

## GENDER SOCIALIZATION IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN LATER LIFE

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### **Abstract**

*Women as adult learners have challenges participating in learning and continuing their education. Whether or not these challenges are peculiar to women is unknown but likely, considering the fact that gender socialization in traditional African society place women in a disadvantaged position than the male counterpart. Therefore, this study aimed at finding out the influence of gender socialization on women participation in adult learning programmes in Edo State. Two research questions were raised. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 406 women of Benin origin because it is an ethnic group the researcher is very familiar with, who are participants in adult learning programmes in government and private centres in Edo South Senatorial District. The entire population constituted the sample for the study because of its manageable size. A self-constructed questionnaire was used as research instrument for data collection and was validated by three experts: two from adult and non-formal education and one from measurement and evaluation. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability method which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data gathered for the study were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation. Findings of the research showed that gender socialization influenced participation of Benin women in adult learning programmes. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that cultural institutions should identify and abolish gender stereotypes and practices that devalue the female gender which can impede participation in alternative education in later life.*

**Keywords:** Gender Socialization, Women Participation, Adult Learning Programmes

### **Introduction**

Gender socialization is the process by which persons develop, refine and learn to 'do' gender through internalizing gender norms and roles as they interact with key agents of socialization, such as family, social network and other social institutions (Balvin, 2017). It is simply learning our culture's gender-related rules, norms, and expectations. Gender socialization is a lifelong process and the beliefs about gender that we acquire in childhood via our culture can affect us throughout our lives

even in adulthood and the impact can be immense, shaping what we believe we are capable of accomplishing and thus potentially determining our life's course whether in business, our relationships, the workplace, or learning in later life.

In different cultures across the world, there are expectations regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women respectively (Philips, 2011). Depending on the culture of a woman's immediate family, ethnic community and geographical region, women are conceptualized as inferior to men to justify and sustain social and cultural systems dominated by men. The socialization process in a patriarchal society is likely to shape how men and women express gender identity differently, and as such, when a woman decides to engage in a learning programme, her ability to thrive in the learning situation is dependent on whether or not she possesses the expected gender identity (Courtney, 2016).

Historically, participation in adult education is largely a voluntary activity because it is expected that adults know what they want. Without volunteer learners, adult education would be a much smaller enterprise. According to Aminchi (2015), providers of adult education do not only need to know who is participating and why they are participating but what conditions are likely to promote greater participation. Knowing why some adults participate in adult education does not tell why many do not. Reasons adults do not participate have been clustered by several researchers into the types of barrier. Of interest to this study is the psychosocial obstacle such as beliefs, values, attitudes and perceptions about education or about oneself as a learner, that is, the learners' self-identity is said to be at the heart of non participation, (Hall & Donaldson (1992) in (Onyishi (2004)). Women who constitute a large proportion of the nation's population have important role to play in society and nation building. Yet, their level of participation is low when compared with the participation of men. The way a woman feels about herself, her self-esteem and self confidence, and the way she expresses herself are significant elements in her decision about whether or not to participate in an adult education programme. Hall & Donaldson recommended that more research be conducted on specific structural factors such as race and gender that enhance or impede participation. Participation is vital and of paramount importance in any adult and non-formal programme. For any successful programme, full participation of the target group is important (Onyishi, 2004). More so, where culture has different expectations for male and female as seen in patriarchal societies, a study on the

possible influence of gender socialization on participation among women learning programmes becomes pertinent.

Women make up the majority of adult learners still; consideration for women has been consistently left out of the planning process in adult education (Spencer, 2006). The result of this failure is that too often, it sabotages what might otherwise be a useful learning experience for women. The numerous roles women play, such as mother, wife, community member, worker and learner have the potential of creating conflict that can distract them from learning. Different cultures are constituted by different practices and discourses all of which influence individuals (men and women) differently. In addition, cultural values which emphasize women's primary roles as wives and home makers are psychological barriers to women (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). It is imperative that adult education researchers begin to recognize and incorporate research and practice that are women-focused or women-driven. Women all over the world sometimes share similar experiences, while for some others, their experiences are peculiar, and as such, this study focused on women from the Benin ethnic group of Edo state in southern Nigeria. An ethnic group with gender expectations the researcher can identify with as an indigene.

