

Empowering Women through Online Education: A Case of North Cyprus

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Abstract Online learning increases the chances of women's access to education. Online learning helps women achieve their educational goals. In addition, it is seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals and ensure social, cultural and economic development of women worldwide. Because online learning provides flexible learning opportunities open to everyone with freedom of time and space, and facilitates education with the use of technology. In the light of the literature review and because of the scarcity of research about the education of women in North Cyprus, this study aimed to determine the educational needs of women living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This is a quantitative study, and the data were collected from 500 volunteers randomly selected women living in Nicosia and Famagusta cities of North Cyprus. A survey generated by inductive method was administered to participants, and the data were analyzed with SPSS 23.0 program. Parametric tests were used in the analysis since the collected data showed a normal distribution. Descriptive statistics, such as percentage and frequency, were used to analyze demographic data. 80.6% of the participants require receiving English language education, 74.6% require social media education, 100% of the participants require receiving courses about baby care, child development, adolescence and mental health, 32.8% of them require healthy nutrition courses, 52.4% require ceramic courses,

98.6% of them would like to take part in a choir to receive music education and 56.4% would like to receive sports training. 50.4% of the participants would like to receive their training at their home as online learning, 88.6% would like to receive their training before noon on weekdays and 69.0% of them prefer to receive synchronous bidirectional interactive type of online learning. In addition, 55.6% of the participants would like to receive this training for free.

Keywords Inequality in Education, Online Education, Women

1. Introduction

Human as a social being is responsible for maintaining its life economically, socially and culturally. The definitions of femininity and masculinity are concepts established and learned by society (Özaydınlık 2014). However, rather than the concept of gender, it is necessary for individuals to fulfill their obligations to maintain a harmonious life in society. This requirement can be achieved through education.

"The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams

and reach their greatest potentials because of artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society” (Olakulein ve Ojo, 2012). The United Nations Development Fund highlights five key dimensions of women's empowerment: education level/health, political empowerment, economic participation, economic opportunities, and well-being (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). Education provides necessary skills to increase productivity, efficiency of individuals to cope with the challenges brought into life by globalization and global competition. Education improves the well-being of individuals and allows economic and social development of societies. Individuals can reach their full potential, believe in their capabilities, and can participate in political and social arenas when they are empowered. The first step that enabled society to have the right to education was the French Revolution of 1789. These rights were subsequently included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Paris Agreement, the basic principles of the Council of Europe, and the documents of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Özaydınlık 2014). Later, with the effect of ongoing developments in the world and political, economic and cultural changes, the right to access education has gained more importance as a society.

However, when the educational attainment criteria in our developing world are examined, it is seen that the literacy rates of women, the length of education they have received and the achievements they have achieved are lagging those of men (Schultz 1993). This situation reveals the existence of gender inequality in the social sense. The difficulties experienced by women in exercising their right to education have brought along various social problems. The education that children receive in the first six years of their life is very important. From birth to school, the children spend most of their time with their family. Therefore, children initially receive education from their families. The education that the children receive forms the basis for the adulthood period. In this respect, the family plays an important role in child's education. Therefore, the first education begins in the mother's arms and then continues with the school (Kayadibi 2003). The education of not only men but also women is equally important. The way mothers, as women, approach their children, their problem-solving skills, and their academic supports for their children are among the most important reasons for their need for education. Women have the potential to create inner peace, productivity, and a healthy living environment at home. A mother's education in a qualified way means that she raises her children as qualified individuals and brings them into society (Summers 1994). In changing cultural and social conditions, the family needs education programs. The education of women in every field is of great importance for the development of countries. If women are empowered by education, they have fewer children, higher child survival rates due to

healthier, and better fed children, have great resource allocation to children, and have higher control over contraceptive choices (Kandpal et al. 2012). According to Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam (2003), the benefits of education to achieve gender equality and empowering women are quite big and education has a key role in this regard. The benefits of education in women's empowerment are: as education of women rises,

