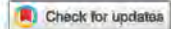


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## Coping experiences of graduate students on full-time employment and full-time academic programmes

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### ABSTRACT



There are full-time employed graduate students who undertake full-time studies at universities in other countries but there is minimal documentation of such engagements in Ghana. This study explored the coping experiences of full-time workers who are pursuing full-time graduate studies in a Ghana higher institution. Purposeful sampling was deployed to recruit ten graduate students from whom information was gathered using one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Findings from the study revealed that the participants' inability to secure financial support for their studies and the need to consolidate their jobs were the key factors influencing their decision to combine full-time study and work. Results also showed that flexitime arrangements served as the best strategy for coping with the two full-time endeavours. Additional results indicated that focusing on one role at the expense of the other and some form of subtle support from superiors were motivators for the study subjects to cope with the dual roles. Moreover, it was apparent that these full-time working-students often experience compelling challenges as a result of their engagement which are potential reasons for employment dishonesty among such employees. The findings of this study are important for consideration among higher educational institutions, employers, policy-makers, graduate students, and others.

### KEYWORDS

Adult education; coping experiences; graduate students; full-time employment; academic programmes

### Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adults need to transform into lifelong learners in order to function and be compliant to the operations at work as a result of the fast-paced technological world. This is evidenced in the premium which has been laid on the completion of graduate and professional degrees in various fields (Miller, 2013). This need has prompted many adults who left school earlier in their lives to return to school in pursuit of higher education, and as a part of their lifelong learning endeavours, in order to secure jobs or consolidate their positions at work (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Thus, Longworth and Davies (2013) define lifelong learning as the development of human potentials through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will need throughout

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their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments.

The quest to engage in formal education is challenging for many adult learners. Nair (2012) contended that the adult learner's ability to take up multiple roles, manage their time and skill to undertake self-learning presents a colossal challenge. Similarly, availability of funds could be a major factor to cushion adults to concentrate on their learning but Moreau and Leathwood (2006) pointed out that reduction in government finance for higher education has created social inequality in England, and as a result forced students mostly from low earning families to undertake underpaying jobs. In a related development, Boateng (2015) established that to finance their studies, a large number of e-learning students in Ghana engaged in full-time or part-time work which could be detrimental to their academic performance.

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, the emergence of technology and its usage in educational settings sought to bring flexibility in delivery and learning. Unfortunately, it has compounded the challenges of some adult learners in higher education institutions (Ra et al.). This may be due to their technophobic tendencies and lack of exposure to the usage of technological gadgets. Also, the self-perception of adult learners in higher education institutions and the perceptions of others about them tend to be a challenge when they are not well accommodated (Goleman, 1998) by faculty and younger colleagues. Additionally, the transformative learning experiences they have to undergo may present a challenge to adult learners.

In spite of the challenges associated with working and studying both full-time, some students still combine the two for various reasons. A topmost reason is the attendant financial benefits to support their studies (Richardson et al., 2009). Additionally, Moreau and Leathwood (2006) mentioned 'extras' and lifestyle as a reason for which students engage in work.

This study focused on a unique group of students who combined postgraduate studies with work, both on full-time basis. These students do not have the benefit of study leave with or without pay. Hence, undertaking the two endeavours full-time makes their case unique in the Ghanaian context and as a result deserves some investigations to understand their experiences.

From the foregone, it is evident that research on the phenomenon under study has been conducted mainly in America and Europe. The situation becomes even more compelling noting that research on full-time postgraduate students who are also full-time workers cannot be cited in the Ghanaian context. Some related works in the Ghanaian context touched on lifelong learning processes and challenges faced by adult learners pursuing e-learning or part-time studies and working (Boateng, 2015; Tagoe, 2011). Thus, it is imperative to explore the coping strategies of full-time workers who are pursuing full-time graduate studies in higher education institutions in the context of Ghana, Sub-Saharan Africa. In that light, this study sought to address three key questions:

- (1) What informed the students to combine full-time study and full-time employment?
- (2) What are the experiences of these full-time working graduate students?
- (3) How are they motivated to overcome the challenges they face in pursuit of their studies?

