

Multiple Social and Academic Roles of Postgraduate Student-Mothers in a Western Nigerian University

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Abstract: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 projected an inclusive and equitable quality education to all citizens, achieving the right to education for all irrespective of their gender. ¹Women in general and student-mothers in particular are builders of a nation as their male counterparts. In ensuring that student-mothers receive an inclusive and equitable quality education, they combine multiple roles with their academics. This study examines the relationship between post-graduate student-mothers' multiple roles and academic success in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and three hypotheses tested at a .05 level of significance. The study adopted a survey design type. Data was collected from a sample of 55 postgraduate student-mothers undergoing their Post Graduate Diplomas at Lagos State University through a self-developed questionnaire. Findings showed that there was no significant relationship between the number of children and role conflict of student mothers $\chi^2 (3, N = 55) = 2.875, p = .411$. Also, there was no significant difference in the role conflict of student-mothers based on marital status, $\chi^2 (1, N = 55) = 2.426, p = .119$. However, there was a significant difference between the support student-mothers receive and their academic achievement, $t = -2.416, df = 53, p = .019$. Student-mothers who received support had a better academic performance than their counterparts who did not receive support. It is recommended that among others the government and school management should provide child care and create campus support units.

Keywords: multiple social roles, post-graduate student-mothers, academic assessment, inclusive and equitable quality education.

Introduction

Education is the key to the technological, social, economic and physical advancement of a nation. The importance of education in national development is captured in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4) where equitable quality education that would promote lifelong learning opportunities for all was unequivocally emphasized, (SDGs 4, 2020). It is the projection of the SDGs to provide inclusive and equitable quality education to all citizens, irrespective of their gender in achieving the right to education for all. Education, universally is perceived as a

How to Cite

Etobro, A. B., & Lawal, R. O. (2024). Multiple Social and Academic Roles of Postgraduate Student-Mothers in a Western Nigerian University. *Benin Journal of Educational Studies*, 29(1&2), 58–67. Retrieved from <https://beninjes.com/index.php/bjes/article/view/122>

catalyst that facilitates the physical, intellectual, moral, political, social and technological development of a nation in general and its citizens in particular, (Ikediugwu, 2015). Accordingly, SDG 4 emphasized an inclusive and equitable quality education for all. One of the major functions of education is the inculcation in the learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that would enable them to contribute to national development, which would eventually lead to sustainable development. Achieving this requires learners having access to quality education been emphasized in SDG 4 which would consequently empower them to live a sustainable life.

However, living a sustainable life requires all learners to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development, (SDG4, 2015). This according to Offorma (2010) calls for the right to education which deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. Every youth in Nigeria aspires to higher education, knowing fully that having access to higher education will improve their living conditions. Thus, efforts are being made by all education stakeholders to ensure that children as well as adults of school age gain admission to tertiary institutions.

Meanwhile, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's population in 2020, was estimated to be 206 million people with men constituting about 50.05% and women about 49.95 % of the population, (NBS, 2021). Table 1 shows the number of candidates admitted into Lagos State public universities to pursue their first degree programmes by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) between 2010 and 2018, JAMB (2019). The data obtained from JAMB showed that there is gender disparity in admissions into tertiary institutions in Lagos State with the male admitted candidates outnumbering their female counterparts. Furthermore, the table shows that about 45.46% and 54.54% in 2010; 47% and 53% in 2011; 45.74% and 54.26% in 2012; 45.93.5% and 54.07% in 2013; 46.08% and 53.92% in 2014; 47.35% and 52.65% in 2015; 49.35% and 50.7% in 2017; and 50.38% and 49.62% in 2018 of female and male students respectively, were admitted into different degree programmes in Lagos State. The decrease in female enrolment could be attributed to cultural and social expectations from the society. Women appear to be underrepresented in higher education in sub-Saharan countries, Nigeria inclusive. It is crucial to consider gender equality in higher education which is a major issue in sustainable development, (Offorma, 2013).

