The Role of Open and Distance Learning in Gender Equality and Women Empowerment - A Case of Diploma in Primary Teacher Education - The Open University of Tanzania

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Abstract

Open and Distance Learning could not only help in gender equality and women empowerment, but also facilitate effectiveness of teaching and learning in primary schools. However there is little knowledge about the contribution of ODL to gender equality and women empowerment in Tanzania. The paper set out to examine the role of ODL in promoting gender equality and women empowerment focusing the Open University of Tanzania Diploma in Primary Teacher Education programme in particular. The study was carried out at Green Bird Teachers college during DPTE intensive face to face session. Students from the following Regional Centers: Kilimanjaro, Tanga, Arusha, Manyara, Dodoma, Dar es Salaam and Morogoro were involved. Questionnaire survey and documentary review methods were employed in data collection. A quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16th version). While qualitative information was analyzed using content analysis.The study observed that majority of the respondents (96.6%) recognized the benefits of DPTE in their economic, political and social wellbeing. The reasons associated with the benefits of DPTE are mostly attributed to the expected positive outcome such as expanding the level of education, increase income and leadership after completing the course. Despite the observed benefits, increase in expenses, domestic echoes and distance reported as the most challenges that hinder the academic performance and progress of the course. The study concludes that studying through Open and Distance Learning provides student with flexibility of studying while working and handling family related matters. Thus, awareness about ODL should be provided regularly so as to attract a good number of Tanzanian to pursue their study at the Open University of Tanzania

Keywords: Open and distance learning, contribution of Diploma in Primary Teachers Education, gender equality, and challenges of Open and Distance Learning

1. Introduction

 Developed and developing Countries were insisted to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are full realized for sustainable development and well-being of their people (UNICEF, 2011). Gender equality in education is understood to mean equal treatment and equal opportunities on one hand, and equality of outcomes on the other" (EACEA, 2010). It implies that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of an education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes (UNESCO, 2009). Thus, achieving gender equality in education implies equality of opportunities for males in relation to females, equality in learning process, equality in outcomes as well as equality in external results after leaving education (UNESCO, 2004).

Over the past 25 years the movement towards gender equality gained momentum in countries throughout the world (Elson, 2002). Worldwide commitment to gender equality in education was reflected 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 should continue 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).

Over the last twenty five years developing countries have used Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a response to a critical problem in gender disparity in education. They have done so to widen education access outside convectional mode of delivering education in higher learning institutions (UNESCO, 2002). Thus, ODL in Developing World was considered as promising and practical strategy to address the challenge of widening access of higher education for disadvantaged groups including women (Pityana, 2009). In Zimbabwe Open University was introduced in 1999 in order to bring higher education to the disadvantaged groups like women

and disabled (Musingafi et al, 2015).

Distance education in Tanzania is organized through the Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA), a national association established in December 1992 (UNESCO, 2002). It started to operate effectively on 1994, with the aim of widening access of higher education to majority of Tanzanian particularly disadvantaged groups including poor men, women. Since its establishment, the Open University of Tanzania boasts a total enrolment of over 25,000 students in various disciplines including education, law, science, commerce, economics and many others (OUT, 2006:ii) cited in Komba (2009). According to the Facts and Figures published in June 2015, the total number of undergraduate students admitted annually has increased from 8679 (2012/2013) to 9009 (2013/2014), however, there is slightly decrease enrollment of 7129 (2014/2015). The decrease was contributed by new system of application, whereas applicants were required to apply through Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU). The percentage of female students has also increased on average from 40.1 (2012/2013) to 62.0 (2014/2015) (OUT Facts and Figures, 2014/2015). Likewise the number of female enrolled into DPTE program continues to increase for three years consecutively from the average of 51.1% (2011/2012) to 51.9% (2013/2014) (OUT Facts and Figures 2014/2015). The paper therefore, examines the benefits of ODL in gender equality and women empowerment and challenges encountered with regard to DPTE course.

