

## Women Retention in Asynchronous Learning Environment: A Case Study of Open University of Sudan

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### Abstract

*The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting Sudanese women retention in blended learning environment. Many studies have investigated women retention in light of Vince Tinto (1975) model. The current study used qualitative research method and interview technical method. Purposive sample of two undergraduate learners were selected as research information, they have chosen voluntary in classes are using blended learning in Open University of Sudan (OUS) main campus -Khartoum. Data was collected from participants who spent more than two semesters in asynchronous learning environment in (OUS). Reliability and validity were verified. The findings showed that the factors affecting women retention in Open University of Sudan (OUS) were societal, environmental interaction, academic, financial and psychological factors in academic session 2018 -2019. The study contributed to understanding the hidden mechanics of women retention in (OUS) environment. The study recommended that administration of (OUS) should pay attention to the problems of female learners in Open University of Sudan (OUS). The result could be extended to other universities which offered distance education in Sudan.*

**Key words:** retention, asynchronous learning, adult learners, open university

## **1. Introduction**

Distance education provides accessibility, credibility and convenience environment. Women are respected kind among people in various communities and enable to reach high level of education as well as considered in administrative hierarchy. Whereby women attempt seriously to develop themselves via distance education program and involve themselves in marketing. It is known that some of African communities have gender inequality in terms of education male versus female and in Sudan community no exception, never the less ,in 1989 winds of revolution have swept the past lack of females education and the dreams become a reality. Females have given priority in tertiary education to fight poverty and lack of education in Sudan. In terms of asynchronous learning background Sudan has acknowledged distance learning in third decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century and due to scarcity of formal opportunities. Therefore, most of Sudanese students had gone abroad to acquire knowledge. In the earlier of 1960s, the national T.V had attempted to disseminate asynchronous learning by offering English language program throughout the capital city – Khartoum and the program had been used for a limit period approximately two years and terminated. Furthermore, during that time University of Khartoum endeavored to offer distance education program particularly in 1963 in terms of vocational program. In fact, in the earlier of 1990s Sudan was taking series steps toward distance education and was establishing Open University of Sudan as well as some higher institutes which began to adopt the philosophy of distance education. Currently there are some strategies have been adopted to implement electronic learning across Sudanese universities. Higher education has afforded a viable means for assisting women in distance education through two decades by launching Open University of Sudan and higher institutes. There are various definitions of retention, for instance, Rust (2006) defines retention as is continued attendance in class ... as successful performance (Rust, 2006, p11). Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory. Vince Tinto (1975) founded his model of traditional student retention on spady's (1970) model of student departure and also he adopted the idea of Emeal Durkheim (1950) suicide theory. Tinto (1977, 2006) in his model of longitudinal process explains interactions

of social and academic factors which motivate people to pursue in the institution university or to leave it. The core idea of Tinto's model (1975), reflects status of students whether communicate within organization socially and academically. In addition, students enter the university or higher college with different background such as, family backgrounds for instance ( family social status, parents education level and value climate), pre collage experiences (high school achievement, CGPA ), individual attributes include for example ( age ,gender , ability and ethnic ), personal expectation (individual commitments), and college goals (institutional commitments ) each factor of which has direct and indirect influence on student performance in the college , these backgrounds differ in terms of academic integration and social integration within college environment which is communication with faculty, sharing within co curricula activities and students satisfaction with social life in campus or off campus which alter the level of commitments and finally lead students to persist or departure the college system (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975), added that individual attributes influence on educational expectations and commitments which individual brings to the university environment, individual characteristics and prior experience and commitments directly relates to his continuous in the university. While, goal and institutional commitment, person normative structural integration into the academic and social systems of college that lead to new stage of commitment. Whereas, the interplay between the individuals commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institute that determines whether or not the student decides to drop out or not from the system of the college . (Tinto, 1975,p. 98). So, personal characteristics impact learners in terms of educational environment. Tinto (2007) believed that students decide to departure or withdrawal from the university or institute because they feel dissatisfied and loss communication that happens voluntary or personal decision. Moreover, we have to understand the experience of students who come from different backgrounds, cultural, economic, race and intuitional shape students retain in the college refer to their previous societies family or tribe. Therefore, factors effecting learners retention can be societal, economic, psychological, academic even personal decision.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Sudan is a country that faces many challenges as well as African countries and distance education is not an exception. Negative attitudes and practices that stopped women to access in tertiary education programs and they have been ignored in some African communities, it is clear that females have been elbowed out of education for long time. Sudanese women like an African women struggle to fight the poverty and keep in touch with universal standard. It can be observed that women in the Sudanese community interact with distance education program which has been offered by several Sudanese universities and they developed their capability in order to participate in Familial responsibilities beside men, but most of them could pursue their study for several years or withdrawal and drop out due to many factors such as academic peers interaction , unbalanced between their work outside and the study...etc .Women retention it seems to be studied and highlighted seriously.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1-To identify factors affecting women retention in Open University of Sudan.
- 2-To identify benefited women retention in Open University of Sudan.
- 3-To identify the perceptions of women attending asynchronous learning program.
- 4- To give suggestions and recommendations to increase women educational level .
- 5-The findings of this study could be utilized as underpinning of further new researches in discipline of andragogy in higher colleges or synchronous learning.
- 6-The findings of the present study will highlight the lecturers and administrators provide asynchronous learning in Open University of Sudan.

