# GENDER IDEOLOGY, SELF CONCEPT AND PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING PROGRAMMES AMONG BENIN WOMEN IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

Women, as adult learners, engage in educational experiences to enhance their personal lives, family well-being, and support national development. However, observations suggest that they often encounter challenges that hinder their commitment to learning programmes. While it is unclear whether these challenges are unique to women, it is likely, given the complex and demanding roles they traditionally hold in African society. To guide the study, four research questions were raised and one hypothesis were formulated. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 406 women of the Benin ethnic group, who are participants in adult learning programmes. The entire population was used for the study because of its manageable size. A questionnaire was used for data collection which was validated by three experts and the reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha formulae yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data gathered for the study were analysed using Mean (x), Standard Deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). Findings of the research showed that gender ideology exists among the Benins and that there was a significant and positive relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation in adult learning programmes among Benin women. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that cultural institutions should deliberately begin to refrain from gender expectations that influences negative self concept especially among the female gender that can impede participation in alternative education like adult learning programmes in later life.

*Keywords: Gender Ideology, Self concept, Women Participation, Adult Learning Programmes.*

## INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of adult education is to meet the needs of society as well as those of individuals. These needs range from social, intellectual to economic development among others. Usually, when adults engage in educational activities, they have specific desires in mind for example to improve themselves at different levels especially as regards the role they play in the society such as taking responsibilities which is the real essence of adulthood. The adult learner and the manner in which he or she learns best have been questioned and researched since the 1920s when adult education became a professional field of practice (Merriam & Caferella, 2001). Today, several theories and models attempt to explain adult learning. One of the most well known theories is Malcolm Knowles' learning theory of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn. Andragogy is a learning theory that is designed to address the particular needs of adults, and it is based on the idea that there are significant differences in learning characteristics between children and adults. In order to understand how adults learn and foresee their goal orientation, Knowles (1980) stated five assumptions about their learning behaviour. The five assumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who:

(1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning,

(2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning,

(3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles,

(4) has a problem-centred focus and is interested in the immediate application of knowledge and

(5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors.

Taking cognizance of the first assumption on self-concept, as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing, and because adults manage other aspects of their lives, they are expected to be capable of directing, or at least assist in planning, their own learning. Knowles suggested that the classroom climate should be one of 'adultness' both physically and psychologically. In an adult classroom, adults feel accepted, respected,

and supported such that a spirit of mutuality between teachers and learners as joint inquirers exists (Knowles, 1980). This suggestion comes from the understanding of specific contrasts between the adult and the child in terms of identity, where children have amorphous self-identity while adults have integrated self-identity. With an ideal self-concept, the adult learner is expected to thrive in a learning situation, but it has been observed that adult learners especially female learners, still encounter challenges arising from their self concept. While it is unclear whether these challenges are unique to women, It is plausible, considering the multifaceted and demanding responsibilities traditionally assigned to them in African society.

Different researches carried out in the past have emphasized the case for looking at factors inhibiting women's participation in adult learning programmes from different perspectives of social cultural realities such as gender difference, but not in the light of how these social cultural realities shape self concepts of individuals in general and women in particular and how it affects their participation as adults learners. Little or no attention has been devoted to the possible relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation in adult learning programmes with particular reference to a woman's ethnic socialization. In spite of the development of so many studies about self directed learning in Adult education, little is known about the relationship between achieving self directed learning and self-concept of the adult learner. If the level of self-directed learning comparable to other parts of the world is to be attained, it therefore warrants closer investigation as a critical research focus.

### Theoretical framework

This study adopted two theoretical frameworks:
1. **Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura**
2. **The Critical Theory of Adult Learning by Stephen Brookfield**

### Social Learning Theory (SLT)

According to Bandura's social learning theory, gender is not a fixed and predetermined attribute of an individual's biology, but a social construct that is shaped by socialization processes. The theory suggests that individuals learn gender through observation and modeling of gender-related behaviours in their environment, including their families, peers, media, and cultural institutions. In addition to the socialization process, the social learning theory of gender identifies several influencing factors that shape an individual's gender identity and behaviour. These factors include cultural norms and values, media representations of gender, and the availability of gender-specific resources and opportunities. For instance, cultural norms and values may reinforce gender stereotypes and expectations, such as the belief that men should be assertive and competitive, while women should be nurturing and emotional. Given the pervasive gender-typed messages in the environment, children and adults acquire a great deal of information about gender from observing their world.

