

The Effects of Home Environment on Academic Performance of Married Female Distance Learners

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Abstract

The study examined the effects home environment has on the academic performance of married female distance learners in Ghana. Sample for the study comprised 500 female married students randomly selected from all the 10 regional study centres of the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Cape Coast (CCE, UCC) Distance Education Programme. The likert-scale type questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected was analysed by using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient to show the various degrees of relationships that exist between the variables of the four hypotheses postulated for the study. Results indicate that there is a relationship between home environment and academic performance of married female distance learners. An academically favourable home environment enhances learning more than an unfavourable one. On the basis of the findings, a number of recommendations that could help married female distance learners to meet the challenges of home environment in order to improve upon their academic performance are made.

Key words: Home environment, academic performance, distance learners

1. Introduction

Distance education is the transfer of knowledge to learners who are separated from the instructor by time and physical distance and make use of technology components, such as the print, internet, video, tapes, and other forms of technology to accomplish learning. Distance education can also be said to be any form of organised educational experience in which teaching and learning take place with the teacher at a distance from the learner for most of the time (Keegan, 1986). Williams (2002) however looks at distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and or time from the learners. Thus in distance education situation, a geographical location separates learners from the institution offering the programme but learning occurs even though the lecturer and the students are usually removed from each other. It must be stressed that the course of study which students complete is equivalent in standard and content to what prevails on campus of the institution offering the programme.

1.2 Distance Education in Ghana

In Ghana, the concept of distance education was conceived by some Ghanaian Universities as a result of the brain drain and dearth of qualified Ghanaian teachers in the classrooms in early 1980's. The concept was to enable teachers to remain in the classroom to teach while perusing a higher education. The main aim of the concept, among others, was to afford learners the opportunity to work and study at home, reduce pressure on residential accommodation on campus, increase access to university education and create off-campus channels (Osei- Anto, 2008). The Centre for Continuing Education, University of Cape Coast (CCE, UCC) was established in 1997 with the responsibility of offering Distance Education Programmes to qualify students, primarily with the following aims:

1. To provide opportunities for people to pursue higher education.
2. To train more professional teachers for all levels of Education in the Ghana Education Service and to train high caliber personnel for national development.
3. To raise the professional competence of serving teachers and personnel of the Ghana Education Service, as well as accounting and secretarial personnel in civil/public service, commerce and industry through Continuing Education.
4. To provide opportunities for applicants who, even though qualify for admission, fail to enter the University due to constraints in physical facilities.

(Source: CCE, UCC. December, 2011)

Even though CCE, UCC was established in 1997, it started offering a Three-Year Diploma in Basic Education, Management Studies and Commerce to qualified workers, through distance learning during the 2001/2002 academic year with only 712 students. During the 2011/2012 academic year however the total students' population was 28,348 with more than one-third being females. Table 1 is the statistics of students during the 2011/2012 academic year confirming that females constitute more than one-third of total number of students pursuing the CCE, UCC Distant Education Programme.

**Table 1: Distribution of Students of CCE, UCC Distant Education
 (2011/2012 Academic Year)**

Serial No.	Region	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total
1	Ashanti	4240 (64%)	2408 (36 %)	6648
2	Brong Ahafo	2159 (67 %)	1081 (33 %)	3240
3	Central	2853 (62%)	1717 (38%)	4570
4	Eastern	1299 (62 %)	797 (38%)	2096
5	Greater Accra	2511 (53 %)	2254 (47 %)	4765
6	Northern	759 (71%)	308 (29 %)	1067
7	Upper East	924 (67%)	465 (33%)	1389
8	Upper West	517 (71 %)	212 (29 %)	729
9	Volta	783 (61%)	511 (39 %)	1294
10	Western	1276 (50 %)	1274 (50 %)	2550
	Total	17321 (61%)	11027 (39%)	28348 (100%)

Source: CCE, UCC, March, 2012

Table 1 shows the summary of distribution of students of CCE, UCC Distant Education Programme by sex in the ten regions of Ghana during the 2011/2012 academic year. The table depicts that there was a total of 28,348 students pursuing the CCE, UCC Distance Education Programme during the 2011/2012 academic year and this comprised 17321 (61%) males and 11027 (39 %) females. Thus more than one third of the total number of students pursuing the CCE, UCC Distance Education Programme during the 2011/2012 academic year was females. It is therefore evident that CCE, UCC has widely opened its doors for qualified females to have access to university education.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Distance Education Programme offered by CCE, UCC has now become the avenue for training both teachers and other public and private workers on a large scale but in a qualitative manner. The female-students' population, including married female students, is gradually increasing and this shows the determination of CCE, UCC to enroll qualified females who want to access higher education.

As part of the 'student-support services' given to student, CCE, UCC supplies students with modules and other study materials for all courses they pursue. The modules are self-explanatory but very comprehensive. CCE, UCC also provides, for the various courses, trained facilitators, most of whom are second degree holders, who meet students fortnightly for face-to-face interactions at their respective study centres. There is also a Guidance and Counselling Unit which counsells students on academic and other non-academic issues.

