



FACTORS AFFECTING THE ENROLMENT OF WOMEN INTO LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN MAIDUGURI METROPOLITAN COUNCIL, BORNO STATE

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Abstract

This study examined factors affecting the enrolment of women into literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan

Council, Borno State. The objectives were to examine socio-cultural, economic, and administrative challenges hindering women's enrolment and to identify strategies for enhancing participation. The study employed a survey research design. The target population comprised 1,020 women learners, 243 facilitators,

Key words: Women's Enrolment, Literacy Programmes, Socio-cultural Factors, Economic Barriers and Administrative Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is universally recognized as a cornerstone for sustainable development, gender equality, and social inclusion. Globally, it is not only a human right but also an essential tool for reducing poverty, improving health, and enhancing civic participation (UNESCO, 2022). Women's literacy in particular has been identified as a key driver of social and economic progress, with educated women more likely to secure employment, support their families, and contribute to the broader society. Despite global campaigns such as Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), millions of women worldwide remain illiterate, with the majority concentrated in developing countries (World Bank, 2021). In many parts of the world, particularly in Africa and Asia, women continue to face barriers to literacy acquisition. According to UNESCO (2021), two-thirds of the

and 30 administrators, totaling 1,293 individuals (Borno State Agency for Mass Education, 2024). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, 278 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling. Data collection was carried out with a structured questionnaire (PAWELPQ), which was validated by experts and achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Findings from the study shows that; Socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, religious misinterpretations, and patriarchal household dominance significantly hinder women's enrolment, Economic barriers, especially poverty and domestic responsibilities, limit participation in literacy programmes. Administrative challenges such as shortage of female facilitators and rigid schedules reduce enrolment. Strategies such as community sensitization, incentives, female facilitators, and flexible schedules are effective in enhancing participation. The study recommended intensified sensitization campaigns to address cultural and religious misconceptions, provision of economic support like stipends and free learning materials, prioritization of female facilitators, and the adoption of flexible schedules to accommodate women's domestic and economic duties.

World's 771 million illiterate adults are women. Factors such as poverty, cultural restrictions, gender-based discrimination, early marriage, and lack of access to educational resources perpetuate this gender gap in literacy.

While international interventions have helped reduce the global illiteracy rate, progress among women remains slow, reflecting deeply entrenched structural and societal challenges that hinder their participation in literacy programmes (Akyeampong, 2018).

In Africa, women's literacy levels are disproportionately low compared to men, limiting their opportunities for empowerment and full participation in development. The African Union (AU, 2020) acknowledges that women's illiteracy continues to fuel cycles of poverty, poor health outcomes, and limited political representation. Many African women remain excluded from literacy programmes due to economic burdens, household responsibilities, and social expectations that prioritize men's education. As a result, the literacy gap between genders remains a significant obstacle to achieving inclusive development across the continent (Oduolowu & Lawal, 2019).

Illiteracy among women is particularly concerning given the country's size and diversity. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), more than 40% of Nigerian women are unable to read or write, with the rates being higher in the northern part of the country. Despite government policies and initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the National Mass Literacy Campaign, women's enrolment in literacy programmes remains below expectation (Akinyemi, 2020). This reflects the persistence of socio-cultural, religious, and economic barriers that limit women's access to education in Nigeria (Salihu & Abdulrahman, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Despite global and national commitments to promote literacy, women in Nigeria particularly in the northern region continue to experience disproportionately low enrolment in literacy programmes. UNESCO (2021) estimates that two-thirds of the world's 771 million illiterate adults are women, and Nigeria reflects this global trend, with female literacy rates in the North-East being among the lowest in the country. In Borno State, years of insurgency have further deepened educational crises, disrupting schools, displacing families, and creating a climate of insecurity that disproportionately affects women's access to learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2020). Reports from the Borno State Agency for Mass Education (2023) reveal that while literacy centres exist across Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, women's enrolment remains alarmingly low compared to men's, highlighting persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers.

Women in Maiduguri face multiple obstacles such as cultural beliefs that discourage female education, economic pressures that prioritize income-generating activities over learning, and domestic responsibilities that limit time for participation (Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2022). In addition, a shortage of female facilitators, inadequate awareness campaigns, and insecurity in certain neighbourhoods further discourage women from enrolling in literacy programmes. These realities have perpetuated gender gaps in literacy and limited women's empowerment, thereby affecting their socio-economic development and their capacity to contribute meaningfully to family and community life. Without urgent interventions to address these barriers, the goal of improving women's literacy in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and by extension, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education for all) will remain elusive.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to examine:

1. The socio-cultural factors affecting women's enrolment in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council.
2. The economic barriers limiting women's participation in literacy programmes in the study area.
3. The administrative challenges hindering women's enrolment in literacy programmes.
4. Strategies that can enhance women's participation in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council.