While the social learning theory of gender has been widely applied in gender studies and has offered valuable insights into the socialization processes and influencing factors that shape gender roles and behaviours, it has also been highly relevant to adult learning and can offer powerful insights on how to address the challenges impeding women from participating in adult learning, particularly in contexts where gender inequality, cultural expectations, or low self-confidence are barriers. SLT emphasizes learning through observation, modeling, and social interaction, which can be used to empower women and reduce these challenges in meaningful ways.

### The Critical theory of Adult Learning by Stephen Brookfield

The Critical theory originally developed from the works of a group of Marxist German intellectuals namely – Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Freidrich Pollock, and later, Jurgen Habermas, all of whom were from the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. During its earlier development, the theory was concerned with the discipline of philosophy and the political cultural understanding of fascism. The theory later became applicable to the field of education (adult education precisely) in response to the construction of social identities that can limit access to education. Some adult education researchers such as Stephen Brookfield (Repositioning Ideology Critique in a Critical Theory of Adult Learning), Jack Mezirow (A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education), Michael Welton (Shaking the Foundations: the critical turn in adult learning theory & the Contribution of critical theory to our understanding of adult education), Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) and Oluwatoyin Mejuini (Women and Power: Education, Religion and Identity) have all embraced the theory, either by just reviewing the theory's implications for adult learning, or by adopting the theory, in part or in whole, explaining certain phenomenon with regards to adult education (Mejuini, 2012).

Stephen Brookfield's Critical Theory explores how power, ideology, and hegemony shape society, education, and individual thought. Emphasizing how dominant ideologies maintain social inequalities and suppress alternative viewpoints. Brookfield argues that critical thinking should involve questioning assumptions, recognizing

systemic oppression, and fostering democratic dialogue. He highlights the role of "hegemonic assumptions" beliefs people accept as natural but actually serve dominant interests. Through critical reflection, individuals can uncover these hidden structures and work toward social change. His work is especially influential in adult education, where he advocates for teaching that empowers learners to challenge oppressive norms. He stresses the importance of recognizing and resisting ideological manipulation in everyday life.

Brookfield's critical theory provides a framework for understanding and addressing the systemic challenges women face in adult education in Africa. By using critical reflection, challenging hegemonic assumptions, and promoting transformative learning, adult education can become a powerful tool for women's empowerment and societal progress.

### Self concept and Adulthood

The psychological study of self concept and its development has a long tradition and has received varying amounts of attention. Historically, the study of self concept has been approached from a number of different theoretical perspectives. According to a theory known as social identity theory, self-concept is composed of two key parts: personal identity and social identity. Our personal identity includes such things as personality traits and other characteristics that make each person unique. Social identity includes the groups we belong to including our community, ethnicity, race, culture, religion, college, and other groups. This social identity theory is pivotal to this study to understand the self concept of adult learners.

Self-concept is the conscious manifestation of one's own identity. The concept of self is mostly referred to as the totality of a complete, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his personal existence (Purkey cited in Alika, 2010).  Every person has some conception or ideas of his/her own self. Self-concept is not innate; it is developed by the individual through interaction with the environment. Adults with a positive self-concept are intrinsically motivated to remedy or continue their school having missed their first chance or dropped out upon the realization that they can make it after all. This shows that self-concept is dynamic and can be modified or changed.  Furthermore, self-concept is developed through the process of taking action and then reflecting on what the person does and what people say about what he or she does. The self-concept of an individual adult moves from that of being a dependent person toward being an independent, self-directed person.

