the authors, a married woman student and a mother may have challenges pertaining to the home. The inter-role conflict is

TIJSSRA
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due to incompatible expectations where demand on one role makes performance of the other more conflicting.

Asare (1997) stressed that home pressure is a huge problem. A married woman student who has children often gets up very early in the morning trying to get everything done at home before going to lectures, becomes tired and not very attentive at classes. Quartey (2003) also asserts that as a result of the damage on their time and energy, married women experience tiredness, lack of time for revision, no time for rest and feelings of guilt over not fulfilling their traditional role expectations at home.

Lee & Myers (2005) state that family problems create imbalance for married women students who are day-students or non-residential students whose husbands move out of the family's home and come back late in the night. The husbands always threaten to divorce his wives as a result of poor marital performance and arrogant behavior on the part of the student-women. This may result in depression, making her emotional state so breakable. Such a woman who is a student is unfocused and has divided attention at home and at academic work.

Lee & Myers (2005) noticed that some mothers on campus are single and others are married; some have one child to look after and others large. Whatever their situation and issues are, each woman has a unique story to tell because student-mothers face a lot of challenges when pursing university education.

Chigona & Chetty (2007) in their study identified lack of time to study and do assignments as one of the major challenges of the student-mother. According to them most of the student-mothers do not have time to study because when they return from school, their relatives who voluntarily serve as baby-sitters want to be free of child-care odd jobs. In addition to that the babies also want their mothers' attention. This suggests that mothers who do not have full day child-care services face the challenges in trying to balance childcare with academic work. Chigona & Chetty (2007) cited Kaufman (2001) in a similar study in South Africa where they found that mothers' adjustment to school life after giving birth during the program is not easy. According to their finding such mothers become divided between childcare and studies.

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A similar sentiment was echoed in the United States where it was argued that managing to care for a child and devoting adequate time to academic work has not been an easy task for mothers (Arlington Public School, 2004). Hallman & Grant (2004) identified missing class or lectures as one major challenge facing mothers in school. According to them, when the child falls sick the mother gives attention to the care of the child at the expense of their academic work. This suggests that even if a mother ignores a sick child because of her academic work it is likely she cannot concentrate. They further stated that, teenage mothers in their case face the challenge of acceptance by teachers and colleagues. They are stigmatized as bad girls who did not plan their lives hence became mothers. This stigma may go a long way to affect their performance at school.

Also, many educators or institutions do not give academic support to students-mothers who are in school. It is suggested that the institutions need knowledge regarding the problem of mothers. Moreau & Kerner (2012) noticed little or lack of institutional support on campus for mothers. In many institutions lectures are re-scheduled in the evening or into the night at the time day-care or other childcare service providers have closed.

According to Moreau & Kerner (2012), academic programs disregard the need of women during pregnancy, childbirth, maternity leave, etc. Ignoring this creates an atmosphere of condemnation hence student-mothers feel their issue has not been given attention. This is consistent with Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid (2009) who noted:

> *"Mothering and fathering is not normative on campus. Student-mothers experience embarrassment by their pregnant bodies on campus, struggle to navigate strollers in classrooms, and search to find clean and discreet places to feed their babies"* (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009, p. 439).

Again, supervisors in higher level of education are mostly men who do not understand the differences between teenagers and student-mothers more especially in terms of time management and student-

supervisor relationship. Some of the lecturers and supervisors are not happy to teach or supervise a woman who has children. On the contrary, many professors in particular understand the challenges of student-mothers and feel happy to support them academically.

Married women suffer from both conflicting demands between family, motherhood and academic work, for example childbearing and nursing time, pregnancy and academic work; which means the progress of academic work is stopped or slowed down. While fathers or mothers without nursing babies could spend nights in the library or laboratories reading, practicing and researching, nursing mothers without reliable childcare facilities cannot do that.

Over the centuries, childcare has been expensive since many centuries ago, therefore, parents resort to family members catering for their children while in school. Chigona & Chetty (2007) also affirmed that financial problems have made mothers to ignore quality childcare services since they cannot hire or pay for it more especially during school season. The findings from Chigona & Chetty (2007) reveal that children of student-mothers are robbed of motherly love or care which has its future implications.

