

Trigger Factors of Academic Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Married Female Sandwich Undergraduates in University of Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract: This research focused on identifying the trigger factors of academic challenges and coping mechanisms of married female sandwich undergraduates, University of Lagos, Nigeria. The study adopted survey method. A sample size of 395 married female sandwich undergraduates was selected through purposive sampling technique. The data was collected using an instrument tagged “Triggers of Academic Challenges and Coping Mechanisms Questionnaire (TACCMQ)” designed by the researchers through literature review. The instrument possessed a reliability coefficient of 0.84 after been subjected to the split-half method. Data was analysed using percentages ANOVA statistical methods. The significance level for testing all hypotheses was set at 0.05. The results indicated that majority of the respondents subscribed to family-related factors and job-related factors as being the most prominent trigger factors academic challenges the encountered while personal factor was the least. The most employed coping mechanisms were both the avoidance and social support coping respectively while the least adopted mechanism was the problem-solving coping. The hypotheses tested shows that there were no significant differences in the triggers of academic challenges of female married sandwich undergraduates on the basis of length of years in marriage, number of children and age. However, respondents were significantly different on the coping mechanisms employed based on age and length of years in marriage. This research, therefore, recommended that the Management of the university should provide accessible counselling services to help married female sandwich students manage family and job-related factors as these factors contribute to their academic challenge

Keywords: Academic challenges, Coping mechanisms, Married female sandwich undergraduates, Trigger factors, University of Lagos

Introduction

Sandwich, otherwise called part-time in some cases, is an academic programme which provides higher learning opportunities for students, especially teachers who wish to pursue further studies but are limited because of other commitments, such as full-time employment or domestic engagements (particularly married women). This programme gives students the opportunity to alternate between academic studies and related work, with the studies mostly taking place during work breaks to enable students who are on jobs participate and obtain university degrees (Maples, 2023). In Nigeria, many universities run sandwich programmes in accordance with the government's goal of providing education for all regardless of limiting conditions. The sandwich programme is a form of university education in Nigeria whereby students are engaged in learning on part-time basis, especially in a fixed period considered to be relatively appropriate for the institution hosting the programme as well students. In spite of the obvious advantages, female undergraduates in sandwich programmes encounter a plethora of academic issues. Since these students live in different parts of the country, they are often required to travel to the university campuses at different times (as the case may be) for physical teaching, learning and tests taking. Married female undergraduates are susceptible to more challenges owing to the different factors peculiar to Individual. It is therefore expedient to find out trigger factors of academic challenges and coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich undergraduates in University of Lagos, Nigeria.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), in the National Policy on Education, detailed the goals of distance learning programme, which include, achieving lifelong learning and education for all by widening access, promoting equity, and enhancing national development through flexible, cost-effective education for underserved populations, the working class, and those seeking skills upgrades. The National University Commission, which is the regulatory institution for university education, set some basic standard to guide sandwich undergraduate programmes and ensure compliance with the best practices. Thus, its states among others that, for a programme to be eligible to run on part-time/sandwich basis, the university must offer the authorized full-time equivalent, obtain full accreditation, and operate on authorized campuses; Part-time and sandwich programs must last at least 150% of the full-time equivalent's authorized duration; and The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) must handle all admissions to sandwich and part-time programs (National University Commission, 2024). When one critically views the conditions set by the NUC, it appears that no exemption is given to married female undergraduates who may likely be combining enormous tasks of wives, mothers, and being key players on domestic affairs in the home-front. It therefore requires that all sandwich students, regardless of

marital status, will experience the same treatment, a situation that predisposes married female undergraduates to different academic challenges.

There are numerous reasons for choosing to go for sandwich studies in the universities across Nigeria. Osajie (2024) listed the following reasons: some students choose to pursue sandwich studies in order to have flexible control over time and resources; some may be working full-time to support themselves or their families; others may have family responsibilities that prevent them from pursuing full-time studies; and the high cost of tuition fees and living expenses of full-time education; and unforeseen residual costs. Maples (2023) identified two types of sandwich degree programmes as “thick” and “thin”. A “thick” sandwich course is a continuous placement in school that generally lasts a year. These courses are a type of educational programme that combines academic study with a substantial period of work engagement. Some of the benefits of this type of sandwich programme include continuous learning, limited travelling, and cost-effectiveness. The “thin” Sandwich course is made up of two or more placements and generally take between 2 and 6 months. This suggests that students would have to engage in academic activities for a shorter period in a contact unlike the case of “thick” type.