### Concept of Gender Ideology

In different cultures across the world, there are expectations regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women respectively, and this has been referred to by scholars as Gender Ideology. The study of gender ideologies is concerned with describing and explaining cross-cultural similarities and differences in human views of women, men, and alternative gender identities (Philips, 2001). This concept of gender ideology, that is, culturally constructed nature of gender has rarely been discussed in relation to possible influence on adult learner self-concept in general and on women folks in particular. 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. Women's self-concept and identity often begin with an individual first confronting her own hegemonic beliefs about what is appropriate and/or not appropriate for a woman in a traditional gender-stratified society including articulation of power relations, especially the way men and women relate in society.  The socialization process in a patriarchal society is likely to shape the self-concept of men and women 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 self-concept required to thrive.

### Participation in Adult Education

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. 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-concept is said to be at the heart of non participation, (Hall & Donaldson cited in Onyishi 2004). 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. They 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). If participation or non participation is seen from sociological and psychological perspectives, factors or issues such as culture and self concept are worthy of consideration.

**Women Participation in Learning Programmes.**

According to Spencer (2006), women make up the majority of adult learners still; consideration for women has been consistently left out of the planning process in adult education. This is evidenced through the "deficit model" approach often used by educators which assumes that learners must "catch up" with the rest of society or with their peers, and potentially fail to consider the diverse knowledge and experience that learners bring to the learning environment. The result of this failure is that too often, it sabotages what might otherwise be a useful learning experience for women who feel devalued and defeated. Adult learning theory has also failed in the depth of its consideration of gender differences in adult learners. Studies on women have tended to observe only variations in the linear "adult life stages'. Some researchers have proposed entirely different ways of looking at the development of women. Caffarella and Olsen (2007) urged that women's social connectedness and multiplicity of roles, as well as a reconsideration of the presumed linear nature of adult development be examined. They also opined that no theory can explain the full breath of women's experiences.

**Ethnography of the Benin People**

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). 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. Today, the names Edo and Benin have been used interchangeably, Edo is better used in speaking vernacular while Benin in speaking English. 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 traced to the palace of the Benin Kingdom ruled by a king known as the Oba. (Egharevba cited in Eghafona and Osunde 2017)

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 rule 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 and men don't use the same bathing buckets, 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, the role and duty of women is to taking care of the children and the household, parents give high value to son's education because they are potential providers and perpetrators of family names, girls should be given priority on training in domestic chores rather than to their education, Parents give less priority on daughters' education because they will go away another house after marriage, the responsibility of giving out daughters in marriage is exclusively for men  as well as, women are 'seen not heard' to mention a few.

Historically, Benin women have occupied subservient and inferior positions except for the Queen Mother (Iyoba) who is given relative prominence, while other women paled into insignificance inprestige. The socio-political system of Benin is built on a firm patriarchal tradition. Hence, Bradbury in (Osezua and Agholor, 2019) revealed that the Oba had a retinue of wives and concubines which served as a royal reserve from which such women are given as gifts to loyal chiefs or for services rendered to the monarch. Women were generally seen as commodities to satisfy the cravings of males within a marriage arrangement that has a master /slave-like relationship. Despite the hostile environment which is averse to the women being able to fully thrive, women have defied the odds and have excelled in the society. A very good illustration of how antagonistic the patriarchal Benin culture was to women is the story of a faceless woman who achieved wealth by dint of hard work. She was

murdered by the, then Oba Ewuare, the same monarch who honored Emotan, a female trader, for her spiritual and financial support, which led to his ascension on the throne (Yakubu cited in Osezua and Agholor, 2019).

Patriarchy, deeply rooted in long-standing discriminatory cultural practices, is often highly resistant to change. While social change (driven by forces such as globalization, westernization, international migration, and even religion) is accelerating, this transformation may pose significant risks for women. In this evolving context, the female gender stands at a potential crossroads, facing both new opportunities and heightened vulnerabilities. The extent to which these shifts impact the safety, rights, and overall wellbeing of women, particularly given the varying intensity of patriarchal structures across different social groups in Nigeria, represents a critical area where further research is urgently needed. Hence this study is hoping to contribute to influencing the narrative by creating awareness about  Benin gender ideology, its influence on the self concept and participation of women in adult learning programmes and proffering the critical adult learning approach as a means of emancipating women.