2. Review of related literature
2.1 Definition of key terms and concept
2.1.1 Gender equality
Gender equality defined as the situation where women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, opportunities and protections (UNICEF, 2011).It is a core human rights principal and valuable end in itself (Ibd). It implies that that women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing 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.
2.1.2 Gender equality in education
Gender equality in education imply that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chance and treatment in access, process, and outcome of an education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes (UNESCO, 2009).
2.1.3 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 has frequently been termed as a process of women gaining more access to a steady income and economic power or security. UN WOMEN (2014) defined women empowerment as a bottom up process of transforming gender power relations through individuals or groups developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge it.
2.1.4 Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
Open and Distance Learning is an approach to learning that focuses on freeing leaners 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).

2.2 Empirical review
2.2.1 Overview of Open and Distance Learning
Provision of higher education through Open and 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 ODL in India is to make education accessible to all sections of society (Ibd).

In Africa, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) 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, ODL has been used to widen access of basic education. The Government of Zimbabwe for example introduced ODL 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.

2.2.2 Benefit of ODL

Distance learning remains the only viable option for reaching dispersed groups of people in remote areas. Additionally, it is cost-effective and convenient for learners who cannot leave their work to study on full-time programs as an in-service program, it does not deplete working task of learners since they learn as they work (Mahsud and Haider, 2014; Musingafi et al 2015). Chute et al. (1999) list other benefits of distance learning: (a) it allows the training of more people; (b) it can be delivered to home and work sites, which are convenient to students; and (c) it is learner-centered and affords students more control of the pace and the style of learning.

2.2.3 Distance education and gender transformation

Leach, (1988) points out that there is generally 'under representation of women in highly skilled and professional employment, in politics and until recently, in the design of development policy and strategy. Gender inequality in access of education may exclude women from the mainstream of economic, social and political life as no education at all, (Fagerlind and Saha, 1992).

In attempt to eliminate gender inequality in education, the global education agenda has raised awareness for the support of gender parity and gender equality in education as the Human Development report for 1995 declares that 'If human development is not engendered, it is endangered'. Development goals now focus on gender equality and women empowerment. Goal number three of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is to promote gender equality and women empowerment. The fourth target of this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015, (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 2005). Therefore, the shift in the international education goals beyond gender parity to gender equality has had a positive influence in promoting a meaningful education agenda towards the education of females in relation to males. In addition the Post- 2015 development frame work should consider gender equality as a central for sustainable development (UN WOMEN, 2014).

Statistics from Open and Distance Institutions confirm the potential of ODL in achieving gender parity in education in terms of access between males and female (Odwoa and Frimpong, 2008). Achieving gender equality in education implies equality of opportunities for males in relation to females, equality in the learning process, equality of outcomes as well as equality of external results after leaving education (UNESCO, 2004).

2.2.4 Challenges of ODL

Kember (1989) identify several challenges of ODL that include, income, and distance from the learning institution as the barriers in academic progress, since learners engaged in distance education are usually adults. Therefore they face various challenges, such as the learners' ability to integrate the demands of off-campus study with family, work, and social commitments. Distance learners also experience feelings of isolation and stress due to lack of organizational support, which may eventually lead to non-completion (Ibd).

Musingafi et al (2015) found that students learning through ODL face challenges related to failure of trainees to receive training materials on time, students' engagement in other economic activities to supplement their family incomes, and poor learner support services especially where study centers are under resourced and overstretched. Kamau (2007) found that, without effective learners' support services system that provides on-site face to face, timely feedback on student performance and access to library services, student achievement will be undermined and dropout rates and postponement will increase.

3. Methodology
3.1 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 save time and obtain in depth information about the contribution of DPTE program in gender equality and women empowerment. The study employed qualitative and quantitative research approach.

3.2 Study area

The study was conducted in the seven Regional Centers of the Open University of Tanzania that includes: Kilimanjaro, Tanga, Arusha, Dodoma, Morogoro, Dar es Salaam and Manyara. The centers have been chosen because of the researcher's familiarity and the accessibility of the respondents.

