

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY IN BREAKING BARRIERS TOWARDS WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

**Anniekie NNDOWISENI RAVHUDZULO
University of South Africa,
P.O BOX 392, Uinisa, Pretoria0003,
SOUTH AFRICA**

ABSTRACT

Technology has brought about unique changes in education as a whole, how people communicate; research, preference and social interaction. It presents before the society a growing recognition of the recent and wider possibilities in the new era. The proposed study identified the impact of technology in breaking barriers towards women's liberation in Open Distance Learning (ODL) to contribute towards enhancing women empowerment. The two concepts Open Distance Learning (ODL) and Distance Education will interchangeably used in this research because the participants are furthering studies through ODL and DE (ODL/DE).

This paper is qualitative research in nature and an auto-ethnographic approach focused on questions pertaining to how technology breaks barriers towards women's liberation, perseverance, how women integrate the ODL/DE environment into their personal life.

I reflected on my personal journey coming from being a primary school teacher and studied through ODL until I completed my doctoral degree with University of South Africa (Unisa). For this study, 117 women who studied at Unisa an ODL institution were interviewed and 58 women who studied at the University of Pretoria (UP) a Distance Education (DE) Unit. Amongst the 200 participants, there were 25 women who dropped out and they highlighted their attitude towards studying through ODL/DE. Also 110 questionnaires were sent out and 83 were returned. Data were analysed.

The findings suggested that technology improved and liberated women's livelihoods in many respects because of their perseverance and taking extra online modules through ODL/DE. Findings suggested that technology contribute towards enhancing women's empowerment and liberation in. Therefore, women empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which empowers women to realize their full uniqueness and powers in all walks of life. The paper concludes by recommending that women should be able to live a life without limits and see life in a better perspective.

Keywords: Open Distance Learning, women empowerment, women liberation, barriers to women, perseverance, technology.

INTRODUCTION

According to Keengwe (2008) technologies allow students to work more productively than in the past, but the teacher's role in technology rich classrooms is more demanding than ever. Technology has the potential to transform the nature of education by improving teachers' design work, enhancing the roles of students and teachers in the learning process and helping to create a collaborative learning environment, etc.

Presently technology is considered as an important means to promote new methods of facilitating teaching and learning (Voogt, 2003).

ODL is a source of progress and development for women. Marriage has always been a barrier for women's education. I was very much fortunate to get married to a husband who did not suffer the disease called "Pull her Down Syndrome". Instead he encouraged me to pursue my studies through his support.

After passing Matric level, I enrolled for a Junior Degree with the University of Venda for my first degree. It was very difficult for me as a married woman to look after my family (my husband and our 4 sons) and attend classes at the same time, since the University of Venda was a face-to-face one.

Women threatened leave their homes for further studies because of the risk of losing their husbands. It was believed among African cultures that little or no education was appropriate for women just to make them literate.

According to COL (2009), open learning describes policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no barriers or slight barriers of age, gender or time, while recognising prior learning. Distance education is the delivery of learning or training to learners who are separated from their lecturers, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training.

Conceptually different, yet balancing, these two phenomena come together in the term open and distance learning. ODL provides flexible learning opportunities and has been a key to allowing more people to overcome barriers such as age, gender or physical remoteness to access education. Open approaches can also help to scale initiatives so that curricula, teaching materials and other learning content can be freely accessed and adapted to other contexts.

I came to realise that not everybody had an opportunity to learn at universities on a full time bases. Therefore, I took the ODL route. Distance learning caters for the needs of the learners who wish to enhance their knowledge, skills and education, while holding their jobs.

Many people start working immediately after leaving school and these people, if they want to get a degree while working, it is possible because distance learning degrees are available to them. I felt that there is a need for me to upgrade my qualifications and I chose to study through Unisa. I motivated myself because one of the main doubts people have to ODL/DE is the necessity of self-motivation.

As a woman full of experience in ODL, I would like to encourage other women to remind themselves all the time why they are or not studying.

