

**CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE  
VODAFONE/ UEW EDUCATIONAL FUND FOR FUTURE WOMEN  
LEADERS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF  
EDUCATION, WINNEBA, GHANA.**

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**Abstract**

The study investigates the challenges that confront beneficiaries of the Vodafone/UEW Educational Fund in pursuing their studies in UEW. The study is a qualitative research that employed interview and observation data collection instruments to elicit responses from the respondents. In all, Ten (10) beneficiaries' were used as the sample size as this was the total number of awardees of the scholarship scheme. The data collected was analyzed on a thematic basis with the assistance of the Atlas ti data analysis software and the three main themes used were as follows: academic, psychological and domestic challenges. The findings of the study were categorized under the main themes mentioned earlier. The Academic challenges included: lack of concentration; desire to have higher grades and lack of a personal computer. Whiles, psychological challenges brought to light issues such as lack of confidence to speak in public and forgetfulness during examination. Last but not the least; the domestic challenges threw light on various pressures from home. The study recommended the urgent need for counselling sessions to be organized for the beneficiaries on a regular basis. There was also the need for constant monitoring of beneficiaries academic progress so as to ensure that they lived up to the expectation of the fund.

Keywords: Challenges, Scholarship Scheme, Beneficiaries.

**Introduction**

All across the globe, financial assistance are given to students at all levels of education to help them go through their education successfully without any financial constraints. Such forms of assistance come in different forms and packages. One such package of financial assistance to students has

been scholarship schemes for female undergraduate students. Though the award of scholarship schemes have brought about several benefits to its beneficiaries, it has been well documented that the award of scholarships to students does not automatically translate into improvement in students academic performances (Ali, 2010; Watson & Opolot-Okurut, 2012; Ahimbisibwe & Muhwezi, 2002; Adu & Annan, 2013). There were still recorded incidences of drop-out from school after scholarships were given (Ali, 2010; Watson & Opolot-Okurut, 2012). The rates of drop-out for females were quite higher than that of boys (Ali, 2010; Watson & Opolot-Okurut, 2012). Issues such as lack of learning resources, poor infrastructure, domestic challenges, psychological problems and pregnancy among others have been listed as major contributory factors to the low academic performances of scholarship beneficiaries, which in some instances have led to their drop-out (Ahimbisibwe & Muhwezi, 2002; Watson & Opolot-Okurut, 2012; Adu & Annan, 2013).

As a way of addressing the challenges of the scholarship beneficiaries, some scholarship schemes organize retreats and counselling sessions for the beneficiaries (Girl Child Concerns, 2013; Ahimbisibwe & Muhwezi, 2002; Watson & Opolot-Okurut, 2012; Adu & Annan, 2013). During such programmes, female role models and alumni of the scheme who have excelled in their fields of endeavour are brought together to interact with the beneficiaries. Other schemes such as the UEW/ Carnegie Scholarship Scheme have also had the coordinators of the scholarship scheme organizing regular interactions with the beneficiaries to address their many challenges (Adu & Annan, 2013). All these strategies to a larger extent have been beneficial to ensure the holistic development of the beneficiaries.

### **Statement of Problem**

The Vodafone/UEW Educational Fund for Future Women Leaders in Science & Technology was set up for the first time in 2013 through a collaborative effort between Vodafone Ghana and the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). The educational fund was set up as a continuation of efforts aimed at addressing the gender gap in student representation in the sciences, which was initiated through the Carnegie support. The study assesses whether or not the beneficiaries of the present scheme still face challenges and also the extent of the challenges.

### **Objective of Study**

The study assesses the challenges beneficiaries of the Vodafone/UEW Educational Fund for Future Women Leaders in Science & Technology face in the course of the scholarship awarded.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are some of the challenges beneficiaries face?
2. What measure (s) is/ are put in place to address those challenges?
3. What other measures could be put in place to address those challenges?

## **Methodology**

The study adopted the qualitative research approach. Holloway and Wheeler (2002:30) refer to qualitative research as “a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experience and the world in which they live”.

The population for the study was ten (10) scholarship beneficiaries. These Ten (10) beneficiaries formed the total number of awardees of the Vodafone/ UEW Educational Fund for Future Women Leaders in Science & Technology Scholarship Scheme. The research used the purposive sampling technique to select all 10 beneficiaries as respondents of the study because it was felt that all the 10 beneficiaries of the present scheme had opinions to express about the challenges they were encountering and that limiting it to just a selected few would not be appropriate in terms of shedding light on those challenges. Hence, all 10 beneficiaries were chosen as sample size because they were all qualified to share their knowledge and experiences on the challenges they encountered. According to Parahoo (1997:232) purposive sampling is “a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data”.

Interview and observation data collection instruments were used to elicit responses. According to Kusi (2012) interviews and observation assist the researcher to explore the feelings and experiences of the research participants. Focus Group Interview was also conducted for the respondents. According to Bell (2008:49), Focus Group Interviews enables the researcher to bring a number of participants together at one convenient location at one time to assess their views/ opinions, experiences and feelings about a phenomenon under study. Observations were used to gather non-verbal cues to substantiate the qualitative data gathered through the interviews. Documentary evidence was also used for the research.