## Related literature

### *Conceptual framework: andragogy*

The concept of andragogy as popularised by Malcolm Knowles' is seen as a useful concept for this study. This is because it defines adults engaged in all forms of learning and outlines key principles guiding adult learning. Knowles (1980) and Pembridge and Parette (2010) emphasised that andragogy is the art and science of helping adults to learn. In strengthening the concept of andragogy, Knowles (1980) established four assumptions or characteristics of the adult learner. First, he identified adults to engage in learning by moving from dependency to increasing self-directness as they mature towards the point where they can direct their own learning. This serves as a premise

to engage adult learners in a meaningful way that offers them the needed autonomy as they progress through their studies. This is supported by Billett and Ovens (2007), whose study with Australian participants found that working while studying is a human resource initiative and will contribute to self-directed workers who can take initiatives on their own.

Secondly, adult learners draw on their accumulated reservoir of life's experiences to aid their learning. The third and fourth assumptions see adults being ready to learn when they assume new social roles and applying their acquired knowledge and skills immediately respectively. To a large extent, Knowles was right in these assumptions. What he might not have tested was whether their accumulated experiences and their readiness to learn positioned them to have a smooth learning experience at all times. In this case, they are engaged in a dual role. So, Nair's (2012) contention that taking on multiple roles is challenging to adults could be juxtaposed to the second and third assumptions in order to help understand the experiences of the participants in this study.

In 1984, Knowles added the last assumption that intrinsic motivational factors rather than extrinsic ones inspire people to learn as they mature (Gboku & Lekoku, 2007). Allen and Seaman (2016) and (Ra et al., 2016), for example, have underscored the challenges that adult learners are encumbered with, in their bid to study. It, therefore, stands to reason that a cardinal factor that is likely to spur adults to engage in both full-time learning and working is their intrinsic motivation.

Though andragogy has played a major role in helping to understand the way adults learn, it has suffered its fair share of criticisms. Two major criticisms in recent times include the notion that it is ambiguous and that it is not acceptable or applicable in every context (Housel, 2020; Loeng, 2018). Irrespective of the criticisms, andragogy has survived the storms and remains a cardinal concept in the field of adult learning. As a result, it has been chosen to undergird this study in order to have a good understanding of the coping experiences of a cohort of learners who are combining dual roles concurrently.

### *Adults in higher education*

Adult learners may participate in higher education for a variety of reasons. For instance, in a qualitative study that looked at the academic experiences of adult learners, Wolf (2010) established that older students enrol in a variety of educational programmes with the aim of personal and organisational growth. However, Goleman was quick to add that tenacity among such learners leads to a sense of integrity and wisdom while failure leads to despair. In essence, the adult learners' personal perception and inner strength determine their ability to cope with the challenges they face in their pursuit of higher education.

The challenges faced by adults engaged in higher studies are categorised by Cross (1981) as situational, institutional and dispositional while Potter and Alderman (1992) added academic factors as the fourth challenge. As indicated by MacKeracher et al. (2006), the institutional challenges include the methods used to design, deliver and administer learning activities. To this end, Baharudin et al. (2013) argued that a learning barrier is created when the methods used to design and deliver learning activities are unfriendly for adult learners. As a result, the same processes intended to facilitate adult learning end up becoming challenging to learning.

Similar studies on the African context by Setoi (2012) showed that older learners in higher institutions belong to the working class. This was extended by Boateng (2015) that adult learners in Ghana who are pursuing e-learning are engaged in either full-time or part-time work. The two studies touched on challenges with time, technology, health and finances. Hence, the inability of both educational institutions and employing organisations to give due consideration to the backgrounds and status of such learners (Housel, 2020) sets them on the path of failure.

### *Motivation to pursue graduate studies*

Adult learners face barriers as they venture into graduate learning, requiring high levels of motivation to survive. In support of the need for motivation, data collected from all participants in a study by Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Union in 2014 point out that students felt healthy and engaged in healthier lifestyles as they returned to higher education. The learners were also able to build new social networks, experienced improved well-being and generally felt motivated by the thought of improving their lives through formal education.