- Family health improves and child mortality falls
- Participation of women in the labor force and their contributions to their family and national income increase and this has a positive effect on nutrition of children
- Their daughters are more likely to have high educational attainment
- They are more active in politics and know their legal rights

With the social change created by the industrial revolution in the world, women entered the working life. The entry of women into working life has enabled them to take on different roles in business life, besides the role of mother and wife in society. The biggest problems of women in job employment are inadequacy in education level and difficulties in accessing information (Ekmekçi 2004). For this reason, women's participation in working life is based on completing their education in a qualified way. Women who take part in business life both feel the self-confidence of standing on their own feet in the psychological sense and allow them to be independent and free. Every woman has an aspect that she wants to develop, an interest, and an area she wants to learn. Creativity shows itself at the highest level in a place where knowledge is integrated with interest and perseverance. A society in which women are supported is productive and successful. For this reason, enabling women to benefit from educational opportunities such as in-service training, online courses, and open education should be among the primary goals of society. The development of nations shows a parallel development with the education of women (Kayadibi 2003). There are many areas where women want to improve themselves. The 21st century is a period in which both the innovations and developments brought about by technology and education become more interactive and the use of the internet becomes widespread. The frequent use of the Internet in daily life is an important reason for women to receive education in this context. The widespread use of the internet in home, work and social lives caused a multi-faceted development. Education is a key factor in women's equality and empowerment in all sectors (Sonowal 2013). With higher education, women gain economic independence and contribute significantly to their families (Malik and Courtney 2011). It is known that especially educated mothers can contribute to the education quality of their children more effectively (Ambe-Uva 2010).

However, the COVID-19 virus, which affected the

world in 2019, shook the world deeply (WHO 2020). This period, which is called the epidemic period, has negatively affected human life. Due to the spread of COVID-19 around the world, the internet has become more integrated into social life and has made it compulsory for every individual to learn the use of the internet. In addition, quarantine measures and restrictions taken due to this disease caused entrepreneur women to experience balance problems in their home and business lives, and the weight of the responsibilities imposed on women put women in a difficult situation (Peterman 2020). Women are loaded into gender roles by taking the role of mother in the family and the role in business life (Power 2020). This situation caused women to have difficulties in this process. For this reason, the need for educated women has increased, making it necessary to share roles within the family, regardless of gender. Increasing hygiene problems during the COVID-19 period have led to the attribution of housework to women and girls in the family environment. This situation is defined as an indicator of gender roles (Fidan 2020), but in order to improve the situation, it is necessary to share tasks within the family regardless of gender.

Education of women ensures their social, cultural and economic development (Seven and Engin 2007). It is necessary to increase the education quality of women and to support them by providing in-service training in areas where they want to improve themselves, such as music, painting and handicrafts, etc. Education provides the welfare, development, and raising of the level of civilization of society. Open and distance education provides flexible learning opportunities open to everyone with freedom of time and space, and facilitates education with the use of technology. Open and distance education increases the chances of women's access to education, thus reducing the inequality of opportunity in education; women can work at the same time while receiving their education and distance education is seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals (Ambe-Uva 2010; Ferdousi 2010; Azaiza 2012).

The study of Olakulehin and Ojo (2012) in Nigeria revealed that distance education increases women's literacy rates, has an effect on the reduction of infectious diseases, so that quality education is very important in combating poverty. Women's participation in open and distance education is crucial to Nigeria's democratization, poverty reduction, higher education attendance and empowerment (Ambe-Uva 2010). Ofoegbu (2009) conducted a study in Benin, Nigeria, and concluded that open and distance education has a high effect on women's enrollment in school and continuing their education. Buksh (2007) investigated the relationship between distance education and women's empowerment in Pakistan and concluded that women have more chance to receive education through distance education in Pakistan. Azaiza (2012) carried out research on 150 female students studying at the Palestine Open University and concluded that distance education is

potential solutions that will help women reach their educational goals. The results of the study of Günsoy et al. (2019) showed that Anadolu University Open and Distance Education System in Turkey has the positive effects on social and economic empowerment and women's participation on private decisions, economic trust, private independence and freedom, individual mobility.