Pursuing higher education in Nigeria is frequently a daunting undertaking, particularly for those who must balance their academic obligations with other commitments or daily survival responsibilities, especially the sandwich students. More worrisome, married female sandwich students tend to face a number of peculiar academic issues as a result of having to juggle their academic work, domestic chores, and marital responsibilities. These unique set of challenges can have multiple tolls academic journey of married female undergraduates of this category. Researchers have shown different problems faced by sandwich students in Nigeria. According to Chukwuemerie et al (2024) some difficulties sandwich undergraduates encountered were erratic internet connectivity, technical issues during online courses, and challenges related to practical courses in distance learning. Madu and Musa (2025) reported that sandwich students faced challenges such as technical difficulties, lack of face-to-face interaction, poor learning infrastructures, and time management issues. Obisanya (2025) discovered several challenges faced by students which do not exempt married female undergraduates. The challenges include pressure (from self and others) to perform well academically, being an older student, poor classroom attendance by lecturers, inadequate financial support, and problem coping with other students from different backgrounds. If not adequately addressed these series of challenges can limit married female undergraduates’ overall academic achievements to a large extent. A study by Khan (2021) revealed that domestic role-imposed, health issues, emotional stress, time constraints, and restricted social engagements negatively influenced academic

performance of married female undergraduates. According to the findings of Hiremath (2024) on conflict of roles for married girls engaged in higher education, nearly all of the respondents (97.77%) cited the difficulty of juggling several responsibilities. The majority of 91.11 stated that they were unable to prioritise self-care, despite its essential nature. The majority of the respondents (77.77 percent) said that they struggle academically because of all the household chores they have to do. Among the students interviewed, 71.11 percent said they had difficulty connecting with and making friends among their fellow college students. When asked about the impact of housework on their academic achievement, most respondents acknowledged that it is something they struggle with. Similarly, Onojetah (2020) studied the challenges of distance learning in Delta State and identified administrative, technological, as well as pedagogical challenges and the mitigative measures as the major challenges. These challenges require some basic forms of coping method in order for students to survive with satisfactory performances.

Coping mechanisms are key in handling different challenges, especially academic; they can make or break how students bounce back from tough times and face future challenges in their academic pursuit. Healthy coping strategies could ease the pain and actually help students grow and become more emotionally smart. It not only reduces immediate discomforts but also encourage students' growth and EI (emotional intelligence). Coping is the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to deal with stress (Nagle & Sharma, 2018). Palhares (2024) categorised coping mechanisms into two patterns: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. In problem-focused coping, the cause of discomfort or emotional distress is actively addressed. For instance, problem-focused coping may involve assessing more effectively or asking for assistance from others if a person is excessively worried about an impending task. The coping strategy focuses on feelings: Instead of dealing with the cause of the discomfort, this kind of coping is based on controlling the emotional reaction to a stressful circumstance. Emotion-focused coping strategies uses deep breathing, mindfulness, and reaching out for social support. This strategy is especially helpful when the stressor is uncontrollable, like when a loved one passes away. Khan (2021) found notable coping mechanisms by married female undergraduates to include emotional and financial support from spouses, meticulous planning, and the guidance of peers and supervisors.

The impact of coping styles on mental health and academic achievement is well documented. Peretomode and Ugbomah (2013) found significant difference in the sources of academic problems of students of different number of years in marriage. Kwaah and Essilfie (2017) found respondents of different ages did not adopt the same coping strategies for academic stress. Gyambrah et al (2017) reported that age, duration

of marriage, and number of children could affect the kind of problems and coping strategies employed by married female sandwich students. Conversely, Lembas et al (2017) found no difference in students' strategies for managing academic stress.