Moreover, in coping with challenges in adult learning, Rogers (2002) outlined few mechanisms which he called 'ego-defence' mechanism for adult learners to adopt and adapt in order to cope with their personal or dispositional challenges. Some of the ego-defence mechanisms outlined by Rogers (2002) are fantasy, compensation, identification with others, projection unto others or own impulses and traits, rationalisation, repression, sublimation, displacement, negativism and reaction formation. When these mechanisms are put into perspective then EACEA's (2014) findings show that returnee students who feel healthy and engaged in healthy lifestyles received credence.

### *Methodology*

To chronicle the experiences of participants in this study and retell their stories in a chronological manner, the narrative research design was adopted. Through the narrative approach, the experiences of individual participants through their own narratives were focused on. This design also allowed us to combine the views of the participants on their coping strategies to that of the researchers and review of literature and the conceptual framework undergirding this study.

The participants in this research consisted of ten graduate students in a Ghanaian university. This is made up of five students pursuing varying Master of Arts (M.A) programmes, three Master of Philosophy (MPhil) students, and two doctoral (PhD) students. They consisted of six males and four females. The youngest among the participants was 32 years while the oldest was 57 years. The duration of time from when they completed secondary school and started pursuing higher degrees span between two and 13 years. Nine out of the ten participants were employed in different organisations, with six as administrators and three as teachers, while the remaining one was a self-employed individual.

Participants' recruitment began when we attended a graduate seminar during the first semester of the 2017/18 academic year of which about 50 graduate students from different departments of the university participated. After listening to their introductions, we were able to identify those who were working full-time and engaged in full-time studies at the same time (the main criteria to qualify one as a participant in this study) after which among 14 who met the criteria, 10 agreed to participate. The samples from the selected 10 were deemed good enough as a representation because a small sample size enhances in-depth engagements. Thereafter, dates for the face-to-face interviews were agreed on.

The face-to-face semi-structured interview' questions helped to elicit participants' voices on: 'their reasons for combining full-time study with full-time employment'; 'the challenges they face in combining full-time study and full-time work'; 'strategies they adopt to mitigate the challenges'; and 'their motivation to succeed in their studies'. The rationale for the research questions was based on studies conducted by earlier researchers. Though this study is novel in the Ghanaian context, experiences of such cohort of learners transcend boundaries. It is thus essential to use these questions to establish the experiences of the participants of this study.

The five interviews with the M.A. students were held in the office of the lead researcher, the three M. Phil and two doctoral students were held in their respective lecture rooms. All interviews were audio-taped and conducted in the English language. All interviews lasted between 35 and 45 minutes.

In analysing the data, we resorted to Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal (2004) six-cycle process. These stages are analysis of biographical data (captured previously), thematic analysis, reconstruction of the case history, analysis of individual texts, a comparison between a narrative and the formation of different types of narratives.

In the second phase, we conducted what Ezzy (2002) termed a thematic analysis of data where all researchers read through the transcripts three times while listening to the audio-tapes to ensure the prose conforms with the audio. After listening to the audio and reading the transcripts concurrently, significant words and sentences relating to the study's themes and critical incidents were identified. This identification helping in agreeing on common codes which later became useful in arriving at the adopted themes.

In the third stage, all the bugs from the narratives provided by our participants were removed and their narratives reordered for chronological, logical and brief output. At the fourth stage, the summarised and re-ordered transcripts were analysed thoroughly. This led to the last two stages where the narratives were re-ordered and discussed. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants in this study as well as peer debriefing to get full consent of the data.

## Findings

### *Combining full-time studies and full-time work*

In the Ghanaian context researchers such as Boateng (2015) and Tagoe (2011) have studied the experiences of adult students engaged in part-time work or vice versa but not on those engaged in both on a full-time basis. This has left a gap in the motivation for engaging in both endeavours concurrently. Asked for the reasons for this combination, it emerged that the majority of the participants in this study were battling with finances and was concerned with the security of their job. Hence, the only option was to combine both undertakings concurrently. Throwing more light on this, Dan reflected:

I have to combine work and studies with equal effort because I need the certificate for my work and I also need money to pay for my tuition and support my family.