There are few studies about the issues such as education, employment, career in business life of women in North Cyprus. Öksüzoğlu and Cizrelioğulları (2021) reviewed the results of the Household Labor Force Survey in Northern Cyprus between 2014 and 2018 from a gender equality perspective. In the light of the findings obtained in the research, it has been observed that women are exposed to social exclusion by staying away from employment opportunities, health, education services and decision-making processes. According to the Household Labor Force Survey, there has been a noticeable increase in the education level of women, especially among those who have completed high school and higher education. Despite the increase in education levels, it has been determined that the rate of women's unemployment and youth unemployment is high. Although an increase has been observed in the participation of women in politics in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) compared to previous periods, this rate is far from the desired equal representation and is well below the world average. In terms of participation in life, there is significant inequality between men and women. Debeş, Tatar, and Abalar (2021) aimed to determine the views of female administrators working in educational institutions of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on whether women's roles affect their careers according to gender equality and to examine their perceptions of strategies to cope with possible career barriers. Within the qualitative research, 21 female educators within the borders of Nicosia district were interviewed. According to the results, 57.14% of the participants stated that the role of women in the family did not affect their career. However, the participants stated that the male-dominated structure of career development on the ranking of positions did not influence career development, and 76.19% stated that it did not make an obstacle to their appointment to higher positions. The participants could cope with the career barriers they encountered during their career development, with a gender equality approach, empathy, patience, rational decisions, unity and solidarity with the opposite sex, and an attitude aware of their rights.

In the light of this literature review and due to the scarcity of research about women and their education in North Cyprus, this study aimed to determine the educational needs of women living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

Research Question 1: What are the training subjects that the participants want to receive?

Research question 2: Where would the participants like to receive their training?

Research question 3: In which period do the participants want to receive their training?

Research question 4: What type of online learning do the participants prefer?

Research question 5: What are the opinions of participants about the financial aspect of their training?

2. Method

2.1. Sample

500 volunteer women living in the two big cities of Northern Cyprus, Nicosia and Famagusta took part in this study. Participants were selected by using random sampling technique. Demographic data of the participants are presented in the results section.

2.2. Research Model, Data Collection and Analysis

In this research, quantitative research design was utilized. The inductive method was used to generate the item pool of the questionnaire to obtain the research data. Randomly selected 30 women wrote essays about the training subjects they want to receive, place, timing, preferred type of online learning and financial aspects of their training. As a result of the analysis and evaluation of the essays, a questionnaire consisting of three parts was created. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are 4 questions about the demographic data of the participants. In the second part of the questionnaire, there are options written to determine the type of education that women want to receive. In the third part of the survey, there are questions to determine the type of online education that women want to receive, in which environment and in what time frame they want to receive the education and their views on the financial aspect of their training. The obtained data were analyzed with SPSS 23.0 program. Parametric tests were used in the analysis since the collected data showed a normal distribution. Descriptive statistics, such as percentage and frequency, were used to analyze demographic data.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Features of Participants

In this section, demographic information about the participants of the study is presented. The age distribution

of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Age Distribution of the Participants

Age	f	%
25 and below	2	0.4
26-30	15	3.0
31-35	60	12.0
36-40	134	26.8
41-45	117	23.4
46-50	99	19.8
51-55	55	11.0
56-60	18	3.6

Table 2. Educational Status of the Participants

Education	f	%
Primary school	37	7.4
Middle school	143	28.6
High school	189	37.8
University	100	20.0
Master	26	5.2
PhD	5	1.0
Total	500	100.0

Table 3. Nationality of the Participants

Nationality	f	%
TRNC	181	36.2
TR	268	53.6
TRNC-TR	51	10.2
Total	500	100.0

Among the 500 women participating in the study, it was determined that the 36-40 age group with the highest rate of 26.8%, and the age group of 25 and below with the lowest rate of 0.4% (table 1).

It was determined that 189 (37.8%) of the participants participated in the research with the highest rate of high school education and 5 of the participants (1%) graduated from the doctoral program (table 2).