The University of Lagos, like many other universities in Nigeria, adopts the "thin" type of sandwich programme. The undergraduates often come for 2 to 3 months each contact session thereby allowing them to resume their work placement after the period. According to University of Lagos (2025), the population of sandwich students was 2,539 (1,442 males and 1,097 females) out of the total population of 48,680 students in the university of Lagos in 2024. The university of Lagos has 38 academic programmes in the Institute of Continuous Education (ICE) which runs the sandwich programme of the institution. However, the academic workload within the short period is often overwhelming, especially for married female undergraduates who would have to play multiple roles of wives, mothers, and students. Trigger factors of academic challenges and coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich undergraduates in university of Lagos, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- What are the trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students of the university of Lagos, Nigeria?
- What are the mechanisms employed by female sandwich students of the university of Lagos, Nigeria to cope with trigger factors of academic challenges?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on age.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in coping mechanisms of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on age.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on length of marriage.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in coping mechanisms of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on length of marriage.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference in trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on number of children.

H₀₆: There is no significant difference in coping mechanisms of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on number of children.

Method

Research Design: A quantitative research methodology was employed for this research, specifically a descriptive survey, to identify the trigger factors of academic challenges and coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich students at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The descriptive survey was selected for this research because it enabled the researchers to collect and examine data from a sizeable population, and it also facilitated understanding of prevailing discourse.

Population and Sampling: The target population for this research consists of all female sandwich students at the University of Lagos. As of 2024, the total of 1,097 constituted the female sandwich students' population of the institution. The sample size for this study was 375 having been guided by the Research Advisor (2006), which suggested 357 as minimum for a population between 1,001 and 5,000 at a 5% margin of error and 95% to 375 to cater for attrition. Confidence level. However, 5% of the suggested figure was added to cater for possible data attrition, which totaled to 375. The purposive sampling technique was used to select married female undergraduates that participated in the study.

Instrumentation: An instrument titled Trigger factors of Academic Challenges and Coping Methods Questionnaire (TACCMQ) was used to gather the required information. The questionnaire was generated by the researchers, after consulting relevant literature on the subject matter. The instrument has three sections: Section A captured demographic variables; Section B contained items on four categories of trigger factors of academic challenges Section C contained 10 items on coping methods adopted by respondents. The instrument was patterned in alternative response format of "True of Me" and "Not True of Me"

Validity and Reliability: The instrument was subjected to experts' scrutiny in the field of measurement and evaluation and counselling psychology, Universities of Ilorin and Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was obtained through the split-half method and Cronbach alpha formula, which yielded $r=0.89$.

Data Collection Procedure: The researcher and two trained research assistants administered the questionnaire in person. To foster collaboration and maximize the return rate, a positive relationship was established with the respondents.

Ethical Issues: The University of Ilorin Ethical Review Committee approved the ethical aspects of this study. Data collecting was preceded with permission from relevant authorities and individuals that participated in this study. Hence, respondents were not

coerced to participate at any point in time. To preserve participants' confidentiality and anonymity, their names were not required.

Scoring Procedure: The demographic questions (Section A) were interpreted, using frequency counts and percentages. Sections B and C were also calculated on percentages in order to take appropriate decisions on the responses.

Data Analysis: Both inferential and descriptive statistics were used. The research questions were answered using the percentages while the hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Demographic Variables

Variable	Sub Variable	Freq.	%
Age	18-25 years	157	40.27
	26-35 years	122	32.53
	36 years and above	96	25.60
	Total	375	100.0
Length of Years in Marriage	1-5 years	61	16.27
	6-10 years	244	65.07
	11 years and above	70	18.66
	Total	375	100.0
No. of Children	1-3	83	22.13
	4-6	194	51.74
	7 and above	98	26.13
	Total	375	100.0

The distribution of the demographic data shows that 40% of the respondents are between 18 and 25 years old, 32.53% are 26-35 years and 25.60% are 36 years old and above. Length of marriage 6-10 years are 65%, 11 years and above are 18.66% and 1-5 years are 16.27%. respondents having 1-3 children 4-6 are 51%, 7 and above are 26.13%, while 1-3 are 22.13%.

Research Question 1: What are the trigger factors of academic challenges among married female sandwich undergraduates of university of Lagos, Nigeria

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of trigger factors of Academic Challenges

My academic challenge is trigger factored by:	True of Me (%)	Not True of Me (%)
Personal Factor	68 (18.13)	307 (81.87)
Family-Related Factor	295 (79.25)	80 (20.75)
School-Related Factor	249 (66.36)	126 (33.64)
Job-Related	289 (77.17)	86 (22.83)

Table 4 shows that family-related factor is the most prominent trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in University of Lagos, Nigeria with 79.25% of the respondents subscribing to it as being true of them. This is followed by job-related factors (77.17%), school-related (66.36%) and personal factor (18.13%) respectfully.