Table 1: JAMB Admitted Candidates into First-degree programmes in Lagos state: 2010-2018

Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total
2010	5759	54.54	4801	45.46	10560
2011	5168	53.00	4583	47.00	9751
2012	5058	54.26	4263	45.74	9321
2013	4147	54.07	3522	45.93	7669
2014	4137	53.92	3536	46.08	7673
2015	4341	52.65	3904	47.35	8245
2017	4822	50.7	4694	49.35	9511
2018	4823	49.62	4897	50.38	9720

Data Source: National Bureau of Statistics /Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (2017 & 2019 Reports)

This gender disparity with male individuals dominating the female population is worrisome since education is a right of citizens of a nation's development. By implication, it means the female population does not have equal access to higher education, which is deviant from the clarion declaration of provision of inclusive and equitable

quality education for all in the Sustainable Development Goals. The decline in female enrolment could be a result of their reproductive role as required by societal norms. Thus, according to White (2008), the existence of student mothers raises concerns about playing the roles of mother and student. A woman may enthusiastically embrace the simultaneous roles of motherhood and studentship; however, undertaking these two roles, even in ideal conditions, can pull one person in two directions (Springer, et al in Ogunji, 2019).

Education is seen as a *sine qua* to sustainable development and empowerment. Consequently, achieving sustainable development goals in any nation might in a way depend on the female populace's participation. Thereby, the involvement of the right ratio of female populace in the educational reform of any nation could aid in achieving the projected SDG 4 of inclusive and equitable education. Education is thus, a sustainable developmental instrument and a female individual should have the right to it as well as benefit therein. However, females' procreation role has become a barrier to some female students' attainment of their academic dreams. A woman's reproduction rights, such as having the right to have children, are not considered equally as important as their education rights, (Moghadam et al, 2017). It is therefore pertinent that females' procreation rights are recognized along with their education rights as entrenched in the SDGs.

Women in Nigeria with their diversified cultures and norms are conferred with different roles vis-à-vis their known to be flexible nature. These roles include but are not limited to academic, entrepreneurial, employment and parenting. This implies that women combine motherhood with other roles without compromising any of the roles. Engaging in these multiple roles, student-mothers could encounter some dilemmas in attaining the right to education. In the words of Visick (2009), if a woman must adequately focus on her academics squarely, there is a tendency that her behaviour might be a little bit altered as far as carrying out her traditional motherhood role is concerned. This is because of some coping strategies/adjustments that might be required in the academic pursuit. Then, multiple role challenges may cause student-mothers to abandon one role for the others (Springer et al., 2009). Accordingly, motherhood roles impose an extra burden on student mothers. Thus, as society focuses on traditional motherhood roles, the academic community focuses on academic success thereby posing a competitive playing ground for student-mothers and their colleagues, without succor. Moghadam et al, (2017) argued that taking on motherhood along with studies is not considered normal in universities inferring that the education of student-mothers is not given priority thus, exposing them to unpleasant emotional pressures. Student-mothers are stigmatized as being unserious and never ready for academic rigour. As such, they tend to avoid taking their baby with them to school and even hide their parenting roles (Williams et al, 2006). In the view of Adofu (2013), taking a baby or child to school is an indication that the student-mothers do not possess the required interest and enthusiasm to take academic pursuits.

Obligations accompanying marriage, family and child-rearing could be mentally, physically and emotionally stressful for both men and women. Women, however, seem to bear the burden more often than men, and society continues to maintain expectations of motherhood and caregiving. Motherhood obligations interfere with the student-mothers' health, class attendance, submission of assignments, tutorial attendance, ability to concentrate in class and ability to sit for examinations. The process of motherhood according to Adu-Yeboah (2015) which includes pregnancy and subsequent delivery has been found to affect the ability of student-mothers to sit for examinations. Other motherhood expectations that have been found to influence students' academic performance more than the fixed material and economic conditions of society include domestic workloads, societal, home background, cultural practices and parental factors (Hontoundji et al, 2004).