It was determined that 36.2% of the participants were TRNC nationals, 53.6% were Turkish citizens, and 10.2% were both TRNC and Turkish nationals (table 3).

Research Question 1: What are the training subjects that the participants want to receive?

Table 4. Training subjects that the participants want to receive

		f	%	x	Sd
Foreign language education	Greek	78	15.6		
	German	16	3.2	3.46	1.11
	French	3	0.6		
	English	403	80.6		
Computer education	Word/Excel	1	0.2		
	Safe Internet Use	126	25.2	2.74	0.44
	Social Media Education	373	74.6		
Baby care	Yes	500	100	1.00	0.00
Child development, adolescence and mental health	Yes	500	100	1.00	0.00
	Healthy nutrition	164	32.8		
Health education	Sexually transmitted diseases and ways to prevent them	77	15.4		
	Causes of cancer, ways of prevention, early diagnosis and treatment	120	24.0	2.57	1.37
	Pregnancy and contraception methods	85	17.0		
	Menopause	54	10.8		
Art Education	Painting	219	43.8		
	Ceramic	262	52.4	1.60	0.56
	Handicrafts	19	3.8		
Music Education	Choir	493	98.6		
	Playing a musical instrument	7	1.4	1.02	0.19
Environmental Education	Yes	83	16.6	1.83	.37
	No	417	83.4		
Home Economics	Yes	36	7.2	1.92	
	No	464	92.8		
Family Communication	Yes	165	33.0	1.67	.47
	No	335	67.0		
Culinary Arts	Yes	143	28.6	1.71	.45
	No	357	71.4		
Sports Training	Yes	282	56.4	1.43	.49
	No	218	43.6		
Sports Training	Yes	282	56.4	1.43	.49
	No	218	43.6		

80.6% of the participants require receiving English language education, 74.6% require social media education, 100% of the participants require receiving courses about baby care, child development, adolescence and mental health, 32.8 of them require healthy nutrition course, 52.4% require ceramic courses, 98.6% of them would like to participate in a choir to receive music education and 56.4% would like to receive sports training.

Research question 2: Where would the participants like to receive their training?

It was determined that 50.4% of the participants wanted to get their training at home as online, 45.2% at a university, and 4.4% at Public Education Centers under the roof of Ministry of Education.

Research question 3: In which period do the participants want to receive their training?

88.6% of the participants want to take their training before noon on weekdays, and 11.4% of the participants want to take their training in the afternoon on weekdays (table 6).

Research question 4: What type of online learning do the participants prefer?

While the highest rate of 69% of the 500 participants participating in the research wanted to receive synchronous bidirectional interactive training, at least 1.8% stated that they wanted to receive asynchronous bidirectional interactive training.

Research question 5: What are the opinions of participants about the financial aspect of their training?

Table 5. Place of education

Place of education	f	%
Public education center	22	4.4
University	226	45.2
At home-online	252	50.4
Total	500	100

Table 6. Time periods of trainings

Training time periods		
Before noon on weekdays	Weekday afternoon	Total
443 (88.6%)	57(11.4%)	500

Table 7. Type of Online Learning

	f	%	X	Sd
Synchronous one-way passive	112	22.4	5.20	1.58
Synchronous Bidirectional interactive	345	69.0	4.74	1.38
Asynchronous one-way passive	34	6.8	5.35	1.09
Asynchronous bi-directional interaction	9	1.8	5.88	0.60

Table 8. Financial aspect of training

	f	%	X	Sd
I can pay the full fee for each lesson	211	42.2		
I can pay a small fee for each lesson	11	2.2		
I would like to receive free training	278	55.6	2.13	.98

55.6% of the participants wanted to receive free training. 42.2% of them stated they can pay the full fee for each

lesson, and only 2.2% of them stated they can pay a small fee for each lesson.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