Research Question 2: What are the coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich undergraduates in university of Lagos, Nigeria?

Table 3: Percentage distribution of responses

Mechanism	True of Me	Not True of Me
Emotional Coping	153 (40.8)	222 (59.2)
Avoidance Coping	307 (81.9)	68 (18.1)
Problem-solving Coping	92 (24.5)	283 (75.5)
Social Support Coping	214 (57.1)	161 (42.9)
Spiritual Coping	208 (55.5)	167 (44.4)

The result in the Table shows that 81.9% respondents employed avoidance coping mechanism for trigger factors of academic challenges. This coping mechanism is the most employed among others. Social support coping is also significantly used with 57.1% respondents ticking “true of me” on the instrument and it is closely followed by spiritual coping mechanism. The least adopted mechanism is emotional coping and followed by problem-solving coping.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

H ₀	Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Crit. F	p-val	Decision ($\alpha = 0.05$)
H ₀₁	Trigger factors of Academic Challenges (Age)	Between Groups	87.029	2	43.541	0.61	3.00	.416	Not Significant (Retain H ₀)
		Within Groups	25,765.761	365	70.591				
		Total	25,852.790	367					
H ₀₂	Coping Mechanisms (Age)	Between Groups	2,539.191	2	1269.596	14.45*	3.00	.001	Significant (Reject H ₀)
		Within Groups	32,047.886	365	87.802				
		Total	34,587.078	367					
H ₀₃	Trigger factors of Academic Challenges (Length of Marriage)	Between Groups	327.171	2	163.586	2.30	3.00	.068	Not Significant (Retain H ₀)
		Within Groups	25,525.619	365	70.829				
		Total	25,852.790	367					
H ₀₄	Coping Mechanisms (Length of Marriage)	Between Groups	1,268.581	2	634.290	6.95*	3.00	.000	Significant (Reject H ₀)
		Within Groups	33,318.497	365	91.284				
		Total	34,587.078	367					
H ₀₅	Trigger factors of Academic Challenges (Number of Children)	Between Groups	25.051	2	12.526	0.18	3.00	.051	Not Significant (Retain H ₀)
		Within Groups	25,827.739	365	70.760				
		Total	25,852.790	367					
H ₀₆	Coping Mechanisms (Number of Children)	Between Groups	57.280	2	28.640	0.30	3.00	.047	Not Significant (Retain H ₀)
		Within Groups	34,529.798	365	94.602				
		Total	34,587.078	367					

The analysis of hypothesis one indicates that the p-value (.416) is greater than 0.05, therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in trigger factors of academic challenges among married female sandwich students at the University of Lagos, based on age. Hypothesis two shows that the p-value (.001) is less than 0.05. This implies that there is a statistically significant difference in the coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich undergraduates across different ages. The result

of hypothesis three shows that the p-value (.068) which is greater than 0.05. Thus, there is no significant difference in the trigger factors of academic challenges among married female sandwich undergraduates in relation to the length of marriage. The result of hypothesis four shows that the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, which implies there is significant difference in the coping strategies of married female sandwich undergraduates based on length of their marriage. Based on the result of hypothesis five, the p-value (.051) is greater than 0.05 suggesting that, there is no considerable variation in the trigger factors of academic challenges among married female sandwich undergraduates in University of Lagos, Nigeria based on number children. The output of hypothesis six indicates the p-value (.047) is greater than 0.05, hence, the coping mechanisms of married female sandwich undergraduates based on the number of children, do not differ significantly.

Discussion

The result from the findings of the study shows the most prominent trigger factors of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria was family-related factor. This could manifest in different ways which include the need to attend to children's and husband's care and constant thought of family while in school. It could be tasking for married female women to combine academic engagements with other responsibilities at home owing to the need to at the same time concentrate on school works. This is not in tandem with Chukwuemerie et al (2024) which reported the prominent challenges faced by sandwich undergraduates to include unreliable internet access, technical issues with online courses, and challenges with distance learning practical courses. The reason could be that majority of married sandwich student in university of Lagos might come from neighbouring states where husband and children could exert pressure of home front responsibilities since the institution is not far from their residence states. However, the present study is similar to Hiremath (2024) who reported that nearly all of the married girls (97.77%) cited the difficulty of juggling several responsibilities as the major source of their challenges in school. Other factors include job-related which could be tasking on respondents because of the pressure from work-place. This is significant because sandwich programme in Nigeria extends beyond usual period specified owing to different factors, such as inability of the institution to cover the required curriculum in record time. Another reason could be the irregularity in the period of the sandwich programme because of unforeseen fluctuation in regular academic calendar; sandwich programme comes up during the academic breaks of the full-time programme.