## **1.4 Research questions**

This study intends to give answers to the following question:

- 1-What are the factors affecting women retention attending asynchronous learning program in Open University of Sudan?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The present study is significant for these points :

- 1- The study would meet certain expectations.
- 2- Findings would be benefited to learners of asynchronous learning program stakeholders in (OUS) and public at large .
- 3- It will be explored factors affecting women retention attending asynchronous learning program that would solid steps towards its solution.
- 4- It would provide useful information policy decision makers and planner of asynchronous learning.
- 5- It would be contributed to access in depth factors affecting women retention attending asynchronous learning in general.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTATION**

The present study used descriptive research design. It's a scientific method, which describes the behavior of a subject without influencing it in anyway. It used to obtain information concerning the status of the phenomenon to describe what exists. The population of the present study consisted of some learners of (O.U.S) in Khartoum. The participants for the present study consisted of a sample size of three undergraduate learners. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three (3), out of (thirty) learners in Khartoum city center. In each of the selected study center, three learners were selected. It was only used for this study and it was divided into two sections, first section was demographic information of the respondents while , section two was included the items of the study. Random sample has been selected Creswell (2002), the purpose of random sample was to have a smaller potential participants that represented the larger population . Moreover, Neuman (2003), purposive sampling is an acceptable kind of sampling of special situations ...when a researcher wants to identify a specific types of cases for in depth investigation.

### **2.1 Population of the Study**

The present study consisted of all women attending asynchronous learning in (O.U.S) at main campus Khartoum an official permission had been issued from the head coordinator of main campus-Khartoum and it focuses on three women one was withdrawal before conducting

primarily study and the population had been chosen randomly. The interview with two participants was conducted over four months of academic sessions in (OUS). The sample of two females were selected randomly as research information . In fact, they selected on the basis of voluntary participation to share their experiences and perceptions with so transparency and openness. Their average age between 20 – 40 years old. They come from varies educational, economic and family background and they work in different sectors in Khartoum capital city. Sarah coded ( P1) is a single in 24 years old, works as an officer and lives in Omdurman city. Huda coded (P2) is married, has four children female and male. She works as a clerk in a private company in Khartoum city. This is a brief profile of the participants of the present study. Participants were highlighted before conducting the interview and had been told that information will be used for academic purposes and will be confidential no records were used.

## **2.2 Data Discussion**

This study explores and identifies factors affecting women retention for several years in higher education in Open University of Sudan (**O.U.S**). Tinto (1993) found that student success is dependent upon access to learner support services. As education is offered face to face amongst learners who drop out of asynchronous Learning program, several factors are often cited, including for instance lack of time; technological challenges; motivation problems; lack of support from students, administrators, and/or instructors; poorly designed course; and personal learning preference.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

In this study transcription of the participants, an open-coding process identified key words or phrases , these codes were organized into cells. The major code cells were identified: Factors affecting women retention in asynchronous learning environment in Open University of Sudan (**O.U.S**). Participants were the primary sources of information, however, also points to the difficulty of obtaining feedback from participants who may hesitate to contradict the researcher's understanding of their perceptions because the summary appears, the information basic values and lives. The same information

it was vital that the data reflected their responses as faithfully as possible.

### **3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This study reflects factors affecting women retention in asynchronous learning program and were ranked of codes, based on the number of respondents which representing each one separately for instance respondent (P1) and respondent (P2).

#### **3.1 Key Factors Affecting Women Retention in Open University of Sudan**

Based on the data analysis of a case study, themes revealed that the factors affecting women retention in Open University of Sudan (OUS) in light of Tinto model of retention. The following section describes the major themes and provides supporting quotations from the interview participants (P1) and (P2).

#### **3.2 Social Factors**

Regarding to this theme participant (P2) was agreed responsibility by taking care of peers interaction as well as instructors interaction and she said that "I am a working mother and you know that I had two semesters beside that, I was working during the day and I was just exhausted", but she regretted so many courses are left. Similar to other research findings (Dzakari 2013; Simpson 2014 and Malik 2010), results from this study showed that meaningful interaction among learner's was an important aspect of respondents' learning communities in asynchronous learning. When respondents felt interested and engaged among their peers learning takes place. Research suggests that women prefer learning by forming personal connections (study of Akubulilo & Meje 2012). Participant (P1) said: "I learn the most syllabuses from my own peers and interaction with my instructors. When anything becomes personal, then I really learn it, but it is better to be absorbed clearly with peers". I think much of the women's sense of satisfaction came from interactions with their peers and instructors (study of Simpson 2014&Dzakari 2013). Interviewees felt positive about the asynchronous face to face gave them the opportunity not only to learn but also to inquire about the

lives of others whom they had met during the summer residency. A surprising finding of this study was that a strong face-to-face preference appeared negligible when compared to other barriers. Participants did not think their preference was a significant obstacle. Feelings of frustration, anxiety, or disappointment were perceived as greater impediments to their education.