Ben's story was not too different from that of Dan who struggled to find his voice and eventually remarked:

How can I remain at work while people are coming with higher degrees and being promoted? Meanwhile, nobody is ready to sponsor my education or even give me leave. I need my salary to pay for my tuition.

Joe rather had to make this decision because he thought it was not worth gambling with the opportunity that had prevailed. He narrated:

My attempt to pursue a PhD has failed severally so I tried and succeeded this time. Unfortunately, I could not make arrangements for study leave since I wasn't sure of gaining admission. Now I have to bite the bullet and suffer as I combine my studies with my job.

Dan and Ben's reflections detail their challenges and their quest to survive. This dovetails into Knowles' third and fourth assumptions. These participants have prepared themselves to study amid challenges as a way of solving problems and position themselves at their workplaces and the larger society. Their engagements are characteristic of Moreau and Leathwood (2006) assertion that students may take jobs with the idea that they may not find one after higher education.

Reflections from some participants brought a twist to Knowles' second assumption in the sense that they did not only resort to their experiences to engage in learning but they also tap into their experiences as a lens to see the future. In that light, Ama noted:

I realized I may lose my position at work if I take study leave so I decided to keep my job while pursuing this degree.

It is clear that the majority of the participants were encumbered with challenges in their dual role efforts. However, Esi resonates self-directedness and intrinsic motivation in andragogy. She shared what follows:

Since I am my own boss, I decided to push my [work] schedules to my free days and weekends so that affords me the flexibility of working full-time and studying full-time.

The other participants mainly expressed that they were motivated to combine study and work as a lifelong dream so they remained somewhat indifferent about the consequences should their bosses discover that they were using part of their working time to attend lectures. Tusting's (2015) work demands and school demands domains are in full force at this point. Thus school-work-demands are competing for space in the life of these adult learners, making their undertaking a difficult one. It is somewhat clear at this point that the participants' intrinsic motivation is a major factor pushing them to engage in dual roles.

### *Juggling between full-time studies and full-time work*

Studies in this direction have looked into full-time workers engaged in online learning or part-time studies (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Boateng, 2015; Tusting, 2015), leaving a gap with regards to the experiences of full-time graduate students engaged in full-time work. In an attempt to establish how participants juggled between the two endeavours, a range of measures they adopted were articulated. For instance, Dan narrated:

All my courses appear on the time table twice a week, so I make sure I attend lectures once for each course and spend the rest of the time at work.

This experience is not peculiar to Dan alone, Kwame narrates how he also juggles between school and the office. He is quoted as follows:

Sometimes I have to get to the office early, register my name in the attendance book, run for lectures for only 30 minutes and get back to the office.

The two narratives above represent some dishonesty to both the educational institution and the employers. Based on the two participants' reflections, intrinsic motivation showed up strongly as they are exploring every possible means to go through higher education. By inference, their readiness to learn may be based on a prospective role that lies ahead of them.

Giving the strategies adopted by the study's subjects, Dan further reflected on how he taught he could rely on his undergraduate experience to help him combine study and work, both on a full-time basis. Though he is coping, his response resonates that adult experiences may have its limits. In this regard, Dan noted:

During my undergraduate years, my study leave was revoked in my third year when the management of my organisation changed, so I had to work and study at the same time for my final year but I made it so I am managing the situation again. Though it's tougher this time.

Agreeably, juggling between full-time study and full-time work cannot be an easy endeavour but there seems to be some respite for some of the participants. This may be based on a special arrangement made by the participant. For instance, Ama articulated thus:

After long negotiations with my principal and colleagues, my subjects have been shifted to accommodate my schooling.

In Esi's case, the organisational barriers relating to her work have been organised (use of flexitime arrangement) to fit into her study schedule. It must be noted that she is the only participant to have this leverage because she runs her own organisation. She intimated:

I have created flexible working hours so I don't miss lectures. On Saturdays, I have to be in the office to complete the week's work schedule while I study on Sundays to prepare for the week's lectures.

Apparently, the key strategies that seemed to have worked best are work rescheduling and flexitime arrangements as all other identified strategies seem to compound the challenges of the adult learners. Incidentally, only a handful of the participants have the benefit of this arrangement.