The home plays a very important role in distant learning since distance learners have to read their modules privately at home before attending face-to-face meetings fortnightly. A very conducive home environment therefore is required by married female distance learners for effective learning to take place. Since much learning is done privately at home, it cannot be denied the fact that conditions at home can have a very great impact on the academic performance of married female distance learners. The varied roles played by married female distance learners at home and other home environment factors therefore pose a great challenge to their academic performance. Some of the aiding home factors are availability of intellectual stimulation, ability of student to meet financial obligations, interest, support and motivation exhibited by the spouse and commitment to household work habits by students. These are crucial in determining the level of academic performance of married female students.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Based on the foregoing therefore, the study was aimed at determining the effects home environment has on the academic performance of married female distance learners and to make recommendations on how best home environment could be made very conducive to enhance better academic performance.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study would be very beneficial to married female distance learners, their husbands, the Counselling Unit of CCE, UCC and Government of Ghana. This is because it would guide the learners on how to overcome challenges confronting them at home which affect their academic performance. The husbands, Counselling Unit and government would also be made aware of their respective roles in ensuring good academic performance of married female distance learners. Finally the study would add to available literature on the effects of home environment on the academic performance of married female distance learners.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

The following four null hypotheses were generated and tested:

Ho1. There is no significant relationship between intellectual stimulation at home and academic performance.

Ho2. There is no significant relationship between fulfillment of financial obligations and

academic performance.

Ho3. There is no significant relationship between husband's interest, support and motivation; and academic performance of spouse.

Ho4. There is no significant relationship between commitment to household chores and academic Performance.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The descriptive analytic survey research was used for the study. The descriptive survey design involves the collection of data in order to test hypotheses to answer questions concerning the current state of phenomenon (Gay, 1992). The purpose of the descriptive survey design is to observe, describe and document aspect of a situation as they naturally occur (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

2.2 Population and Sample

The population for the study was made up of all married female learners of CCE, UCC Distance Education Programme in the 10 regional study centres in Ghana however 500 of them comprising 50 from each regional study centre were randomly selected to constitute the sample.

2.3 Research Instrument

The main instrument used for the study was the questionnaire. Most of the items on the questionnaire were of the 5-point likert-scale type which demanded respondents to select either 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Uncertain', 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree'. The questionnaire was in five parts. The first part enquired about personal data of respondents. The second part was on extent of intellectual stimulation at home. The part three requested respondents to give information on their ability to meet financial obligations whilst part four elicited information on level of interest, support and motivation of their husbands towards their academic work. The last part demanded respondents to give details of level of their commitment to household chores.

2.4 Validation and Reliability of Instrument

A construct validity of the instrument was done by three lecturers while a reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained following a test re-test of the instrument at an interval of two weeks.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the married female distant learners on March 17th, 18th 24th & 25th 2012, when students of CCE, UCC Distance Education Programme were writing their second quiz for the first semester of 2011/2012 academic year. The invigilators posted to the various regional study centers were used as research assistants to administer the questionnaires after they had been briefed on the objectives of the study and what they were expected to do in the administration of the questionnaire. All the administered questionnaires were completed and collected with a 100% return rate.

2.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient statistic was used in analysing the findings of the study to show the various degrees of relationships that exist between the variables of the hypotheses postulated for the study at 0.05 error margin.

3. Findings

The results of the study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Test of Relationships between Variables

Hypothesis	Variable	N	Pearson (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Ho 1	Relationship between intellectual stimulation at home and academic performance	500	0.412	0.010 P<0.05	Significant
Ho 2	Relationship between fulfillment of financial obligations and academic performance	500	0.741	0.000 P<0.05	Significant
Ho 3	Relationship between husband's interest, support and motivation; and academic performance of spouse	500	0.762	0.000 P<0.05	Significant
Ho 4	Relationship between commitment to household chores and academic performance	500	-0.711	0.011 P<0.05	Significant

The data in table 2 shows the test of relationships between variables of the hypotheses. It can be seen from the table that the relationship between intellectual stimulation at home and academic performance was calculated at $r = 0.412$. This indicates a significant relationship at alpha level of significance of 0.05. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between intellectual stimulation at home and academic performance is therefore rejected.

Similarly, Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between fulfillment of financial obligations and academic performance because $r = 0.741$ at 0.05 alpha level of significance hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between ability to meet financial obligations and academic performance is equally rejected.

In the same vein, Table 2 reveals a significant relationship between husband's positive interest, support and motivation; and academic performance of spouse since calculated $r = 0.762$ at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between husband's positive interest, support and motivation; and academic performance of spouse is also therefore rejected.

Finally, it is evident from Table 2 that there is a significant relationship between commitment to household chores and academic performance. This is because $r = -0.711$ at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between commitment to household chores and academic performance is therefore rejected.

4. Discussion and Implications

It is evident from the findings that there is a weak positive relationship between intellectual stimulation at home of married female distance learners and their academic performance. This implies that learners, who live in academically stimulating homes, may to some extent academically do better than those who do not have such facilities. The extent of intellectual stimulation at home is very important in promoting academic performance (Johnson, 1990). Most married female distance learners have certain basic educational facilities such as radios, television sets, newspapers, magazines and textbooks which have potential for stimulating intellectual interest. Effective use of these facilities inevitably supplements information in the study materials supplied to students and this helps students to acquire more knowledge which could enhance academic performance. It must however be stressed that the contents of the modules supplied to the distant learners by CCE, UCC are so comprehensive that users need very little additional information to supplement them. This might have been the reason for the low correlation between intellectual stimulation and academic performance even though it is positive.