The name "Benin" is both a geo-political and demographic ethnic identity and expression. It refers to the land and the people indigenous to the land hence, the word Benin here mean the indigenous people of the modern south senatorial district of Edo State, South-South Nigeria. The total area of Benin covering its present seven local government areas (Oredo, Orionhnwon, Ovia South west, Ovia North East, Egor, Ikpoba-okha and Uhunwonde) is about 10,360 square kilometres (Eghafona and Osunde, 2017). According to oral tradition account, when the founding families arrived at the spot known today as Benin around the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, they found that the land was flowing with resources hence the land was named Ubini. The Benin historical account claim that Benin arrived at the name as a derivation from Oranmiyan's description of the land and people as 'Ile-Ibinu' meaning land of vexation. The name Edo, on other hand was said to have been the name of a slave, who saved Oba Ewuare (1440-1473) from being killed. To immortalize Edo's name for the services he rendered, Oba Ewuare changed the name of the land to Edo (Egharevba in Eghafona & Osunde 2017). Today, the names Edo and Benin have been used interchangeably, Edo is better used in speaking vernacular while Benin in speaking English.

According to Eghafona (2003), even though the name Bini is closer to the original Ubini, which is likely to be the proper name of the area, Oba Erediauwa (1979-2016), decried its usage as wrong. He claimed that no word like 'Bini' existed in the Edo vocabulary, and its usage alongside with Edo and Benin is erroneous. Therefore, only Edo and Benin should be used when describing the people, place and language (Erediauwa, 1992). In this study therefore, the people and language will be referred to as Benin. Benin City is the ancestral home of the Benin people who trace their genealogy to a common ancestor. Presently, there are different ethnic groups living in Benin City, but these people are different from the Benin indigenes since they do not share a common ancestral history.

In terms of social organisation, Ebohon (1996), stated that decent among the Benin people is patrilineal, as children trace their decent or blood relation to the lineage of their father from whom they inherit. The principle of primogeniture by which a senior son inherits his father's house, property and title where applicable, holds in Benin. The family estate known as 'igiogbe' was usually an all-male affair. Consequently, in a traditional gender-stratified society, there are expectations regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women respectively, including articulation of power relations, especially the way men and women relate in society. Examples of what is appropriate and/or not appropriate for a woman include: Women do not take decisions in the home. It is exclusively for the men, Funeral rites / mourning expectations differ for widows and widowers, women are considered unclean during their monthly periods, daughter's education is less important than son as sons are potential providers and perpetrators of family names, it is the role and duty of women is to taking care of the children and the household and should be given priority on training in domestic chores, the responsibility of giving out daughters in marriage is exclusively for men, a woman is not expected to take her bath once the fowls have gone to take shelter i.e, at night fall, if a woman sees a man urinating on the road she is expected to spit out.

Specifically, the study sought to: identify the gender socialization that exist among the Benins; find out if gender socialization influence women's participation in adult learning programmes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The adult learner and the manner in which he or she learns best have been questioned and remain an issue of research till date in the field of adult education. Different researches carried out in the past have emphasized the case for looking at factors inhibiting women participation in adult learning

programmes from different perspectives but not in the light of social cultural realities such as gender socialization with particular reference to a woman's geographical region and ethnicity. The fundamental question that now arises is: does gender socialization in anyway influence women's participation in adult learning programmes? Gender socialization discourse is not devoid of cultural context. This study therefore aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the influence of gender socialization on participation of Benin women in adult learning programmes.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What gender socialization exists among the Benins?
2. Does gender socialization influence women's participation in adult learning programmes?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 406 women of Benin origin who are participants in adult learning programmes in both government and private centres in Edo South Senatorial District. The entire population was used for the study because of its manageable size. Therefore, there was no sampling. A self constructed questionnaire was used as research instrument for data collection. The instrument for data collection was validated by two experts in adult and Non-formal Education and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. Corrections on the appropriateness of language and expression were made and incorporated into the final draft of the instrument. The scoring pattern of the response scale was a four point modified likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was trial tested with twenty (20) women from the adult learning centre. The data generated was then analyzed using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data gathered for the study were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of research assistants who were on ground for their practicum posting to some centres and additonal research assistants were recruited for centres not covered by the posting. They were briefed on how to administer the instrument. The research assistants also helped to

