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DISTANCE LEARNING AS A CATALYST FOR EFFECTIVE GENDER EQUALITY IN TANZANIA

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1.0 ABSTRACT

Distance Learning is considered effective tool for gender equality and empowerments for balancing burden of assigned gender roles in particular for female students. The paper set out to examine the role of distance learning as a platform of promoting gender equality and women empowerment focusing TICD blended Model. Questionnaire survey and documentary review methods were employed in data collection. A quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16th version). While qualitative information was analysed using content analysis. The study observed that majority of the respondents (96.6%) recognized the benefits of blended model in their economic, political and social wellbeing. Mostly TICD blended model was attributed to the expected positive outcome such as expanding the level of education, increase income and leadership after completing the course. The study concludes that studying through Distance Learning provides student with flexibility of studying while working and handling family related matters. Thus, awareness about uses the enhancing model should be provided regularly so as to attract a good number of Tanzanian to pursue their study at the TICD.

KEYWORDS: Gender, empowerment, gender equality, and challenges of Open and Distance Learning.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Gender equality extended momentum in countries throughout the world (Elson, 2002). Globally, commitment to gender equality in education institutions was echoed in Dakar Framework of Action on Education for All (EFA) 2000 and Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs 2000). The two development frameworks under their gender and educational specific related goals insisted on elimination of gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015. The Post-2015 Development Framework would remain to underlines Gender Equality as central to sustainable development (UN WOMEN, 2014). Statistics show that many African Countries have now effectively eliminating gender inequality in primary education although they lag behind in secondary and colleges and very little have been done on tertiary level of education(ADB, 2015). In Nigeria for example, women are discriminated in access to education for social and economic reasons (Aderinoye, and Ojokheta, 2004). The Human Development Report 2002 puts the statistics of illiterate women at 57 percent as against 43 percent for males. As seemingly this insignificant difference continue to persist even after the deadline (2015) of achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Distance education in Tanzania is organized through the Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA), a national association established in December 1992 (UNESCO, 2002). Blended mode of learning started to operate in TICD in 2022, with the aim of widening access of higher education to majority of Tanzanian particularly disadvantaged men, women and their diversity.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Examine women specific benefits of studying through blended mode of learning in Tanzania
2. Explore the role of blended mode of learning in realizing gender equality in Tanzania

4.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Definition of key terms and concept

4.1Gender equality

Gender equality implies as the situation where women, men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, opportunities and protections (UNICEF, 2011).It is a fundamental human rights principal and valuable end in itself (Ibd). It designates that women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for comprehending their full potential, human rights and dignity and for contribution and or benefiting from economic social cultural and political development (UNESCO, 2009). Gender equality is essential for protecting universal human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNESCO, 2012). It is also a powerful development accelerator.

4.2 Women empowerment

Women empowerment is (a result of) a process of women identifying their inner strength, opportunities for growth, and their role in reshaping their own destiny (Saraswathy, et al. 2008). According to Malhotra, et al., (2002) women empowerment refers to a process of women gaining more access to income and economic opportunities. UN WOMEN (2014) explained women empowerment as a bottom up process of transforming gender power relations.

4.3 Distance Learning

Distance Learning is an approach to learning that focuses on freeing learners from constraints of the time space and place while offering flexible learning opportunities (SADC, 2012). It reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure (UNESCO, 2002).

5.0 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Provision of higher education through Distance Learning is recognized as an effective step towards democratization of education as it has greater inputs in development of higher education (UNESCO, 2002). Open and Distance Learning has been in operational for over one hundred years in Developed Countries, but usually for only one or two generations in the Less Developed Countries (Ibd). The European Union has in recent years consistently increased distance education components of its educational programmes, and has included open and distance learning explicitly in its Maastricht Treaty (UNESCO, 2002). India has established Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and other 120 dual mode institutions offering distance education programmes. One of the main objectives of introducing distance learning in India is to make education accessible to all sections of society (Ibd).

In Africa, Distance Learning has become a policy option for most of the African States because it has very crucial roles towards the advancement of African development through the promotion of participation in, and access to higher education, at a time when demand exceeds resources and opportunities available in the conventional educational system (Oladejo and Gesinde, 2014).

In Southern Africa, distance has been used to widen access of basic education. The Government of Zimbabwe for example introduced distance learning in 1999 in order to bring higher education to the disadvantaged groups like women and the disabled (Musingafi et al 2015). In Botswana, the major distance education provider is the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). BOCODOL currently offers distance education courses for the Junior Certificate and General Certificate in Secondary Education (UNESCO, 2002). Like other Southern Africa Countries, the process of establishing Open and Distance Learning institution in Tanzania started in 1992, when the Parliament endorsed establishment of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) and it became operational in 1994 (Mnyanyi and Mbwete, 2009). The main aim of OUT is to open door to higher education.

Distance learning remains the merely worthwhile opportunity for reaching detached groups of people in remote areas including women and disable. Furthermore, it is minimizing direct expenses of learning and appropriate for students with strictly commitments like employed individuals (Mahsud and Haider, 2014; Musingafi et al 2015). Chute et al. (1999) highlights further benefits of distance learning as, it allows the training of more people, it can be delivered to both home and work stations and it is learner-centred and offers learners additional control of the speed and the style of learning.

Leach, (1988) points out that there is normally ‘under representation of women and girls in highly skilled and professional employment in almost all spheres of developments, in the design of development policy and strategy. Gender inequality in accessibility of education may discount women from the mainstream of economic, social and political life as no education at all, (Fagerlind and Saha, 1992).