Nine (9) of the respondents were on Winneba campus of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and One (1) was from the College of Agricultural Education, Mampong Campus of UEW. All the respondents were in level two hundred (200) of their studies. Four (4) of the beneficiaries read Mathematics Education, whiles, Two (2) read Information, Communication and Technology (ICT). Also, One (1) read Chemistry, another One (1) read Physics, One (1) again read Health Physical Education Recreation & Sports (HPERS) and also One (1) read Agricultural Education.

The data was analyzed using the Atlas ti qualitative software and were based on three themes. These were: Academic, Psychological and Domestic Challenges.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section of the paper discusses the results of the study. The results of the study elucidate the challenges confronting the beneficiaries of the scheme. Several important issues were brought to light for discussion as highlighted below in subsequent paragraphs of this paper.

## Challenges Beneficiaries Face

The following responses were gathered from the interview conducted with the beneficiaries. It has been captioned under three main thematic areas: academic challenge, psychological challenge and domestic problems. These are expatiated below:

### Academic Challenge

Six (6) representing sixty percent (60%) of the beneficiaries mentioned their academics as a challenge. From the explanations given by these beneficiaries, it could be inferred that the scholarship was not an end in itself but a means to an end. The following extract tells the extent of the challenge.

A respondent shared in an interview that:

*“My major challenge is discipline for study. I find it very difficult to sit at one place to study. I constantly get up from my seat to watch what is going on outside my study place and this is seriously affecting my study. I am unable to concentrate when reading.”*

Another remarked:

*“I find my academic work as a major challenge. I want to have good grades and I see that as a major challenge affecting my learning.”*

Still another mentioned:

*“Lack of a personal computer for studies is a major challenge I am facing now.”*

The findings affirm the assertion that the award of scholarships do not automatically impact on the academic performances of beneficiaries (Watson & Opolot - Okurut, 2012; Ali, 2010). As mentioned in the literature, the lack of learning resources such as personal computer poses a major challenge to the academic performances of beneficiaries (Adu & Annan, 2013).

### Psychological Challenge

Eight (8) of the beneficiaries, representing eighty percent (80%) indicated that a sudden fear griped them anytime they attempted to speak in public. The following responses were gathered:

One beneficiary mentioned:

*“I lack confidence to speak in public...Anytime I attempt to speak my voice begins to shake”*

Also, another indicated:

*“I have learning problems. I find it difficult to recollect what I have learnt during examinations and this is seriously affecting my grades.”*

Psychological challenges have been mentioned by Ahimbisibwe & Muhwezi (2002) as one of the challenges which affects the performances of beneficiaries in school. The psychological challenges are manifested in different ways as illustrated in the findings on this subject.

### **Domestic Problems**

Two (2) who represented twenty percent (20%) of the beneficiaries also pointed at domestic responsibilities as the challenge affecting their academic work. This, they mentioned had a heavy tow on their academics. The statements below expatiate on some few:

One beneficiary indicated that:

*“I am afraid of my responsibilities at home. I mean, I am scared. I am now the only hope of my parent even though I am the second born. The first born (sister) is mentally derailed and as a result my younger siblings expect me to take up the responsibility of caring for them. My fear is that I am in school and not working to earn enough money to assist them as they expect of me.”*

Another beneficiary lamented:

*“I live at home and attend lectures. I find it very difficult to concentrate on my learning. My mother often interrupts with errands anytime I sit to study”*

Domestic and social problems have been mentioned as challenges perceived to be of influence over scholarship beneficiaries academic performances (Ahimbisibwe & Muhwezi, 2002).

### **Measures put in place to address beneficiaries’ challenges**

On finding out from beneficiaries the measures put in place by the coordinators to address these challenges faced, the following came to light: Meetings were organized with students regularly to address their challenges. Several motivational speakers and counsellors were often brought on board to advice and share their own experiences with them. All the respondents commended the coordinators for such efforts, whiles urging them to continue the practice. Through such interactive seminars, all the beneficiaries (100%) remarked that their fears have been allayed and they felt reassured of constant support amid their challenges.

Also, the beneficiaries of the scholarship scheme noted that their membership in the Students Gender Club have helped to develop their confidence levels as the Club serves as a preparatory ground for students to take up future leadership positions.

To substantiate the relevance of counselling sessions for scholarship beneficiaries, according to Watson & Opolot-Okurut (2012) and Adu & Annan (2013) Counselling and interactive sessions have been a regular feature of the Mvule Trust and the UEW/ Carnegie Scholarship Scheme. It has been documented by these researchers that the counselling sessions have had a tremendous impact on the beneficiaries of these schemes including improvement in their academic performances.

### **Other Measures to address Challenges**

The respondents reiterated on the need to organize more interactive sessions for them. They also suggested the need to initiate a mentoring scheme, where beneficiaries will be assigned mentors to constantly engage with them and help in their development. This, they mentioned would go a long way to ensure that they were well groomed for their chosen future careers in the sciences.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that the beneficiaries of the Vodafone/ UEW Educational Fund for Future Women Leaders in Science & Technology are experiencing various forms of challenges which adversely impact on their academic work. These challenges are academic, psychological and domestic problems. It is therefore being recommended that efforts should be made by the coordinators and stakeholders of the fund to intensify the counselling sessions and seminars organized for the beneficiaries, while aiming to bring out other means of helping beneficiaries cope better with their academic work and become well grounded citizens.

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