conscientiously retrieve the instrument immediately to enhance maximum return and reduce mortality rate.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What gender socialization exists among the Benins?

**Table 1:** Mean and Standard deviation of Gender socialization among the Benins.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	In the Benin culture, men and women don't bath with the same bucket.	406	3.97	0.38	Agreed
2	Mourning expectations differ for men and women in the Benin culture,	406	3.79	0.48	Agreed
3	Women in their monthly cycle are not permitted to cook for their spouses.	406	2.72	0.81	Agreed
4	The responsibility of giving out daughters in marriage is exclusively for men.	406	3.75	0.47	Agreed
5	Girls are given priority on training in domestic chores rather than to their education.	406	3.43	0.60	Agreed
6	High value is given to the education of sons than daughters because they are potential providers and perpetrators of family names.	406	3.09	0.73	Agreed

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Decision Point = 2.50

In response to research question one, Table 3 shows that the respondents rated item one to five as agreed with a mean rating ranging from 2.75 to 3.97 while the standard deviation also ranges from .38 to .81. With these results, the above mean score shows that different gender ideologies exist among the Benins.

**Research Question 2:** Does gender socialization influence women's participation in learning programmes?

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard deviation of Gender socialization and women's participation in Adult learning programmes.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	I am active and give input in my learning programme despite my cultural orientation as a Benin woman	406	2.74	0.45	Agreed
2	I am passive and give little or no input in my learning programme because of my cultural orientation as a Benin woman	406	2.27	0.45	Disagreed
3	My responsibilities as a Benin woman are enormous and as such gives me little or no time to participate in learning activities	406	3.02	0.18	Agreed
4	I tend to allow the male participants lead and take decision in group learning activities because of my cultural orientation	406	3.28	0.47	Agreed
5	I don't put pressure on myself in the learning programme because of my cultural orientation doesn't expect so much from women	406	3.10	0.34	Agreed
6	I can do better in my learning programme if the cultural expectations were less hegemonic	406	3.01	0.14	Agreed
	<b>Cluster</b>	406	2.91	0.12	Agreed

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Decision Point = 2.50

The data analysis in Table 5 depicts that the respondents rated item one, two to six as agreed with a mean rating ranging from 2.74 to 3.28 while item two was rated as disagreed with a mean of 2.27. The standard deviation also ranges from .12 to .45. With these results, the above mean score shows that Benin gender ideologies influence women's participation in programme planning in adult learning programmes.

### Discussion of Findings

Research question 1 sought to find out what gender socialization exist among the Benins. The findings showed that six gender socialization raised are accepted as exist among the Benins. These include: "in the Benin culture, men and women do not bath with the same bucket" was rated first. The second being "mourning expectations differ for men and women in the Benin culture" The third is the responsibility of giving out daughter in marriage is exclusively for men, The fourth being "girls are given priority on training in domestic chores rather than to their education". Where the fifth is

“high value is given to the education of sons than daughters because they are potential providers and perpetrators of family name”. The sixth being “women in the monthly cycle are not permitted to cook for their spouses”.

The findings are consistent with the view of Omodjohwoefe, (2011) who found out that in all societies, people have different ideas as to what constitutes proper behaviour and expectations for women and men. Girls and boys are socialized into their different roles. Although each culture has its own definitions of male and female roles and characteristics, there are some impressive cross-cultural regularity. The majority of societies around the world organize their social institutions around males who are more dominating and more deferred to than women. Women on the other hand, generally carry out established routines that has to do with house work. The three major functions of house work are housekeeping (including cooking), childcare, and personal service to husbands, children and other people.