The thought of children or babies being left behind at home or in the hands of caregivers might negatively affect student-mothers' concentration during lectures. In the course of ensuring that their obligations are carried out,

they tend to skip classes, and miss assignments, tutorials and tests. Therefore, their non-participation in some of the academic activities could invariably affect their academic success. This however portends that student-mothers' academic commitments are at risk and the clamour for inclusive and equitable education for all in the SDGs might be unattainable. This study was carried out to examine the relationship between post-graduate student-mothers' multiple roles and their academic success at a South-West University, in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to access:

1. the challenges student-mothers encounter in exercising their motherhood roles and academic activities;
2. relationship between the number of children and role conflict of student-mothers;
3. the difference in the role conflict of student-mothers based on marital status; and
4. difference between the support student-mothers receive and their academic achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study.

1. What challenges do postgraduate student-mothers encounter in exercising their motherhood role along with their academic activities?
2. How do student-mothers cope with motherhood activities and academic expectations?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were tested at .05 Alpha level.

1. There is no significant relationship between the number of children and role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers.
2. There is no significant difference in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status.
3. There is no significant difference between the support postgraduate students receive and their academic achievement.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design type. The population of the study comprised all students with their postgraduate diplomas in the Faculty of Education of Lagos State University in Lagos State. Fifty-five student-mother respondents were purposively selected to respond to the self-developed instrument titled "Multiple Social Roles of Postgraduate Student-Mothers Questionnaire (MSRPSQ)". The instrument is divided into two sections. Section A elicited information on student-mothers' demographic data while Section B focused on items that elicited information on the challenges faced and the coping strategies adopted. The respondents were nursing mothers or who had just nursed a baby with 51(92.7%) married and 4(7.3%) single student-mothers. Among them, 15(27.3%) had one child, 20(36.4%) had two children, 13(23.6%) had three while 7(12.7%) had four children respectively. Meanwhile, out of the 55 student mothers, 20(36.4%) were in part-time while 35(63.6%) were in full-time programs.

The initial draft copy of the instrument comprised 41 items and was given to five experts for test, measurement and evaluation to establish both face and content validity. The instrument was a modified 3-point Likert-type scale on a 1 to 3 continuum of useful and necessary, useful but not necessary and useful with little modifications. The results from the experts were subjected to Content Validity Ratio (CVR). Based on the ratio of each item, some items were retained, others modified while those that did not meet the criteria were discarded. Thus, the final form of the instrument had 23 items.

The instrument was pilot-tested on 31 postgraduate student-mothers undergoing their Master's program while the Cronbach Alpha statistic was used to establish a reliability coefficient of 0.81. The final copy of the instrument

was administered by the researchers while responses elicited were collated, summarized and analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and t-test statistics of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

Research Question 1

What are the challenges postgraduate student-mothers encounter in exercising their motherhood role along with their academic activities?

Table 2: Challenges Postgraduate Student-Mothers face in Exercising their Motherhood Role

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)
1.	Able to attend lectures regularly	55 (100)	00 (0)
2.	Attend tutorials regularly	55 (100)	00 (0)
3.	Find learning difficult	55 (100)	00 (0)
4.	Take part in group discussion	55 (100)	00 (0)
5.	Face some challenges when a child falls sick	54 (98.2)	1 (1.8)
6.	Skip some lectures to breastfeed	50 (90.9)	5 (9.1)
7.	Find it difficult to breastfeed the baby during lecture periods	50 (90.9)	5 (9.1)
8.	Lack of concentration during lectures	39 (70.9)	16 (29.1)
9.	Find it difficult to study in the library	24 (43.6)	31 (56.4)
10.	Meet the deadline for assignments	24 (43.6)	31 (56.4)
11.	Find it difficult to get a place to keep my baby during exam	22 (40)	33 (60.0)
12.	Have challenges in understanding topics taught in my absence	20 (36.4)	35 (63.6)

All the postgraduate student-mothers disagreed that they regularly attend lectures and tutorials and take part in group discussions, thus finding learning difficult, as indicated in Table 2. Most of the student-mothers had challenges when their children fell sick (N = 54, 98.2%); skipped some lectures to breastfeed (N = 50, 90.9%) and had difficulties in breastfeeding their children during lecture periods (N = 50, 90.9%). Furthermore, Table 2 shows that 39 (70.9%) lacked concentration during lectures, 35 (63.6%) had challenges in understanding topics taught in their absence, and 33 (60%) had difficulties in getting places to keep their babies during examinations. Meanwhile, 31 (56.4%) of the respondents agreed that they had difficulties studying in the library as well as meeting the deadline for the submission of assignments.

