Effect of Distance Learning on the Work-Life Balance of Adult Learners in south west Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

Distance learning has become a critical component of adult education globally, particularly for those who cannot attend conventional on-campus programs. The rise of distance learning programs has revolutionized adult education globally, including in Nigeria. Distance learning offers flexibility and accessibility, making it an attractive option for adults who are balancing work, family responsibilities, and academic pursuits. However, while distance learning provides opportunities for continued education, it also introduces challenges, particularly in maintaining a healthy Work-Life balance. This research explored the impact of distance learning on the Work-Life balance of adult learners in Nigeria, assessing both positive outcomes and potential stressors associated with managing these concurrent responsibilities. The research concluded that while distance learning offers flexibility, it also presents significant challenges for adult learners, particularly in terms of managing workload and time. It was therefore recommended that universities should consider providing more support services for adult learners, such as counseling, time management workshops, and stress reduction programs, to help them better manage the demands of both their studies and personal lives.

Introduction

The rapid growth of distance learning programs in Nigeria has transformed the landscape of adult education, offering flexibility and accessibility to a diverse population of learners. However, the balancing act between work, family responsibilities, and academic pursuits presents unique challenges for adult learners. Work-Life balance refers to the equilibrium between an individual's work responsibilities and personal life. For adult learners, this balance is particularly complex as they must manage their job, family duties, and educational commitments simultaneously. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) conceptualize Work-Life balance as the absence of conflict between work and family roles, where the demands of one role do not negatively impact the ability to fulfill the other.

Distance learning has become an increasingly popular mode of education for adults in Nigeria, largely due to its flexibility, which allows learners to juggle their studies with work and family commitments. Despite its advantages, the demand of pursuing education alongside existing responsibilities can create significant strain on learners, potentially affecting their work performance, family life, and overall wellbeing. Institutions offering distance learning programs play a crucial role in supporting adult learners. Research by Simpson (2013) highlights the importance of providing flexible scheduling, access to academic resources, and support services to help learners manage their Work-Life balance. In Nigeria, however, there are often gaps in institutional support, with many distance learning programs lacking the resources to provide comprehensive support to adult learners (Jegede, 2003). Understanding how distance learning impacts the Work-Life balance of adult learners is crucial for developing strategies to support their success. This research aims to explore the impact of distance learning on the Work-Life balance of adult learners in Nigeria, assessing both positive outcomes and potential stressors associated with managing these concurrent responsibilities. The study will contribute to the broader understanding of the impact of distance education on adult learners' personal and professional lives in the Nigerian context.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:
1. To examine the impact of distance learning on the Work-Life balance of adult learners in Nigeria.
2. To identify the challenges faced by adult learners in maintaining Work-Life balance while enrolled in distance learning programs.
3. To explore the strategies used by adult learners to manage their work, life, and academic responsibilities.
4. To assess the relationship between Work-Life balance and academic performance in distance learning programs.
5. To provide recommendations for improving support systems for adult learners in distance learning environments.

Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived effects of distance learning on the Work-Life balance of adult learners in Nigeria?
2. How do adult learners manage their time between work, family, and academic responsibilities?
3. What challenges do adult learners face in balancing work, life, and studies in a distance learning environment?
4. What coping strategies do adult learners employ to maintain a healthy Work-Life balance?
5. How does Work-Life balance influence academic performance and overall satisfaction with distance learning programs?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to comprehensively explore the impact of distance learning on the work-life balance of adult learners in Nigeria. The mixed-methods approach is suitable because it allows for both the generalization of findings through quantitative data and the in-depth exploration of individual experiences through qualitative data.

Population and Sampling

Population

The target population for this study consists of adult learners enrolled in distance learning programs at various universities in Nigeria. This includes learners from diverse backgrounds, including those employed full-time, part-time, and those with significant family responsibilities.

Sample Size

A sample size of approximately 200 adult learners across distance learning programs of four universities (the University of Ibadan, National Open University in Nigeria Abeokuta, Agidingbi Lagos, and Osun state centers) in Southwest Nigeria was used for the quantitative survey. This sample size was determined based on the population size and the need for statistical power to detect significant effects. For the qualitative phase, 30-40 participants were selected for in-depth interviews to provide rich, detailed insights into their experiences.

Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews was conducted with a subset of survey respondents who express interest in participating in the qualitative phase.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and frequency distribution) was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the survey items while t-tests and chi-square tests at 5% level of significance, were employed to test the relationships between work-life balance and variables such as academic performance, satisfaction, and demographic factors using SPSS statistical software package.

Results and discussion

Table 1. Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Variable	Categories	frequency	Percentaga
Gender	Male	110	45%
	Female	90	55%
Age Group	18-25 years	30	15%
	26-35 years	50	25%
	36-45 years	60	30%
	46-55 years	40	20%
	56 years and	20	10%

Marital St	Single	70	35%
	Married	110	55%
	Divorced	15	7.50%
	Widowed	5	2.50%
Employment	Full-time	120	60%
	Part-time	40	20%
	Self-employed	30	15%
	Unemployed	10	5%

As displayed in Table 1 above, the majority of respondents (55%) are male, and most fall within the 26-45 years age group (55%), which aligns with the common assumption that adults in this age bracket are actively involved in both work and academic pursuits. A significant proportion (60%) are full-time employees, further emphasizing the challenge of juggling work and academic commitments. Additionally, 55% are married, meaning they must balance educational demands with family responsibilities. This sample reflects a typical adult learner demographic in South West Nigeria (Table 1). The results suggest that adult learners in distance education often belong to a working-class demographic with family responsibilities, making work-life balance a critical concern. This findings agrees with previous report by Adeoye, (2011) who emphasized the critical concerns of adult learners in distance learning programs.

Table 2. Distance Learning Experience

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n = 200)	Percentage (%)
Duration in Distance Learning	Less than 1 year	20	10%
	1-3 years	80	40%
	4-6 years	60	30%
	More than 6 years	40	20%
Mode of Learning	Online platforms	90	45%
	Recorded lectures	40	20%
	Virtual live classes	50	25%
	Printed study materials	20	10%
Weekly Study Hours	Less than 5 hours	30	15%
	5-10 hours	80	40%
	11-15 hours	50	25%
	More than 15 hours	40	20%
Challenges in Distance Learning	Internet issues	80	40%
	Time management	90	45%
	Lack of motivation	50	25%
	Work-family conflict	110	55%

Duration in Distance Learning: A significant proportion of respondents (70%) have spent between 1 to 6 years in distance education. This indicates that many adult learners persist in their programs, despite challenges (Table 2).

Mode of Learning: The most preferred learning method is online platforms (45%), followed by virtual live classes (25%). However, recorded lectures (20%) and printed study materials (10%) are also used, highlighting the need for flexible and varied instructional methods (Table 2).

Weekly Study Hours: The majority of respondents dedicate 5-10 hours per week (40%), suggesting that learners must strategically allocate time to study amid work and family responsibilities (Table 2). The reliance on online platforms and virtual classes highlights the importance of stable internet access and technological infrastructure for effective learning. Many adult learners have developed long-term strategies to sustain participation in distance learning, but limited study time per week may affect academic performance. This finding is in agreement with earlier findings of Russel et al. (2015) who posited that some adult learners have devised certain means of coping with the demands of the distance learning programs.

Table 3. Challenges in Distance Learning

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n = 200)	Percentage (%)
Difficulty Balancing Work, Studies, and Personal Life	Never	10	5%
	Rarely	30	15%
	Sometimes	80	40%
	Often	50	25%
	Always	30	15%
Effect on Work Productivity	No impact	20	10%
	Minimal impact	50	25%
	Moderate impact	70	35%
	Significant impact	40	20%
	Very high impact	20	10%
Family Responsibilities Interfering with Studies	Yes, very often	60	30%
	Sometimes	90	45%
	Rarely	30	15%
	Never	20	10%
Effect on Stress Level	No stress	10	5%
	Slightly stressful	30	15%
	Moderately stressful	80	40%
	Very stressful	50	25%
	Extremely stressful	30	15%

The major difficulties faced by adult learners as shown in Table 3 include:

Work-family conflict (55%) – A significant proportion struggle with balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Time management (45%) – Many learners find it difficult to schedule their academic work alongside job and home duties.