The research findings reveal a notable trend in how respondents cope with academic challenges. A significant majority, 81.9%, resort to avoidance coping

mechanisms, suggesting a prevalent tendency to sidestep trigger factors of academic challenges rather than confront them head-on. Bottomley and Neimeyer (2025) reported that avoidance-based strategies directly and indirectly contribute to poorer outcomes and impaired meaning making processes. This may suggest a better coping mechanism might work well with married female sandwich students than avoidance coping mechanism. In contrast, social support coping is also a popular strategy, with 57.1% of respondents seeking solace in their social networks, such as family members and friends. This underscores the value of interpersonal relationships in navigating trigger factors of academic challenges. Spiritual coping mechanisms are also significantly employed, implying that faith and spiritual practices play a considerable role in helping students cope.

On the other hand, emotional coping and problem-solving coping are the least adopted mechanisms. This disparity suggests that students may struggle with regulating their emotions and tackling problems directly, highlighting potential areas for development and support. The dearth of problem-solving coping strategies is particularly noteworthy, as it could indicate a lack of confidence or skills in addressing academic challenges proactively.

The study's outcome indicates a statistically insignificant difference between age and trigger factors of academic challenge trigger factors among married female sandwich students at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. This suggests that age may not be a determining factor in the academic difficulties faced by this demographic. Khan (2021) reported similar result on major source of academic stress among students. In contrast to the previous finding, this result indicates a statistically significant difference between age and coping mechanisms among married female sandwich students at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. This implies that age may influence the strategies employed by this group to manage trigger factors of academic challenges. This supported Kwaah and Essilfie (2017) who found respondents of different ages did not adopt the same coping strategies.

This study further revealed that there was no significant difference in trigger factors of of academic challenges among married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on length of marriage. This finding suggests that the duration of marriage does not significantly impact the factors trigger factoring academic challenges among married female sandwich students at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. This is not in tandem with Peretomode and Ugbomeh (2013) who found significant difference in the sources of academic problems of students of different number of years in marriage.

The study revealed that there was significant difference in coping strategies among married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on length of marriage. This result implies that the length of marriage has an influence on the coping mechanisms employed by married female sandwich students at the University of

Lagos, Nigeria. It suggests that as the duration of marriage increases, the students' approaches to managing academic challenges may change. The finding was in line with Gyambrab et al (2017) whose study also found significant difference in coping methods employed by married students facing school-related problems.

The result of hypothesis five shows that there was significant difference in sources of academic challenges of married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on number of children. This finding indicates that the number of children a married female sandwich student has would significantly trigger factors her academic challenges at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Probably, the more dependents (children) she has, the more her academic responsibilities are impacted. In contrast, there was no significant difference in coping mechanisms among married female sandwich students in university of Lagos, Nigeria based on number of children. The finding negated Lembas et al (2017) whose found no difference in students' strategies for academic stress.

Conclusion

Family issues top the list as the biggest trigger factors of academic challenge for married female sandwich students at University of Lagos, followed closely by job-related stress, then school-related issues, and lastly personal factors. The findings also paint a complex picture of how married female sandwich students manage academic challenges, with a tendency towards avoidance and reliance on external support systems, rather than confronting issues directly. Trigger factors of academic challenges are not affected by length of marriage, age or number of children. However, coping mechanisms differ based on length of marriage and age. Interestingly, coping mechanisms do not differ significantly based on the number of children.

Recommendations

- The University of Lagos Management should provide accessible counselling services to help married female sandwich students manage family and job-related factors as these contribute to their academic challenges;
- The university management should establish social support groups for married female undergraduates to share experiences since they use such to cope with academic challenges; and
- Guidance counsellors should organise awareness campaigns to highlight the challenges faced by married female sandwich students.

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