Research Question 2

How do student mothers surmount the challenges of motherhood activities and academic expectations?

Table 3: Coping strategies of Postgraduate Student-Mothers

S/N	Items	A	%	D	%
1.	Employ the services of a caregiver to assist me	46	83.6	9	16.4
2.	Employ the services of a family member when attending lectures.	9	16.4	46	83.6
3.	Campus management allows me to attend campus clinics.	5	9.1	50	90.9
4.	Getting support from my in-law	16	29.1	39	70.9
5.	Getting support from my parents	40	72.7	15	27.3
6.	Weaning my baby earlier and starting up with formula	35	63.6	20	36.4
7.	Request for my colleagues' lecture notes and other academic materials to be photocopied	51	92.7	4	7.3
8.	Request my colleagues to hold group discussions close to my place of residence.	33	60.0	22	40.0
9.	My husband assists me with my assignments	18	32.7	37	67.3

10.	My husband supports me with some domestic work in the house	31	56.4	24	43.6
11.	Sometimes skip lectures to breastfeed my child.	54	98.2	1	1.8

The strategies postgraduate student-mothers adopt to surmount challenges of motherhood and academic activities as indicated in Table 3 include skipping lectures to breastfeed their children (N = 54, 98.2 %); requesting for colleagues' lecture notes and other academic materials to be photocopied (N = 51, 92.7%) and employing the services of a caregiver to assist them (N = 46, 83.6%). The Table further showed that 40 (72.7%) of the respondents agreed that they receive support from their parents, 35 (63.6%) wean their babies earlier and start up with formula, 33 (60%) requested colleagues to hold group discussions close to my place of residence, whereas, 31 (56.4%) sought for their husbands' supports with some domestic work in the house. However, the majority of the respondents (N = 37, 67.3%) disagreed that their husbands assist them with academic assignments, 46 (83.6%) did not employ the services of family members when attending lectures while 50(90.9%) postgraduate student-mothers claimed that campus management did not allow them to attend campus clinic.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status.

Table 4: Chi-square on the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status.

Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig.	Phi (φ)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.426 ^a	1	.119	
Likelihood Ratio	1.967	1	.161	0.21
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.382	1	.123	
N of Valid Cases	55			

Table 4 indicates that there was no significant difference in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status, $\chi^2(1, N = 55) = 2.426$, $p = .119$, $\phi = .210$. Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status is not rejected. The association was of weak strength: $\phi = .210$ since marital status accounted for 4.4% of the variance in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between the number of children and role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers.

Table 5: Chi-square on the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on number of children

Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig.	Phi (φ)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.875 ^a	3	.411	
Likelihood Ratio	2.525	3	.471	.229
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.490	1	.222	
N of Valid Cases	55			

Table 5 indicates that there was no significant relationship between the number of children and role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers, $\chi^2(3, N = 55) = 2.875$, $p = .411$, $\phi = .229$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the number of children and role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers is not rejected. The association was of weak strength: $\phi = .229$ since the number of children accounted for 5.2% of the variance in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the support postgraduate students receive and their academic achievement.

Table 6: t-test Summary of the difference between the support postgraduate student-mothers receive and their academic achievement

Support	N	Mean	SD	Df	Sig.	t-value
No support	18	2.44	.705	53	.0192	-2.416
Support	37	2.89	.614			