### **3.3 Goal and Institutional Commitment**

All women had a positive experience during their courses in OUS. Participant (P1) and (P2) summarized general feelings: In fact we enjoyed enroll for this summer semester and it was very intense, but in the weekend of that course, it was so exhausting and terrifying because we felt that part is done of the course. Anyway, we interested in for few syllabuses that have been offered in this summer and hope to finish it successfully.

### **3.4 Facilities and Environment**

According to research (Dzakari2012; Simpson 2014; Alaklehim ,&Davud 2006 and Mapolisa 2012), building social relationships with peers and instructors provide a key motivation among learners. Respondents P1,P2 ranked high in importance the relations they built with face to face peers within interaction courses “When I was coming to face to face classes I became a friend with someone who I don’t like to call each other, and finally we give each other support” (P1). Participant (P2) found that communicating with peers motivating . “I’m not getting shy with my peers but towards instructors I had and not similar to the importance of instructors classmates’ support to rely on them during online interaction. Participant (P1) added that I found that faculty should remind our instructor during face to face interaction and responded to us in terms of obscures points in the course that motivated and encouraged us to pursue the course. She emphasized that should help us if we needed it either during face to face or email and that will be positive.

### **3.5 Academic Factors**

Participants were highlighted regarding this question and responded specifically participant ( P1) said that : I’m very fortunate to do peers around me and I feel they motivated me to study hard in order to



achieve the goals successfully. Whereby (**P2**) responded by saying that everyone will success and achieve his own goals either in this course or others courses, but sometimes it so hard to get what you want. For instance it is difficult to find who can advise you and gain whatever you dream may get frustrate. Second theme was analyzed and showed that she was disappointed in faculty of two participants because women preferred a traditional classroom setting, which having a face-to-face interaction. Participant (**P2**) believed that dealing of some academic courses was feeling anxious, frustrated, and overwhelmed for us. Two of participants (P1) and (P2) of the interview mentioned that design of some syllabus was intensive and the barriers to retain women faced many technology barriers such as the internet access, email, or software problems which diminished CGPA of more than two semesters. I think it was more homework and assignment per week that were stressing me too much and I feel stressed and isolated during interaction hours because some classmates appeared to be passing courses even though they failed to complete assignments and projects. But , participants (P1) she thought that the only problem with the face to face course has been taken is really never quite worked out, due to the fact of getting the right dates, the right times and scheduling conflicts increased throughout the course.

### **3.6 Faculty Staff Interactions**

No doubt that frequency interaction inside faculty environment led to learners' satisfaction nevertheless limit interaction may not lead learners to understand the course. Participants P1 and P2 agreed that we were emailing each other but “ it was difficult to get a hold of staff and instructor and It occurred four or five times without responses with different techniques in addition most of instructors immediate feedback. (P1) said that I hope I can get advanced technology to work and interact with faculty staff 24/7hrs in order to adjust some managing time , study schedule which can mitigate stress and anxiety ” (P2). “I was thinking about how I would adjust taking online courses . . . managing a family . . . teaching myself, . . . having my own things going on, and having to see if online classes fit into my schedule. While participant (**P2**) was concerning about being able to manage my schedule of study whenever interact successfully with instructors as well as faculty staff. The demands of their face to

face interaction and coursework they felt overwhelmed by the number of assignments scheduling.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

At the end of the study in academic session 2018-2019, two participants out of thirty had many semesters left to complete their degrees. Findings suggested that variables supporting participants to continue study. Generally seemed to me that participants views was the positive and negative factors affecting their asynchronous learning program at ( *OUS* ). In addition, respondents seemed to experience a higher level of interaction with their face to face courses. It is also possible that ( *OUS* ) did not prepare the program effectively and that adequate support the environment of ( *OUS* ).

#### **5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This is a case study which was limited to a small number of participants who retained in asynchronous learning program offered by Open university of Sudan ( *OUS* ) in the academic session 2017-2018. The researcher in this study attempted to investigate the major factors effecting women to retain in tertiary education rather than including women who had dropped out of the blended learning programs were unsuccessful. The sample had been taken from Open university of Sudan ( *OUS* ) main center of Khartoum city and it can be generalized.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

According to previous studies showed that women learners in higher education more than men in Sudan, more men than women are taking blended learning courses. In some countries the misperception still exists that women with small children are house bound and have no time for studies. 1-Authorities in Sudan should be taking into account that women continue to be primary caretakers of children and other family members.2- Gender roles are therefore an important variable to consider when designing distance education programs.3-Further researches can be conducted to investigate to what extent other

factors may support retention of women learners who have full-time jobs, as well as family and community responsibilities.4-Future research could explore both institutional and demographic variables that may significantly influence women's blended learning and academic success at the college and at similar institutions. 5- Additional research could investigate how disparities in professional and economic status affect women's ability to pursue a higher education specifically blended learning and/or online learning .6-Future studies may compare two types of education modes online and blended by testing experiences of women and men and or highlight differences.

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