### Statement of the Problem

Women as adult learners come into a learning experience to improve on their lives and circumstances as individuals and as well contribute to the improvement of family life and national development. For women to achieve this, education, whether formal or non formal has over time proved to be the bedrock of women empowerment and improvement of the status of women. However, observations at non-formal adult learning centres reveal that women particpants seem to be faced with the challenges affecting their commitment towards the learning programme. Whether or not these challenges are peculiar to the female gender due to the socialization process is used to communicate cultural values including articulation of power relations, especially the way men and women relate in society which is predominantly patriarchal possibly affects the daily lives of women and men differently and throughout the stages of adulthood considering the fact that the role and responsibilities of woman in traditional African society is complicated and challenging, placing them in disadvantaged position than the male counterpart. Hence, the study therefore seeks to find out the possible relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation of Benin women in adult learning programmes.

### Purpose of the Study

The study aimed at finding out the relationship among gender ideologies, self concept and participation of Benin women in adult learning programmes.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1.    identify the gender ideologies that exist among the Benins;

2.    find out if the gender ideologies shape the self concept of women participants in adult learning programmes;

3.    ascertain the relationship between gender ideologies and participation in adult learning programmes;

4.    establish the relationship among gender ideologies, self concept and participation in adult learning programmes;

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1.    What gender ideologies exist among the Benins?

2.    Do gender ideologies shape the self concept of Benin women?

3.    Do gender ideologies influence women's participation in Adult learning programme?

4.    Is there any relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation in adult learning programmes by Benin women?

### Hypothesis

Research questions four (4) was hypothesized to guide the study;

1.    There is no significant difference in the relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation of Benin women 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, Hence a census. 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 pilot tested with twenty (20) women from the adult learning centres who also formed part of the study sample. The data generated was then analyzed using Cronbach Alpha formula. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data gathered for the study were analysed using Mean (x), Standard Deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). 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 addditonal 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 ideologies exist among the Benins?

**Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation of Gender ideologies 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:** Do Benin gender ideologies shape the self-concept of Benin women?

**Table 4: Mean and Standard deviation of Gender ideologies on self-concept of Benin women**

| S/N | Item | N | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | My cultural background as a Benin woman influences how I see myself (fulfilled, inferior, proud etc.) | 406 | 2.94 | 0.27 | Agreed |
| 2 | The influence of cultural expectation on myself concept as a woman is positive | 406 | 2.40 | 1.55 | Disagreed |
| 3 | The influence of cultural expectation on myself concept as a woman is negative | 406 | 2.64 | 0.59 | Agreed |
| 4 | My cultural background encourages women to be achievers in every aspect of life | 406 | 1.89 | 0.68 | Disagreed |
| 5 | The patriarchal nature of the Benin culture give the men advantage than the women hence it shapes their self-concept differently | 406 | 3.04 | 0.54 | Agreed |
| 6 | My cultural background as a Benin woman influence the way I see myself as an adult learner | 406 | 2.94 | 0.24 | Agreed |

| 7 | My cultural background as a Benin woman did not encourage me to seek alternative education or skill even when I have missed my first chance of formal schooling | 406 | 2.53 | 0.50 | Agreed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | My cultural background as a Benin woman influenced my enrolment as an adult learner | 406 | 2.71 | 0.57 | Agreed |
| | **Cluster** | | 2.64 | 0.22 | Agreed |

**Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)          Decision Point = 2.50**

The data analysis presented in Table 4 indicates that the respondents rated item one, three, four to eight as agreed with a mean rating ranging from 2.53 to 3.04 while item two and four were rated as disagreed with a mean of 2.64 and 1.89. The standard deviation also ranges from 0.22 to 1.55. With these results, the above mean score shows that Benin gender ideologies shape the self-concept of Benin women.

**Research Question 3:** Do Benin gender ideologies influence women's participation in learning programmes?
**Table 5: Mean and Standard deviation of Gender ideologies on 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 | 2.27 | 0.45 | Disagreed |
| 2 | I am passive and give little or no input in my learning programme because of my cultural orientation as a Benin woman | 406 | 2.74 | 0.45 | Agreed |
| 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 |
| | **Cluster** | 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 one was rated as diagreed 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.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the relationship among gender ideology, self concept and participation of Benin women in adult learning programmes.