Essentially, eradicate gender inequality in education sectors, the global education agenda has outstretched consciousness for the upkeep of gender parity and gender equality in education as the Human Development report for 1995 asserts that ‘If human development is not engendered, it is endangered’. Development goals currently focus on gender equality and women empowerment (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 2005). Consequently, the shift in the international education goals beyond gender parity to gender equality had a positive inspiration in encouraging a significant education agenda towards the education of females in relation to males. Primarily, the Post- 2015 development frame work should deliberate gender equality as a fundamental for sustainable development (UN WOMEN, 2014).

6.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

6.1 Study design

The study used case study research design. Miles and Huberman (1994) define a case study as the investigation of a phenomenon occurring within a specific context. Furthermore, Gall & Borg (2007), Case study has been chosen so as to obtain in-depth information about the contribution of distance learning program in gender equality. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research approach (Mixed model)

6.2 Study area

The study was conducted at Tengeru Institute of Community Development (TICD) potentially due to having blended mode of learning with more female students enrolled for masters' degree

6.3 Sample size and sampling procedures

This study data were collected from the sample of 58 respondents including male and female whereby the benefits and roles of blended mode of learning in gender equality were acknowledged. Then, simple random and purposive sampling procedure was used in selecting the required respondents.

6.4 Data collection methods

The study used questionnaire (used for qualitative data) and interview (used for quantitative data) was used as a data collection methods used to reached 58 respondents who were female students.

7.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study on the role of Distance Learning in promoting gender equality and are discussed as follows

The most important factor for joining TICD Blended model was flexibility (38.1%). This may attract good number of students since the blended mode of delivery provide them an opportunity to carry out their studies equally with other responsibilities (balancing triple gender roles). This was correspondingly true for study conducted by Mahsud and Haider (2014) in their study on self-study mode of distance learning revealed that, 92% of respondents declared that they resort to join Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan because it offers opportunity of education while in – service and while remaining at home.

Moreover, 33.6% of the respondents reported that, they opted to pursue their studies at the TICD through blended mode of learning in order to get qualification and experience for further studies. They also recommend that courses in terms of blended offered at TICD is so unique compare to the same course offered through traditional mode of learning.

Table 3: Reasons for joining TICD Blended courses.

Reasons	Frequency	Percentages
Flexibility	22	38.1
Improve professional skill	11	18.6
Further studies	19	33.6
Others	06	9.7
Total	58	100

The contribution of blended mode learning in promoting gender equality

Findings from this study revealed that, 96.6% of the respondents acknowledge importance of blended Learning in promoting gender equality and women empowerment compared to 3.4% of the respondents who do not see any benefit of TICD Blended program in gender equality and women empowerment (Table 4). The contributing factors for the recognized benefits of distance learning can be associated with the mode of delivering that could enable both men and women to pursue the course while at work or taking care against the family. UNESCO (2002) argues that, Distance Learning provide an opportunity for empowerment of the most disadvantaged groups including women, disabled, unemployed and ethnic minority. Njaya (2015) reported that, ODL in Zimbabwe allow women to study at their own pace and time while attend other commitments especially household tasks, family and work. Equally the study by Mahsud and Haider,(2014) show that most of women in Pakistan opt to study at Allama Iqbal Open University because they fail to enroll for higher education in conventional university far from their cities of residence because of multiple care roles they have in their family.

Table 4: Show if blended mode of learning contributes to gender equality.

Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
YES	56	96.6
NO	2	3.4
TOTAL	58	100

The Blended mode of learning benefits include: economic, education, and leadership as depicted in table 4 below.

Gender equality ways	Frequency	percentage
Economic opportunities	19	33.3
Education Accessibility	23	38.7
Leadership opportunities	14	24.7
Others	2	3.3
Total	58	100

Education accessibility

The study findings show that, 38.7% of the respondents argue that blended mode of learning provided at the TICD enable them to get access for further education in their related field of study. UNESCO, (2002) reported that, Distance Learning has been used extensively to provide pre- service teacher preparation, upgrading of academic qualifications and in - service continuing professional development in particular subject content areas and instructional methods. In other hand it equips them with different skills in integrating theoretical part of their learning into practical. Correspondingly, Mahsud and Haider (2014) in their study of self-study mode of blended mode of learning observed the same in Pakistani whereas 89% of respondents agreed that Allama Iqbal Open University enhances their skills and definitely brings progress in their professional existence.

Economic opportunities

The study observed that 33.3% of the respondents reported that blended course provided at TICD could enable them to strengthen their level of economic development as they expect to get attractive salaries through promotion soon after completing the course. Correspondingly a study by Mahsud and Haider, (2014), show that distance learning increases female and male access to employment and or improve professional status hence improve their economic status that support their family expenditure.

Leadership opportunities

In many African Universities leaders are not recruited and awarded for their leadership potential but for their academic qualifications, research and community services (Sifuna, 2012). The finding of this study does not support this argument as 24.7% of the respondents commented that blended course provide an equal opportunity for management and leadership post. Graduate of this programme both men and women can equally be appointed . The respondent said “most of our fellows who undergo similar program have been promoted into

various leadership posts". Njaya, (2015) observed the same in Zimbabwe whereas the interviewed women graduate from Zimbabwe Open University said that they were promoted into various management posts after completing their studies were required to travel and live near Regional Center's Office for stated period of time. The finding is in line with the study by Kangai and Mapolisa, (2012) in Open University of Zimbabwe reported that, 78% of the students saw the cost of travelling from their working/residential areas to Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) Headquarter as a major factor that hindered their academic progress.

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