Though mothers knew the effects, they are forced by academic work to overlook it. Although some of the researchers claimed that academic and family life of mothers is colliding, others revealed that motherhood is not always a disadvantage in school. According to Chigona & Chetty (2007), some mothers are able to blend their course work with their family life without any lapses. Additionally, married women returning to school after many years of absence from school may not have realistic ideas about how student life will be like. Some of them are not certain about how to cope and relate to lecturers and younger students in class. They may also have problem with developing appropriate study skills. This makes them feel uncomfortable on campus.

Some students may have issues with their roommates thus "possible roommate conflicts." In addition, when student-mothers are mixed with other students who are younger or are not mothers, it creates an atmosphere of inconvenience since some of them may be noisy. This creates an atmosphere of disturbances and limited privacy. Research

shows that the experiences, anxiety and emotional stress that adult-students go through, sometimes affect their academic performances. For instance, the findings of Olu and Brown (1979) stated that adult students can perform excellently if they are free from other roles and concentrate only on their academic work.

Marriage ensures security for the couple and their children in Muslim societies. Marriage therefore bestows high social status on the couples especially the women. A study conducted by Becker in 2000 on Married Women Pursuing University Education in Africa revealed that 35% being between 35 – 40 years were in the University to upgrade themselves in order to be promoted to be abreast with time, to raise their social status or prestige and upgrade themselves in order to get a good job. This confirms the findings of Becker (1995) that some married women go for further studies for credentials, promotion and good job.

Reasons why some married women did not enter the university earlier to pursue further studies were due to finances, childcare or because they did not get somebody to take care of their kids for them and for that matter their husbands did not encourage them to further their studies at the University level (Patricia M. A. & Esther, 2015). Submissions from the various literatures mentioned indicate various problems that student-mothers face. It is likely that student-mothers are likely to have more challenges as compared to adult students. Thus, they have to face the challenges of adult learners and at the same time the challenges of student-mothers.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 respondents from a group of Muslim student-mothers in Federal University of Kashere. The questionnaire was administered to a group of 30 Muslim student-mothers and they all responded to the questions for statistical analysis. Questions were designed to elicit detailed responses enabling the researcher to understand and identify key views of respondents about their needs in degree-seeking endeavors. Purposeful sampling included participants selected for inclusion in this study, because they were

Muslim student-mothers who were enrolled in degree conferring programs at the Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State.

The study was conducted via Qualtrics survey to ascertain need and response. I sought to document personal and educational need experiences of Muslim student-mothers at both school and home settings. The length of the survey was 12 questions that cover personal, marital, parental and educational information. Qualtrics survey data was analyzed thematically in order to arrive at a description of the Muslim student mothers' educational needs and experiences.

Results

Domestic challenges that Muslim student-mothers encounter in their university life

The Muslim married women indicated that they encounter domestic challenges as students and married women. They indicated that these challenges include the inability to do cleaning, cooking and washing for the members of their families due to the academic demands and the time that they had to spend at school. Others also mentioned the fact that there is always some misunderstanding with their husbands in connection with the time they spend with them and the children. While others mentioned that their problems are with their house mates and in-lows in connection with childcare responsibilities. Others also mentioned the way some scholars misinterpreted the effort of Muslim married women to further their education as the major problem. Here are excerpts:

-   *"Inability to cook and do washing for my children is my major challenge, not being able to do washing and cleaning for the children and my husband are among my major problems".*
-   *"Lack of time to nurture the children to become disciplined individuals is my major challenge, Difficulty in taking care of the children due to my absence from home for learning activities is my major problem,"*

- *"There is always a misunderstanding between my husband and I on the time I spend at school instead of attending to my duties at home".*

- *When I come to school I do not need to think about my baby. I only stay with my baby during the night and weekends. I could leave my baby with the nanny to go to the library to study.*

- *There is no balance between the two roles, I play fewer roles in parenting because I am studying and my mother is the one doing more parenting. I don't see her often because of the distance. I can only see her like once every month.*

- *Sometimes I can be restless and do not have time to study, not in the mood for people, sometimes I have an appointment to see the doctor and end up skipping lectures. The queues were always long.*