3.3 Study population
Population is defined as the total number of subjects or the total elements of interest to researcher (Kothari, 2004). In this study the target population was DPTE students from seven Regional Centers: Kilimanjaro, Tanga, Arusha, Dodoma, Morogoro, Dar es Salaam and Manyara. The choice of the group was due to the fact that DPTE program provide primary teachers with opportunity for further studies, contrary to the normal procedures where they required to go through A' level studies as qualification to Diploma in Education program.

3.4 Sample size and sampling procedures
Sample size refers to the number of items to be included in the sample. Patton (2002) argues that sample size selection is influenced by the time and resources available for collection of data in a particular research study. To achieve this goal and compromise with time, in this study data were collected from the sample of 58 respondents including male and female whereby the benefits and challenges of DPTE were acknowledged. Then, simple random sampling procedure was used in selecting the required number of DPTE students with the assistance of Regional Directors.

3.5 Data collection methods
In this paper survey and documentary review methods used in data collection. For example survey method was used to 58 respondents (including male and female) in assessing the benefits of DPTE and challenges that may affect academic progress. Data obtained through questionnaire survey was analyzed quantitatively.

4. Results and discussion
The findings of the study on the role of Open and Distance Learning in promoting gender equality and women empowerment are discussed as follows:

4.1 Reasons for joining Open University of Tanzania
The respondents were asked to give out the reasons for joining the Open University of Tanzania for DPTE program. Among the reasons mentioned were; flexibility, improve professional skills, and further studies as depicted in Table 3.

The most important factor for joining Open University of Tanzania for Diploma in Primary Teacher Education was flexibility. This may attract good number of students since the ODL mode of delivery provide them an opportunity to carry out their studies equally with other responsibilities. For example most of respondents reported that studying at OUT provide them with freedom to decide whether to sit for exam in the said academic year or postpone till next academic year compared to conventional universities. Similarly, Mahsud and Haider (2014) in their study on self-study mode of ODL revealed that, 92% of respondents mentioned that they resort to join Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan because it offers opportunity of education while in – service and while staying at home.

Moreover, 33.6% of the respondents reported that, they opted to pursue their studies at the Open University of Tanzania in order to get qualification and experience for further studies. They also recommend that DPTE offered at OUT is so unique compare to the same course offered in other colleges. That means DPTE has link to Teachers Education Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) project, hence making it more international..

Table 3: Reasons for joining Open University of Tanzania for DPTE course

Reasons	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Flexibility	43	38.1
Improve professional skills	21	18.6
Further studies	38	33.6
Others	11	9.7
Total	113	100

Source: Field data, 2016

4.2 The contribution of DPTE in promoting gender equality and women empowerment
Findings from this study revealed that, 96.6% of the respondents acknowledge importance of Open and Distance Learning in promoting gender equality and women empowerment compared to 3.4% of the respondents who do not see any benefit of DPTE program in gender equality and women empowerment (Table 4). The contributing factors for the recognized benefits of ODL 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, Open and 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: Benefits of DPTE programme

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	56	96.6
No	02	03.4
Total	58	100

Source: Field data, 2016

The observed DPTE benefits include: economic, education, and leadership as depicted in table 4 below.

Table 5: Benefits of DPTE

Benefits	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Economic	50	33.3
Education	58	38.7
Leadership	37	24.7
Others	5	3.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field data, 2016

4.2.1 Education

The study findings show that, 38.7% of the respondents argue that Diploma in Primary Teachers Education provided at the OUT enable them to get access for further education in their related field of study. UNESCO, (2002) reported that, Open and 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. Similarly, Mahsud and Haider (2014) in their study of self-study mode of ODL 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. Probably this could be the factor that attracts a good number of primary school teachers to pursue their studies though ODL.

4.2.2 Economic

The study observed that 33.3% of the respondents reported that DPTE course provided at the Open University of Tanzania 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 ODL increases female and male access to employment and or improve professional status hence improve their economic status that support their family expenditure.