Again, the findings reveal that there is a strong positive relationship between married female distance learners' fulfillment of financial obligations and their academic performance. Learners who are able to pay their fees promptly and also do not owe other people may have the peace of mind to study and may perform better than those who always think about how to get money to fulfill financial obligations. The ability to fulfill financial obligations has positive effects on academic performance. The fees charged by CCE, UCC is so affordable that many distance learners do promptly pay their fees. Students who however have huge financial obligations to fulfill at home might not be able to pay their fees promptly. Furthermore, most married women in Ghana use greater portions of their income either to supplement the house keeping money given to them by their husbands or buy expensive clothing and thus are left with very little money for other purposes (Lusk, 2007). Married female distance learners who find themselves in any of these situations may find it very difficult to either pay their fees promptly or get money to travel fortnightly to meet their facilitators. This inevitably may affect their academic performance negatively. Those who are however financially sound are likely to have the sound mind needed for their studies and therefore would excel.

Furthermore, the findings show that there is a strong positive relationship between interest, support and motivation of husbands of married female distance learner and the academic performance of the learners. The extent of husband's interest, support and motivation are very crucial as far as academic performance of married female learners is concerned. Atkinson (2000) has stated that husbands have major roles to play in ensuring excellent academic performance of their wives. Female distance learners whose husbands show more interest and encourage them to learn are likely to perform better than those who do not have such support from their husbands.

Finally, the findings point out that there is a strong negative relationship between married female distance learners' commitment to household chores and academic performance. This means that learners who are always engaged with huge household responsibilities may not have enough time for their studies and may therefore not perform creditably while those who spend less time on household chores may have enough time for their studies and therefore may perform well. This corroborates studies by Agu & Hamad (2000), Smith (2004) and Davidson (1999) which argue that the academic performance of females who combine huge home management responsibilities and academic work is normally very low while those with very few home management responsibilities normally excel. A high level of commitment to household work habits before and after face-to-

face meetings can be time consuming and therefore leaves little time for the distance learner. It must be stressed that the Ghanaian society generally recognises the woman as the one who manages the home (Asomaning, 2005). The Ghanaian woman therefore, with this societal gender role in mind, tries to fulfill this household obligation by combining home management roles with other roles she performs. This therefore leaves little time for her private studies at home and eventually impacts negatively on her academic performance. This implies that married female distance learners who are not too much commitment to household chores and therefore do not devote much attention to household responsibilities get enough time to study and may therefore perform better than those who are too much commitment to household chores (Agu & Hamad, 2000).

5. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the major findings of the study are as follows:

- There is a low positive relationship between the level of intellectual stimulation at the home of married female distance learners and their academic performance. This is because the contents of the modules given to distance learners are so comprehensive that students virtually need only very little additional information to supplement them.
- There is a highly positive relationship between the ability of married female distance learners to meet financial obligations and their academic performance. Students with less financial burden may have the sound mind needed for academic work and may perform better than those with huge financial problems.
- There is a highly positive relationship between the extent of interest, support and motivation of husbands of female married distance learners and the academic performance of the learners. Married female distance learners whose husbands give them all the needed support and encouragement are highly motivated and may therefore perform better than those whose husbands very often give them problem at home.
- There is a strong negative relationship between married female distance learners' commitment to household chores and academic performance. This is because students who are more committed to household work habits may have little time for academic work and may therefore have poor academic results unlike those who spend less time on household activities in order to get more time to learn.

Evidence from the study therefore indicates that there is a relationship between home environment and academic performance. An academically favourable home environment is more likely to enhance learning than an unfavorable one and therefore home environment cannot be over-emphasised if married female distance learners are to excel academically.

6. Recommendations

The results of the study have generated the following recommendation:

- There are a lot of married female distance learners who, though are academically brilliant, are so financially handicapped that they do not have the needed sound mind for their academic work, thus impacting negatively on their academic performance. Government should therefore financially support all female distance learners by paying either part or all their fees.
- Attainment of higher education normally positively correlates with increased income. There is therefore the need for husbands of married female distance learners to rather encourage and support their wives to have higher education so as to increase the family income.
- Married women perform most of the domestic work and also ensure proper management of the home as well as the survival of the family. Husbands of married female distance education students should therefore appreciate the enormous contributions of their wives towards the upkeep of the family and think of relieving the women of some of their work load at home by helping them in their domestic schedules. This will enable the women get more time for their academic work.
- Devoting much time to household chores and home management at the expense of academic activities obviously negatively affects academic achievements. It is therefore important for married female distant learners to plan well so as not to devote most of their time on household chores and home management at the expense of their academic work.
- Most married female distant learners do not know how to plan their studies. It is therefore necessary that the Counselling Unit of CCE, UCC organises orientations programmes for married female distance learners on effective study habits.

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