However, since the adoption of technology in education sought to salvage most of such breaches and challenges in attaining higher education, participants were quizzed on whether their university's learning management systems (LMS) have helped in their efforts. Incidentally, a majority of the participants thought otherwise. Two of the participants stated that their departments had not introduced them to any LMS, hence, could not count on it to help in their dual role combination. Conversely, two participants expressed slightly varied views about the use of the LMS. While one participant indicated that he is able to access materials and lecture slides from it, another participant (Ben) reflected:

The Sakai Learning Management System has been very helpful. It's not a headache missing lectures anymore. Most of my lecturers put lecture slides, readings and assignments on the system and accept soft copies of assignments. I only have to make time for the end of semester examinations.

It was noted that Ben was not different from other participants at the onset of his enrolment in higher education but as noted by Knowles (1980), adults learn when they assume new social roles. Consequently, he acquainted himself with the LMS which helped him to navigate his dual roles with some ease compared to the other participants.

Based on how the participants juggled between work and study, it became necessary to explore their experiences in terms of how one role affected the other.

### **Dual role effect**

As established by Nair (2012), combining work and study is a difficult undertaking. In the case of the participants in this study, work demands are having a toll on their studies and vice versa (Tusting, 2015). In a typical response, Mark reflected:

Wow! My bosses are always on me to complete tasks and the courses are even more difficult than last semester. I pray my grades for this semester don't get any worse.

Another participant, Prince, expressed a similar sentiment:

I try to maintain a credible performance at work but I am not succeeding. It's a matter of excelling at work and failing my studies but this is a post-graduate programme and I can't afford to fail or get bad grades.

In like manner, Joe seemed to be trading his promotion for his studies. His motivation to succeed in his studies seemed to be having an excessive toll on his work and his future prospects. This is shared in this statement:

I am burning the midnight candle to excel and serve as a model for my children but I can't say the same for my work. Honestly, I am sure my boss will not recommend me for a higher position which will be vacant very soon.

In all the three responses so far, it is apparent that the participants are driven by an intrinsic source to succeed. Further to this, Joe brings another dimension to Knowles' (1984) readiness to learn. His readiness is on motivating his children to study as compared to other counterparts who are motivated to take up jobs or consolidate their positions at work or in society.

The idea of multitasking being difficult seems to have been overruled by Esi who had used flexitime working arrangements to engage in full-time study. However, she had to sacrifice her social life in order to be successful in both endeavours. She recounted:

I have created flexible working hours so I can study but I am unable to interact with those in the industry for fresh ideas. Hey! Remember I am also losing money because I have to turn down some contracts to concentrate on my studies.

Esi's experience has a converse relationship with Eno who seemed to be bearing the brunt more than the others. She seemed not to be meeting the demands of both dual roles. She recollected:

I sometimes think I am falling behind so much in both. I can't wait to graduate but I am not sure I can pass all my courses this semester. Besides, there is a query from my bosses almost every month since I started this programme.

Compounding the situation, the participants face in their dual roles, Eno's voice represented that of the others when she added what follows with a sense of emotions:

I am not able to spend time with the family as I have to. I have to put a hold on all social events until I am done with this programme.

The views of the participants led to the conclusion that playing a dual role will leave an imbalance in the individual's engagements as an effort in one role impinges on the other. It becomes obvious that family and social lives suffer. In the extreme case, one account was indicative that succeeding in either of the undertakings was a mirage. In this light, it became necessary to inquire why the participants were still burnt on completing their studies.

### *Motivation to succeed in studies*

Adults have competing interests so their motivation is likely to determine the roles they are able to complete successfully. A question to elicit participants' views on their motivation to succeed in their studies owing to the challenges they faced generated varied views. However, the crux of the views centred on the experiences they had gained and the future they conjectured. A reflection shared by Ama follows:

Since I started this programme, I have gained more experience in training, research and consultancy activities ... team building and team working. I believe upon completion I will excel in my career.