**Table 6: Pearson's r of gender ideology on women's self-concept and participation in adult learning programmes**

| Variables | N | r | Sig.(2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender ideology on self-concept** | | | |
| **Gender ideology  on participation** | 406 | .136 | .006 |

*α = 0.05*

Table 6 shows an r value of .136 and a p value of .006, testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant relationship among gender ideology, self-concept and participation in adult learning programmes" is rejected. Consequently, there is a significant relationship between gender ideology's influence on women's self-concept and their participation in adult learning programme.

**DISCUSSION**

**Gender ideologies among the Benins**

Research question 1 sought to find out what gender ideologies exist among the Benins. The findings showed that six ideologies raised are accepted as gender ideologies that 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 regularities. 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 ideology, 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.

**Influence of gender ideologies on the self-concept of Benin women**

Research question 2 sought to find out if Benin gender ideologies shape the self-concept of Benin women. Findings from the study showed that Benin gender ideologies shape Benin women self-concept. This finding is in line with that of Home, (2003) in which he stated that every society establishes a set of accepted behaviours to which males and females are expected to conform. In this regard, the roles ascribed to men and women vary from culture to culture and overtime they are accepted as normal.  In a related study,  Smith, (2007) showed in his study on pupils in primary school that mothers as well as teachers based their feedback on children's competence in mathematics not only regarding previous grades but the respective child's gender as well. Furthermore, mothers were even more prone toward gender stereotypes than teachers. Stereotypes were especially strong in feedback on achievements and had a significant impact on the children's self-concept. When parents endorse specific gender stereotypes (e.g., boys are better in STEM, girls are better in languages), they are more likely to uninvitedly intrude on homework, undermining children's confidence in these areas, and weakening their self-concept (These kinds of long-term influences by parents and teachers may have a significant influence over the years not only on motivation and achievement but regarding career choices as well

**Influence of gender ideologies on Benin women's participation in Adult learning programmes**

Research Question 3 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 (McGiveney, 2013).  Different researchers in Ethiopia 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 and 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.

**Difference in the relationship among gender ideology, women's self-concept and their participation in adult learning programmes.**

Hypothesis 1 sought to find out if there is a significant difference in the relationship among gender ideology, women's self-concept and their participation in adult learning programmes. With an r value of .136 and a p value of .006, testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the p value is less than the alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant relationship between gender ideology influence on women's self-concept and their participation in programme planning in adult learning programmes" is rejected. Consequently, there is a significant relationship between gender ideology's influence on women's self-concept and their participation in adult learning programme. .According to (Hyde and Kling, 2001) in their paper which provided a review on the impact of gender roles on women involvement in Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) in Ethiopia, contended that women who grew up having the same gender role expectations and behaviours as men are confident and develop positive self-concept about themselves than those who grew up having roles and behaviours different from that of men. It was also argued that the gender roles of women have implication for their participation in education in general and in functional adult literacy in particular. As many educators underlined, the gender role of women and how they were socialized towards these roles make them think that their roles are appropriate only at home and hence reluctant to be enrolled in the school, less expectant of success and choose those subjects which either provide them the opportunity to fulfill such roles or are consistent with their self-image.

It is widely accepted that culture is a means through which guidelines for appropriate behaviors, social norms including those related to gender are reflected (Arrindell, 2008). It is through one's culture that gender relation within the society and activities carried out by men and women are determined. That is, it plays a significant role in the construction of gender. Researches indicate that there is close relationship between culture and gender for example, culture and gender are entwined, interdependent and mutually defining to a certain extent. For Coplan in Hofstede (2001), culture and gender are not only related but they have a strong relationship that gender is a "cultural construct." Culture determines what women and men should do; the resources women and men should get including education. Culture plays a significant role in the construction of gender inequality in such a way that men have dominating position in different spheres (Kalkidan, 2007). However, Olomukoro (2013) posits that many studies have demonstrated the benefits of women literacy and education for a county's overall advancement.