Table 6 shows that student-mothers who received support had a better performance (Mean = 2.89) than those who did not receive support (Mean = 2.44). The difference between the support student-mothers receives and their academic achievement was statistically significant, $t = -2.416$, $df = 53$, $p = .019$. Since there was a significant difference between the support student-mothers receive and their academic achievement, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that the support student-mothers receive affects their performance.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed that all the postgraduate student-mothers experienced difficulties in attending classes, tutorials and group discussions regularly thereby making learning difficult. These challenges could be linked to the multiple roles of student-mothers. Student-mothers in attempting to take on motherhood duties perhaps engage more in domestic activities to the detriment of their academic roles. Engaging in all the expected roles of student-mothers in an academic environment poses great challenges which could subsequently affect their academic success, thereby jeopardizing SDG 4 of providing an inclusive and equitable quality education. Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the student-mothers had difficulties in breastfeeding their children during lecture periods resulting in a lack of concentration during lectures and sometimes skipping lectures. Oftentimes, they had difficulties in getting places to keep their babies during examinations and studying in the library. This finding is in line with the view of Esia-Donkoh (2014) who stressed that performing all the roles of motherhood within a 'strict' academic system not only complicates the challenges they face but subsequently has adverse effects on their academic roles. The myriad of challenges student-mothers face will create inequality in the type and quality of education of women to the advantage of men. This is a negation of the sustainable development goal of providing an inclusive and equitable quality education for all irrespective of gender.

The findings of this study further showed that postgraduate student mothers adopt different strategies to surmount the challenges of motherhood and academic activities. Such strategies include skipping lectures to breastfeed their children, requesting for colleagues' lecture notes and other academic materials to be photocopied and employing the services of a caregiver to assist them. This finding supports that of Najjuma and Kyarugah (2006) and Dankyi et al, (2019) who in their study, found that some women either take their children with them to class, use paid caregivers, leave children with neighbours, relatives, old siblings or take them to a day-care centre as coping strategies for the challenges they encounter in the course of prompt lecture attendance.

Other strategies student-mothers adopt to overcome some of the challenges as revealed in the study include obtaining support from their parents, husbands and student colleagues, weaning their babies earlier starting up with formula and holding group discussions close to their places of residence. This is in tandem with Amangbey et al, (2017) who stressed in their study that first-time mothers obtain support from parents, family relatives as well as external sources as ways of coping with motherhood challenges. This finding also supports a study by Mbekenga et al, (2011) who argued that first-time mothers experienced joy and challenges.

Also, since the result revealed that there was no significant difference in the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers based on marital status, it implies that marital status statistically had no impact on the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers. The social and traditional motherhood duties are bestowed on all women,

irrespective of their marital status. Therefore, postgraduate student-mothers experienced some level of stress as a result of their desires to meet all the roles of motherhood irrespective of their marital status.

Moreover, an insignificance association existed between the number of children and the role conflict of postgraduate student-mothers in the study. This may be due to different coping strategies adopted by student-mothers as reported. The finding is in tandem with the view of McConnell, Breitzkreuz, and Savage (2011) that feeling supported socially by student mothers could assist them in surmounting the negative impact of stressors. Meanwhile, Deater-Deckard (2004) stressed that family size hurts making the parent more stressed, such that the more children in the family, the more the levels of stress.

Another finding of this study showed that the difference between the student-mothers who receive support and those who do not receive support in their academic achievement was statistically significant. This suggests that the support student-mothers receive has a positive effect on their academic performance. Therefore, support being a coping strategy is germane in surmounting student-mothers' conflicting roles. The support received by student mothers could have negated the impact of stress within the family. This finding is consistent with that of Akpotor (2018) who reported that women who were not supported at home experienced academic problems.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 projected an inclusive and equitable quality education to all citizens, achieving the right to education for all irrespective of their gender. Living a sustainable life requires all learners to acquire the right knowledge, skills and attitude needed to promote sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights and gender equality. This calls for the right to education which deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. Every youth in Nigeria aspires to higher education, knowing fully that having access to higher education will improve their living conditions. Thus, efforts are being made by all education stakeholders to ensure that children of school age as well as adults gain admission to tertiary institutions. The study can therefore be concluded that female individuals (women) who are student-mothers should be seen as part of citizens who could help in fostering the acclaimed SDGs projection come 2030 and the researchers thereby recommended that among others, government and school management should provide child-care campus support units to alleviate the challenges that student-mothers encounter to achieve sustainable development goals as envisaged.

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