There is a fact that women take on many roles in society such as being mothers in the family, employees in business life (Power 2020). Empowering women by education in every field is very important because it contributes many benefits to their social, cultural, economic development, their families and the development of countries (Summers 1994; Kayadibi 2003; Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam 2003; Seven and Engin 2007; Ambe-Uva 2010; Malik and Courtney 2011; Kandpal et al. 2012; Sonowal 2013). It is necessary to increase the education quality of women and support them by providing training in areas where they want to improve themselves. This study aimed to determine the educational needs of women living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This is a quantitative study, and the data were collected from 500 volunteers randomly selected women living in Nicosia and Famagusta cities of North Cyprus. 96% of the participants are between age of 26-55, 37.8% of them have high school diploma, 53.6% are TR citizens, 36.2% of them are TRNC citizens and 10.2% of the participants are both TR and TRNC citizens. A survey generated by inductive method was administered to participants and the data was analyzed with SPSS 23.0 program. Parametric tests were used in the analysis since the collected data showed a normal distribution. Descriptive statistics, such as percentage and frequency, were used to analyze demographic data.

Recent studies showed that quality education empowers women, especially those living in the poorest countries. Quality education helps women overcome “the pervasive deprivations and constraints that women and girls worldwide face—from epidemic gender-based violence to laws and norms that prevent women from owning property, working, making decisions about their own lives, and having influence in society” (Hasan & Klugman et al, 2014).

The results of the analysis of data showed that 80.6% of the participants require receiving English language education. English language is a global language in today’s society. Learning English can open up many new opportunities for individuals (Mohammadian, 2014).

Women can get many opportunities by receiving English language education. Women can get more employment opportunities and they can be independent economically, their family incomes raise. In addition women can promote an understanding between communities and nations and their intercultural dialogue (Gonzi, 2004).

74.6% of the participants require social media education. By receiving social media education, women can use social media platforms securely and wisely. Social media is a strong tool that can help women to build engagement within a community, to be interactive and to share support.

Online platforms are amazing places for young females to make their right career choices such as STEM education and getting a career in science, building their own brands (Miss Osmosis, 2022). Carneiro et al. (2022) claims that social media platforms may be a valuable tool to educate individuals about diseases and treatments.

100% of the participants require courses about baby care, child development, adolescence and mental health, 32.8% of them require healthy nutrition course, 52.4% require ceramic courses, 98.6% of them would like to participate in a choir to receive music education and 56.4% would like to receive sports training. Countries can get benefit from the education of girls because if women are educated better about nutrition and healthcare, they marry at a later age, and have fewer and healthier children (Worldbank, 2022). In addition, education develops skills and capabilities of women such as critical thinking, communication, literacy and numeracy, increases their self-confidence, increases their ability to express their decisions, and hopes about their lives (Marcus & Page, 2016).

50.4% of the participants would like to receive their training at their home as online learning, 88.6% would like to receive their training before noon on weekdays and 69.0% of them prefer to receive synchronous bidirectional interactive type of online learning. In addition, 55.6% of the participants would like to receive these training for free. Many women in the world, especially in non-developed and developing countries, face problems of poverty, gender inequality, having not enough time to attend an institution due to lots of responsibilities. Online learning through open and distance education increases the chances of women's access to education and is seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals (Buksh 2007; Ofoegbu 2009; Ambe-Uva 2010; Ferdousi 2010; Azaiza 2012).

5. Further Suggestions

- This study is limited with the data collected from 500 volunteer women living in Nicosia and Famagusta cities of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This type of in-depth research can be carried out by the researchers to determine the educational needs of higher percentage of women who have difficulties in accessing education, and who lives in every city of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
- Universities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, can plan online training for the women according to their educational needs and their education backgrounds.
- This study can be replicated by researchers in other countries and women can be empowered by online education. In this way, gender equality in education can be achieved and quality online education will ensure the social, cultural, and economic development of women worldwide.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

F.Y.L. is the corresponding author and conducted the statistical analysis. H.Ş designed the study, prepared the survey forms, interpreted the data, and wrote down the article. F.Y.L. and N.H. contributed to research by collecting data from volunteer women, contributed to the interpretation of data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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