**CONCLUSION**

This study established the existence of gender ideology among the Benins of Southern Nigeria having different expectations for men and women. The study also showed that self concept of women can be influenced by gender ideologies and all the more their participation in Adult learning programmes in later life. This is important as adult learners hail from peculiar cultural origins. This study has provided information about the culture of the Benins, which is engulfed with generations of patriarchal ideologies and because of the power of cultural transmission through socialization process, its possible interference with personality development such as the self concept of individuals should not be underestimated.

**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 which subjugate the female gender with its implication for their self concept. This is significant because self-concept is built upon perception, based on the knowledge gained over a lifetime of experience often from ones cultural orientation. This perception is based on the information gathered about values, life roles, goals, skills, abilities and much more.

• Towards improving participation by women, curriculum planners should in the planning of Adult Education programmes, ensure the inclusion of gender education and counseling in the curriculum to promote gender consciousness and guarantee a leverage for reorientation and attitudinal change.

• Identifying negative self concept among learners is important. As such, government and private providers of Adult Education should ensure regular training and retraining of adult facilitators and counselors so as to equip them with skills necessary to identify negative self concept, guide learners by applying insights from theoretical perspective on using relevant techniques, approaches and methods in adult learning practice and ultimately help them in achieving learning goals.

• Also, the Government through the National Orientation Agency, should sensitized the general public on the implications of cultural gender ideologies that constitute a serious violation and infringement on the right of women to human dignity so that they can be part of the decision making process especially on the protection of rights of women and the extinction of marginalization and discriminatory behaviours against women.

**Theoretical Application to Adult Education Practice.**
***Practical guide to addressing key challenges for women in adult learning using Social Learning Theory:***
1. Lack of Confidence and Fear of Failure.
Challenge:
Many women—especially those re-entering education after years away—struggle with low self-confidence or fear of failure, often due to societal messages about their abilities.
SLT application to adult learning practice:
• Women observing other women succeeding in learning environments builds self-efficacy (belief in their own abilities).
• Female educators, peers, or mentors act as models of success, especially when they've overcome similar barriers.
• Vicarious experiences (seeing others succeed) can be as powerful as direct experience in building motivation.
2. Cultural and Gender Norms
Challenge:
In many communities, women are expected to prioritize caregiving or domestic roles over education or career advancement.
SLT application to adult learning practice:
• When women see others like them balancing learning, family, and work, they begin to reframe what is "possible" for them.
• Adult education programmes can include community leaders or peers who model non-traditional gender roles, helping shift cultural perceptions over time.
3. Isolation or Lack of Support
Challenge:
Women may feel isolated in educational settings, especially if they are the minority gender or if they lack family support.
SLT application to adult learning practice:
• Group learning, peer collaboration, and study circles encourage social bonding, emotional support, and shared learning.
• Seeing peers struggling and succeeding creates a sense of belonging and reduces stigma or self-doubt.
4. Practical Barriers (Time, Childcare, etc.)
Challenge:
Balancing learning with domestic responsibilities or lack of resources (like childcare) is a common barrier.
SLT application to adult learning practice:
• Programs that showcase women learners who have found ways to navigate these barriers help others adopt similar strategies.

- Community-based learning environments can include role models who discuss practical coping mechanisms, creating a toolkit for success.

5. Perceived Irrelevance of Learning

Challenge:

Some women may not see immediate relevance of education to their lives due to societal messaging or previous negative school experiences.

SLT application to adult learning practice:

- Observing real women who used learning to start a business, gain employment, or improve their families' lives shows tangible benefits.
- This motivates learning through the lens of personal transformation and social empowerment.

### Practical framework using Critical Theory

Brookfield's Critical theory provides a framework for understanding and addressing the systemic challenges women face in adult education in Africa. By using critical reflection, challenging hegemonic assumptions, and promoting transformative learning, adult education can become a powerful tool for women's empowerment and societal progress.

Applying Brookfield's Critical Theory to women learners in Africa requires:

- Gender-sensitive policies that address the barriers women face.
- Community-based adult education programs that incorporate local cultural contexts while promoting gender equity.
- Teaching methods that encourage critical questioning of societal norms.
- Greater investment in literacy and vocational training tailored to women's needs.

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