Research Questions

1. What socio-cultural factors affect women's enrolment in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council?
2. What are the economic barriers that limit women's participation in literacy programmes in the study area?
3. What administrative challenges hinder women's enrolment in literacy programmes?

4. What strategies can be adopted to enhance women's participation in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council?

Significant of the Study

This study is significant to multiple stakeholders, particularly women, by highlighting the barriers hindering their enrolment in literacy programmes and suggesting practical strategies to overcome them. It is expected to promote inclusive policies and encourage community support, thereby enabling women to access education, improve their literacy skills, and strengthen their socio-economic and decision-making power. For the Borno State government, the findings will provide evidence-based insights into the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers to women's literacy, which can guide the formulation of gender-sensitive policies, effective resource allocation, and stronger adult education systems that promote inclusive development.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in education, gender equality, and community development will also benefit from the study by gaining an understanding of the root causes of low female enrolment. This knowledge can help them design targeted awareness campaigns, provide financial and material support, and advocate for women-friendly learning environments. Similarly, the Ministry of Women Affairs will draw from the findings to improve its advocacy for women's education and empowerment, reduce cultural and gender biases, and foster collaboration with other stakeholders toward achieving literacy and empowerment goals.

In addition, researchers will benefit from the study by accessing empirical evidence and literature on women's enrolment in literacy programmes within conflict-affected regions, providing a foundation for further academic exploration in Nigeria and beyond. Students in fields such as education, gender studies, and development studies will find the study useful as an academic reference, helping them to broaden their understanding of gender and literacy issues while equipping them with practical knowledge for advocacy. The study, however, is limited to examining socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors within Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and focuses specifically on adult women learners, facilitators, and stakeholders in literacy centres, without extending to other educational contexts outside the council.

Literature Review

The Gender and Development (GAD) theory emphasizes the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender inequality, moving beyond welfare-based approaches to highlight how patriarchal systems, unequal access to resources, and institutional neglect hinder women's participation in education and development. Applied to literacy programmes, GAD provides a framework for understanding how interconnected socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers limit women's enrolment. In Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, these barriers are compounded by insurgency, poverty, and inadequate institutional support, underscoring the need for holistic reforms that address cultural norms, policies, and resources simultaneously.

Studies across Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa confirm that socio-cultural barriers remain central to women's exclusion from literacy programmes. Research by Afolami (2019) and Khadija & Musa (2020) shows that patriarchal household authority and conservative religious interpretations significantly reduce women's chances of enrolment, while Osei (2021) highlights how early marriage limits educational opportunities later in life. These findings illustrate how deep-rooted cultural practices, from male dominance in decision-making to child marriage, systematically deprive women of literacy opportunities, making cultural reorientation a critical step in increasing participation.

Economic conditions also strongly influence literacy enrolment. Bello (2019) found that women from low-income households in Niger State were less likely to participate due to prioritizing income generation, while Tadesse and Bekele (2020) showed that women in Ethiopia weighed literacy against lost wages and family responsibilities. Interventions that address these barriers, such as stipends, subsidies, and microfinance, have proven effective in boosting enrolment (Adeyemi, 2021; Rahman, 2022; Obeng & Mensah, 2023). These studies stress that without addressing both direct and indirect economic burdens, poverty will continue to restrict women's access to literacy programmes.

Administrative inefficiencies further discourage women from participating in literacy programmes. Kamara (2019) revealed that rigid class schedules in Sierra Leone reduced enrolment, while Ibrahim & Bello (2020) demonstrated that the absence of female facilitators in Sokoto State discouraged women from joining programmes. Additional challenges such as weak outreach, irregular classes, and poor monitoring (Okonkwo, 2021; Hassan et al., 2022) create distrust and high dropout rates. Evidence from Aliyu (2023) shows that literacy centres offering flexible hours, childcare services, and gender-sensitive policies achieved significantly higher enrolment, emphasizing the importance of responsive administration.