This participant's view epitomises Billett and Ovens (2007) findings among Australian student-workers that studying and working are purely human resource development initiatives. She has acquired additional knowledge in her job area and she stands to gain more upon completion of her programme of study. She is not alone in that bracket. Joe also noted:

I know I will miss a promotion very soon but I'm not worried. After graduation, I will be moved to a higher office. Who knows? I may even get a better offer from another firm.

Another participant, Nana (the oldest participant), expressed the following view:

At my age, I have been introduced to the computer and social media so I can match up with younger colleagues at work and my own children.

The same participant recounted how excited he always becomes whenever his family pays attention to his experiences in school. Nonetheless, he still gave the indication he might attempt enrolling in a PhD programme to motivate his children and grandchildren.

The application of the knowledge already garnered also served as motivation for some of the participants who claimed they were being retained at work due to how effective they have been at work. In this regard, Eno noted:

I think the only reason why my bosses keep querying me and not applying drastic disciplinary measures is that they have seen how effective I have become. They can't deny that I have improved so much from the time I started this programme. Honestly, my current programme has helped me acquire a lot of knowledge related to my job.



The kind of support provided by faculty and younger students also serves as a source of motivation for older students. This was obvious when Ama reflected:

During my undergraduate days, those of us who were older were well accommodated by faculty but the younger students tended to mock us. Fortunately, we are not seeing that at this level. All are accommodating us and it eases our stress a bit.

There is a mention of faculty and younger students' support and even the indirect kind of support from managers (this can be inferred from a participant's response that her managers are keeping her at the workplace due to the improvement in her job performance since enrolling in higher education). The import of this is that support from others serves as a complement to adults' intrinsic motivation to spur them on in times of challenges.

The data gleaned from the interviews made it obvious that the participants were not having a roller coaster ride in their dual role engagements. However, their motivation is derived from the future that lies beyond their studentship. Kwame, who was so upbeat at this point, summed their perspectives in the comment that follows:

After all the stress I am going through, I will acquire more knowledge and skills to help me work more effectively and solve problems in my society. It is really difficult now but I can't give up. The future is bright.

By way of summary, it is clear participants in this study are having their own struggles with their school-work-demands but various factors serve as motivators to urge them to continue in their studies.

## Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the coping strategies of full-time workers who are pursuing full-time graduate studies in a Ghanaian higher education institution. This started with a discussion of the study participants' motivation to meet their school-work-demands. A predominant reason was the inability of the participants to gain sponsorship for their studies. The analysis of the data also revealed that there is no distinct strategy that helped participants to navigate their way through their dual roles. Also, the challenges they are encumbered with, in their efforts and their motivation to engage in higher education, which is mainly intrinsic and futuristic, came to light in this study.

It was revealed that the participants' wish was to have gained some form of financial support from their employers or other agencies but this eluded them. The understanding is that such sponsorship would have cushioned them against embarking on the dual roles concurrently so they could concentrate fully on their postgraduate studies. The absence of such financial sponsorships resonates the assertion by Ford et al. (1995) that many institutions are not providing financial support for their staff and Richardson et al. (2009) that flexible work times are not being created to enable workers to undertake studies concurrently.

The findings further revealed that some participants were not sure of their job security once they took leave from work for further studies. Hence, they preferred engaging in the dual roles to protect their positions. This is corroborated by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) that students will take on jobs with the fear that the jobs may not be available after higher education. In this regard, it behoves on organisations to make use of flexible time arrangements (Richardson et al., 2009) to enable such workers to study towards improving themselves and consequently be more efficient at work.

Fortunately, the self-employed participant had the benefit of creating flexitime so she could engage in full-time studies. It is admissible that as Billett and Ovens (2007) asserted, working and studying is a purely human resource development initiative to meet both work demands and school demands (Tusting, 2015) equally. Meeting the two demands means students would need a good time and resource management, supervision and control as key ingredients for success. This also goes to inform employers

and providers of higher education to give due consideration to what Housel (2020) termed 'educational backgrounds' and status considerations of people engaged in such dual roles.