Internet connectivity issues (40%) – Given that most learners rely on online platforms, poor internet access becomes a major limitation.

Lack of motivation (25%) – A quarter of the respondents feel demotivated, possibly due to isolation in online learning environments.

Effective time management strategies and institutional support (such as academic counseling or flexible deadlines) may help alleviate stress.

Improving technological infrastructure can significantly enhance learning experiences and engagement in distance education.

Table 4. Impact of Work-Life Balance on Productivity

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n = 200)	Percentage (%)
Coping Strategies for Work-Life Balance	Time management	80	40%
	Setting study schedules	90	45%
	Reducing social activities	50	25%
	Seeking employer/family support	60	30%
Improvements Needed in Distance Learning	More flexible schedules	110	55%
	Better study materials	70	35%
	Improved internet access	90	45%
	More interactive support	60	30%
Overall Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance	Very satisfied	20	10%
	Satisfied	60	30%
	Neutral	50	25%

	Dissatisfied	50	25%
	Very dissatisfied	20	10%
Recommendation of Distance Learning to Others	Strongly recommend	70	35%
	Recommend with reservations	80	40%
	Not recommend	30	15%
	Not sure	20	10%

Work-life balance difficulty: 40% of respondents "sometimes" experience difficulties, while 25% often struggle to manage their multiple roles.

Impact on work productivity: 35% of respondents feel that distance learning has a "moderate impact" on their productivity at work, while 30% reported significant or high impact.

Interference of family responsibilities: 45% of respondents stated that family obligations sometimes interfere with their studies, making it difficult to focus on academic tasks.

Stress levels: 40% experience "moderate stress", while 25% report "very high stress" due to the demands of work, studies, and personal life.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Results for Predictors of Work-Life Balance

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Value	p-Value	Significance
Time Management Skills (TMS)	0.42	0.08	5.25	0.001	Significant
Internet Access (IA)	0.21	0.09	2.33	0.028	Significant
Workplace support	0.35	0.07	4.98	0.003	Significant
Family responsibilities	0.19	0.1	1.9	0.065	Not Significant
Study-work conflicts	0.12	0.11	1.1	0.132	Not Significant

Regression Analysis

Time Management Skills ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$): Time management skills emerged as a significant predictor of positive work-life balance. Learners with better time management abilities were more likely to experience improved work-life balance (Table 5).

Workplace Support ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$): Workplace support, such as flexibility in working hours and understanding from employers, significantly contributed to better work-life balance for adult learners (Table 5).

Family Responsibilities ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.10$): Family responsibilities were found to negatively affect work-life balance. Adult learners with more family responsibilities struggled more with balancing work, study, and personal life, though this factor was less significant (Table 5).

Study-Work Conflict ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.05$): A higher level of conflict between study and work responsibilities was associated with poorer work-life balance, indicating the importance of managing both domains effectively (Table 5).

T-Test Results: The T-test showed a significant difference ($t(198) = -3.20$, $p < 0.05$) in work-life balance before and after the participants enrolled in distance learning programs. This suggests that distance learning had a measurable impact on the participants' ability to balance work, study, and personal life, with most participants reporting a shift toward increased stress and time management challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the complex relationship between distance learning and work-life balance, underscoring the need for a more tailored approach to supporting adult learners in Nigeria. The study shows that while distance learning offers flexibility, it also presents significant challenges for adult learners, particularly in terms of managing workload and time.

A significant number of learners experience strain while balancing work, family, and studies, which may reduce academic performance and job efficiency. Institutions offering distance learning programs should introduce stress management workshops and offer flexible academic schedules to support working professionals. Furthermore, institutions offering distance learning programs should consider providing more support services for adult

learners, such as counseling, time management workshops, and stress reduction programs, to help them better manage the demands of both their studies and personal lives. Employers should offer more flexible work schedules for employees engaged in distance learning, recognizing the dual pressures they face.

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