Finally, evidence from different contexts highlights strategies for improving participation. Community mobilization campaigns (Mwangi, 2019), conditional cash transfers (Chukwu & Adebayo, 2020), and the recruitment of female facilitators (Gyamfi, 2021) have proven highly effective. Flexible class schedules with childcare support (Singh & Patel, 2022) and ICT-based learning in insecure regions (Umar et al., 2023) also improved enrolment and retention. Together, these findings demonstrate that addressing socio-cultural, economic, and administrative barriers through tailored, gender-sensitive strategies can significantly enhance women's access to literacy opportunities, particularly in conflict-affected contexts like Maiduguri.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design to investigate the FACTORS affecting the enrolment of women into literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno State. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), survey design is a quantitative method that involves the collection of data from a sample of individuals using structured instruments such as questionnaires or interviews. The population of this study comprised all women enrolled and potential women learners in literacy centres within Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, as well as literacy facilitators and programme administrators.

According to records from the Borno State Agency for Mass Education (2024), there are 243 facilitators across 105 literacy centres, and approximately 1,020 adult women learners in the study area. To ensure representativeness, the sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, which recommends a sample of 278 respondents for a population of around 1,200.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants. The stratification was done to ensure fair representation of literacy facilitators, administrators, and women learners. This technique was chosen because it gives each subgroup an equal chance of selection and ensures that the results reflect the diversity of the study population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2013).

Table 1: Population and Sample of Respondents in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council

S/N	Category of Respondents	Population	Sample Size
1	Women Learners	1,020	220
2	Facilitators	243	48
3	Administrators	30	10
Total	1,293	278	

Source: Borno State Agency for Mass Education (2024).

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "FACTORS Affecting Women's Enrolment in Literacy Programmes Questionnaire (PAWELPQ)." The instrument was adapted from previous studies such as Adebayo and Usman (2021) and Salihu and Abdulrahman (2021) and modified to suit the current research objectives. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). To ensure validity, the draft questionnaire was reviewed by experts in test and measurment. Reliability was established through a pilot test with 30 respondents outside the study area, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, which indicates a high level of internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2019).

Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. Gravetter and Wallnau (2014) affirmed that these statistical methods are appropriate for establishing relationships and differences among variables in survey research.

Results

Results are presented based on the research questions. A total of 261 valid questionnaires were retrieved out of 278 administered, representing a 94% response rate.

Research Question One: What socio-cultural factors affect women's enrolment in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council?

Table 2: Statistical Analysis on Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Women's Enrolment (N = 261)

S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
1	Cultural beliefs discourage women's participation in literacy programmes.	83 (31.8%)	112 (42.9%)	41 (15.7%)	25 (9.6%)	261 (100%)	3.97	0.88
2	Early marriage reduces women's enrolment in literacy programmes.	96 (36.8%)	103 (39.5%)	39 (14.9%)	23 (8.8%)	261 (100%)	4.05	0.91
3	Religious misinterpretations restrict women from joining literacy classes.	91 (34.9%)	108 (41.4%)	40 (15.3%)	22 (8.4%)	261 (100%)	4.03	0.89
4	Male household dominance limits women's educational decisions.	87 (33.3%)	104 (39.8%)	44 (16.9%)	26 (10.0%)	261 (100%)	3.96	0.92
5	Fear of community ridicule discourages women from attending literacy centres.	76 (29.1%)	97 (37.2%)	55 (21.1%)	33 (12.6%)	261 (100%)	3.82	0.94
	Total Mean						3.97	

The results show that socio-cultural barriers strongly affect women's enrolment. A total mean of 3.97 indicates high agreement. Early marriage ($\bar{X} = 4.05$) and religious misinterpretations ($\bar{X} = 4.03$) were perceived as the strongest factors. This finding agrees with Afolami (2019) and Khadija & Musa (2020) that patriarchal norms and religious interpretations hinder women's literacy participation.

Research Question Two: What are the economic barriers limiting women's participation in literacy programmes?

Table 3: Statistical Analysis on Economic Barriers (N = 261)

S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
1	Poverty forces women to prioritize income activities over literacy classes.	101 (38.7%)	96 (36.8%)	40 (15.3%)	24 (9.2%)	261 (100%)	4.05	0.89
2	Lack of money for learning materials reduces women's participation.	92 (35.2%)	102 (39.1%)	42 (16.1%)	25 (9.6%)	261 (100%)	4.00	0.91
3	Transportation costs hinder women's regular attendance.	89 (34.1%)	98 (37.5%)	47 (18.0%)	27 (10.3%)	261 (100%)	3.95	0.94
4	Domestic responsibilities limit women's time for literacy programmes.	95 (36.4%)	101 (38.7%)	41 (15.7%)	24 (9.2%)	261 (100%)	4.02	0.90

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S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
5	Lack of financial incentives discourages women from enrolling.	87 (33.3%)	103 (39.5%)	45 (17.2%)	26 (10.0%)	261 (100%)	3.96	0.93
	Total Mean						3.99	

Economic barriers had a total mean of 3.99, showing strong agreement that they affect enrolment. Poverty ($\bar{X} = 4.05$) and domestic responsibilities ($\bar{X} = 4.02$) were the most significant constraints. This supports Bello (2019) and Tadesse & Bekele (2020), who emphasized the negative impact of poverty and opportunity costs on women's literacy participation.