On the issue of the participants' ability to juggle between the two full-time roles, the strategies outlined were quite varied and challenging. As noted by Nair (2012), adults' ability to take on multiple roles come with a price. For instance, missing a class per week to stay at work can be detrimental as students have to stay late at work to make up for the time lost while attending lectures. The implication is that they could never fully fulfil their two roles (Tusting, 2015) equally. In effect, the dual role engagement by most participants in this study raises issues about their integrity, honesty and loyalty towards their employers and institutions providing them with learning opportunities as they mostly attempt to satisfy one of their engagements at the expense of the other most of the time.

Furthermore, it is noted that engaging in higher education or employment means committing one's integrity, honesty and loyalty to the institution or organisation. However, given the modus operandi of the participants in this study, it is clear that at best, the three elements skew towards either their employers or institutions of learning. In the worst-case scenario, the elements may be very minimal when the participants are overwhelmed with challenges.

In line with Knowles (1980) assumption of adults relying heavily on their experiences, it was discovered that a participant initially thought that his undergraduate experience as a part-time worker could be beneficial to his current dual roles. Unfortunately, it was admissible that it had become tougher than he had envisaged since the graduate programmes require more efforts from students than lower-level programmes. Again, the fact that people become more self-directed in their learning as they grow (Knowles, 1980) is likely to compound the situation for such learners as they need to do a lot on their own to succeed than they did in their earlier years of study.

Interestingly, the findings of this study corroborated the varied findings expressed by students in the use of technology in teaching and learning in a study by Allen and Seaman in 2016. The majority of the students were of the view that it added to their already weighty academic work. This does not come as a surprise since most of the students were not introduced to such software in their undergraduate days neither were they using them in their workplaces (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Incidentally, few students were oblivious of the LMS since their departments had not adopted it, though it became obvious that they had been exchanging emails with lecturers and students, and also, PowerPoint was used during lectures. There is a clear indication that the kind of effective teaching and learning that is promoted by technology (Ra et al.,) cannot be ascribed to the context of this study.

Engaging in full-time study and full-time work will undoubtedly bring about some conflicts on the individual in what has been termed the dual role effect in this paper. This is an area that attracted some emotional responses from the participants. It was gathered that for some of them, their performance in both roles was waning. In that respect, their ability to respond to both work and school demands (Tusting, 2015) was minimal. Also, there is an indication that some or all of the barriers to adult learning identified by Cross (1981) were likely to be impinging on the participants' ability to perform creditably. Hence, their response to school-work-demands was not the best. This again calls for flexitime arrangements with employers, focus and discipline on the part of the students so they can accomplish both goals. Invariably, the flexitime arrangements will minimise challenges of integrity, honesty and loyalty among full-time employees who are engaged in learning full-time studies.

Obviously, working to ensure good grades at the higher education level is likely to affect the individual's work output and eventual recommendation for promotion. Even among participants who had been able to create flexitimes to work and study full-time, it still came to light that they had to sacrifice their social and family lives in order to succeed in their endeavours. Consequently, it became evident that the dual role effect has a toll on the individual, irrespective of the position occupied at work or the ingenuity of the person in the classroom.

It was also clear that both organisations offering employment and institutions providing educational opportunities for the participants were not doing much to help with the situation of this cohort of students. Once again, the issue of flexitime arrangements come into the picture in the case of the

employing institutions while those offering full-time study opportunities as evening classes could be a great opportunity provided for learning for such learners. However, the case of institutional barriers by Cross resonates at this point as well as the argument by Baharudin et al. (2013) that methods used by educational institutions to design and deliver learning activities are not friendly to adults.

Others also appreciated the benefits that could accrue at the end of their programmes of study. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) underscored the need for adult learners to engage in lifelong learning to secure their jobs. Besides, the arguments by Sandberg (2016) that adults gain knowledge to become employable after attaining higher degrees was foregrounded. This also resonated in the reflections by some participants who were likely to be promoted at work once they were done with their graduate studies.

Finally, it was established that the support which the participants received from staff and younger students served as motivation for them to succeed. Also, the students' own determination to succeed was very instrumental in their coping mechanisms. The findings, therefore, contrast an assertion by Goleman (1998) that older students were ridiculed by younger ones. However, the findings reflect the last assumption of andragogy in the sense that the participants had their minds on the gains they would reap in terms of knowledge and skills for their work and the future they foresaw upon completion of their programmes of study.