4.2.3 Leadership

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 DPTE provide an equal opportunity for management and leadership post. Graduate of this programme both men and women can equally be appointed as Head teachers, School inspectors as well as Cluster Education Officers soon after graduation. The respondent said "most of our fellow teachers who undergo similar program have been promoted into various educational 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.

4.3 Challenges facing DPTE students

Despite the benefits of DPTE program in promoting gender equality and women empowerment as highlighted, the respondents identified several challenges that could affect their career during the course. Those challenges were; distance, domestic echoes, increase in expenses as shown in Table 6.

4.3.1 Increase in expenses

The result indicates that 42.6% of the respondents reported that increase in expenses act as barrier toward their career. The increase in expenses contributed by several factors includes: transport costs, accommodation during examination, face-to-face session, and stationary. These factors are likely to affect the continuation of students to undergo DPTE offered at the Open University of Tanzania. Similarly, Bird and Morgan (2003); Musingafi et al, (2015) commented that, most students studying through ODL mode were self-financing their studies with other obligations back home, it became difficulty for them to allocate enough fund for paying tuition fees and other costs involved in their studies such as travelling for face to face, practical and field attachments sessions.

4.3.2 Domestic echoes

The study revealed that 32.7% of the respondents reported that domestic echoes affecting their studies as they were supposed to allocate time to attend family related matters. The situation become worse in the absence of housemaid as they become fully engaged in multiple domestic roles coupled with office duties and responsibilities. Similarly, the study by Dodo (2013), show that most of female students pursue their studies through Virtual or Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe were facing social problems like nursing ill people and general care of their family. Probably this could be among the reasons that lead to poor academic performance and even drop out among DPTE female students as compared to their counterpart male.

4.3.3 Distance

The study observed that, 14.5% of respondents reported that distance from their localities to the Regional Center has increased expenses incur to undertake the DPTE programme particularly during intensive face to face, orientation and examination sessions where they 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.

Table 6: Challenges facing DPTE student

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Distance	15	14.9
Domestic echoes	33	32.7
Increase in expenses	43	42.6
Others	10	9.9
Total	101	100

Source: Field data, 2016

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study revealed that Open and Distance Learning has a crucial role in promoting gender equality and women empowerment by widening access of education for both women and men and hence improving their socio economic and political status. The benefits associated with DPTE programmme offered by Open University of Tanzania includes rising the economic status, promoting leadership as well as rising the level of education among the DPTE students.

DPTE programme under OUT found to provide qualifications for further studies for those who missed direct entry qualifications to higher education. The study observed that majority of women pursuing DPTE opted to enroll to Open University of Tanzania because it is the only way through which they can sustain their career development and care for their family.

Economic benefits gained from DPTE programme observed to be promotion and attractive salary package after completion of the programme as well as employment to pre-service and hence improvement on socio-economic wellbeing. In spite of the observed benefits gained by studying at the Open University of Tanzania, Distance from their locality to Open University of Tanzania Regional Centers Office coupled with expenses incurred when travelling for various academic activities were identified as challenges affect academic progress among the DPTE students.

Domestic echoes and other family care related matters were also reported to be critical problem for female students. Thus more work is still needed to be done in this area so that to enhance gender equality in access, process and outcome of education.

5.2 Recommendation

There is a need of providing education related to the importance of studying through Open and Distance Learning as alternative for disadvantaged groups women, poor men and disabled so as to achieve career development and hence development of Human Resource focusing on 2025 Development Vision.

There is a need for OUT to establish study and examination centers in every district across the country so as to overcome the problem of distance coupled with expenses. This can be achieved through proper coordination of the OUT management and Regional/ District Government.

There is a need of providing seminars related to gender awareness so that men can find the importance of sharing gender roles in the family and community level. This may provide women with ample time to participate fully in socio-economic activities including studies. It can be done through community based strategy.

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