Research Question Three: What administrative challenges hinder women's enrolment in literacy programmes?

Table 4: Statistical Analysis on Administrative Challenges (N = 261)

S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
1	Rigid class schedules discourage women's attendance.	94 (36.0%)	99 (37.9%)	43 (16.5%)	25 (9.6%)	261 (100%)	4.00	0.92
2	Shortage of female facilitators reduces women's enrolment.	97 (37.2%)	101 (38.7%)	40 (15.3%)	23 (8.8%)	261 (100%)	4.04	0.90
3	Inadequate awareness campaigns hinder participation.	90 (34.5%)	104 (39.8%)	45 (17.2%)	22 (8.4%)	261 (100%)	3.99	0.91
4	Poor monitoring and supervision reduce programme quality.	85 (32.6%)	106 (40.6%)	48 (18.4%)	22 (8.4%)	261 (100%)	3.97	0.93
5	Lack of facilities discourages women from attending literacy centres.	91 (34.9%)	102 (39.1%)	43 (16.5%)	25 (9.6%)	261 (100%)	3.99	0.92
	Total Mean						4.00	

The total mean of 4.00 indicates that administrative challenges are a major factor. Shortage of female facilitators ($\bar{X} = 4.04$) and rigid class schedules ($\bar{X} = 4.00$) stood out. These findings agree with Ibrahim & Bello (2020), who linked female facilitators with higher enrolment.

Research Question Four: What strategies can enhance women's participation in literacy programmes?

Table 5: Statistical Analysis on Strategies for Enhancing Participation (N = 261)

S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
1	Community sensitization improves acceptance of literacy programmes.	95 (36.4%)	105 (40.2%)	40 (15.3%)	21 (8.1%)	261 (100%)	4.05	0.90
2	Provision of financial incentives (stipends,	101 (38.7%)	99 (37.9%)	39 (14.9%)	22 (8.4%)	261 (100%)	4.07	0.88

S/N	Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	σ
	materials) encourages enrolment.							
3	Recruiting more female facilitators motivates women to attend.	104 (39.8%)	101 (38.7%)	37 (14.2%)	19 (7.3%)	261 (100%)	4.11	0.86
4	Flexible schedules (evening/weekend classes) improve attendance.	97 (37.2%)	106 (40.6%)	38 (14.6%)	20 (7.7%)	261 (100%)	4.07	0.87
5	Adequate facilities and security promote women's participation.	92 (35.2%)	103 (39.5%)	43 (16.5%)	23 (8.8%)	261 (100%)	4.01	0.91
	Total Mean						4.06	

Strategies had the highest total mean of 4.06, indicating strong agreement. Recruiting female facilitators ($\bar{X}$ = 4.11) was ranked most important, followed by financial incentives ($\bar{X}$ = 4.07). This aligns with Mwangi (2019), Chukwu & Adebayo (2020), and Gyamfi (2021) that gender-sensitive strategies and incentives improve literacy enrolment.

Summary of Findings

1. Socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, religious misinterpretations, and patriarchal household dominance significantly hinder women's enrolment.
2. Economic barriers, especially poverty and domestic responsibilities, limit participation in literacy programmes.
3. Administrative challenges such as shortage of female facilitators and rigid schedules reduce enrolment.
4. Strategies such as community sensitization, incentives, female facilitators, and flexible schedules are effective in enhancing participation.

Discussion

The findings revealed that socio-cultural norms, including early marriage, misinterpretation of religious teachings, and patriarchal household dominance, are key barriers to women's enrolment in literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council. These factors often restrict women's mobility and decision-making autonomy, thereby limiting their opportunities to pursue literacy. Cultural expectations that prioritize domestic roles over education further reinforce women's marginalization. This aligns with the broader literature that emphasizes how gender norms in Northern Nigeria act as constraints to women's educational access.