## Conclusion

This study has established that adult learners are determined to be in tune with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace and would engage in higher education to update their knowledge and skills. Consequently, all participants in this study have returned to pursue higher education for relevance in their places of work while still pursuing their careers. However, in doing so they adopted different strategies which are mostly unofficial and unapproved by both their employers and educational institutions. This is premised on the fact that financial provisions were not available and flexitime work arrangements had also not been explored. It was also revealed that one of the participants was able to negotiate with her superiors who eventually agreed to schedule her workload not to coincide with her lecture periods to help lessen her challenges in engaging in the dual roles. Unfortunately, this kind of arrangement could not be made for almost all the other participants as most of them hid their academic pursuit from their employers.

Furthermore, supervision and control mechanisms seem to be minimal at the workplace. Therefore, this cohort of workers takes advantage to engage in work and study simultaneously. Although it was indicated that the educational institutions are aware that most of the learners bounced classes to attend to work, they did not incur any direct sanctions apart from the students' personal fear of failure in assignments and examinations.

Despite the participants' ability to engage in-between their dual roles, it is obvious that they were not able to meet the school-work demands which is a recipe for mediocrity on both fronts. This reflects in the lamentations by the majority of the participants concerning how their efforts on their endeavours were having a toll on the other. Aside from that fall in performance at one end, the dual engagements seemed highly stressful for such a cohort of adult learners.

Despite the dual roles' negative effects and its concomitant stresses, the participants in this study are motivated with respect to the positive effects of the knowledge they were gaining on their performance at work and the kind of future they conjectured. Also, they found solace in the kind of cooperation they received from the staff of the university and their younger mates. Surprisingly, a form of subtle support from some superiors of the participants in this study was a form of motivation for them to continuously engage in their dual roles.

Overall, the analysis of data from the field identified that four of the assumptions of andragogy viz, one, three, four and five characterised the experiences of the participants in this study. However, the second assumption touching on adults drawing on their accumulated reservoir of experience to aid their learning did not show up as strongly as the other four did. This may be due to the difficulties associated with engaging in postgraduate studies being compounded with full-time work. Besides, there

is no clearly defined format for engaging in these two dual roles so the experiences one might have accumulated becomes limited when using those experiences to guide one's way under such circumstances. One surprising issue that cropped up was the ability of some female participants to negotiate for work arrangements while none of the males could do the same. Though this was not explored further, it is worth emulating by both genders.

## Recommendations

Through this study, the experiences of full-time graduate students who are also full-time workers have greater implications for human resource development, workplace management, supervision and work output. Extant literature has detailed how online students manage the challenges associated with their studies and work. However, lack of literature and policies on students engaged in the dual roles on full-time basis have compounded the challenges of the participants in this study. This might have contributed to the issues of dishonesty and disloyalty established in this study. Based on this finding, we recommend that flexitime working arrangements should be adopted by organisations so that such students can study and work both full-time as a way of developing the human resource in both practical and academic terms. This is in agreement with the Australian study by Billett and Oven that showed that the two undertakings are regarded as human resource development initiatives. Also, institutions providing learning should leverage the use of LMS and provide adequate orientation so that full-time workers can engage in full-time studies without necessarily being physically present in the lecture room. This means higher institutions offering postgraduate programmes need to revisit their regulations on class attendance. With these cases, the blended mode can be adopted so that students can attend classes in the times apportioned for lectures and related activities or in the evenings while remaining at work during official hours.

Furthermore, the five assumptions of andragogy, which touch on the key characteristics of adult learners, should be critically considered by organisations providing employment for such learners as well as the institutions providing learning in order for them to fully understand their students and their characteristics, and help them to succeed in their school-work-demands equally.

Lastly, national policies should be developed and implemented so organisations would be compelled to financially support workers after they have served a certain number of years. This will contribute to human resource development initiative and will eventually build a cohort of employees who are fully fit for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century job market and can confidently compete with their counterparts everywhere.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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