- *Pregnancy did affect me, more especially in its first week, I did not attend the lectures, I was just in the hostel. I was not feeling well; I was always feeling weak. I failed some of my courses at the end. I failed some courses that are related with calculations and technology because other students made a practical task that I did not do.*

Academic challenges that Muslim student-mothers encounter in the university

The responses that were obtained revealed that all the respondents had academic challenges in one way or the other. Majority noted that they had loaded academic work, inadequate time, and loaded household chores. For instance, some of them noted:

- *"Loaded academic work that had to be completed within a short period of time is my major challenge" "Inadequate time to study at home was my major academic challenge" "my activities at home lead to my lateness to lectures most of the time ""I cannot concentrate during lectures due to the way I leave my home with a lot of house activities undone".*

- *"One of the victims identified the challenges facing Muslim student-mothers in playing their dual roles of parenting and studying. She related how difficult it is to be a mother at one hand and student on the other hand. It is not easy, sometimes when I want to plan during my SBS (School-Based Studies) the baby is crying or I need to change the nappy. I do not have much time to do my role as a mother because I leave for home late".*

- *"It is not easy to be a student mother; you start to lose some friends but you just need to focus on your study. It is not that you lose them but they will not want to walk with you. When you walk alone and people are looking at you it is not easy. I am lonely and it is not easy. She further revealed that she somehow manages to find the balance with the support of her baby's nanny, her boyfriend and her father who help meeting her half way. Here is what she said in that regard":*

Causes of the challenges that they encounter as Muslim student-mothers in the university

Some of the causes of these challenges mentioned by the Muslim married students were finances, childbearing, lack of support from the spouse, societal mistreatment, lack of relative's support etc. For example, some students mentioned:

- *"I face the challenges due to financial constraints"*. Another noted: *"childbearing responsibilities was the cause of my challenges"*.

A similar thing was reported by another respondent where she said:

- *"Childbearing activities such as post- and antenatal visits to the health center were the cause of my challenges"*. Another said, *"The spending of more time out of the home due to academic work at the school is my major challenge"*.

- The other responses include: *"Lack of support from my husband"*, *"insecurity of leaving my husband alone at home*

who may take another woman in my absence" "lack of time to care for my husband and children at home and also travelling from home to campus everyday".

As students of a tertiary institution, the Muslim student-mothers in tertiary institutions were expected to study hard to achieve their goals as the prophet encouraged Muslims to seek for knowledge from time of birth to their grave. A substantial number of them stated that they do not get enough time to study, a few mentioned low academic performance, and lateness or absence from lectures. These are examples of some respondents:

- *"I do not get enough time to study on my own",*
- *"Low academic performance is the way the challenges affected me academically"*
- *"Low concentration during lectures, irregular attendance to lectures are my problems"*

Solutions to domestic and academic issues and challenges faced by Muslim student-mothers in Federal University of Kashere

From the responses given by the students, most of them solve their academic and domestic issues by engaging their mothers, aunties or house helps in the house to take care of their children and other domestic activities. In the case of school, they believe most of the solutions are beyond them so asked that the assignments should be reduced and weekend lectures should be stopped, early morning and night lectures should be shifted and student-mothers should be considered. They mentioned the fact that they make some arrangements and adjustment on some house chores to make way for academic work; here are some excerpts:

- *"I had to ignore some of the house activities and problems in order to make way for school work".*

Others engage in group discussions to curb their academic lapses;

- *"I engage in group discussions with my friends to catch up with my lessons".*

Other students also get help from husbands and relatives;

- *"I ask my husband to support me and do some of the work at home when I leave for school"*
- *"I get help from my husband to take care of the home in my absence"*
- *" I ask my mother in-law to assist me on childcare when I had to be in the school"*
  Others get support from religious leaders:
- *"I was supported by my community religious leaders to come and study medicine in the University"*
- *" I will ask for help from my family members such as my mother to handle my young children during my lecture hours and ask my Islamic teacher to convince my husband in order to support me"*;
- *"I will tell one of my siblings to do some of the work for me in my absence at home"*;
- *"I will ask my husband's widowed aunt to give a helping hand on my house chores"*
- *"There should be an introduction of distance learning for the whole difficult courses"*
- *"there should be no assignments for students on weekends so we can get sufficient time to perform our house duties"*
- *"We (married women) always advice ourselves to plan to complete our secondary education before bearing children so that we can have enough time to study in tertiary level and not face similar challenges"*
- *"There should be a counseling session at school to help married women cope with the stressful University life"*.