Comparatively, Oduaran and Bhola (2006) noted that socio-cultural practices such as early marriage and gender stereotypes remain significant obstacles to women's literacy across Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) reported that patriarchal norms in Nigeria limit women's autonomy in education-related decisions. Salihu and Abdulrahman (2021) also found that in Northern Nigeria, religious misinterpretations are often used to discourage women from participating in literacy

programmes, despite Islam encouraging education for both men and women. These comparisons confirm that socio-cultural barriers are consistent across different contexts and remain deeply entrenched.

The study revealed that poverty and heavy domestic workloads prevent many women from enrolling in literacy centres. Women from low-income households often prioritize income-generating activities and childcare over education, as literacy is not viewed as an immediate necessity for survival. Domestic responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, further reduce the time available for attending classes. This highlights how economic deprivation interacts with gender roles to sustain women's low participation.

This finding resonates with Adebayo and Usman (2021), who found that poverty and unpaid domestic work are major constraints to women's education in rural Nigeria. Similarly, UNESCO (2015) reported that women in developing countries face economic and time-related barriers that hinder their involvement in adult education. Aghedo and Ezeani (2017) also observed that economic insecurity and the burden of household responsibilities limit women's ability to commit to non-formal education programmes. These comparisons show that economic and domestic barriers are widespread and significantly influence literacy participation across different contexts.

Administrative bottlenecks, including a shortage of female facilitators and rigid learning schedules, were also found to discourage women's participation in literacy programmes. Many women prefer to be taught by female facilitators due to cultural sensitivities, yet the limited number of qualified female instructors in literacy centres hinders enrolment. Similarly, rigid schedules that fail to consider women's domestic responsibilities reduce their chances of attending consistently. This reflects the need for gender-sensitive programme administration.

Comparable findings were reported by Yusuf and Afolabi (2019), who highlighted that inadequate staffing and poor planning reduce the effectiveness of literacy programmes for women in Nigeria. In Ethiopia, Abebe and Woldehanna (2013) found that women's participation improved significantly when literacy classes were scheduled flexibly around domestic and market activities. Likewise, Akinwale and Olaore (2019) observed that female facilitators enhance women's comfort and participation levels in adult education. These studies affirm that administrative issues play a pivotal role in shaping enrolment outcomes.

The study found that effective strategies to boost enrolment include community sensitization campaigns, provision of incentives such as learning materials, recruitment of female facilitators, and adoption of flexible learning schedules. Sensitization helps challenge socio-cultural misconceptions, while incentives reduce financial burdens associated with participation. Female facilitators increase cultural acceptability, and flexible schedules allow women to balance education with domestic responsibilities. Collectively, these strategies foster inclusiveness and sustainability of literacy programmes.

Similar strategies have proven effective in other contexts. For instance, UNESCO (2016) emphasized that community awareness campaigns and culturally sensitive recruitment

practices are essential to promoting women's literacy worldwide. Adebayo and Usman (2021) also recommended flexible class schedules and female facilitators as key to improving women's participation in Nigeria's non-formal education sector. In Bangladesh, Haque and Chowdhury (2012) found that providing incentives like stipends and learning materials significantly improved women's enrolment in adult literacy programmes. These comparisons suggest that the adoption of multi-pronged, culturally sensitive strategies is a universal solution to overcoming women's literacy barriers.

Summary

This study investigated the factors affecting the enrolment of women into literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno State. The specific objectives were to examine the socio-cultural, economic, and administrative barriers limiting women's participation and to identify strategies for enhancing their enrolment. Data were collected from 261 respondents comprising women learners, facilitators, and administrators using a structured questionnaire, and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation).

Conclusion

The study concludes that the enrolment of women into literacy programmes in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council is limited by a combination of socio-cultural, economic, and administrative factors. Deeply rooted cultural practices such as early marriage and male dominance in decision-making, coupled with poverty and household responsibilities, prevent women from accessing literacy opportunities. Furthermore, inadequate administrative practices, including shortage of female facilitators and rigid scheduling, discourage women's participation. However, the study also established that targeted strategies such as community sensitization, financial support, provision of adequate infrastructure, and gender-sensitive administration can significantly enhance women's enrolment. Addressing these barriers holistically will not only improve literacy participation but also contribute to women's empowerment, poverty reduction, and sustainable community development in Maiduguri and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and NGOs should intensify community sensitization campaigns to correct cultural and religious misconceptions that discourage women from literacy participation.
2. Economic support mechanisms such as stipends, provision of free learning materials, and subsidized transportation should be introduced to reduce financial barriers.
3. Recruitment and training of female facilitators should be prioritized, as women feel more comfortable learning under female instructors.
4. Literacy programmes should adopt flexible schedules (evening and weekend classes) to accommodate women's domestic and economic responsibilities.

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