Also, according to Osezua, (2016), most African cultures including Benin, have cultural practices such as rituals, name-giving ceremonies, have been used in mobilizing the gender socialization, that is, the role of men and women in society. Most of the ideologies concerning women in traditional societies stem from one or other aspects of her reproductive roles such as menstruation, pregnancy, lactation and so on. In few other societies, it involves strict seclusion and isolation. Limitations are placed on the activities of women during these periods gradually restricting her activities to house work.

Research Question 2 sought to find out if gender ideologies influence women’s participation in learning programmes? The result showed that gender ideologies influence women’s participation in programme planning in adult learning programmes. A number of studies have taken interest in likely barriers to women’s participation in adult learning ranging from lack of time, cultural bias, heavy work load, religious belief, lack of appropriate facilities, negative self-concept and financial factors (McGivney, 2013). Different researchers in Ethiopia such as Kalkidan (2007) and Hofstede (2010) claim that culture influences the education of women resulting in gender division of labor where women are denied important opportunities like educational access and burdened by heavy works which are hardly acknowledged. In most societies, women education is considered as of no value that they prefer men education. Regarding this, Courtney (2001) stressing the cultural patterns and customs as one of the obstacles to women literacy, said, “Parents believe that it is not worthwhile to



invest in girl's education; instead they invest time and money to educate boys." To show in which members of the society this negative attitude towards women is prevalent, Ballara (2002), wrote that husbands, fathers and men in general have such attitudes towards women education mainly because they are afraid that it may reverse the traditional women roles by providing them with new roles.

Every society has its own cultural behavior patterns which the males and females in the society are expected to follow which in turn influence the behavioral and personality development of individuals from early years of life. Culture affects women in various ways, one of which is their education. In the case of the situation of Ethiopia, Onyishi 2014 said, gender inequality in general and gender inequality in education in particular, are mostly the result of the norms and values with which our society defines the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Although the importance of giving priority for educating girls than boys is stressed by different researchers (King & Hill, 2011) in most societies, customarily, educating boys is assumed more beneficial than educating the girls and hence girls should stay at home and help their mothers rather than going to school. Based on what is appropriate for men and women, the latter is expected to stay at home and carry out their 'natural' roles. Since this assumption of the larger society is taken by women as true, it affects their confidence to participate in tasks outside the house, of which education is no exception. In education, too, even if they participate, because of their achievement and subject choices one can tell that they are in line with their cultural roles. In general, cultural influences on education of women are manifold that it has an effect on their enrollment, classroom participation, achievement and career choice. Closely related to the focus of this study are the views of Kalkidan (2007) and Stalker (2005) about dispositional barrier: those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner by lack of self confidence because of 'poor' previous educational achievements or gender orientation and attitudinal barriers such as reification, vilification, and subjugation which adult educators must remain vigilant against.

### **Conclusion**

This study established the existence of gender socialization among the Benins of Southern Nigeria having different expectations for men and women. The study also showed that gender socialization influenced Benin women participation in Adult learning programmes.

## Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are therefore made:

- Custodians of culture should consider identifying and abolishing cultural ideologies and practices such as gender socialization which subjugate the female gender and has implications for gender identity expression. As it will go a long way in protecting the rights of women and the extinction of marginalization and discriminatory practices against women.
- Towards improving participation by women, curriculum planners at all levels of education, should in the planning of Adult Education programmes, ensure the inclusion of gender education in the curriculum to promote gender consciousness and guarantee leverage for reorientation and attitudinal change among citizens .
- Providers of adult education programmes should ensure regular training and retraining of facilitators to equip them with necessary skills to help promote greater and better participation of women in learning programmes despite the challenges posed by gender socialization in traditional African societies.
- Government through the National Orientation Agency, should sensitized the general public on s of cultural gender ideologies that constitute a serious violation and infringement on the right of women to human dignity.

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