Discussions

Muslim student-mothers' participation in higher education is a means of ensuring career enhancement, personal enrichment and a medium of transformation for them, their family and relatives as well as the entire humanity and promotes their liberation and empowerment in the society (Khadija A. 2020). Muslim student-mother's involvement in

education in various universities or pursuing further education is not achieved without series of challenges. The study revealed that the respondents encountered various types of challenges as they combined education with home responsibilities. It was observed that difficulty in having time to care for the members of the family, lack of time to nurture children to become disciplined individuals and difficulty in taking care of the needs of the children and husbands were among the major challenges that the respondents encountered.

These challenges led to low academic performance for some of the respondents and not getting enough time to study was the challenge of others. The stress that they had to go through made other respondents to exhibit low concentration during lectures. Family problems create imbalances for the Muslim student-mothers so much that it makes their emotional state so fragile which leads to depression and distracted attention (poor concentration) at home and at their academic work. It was also observed in the study that the combination of marital responsibilities with tertiary education programs led to irregular attendance and lateness to lectures.

Lateness to and missing classes or lectures was one of the major challenges that generally mothers in tertiary institutions faced, Amina 2020. According to Amina (2020), when a child is sick, the mother gives attention to the care of the child at the expense of her academic work. Most of the respondents have children under their care as mothers; they were bothered with the needs of their children while they pursued their tertiary education at the University. Some had to contend with childbearing situations which include pregnancy, post and antenatal visits to the hospital. Family responsibilities which include childbearing affect not only the participation in University education, but also career and professional development of Muslim student-mothers, thus preventing them in showing up their capacity and contribution to development.

Among the married women contacted in this study, 10% of them were between the ages of 21 and 25 years, 13.3% of them were between the ages of 26 and 30 years and 20% of them were between the ages of 31 and 36 years. Another 33.3% of the respondents were between the ages

of 36 and 40 years and 16.7% of them were found to be between the ages of 41 and 45 years while 6.7% of them were above 46 years. This indicates that majority (53.3%) of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years. Also, 20% of them are married for a period of 1 to 5 years, 50% of them had married for 6 – 10 years and 23.3% of them married for 11 – 15 years. Only 6.7% of them are married for 16 years or more. This shows that majority (73.3%) of the respondents are married for a period of 6 to 15 years. Again, 60% of the respondents have 1 -4 children while the remaining 40% had 5- 7 children.

Results of this study reveal that being a student mother makes it difficult to find enough time to navigate between studying and parenting. The significant difficulty for mothers who are students is lack of time to spend with their children, partners, extended families and friends, and to study and complete assignments. Despite all these, it is evident from the results that participants have their friends and family members supporting them to manage their dual roles. Those supporting them in this respect include extended family members, religious scholars, friends and partners.

Recommendations

In view of the above, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Financial constraint was identified to be one of the causes of the challenges of some of the Muslim Student-mothers in Federal University of Kashere. Therefore, the three arms of government should as matter of necessity introduce a program to support student-mothers in academic life, as the main challenges experienced by female married students is difficulty in acquiring sponsorship for their education.

2. As the student-mothers encounter so many challenges in the course of their programs, the management of the Universities should restructure the content of the University programs so that they can allocate enough time for specific subjects in order to accommodate students with overburdened and too much work in a short period of time.

3. Lecturers should adopt the use of modern technological innovations by presenting some of their lectures and reading materials online so that student-mothers can access them at their various locations instead of having to converge at the campus. This will enable those with marital responsibilities to cope with both the home and school activities.

4. The guidance and counseling department of the Universities should intensify their activities and have special sessions to help student-mothers find ways of coping with school work and marital responsibilities. This can enable them to succeed in their academic pursuits.

5. It would be recommended among others that future research will take a look at challenges of student-fathers in the universities and further examine it in our polytechnics and colleges of education.

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