They should ask themselves what qualification they are striving for. Before I registered, I asked myself what I wanted to achieve. My experience with ODL is that, it can open up new opportunities and benefits such as to be exposed to technology serving as a weapon to break barriers in the lives of women and liberate them.

Technology has the potential of improving quality of education, increasing access to education, pedagogical innovation and creating high market value (Jung, 2008). My experience tells me that the impact of the use of technology breaks barriers towards women's liberation in ODL/DE) has been significant. ODL has created opportunities for

women to make time to upgrade their qualifications and skills at reasonable intervals and further their education.

According to Indiresan (1996), distance education has an important role to play in providing opportunities for women to participate in higher education. It is a suitable mechanism to bring social and economic transformation of women and can allow them to pursue their education while still taking care of their families and outside work. While women are studying through ODL they experience different challenges and I would like to highlight such barriers is this study but how have technology influenced Women's Liberation?

TECHNOLOGY BARRIERS ARE MEANT TO LIBERATE WOMEN IN ODL/DE

Various media, such as video conferencing, printed texts, radio or other audio formats, television or other video formats, the Internet, mobile devices or Web technologies, may be used to empower and each women to be liberated. My experience within my Directorate: Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD) as an Education Consultant at Unisa is that, teaching and learning through technology requires patience and the willingness to learn different teaching and learning tools. In 2007 I took a Cluster of online module. For me, the last five weeks has been a major explosion in online facilitation. This has been driven by technological developments, not only in the delivery of course content but also in tools for communication that allow lecturers and students to interact with each other.

These tools range from email, discussion forums, blogger, wiki, face book and linked in. Each of these has the potential if used wisely and imaginatively.

There are many contexts where today's lecturers might find themselves involved in online learning. It could be through using a Virtual Learning Environment to deliver entire courses at a distance. As I was working at Unisa, I never thought that I would ever use myUnisa Learning Management System (LMS) in my life.

Given the changing role of academics and the importance of technology in all teaching and learning work contexts, lecturers are under increasing pressure to develop their own working knowledge of how to facilitate learning in this changing environment. Drawing on their practical experience and recent research into technology, it is important to take an online course as a student in order to understand the online process. Lecturers and educators who don't have this experience first-hand can underestimate the misunderstanding and confusion that accompanies one's first experience technology.

Personally, I didn't like using myUnisa and everything associated with technology because it was serving as a barrier for me to train academics to facilitate teaching and learning for our distance students.

In my Directorate, the entire Education Consultants were to undergo an online facilitation course for five consecutive weeks. We were expected to register online and I didn't even bother to register until Mrs. Alice Goodwin- Davy said to me "Anniekie I don't see your name on the two groups participating" this statement took my joy away and I would hide whenever I hear Alice's voice by the corridor. I ended up registering and I realized the seriousness of learning through technology. After registering I was allocated to the second group and we were supposed to introduce ourselves online. Let me tell you, it wasn't easy for me and ultimately I was registered. I just want to appreciate Alice, our

online facilitator, a computer guru, who broke the technology barrier of using technology from me by treating the participants as self-motivated adult learners and she supported ideas and suggestions that participants raised.

In spite of limited active participation, this is one of the best learning experiences I have had because of the careful attention to all aspects of the learning content and the learning experience.

From the online facilitation course, I managed to developed a Hydroponics Website with my colleague Mrs. Gugu Ngokha whom we were paired together and as I am talking, it is up and running. A very worthwhile experience, it is a great pleasure to witness facilitation skill executed at such a very high level.

Now that I have learnt technology techniques, I am motivated and encouraged because I am one of the four Facilitators for the A-Z of myUnisa Training at the University of South Africa. As a facilitator, I understand my role to use tools and techniques that engage the hearts, minds and souls of the students online. The academics that I work with realised that when students are in different places and time zones, discussion forums can be useful tool to engage student in an activity. As a distance learning student or lecturer, you might be going through the fear I was experiencing, take this from me, *"if I can do it you can also do it"*. In the beginning, I was quite nervous. Learning to learn is probably one of the most important personal characteristics of an effective online facilitator. My understanding of learning to learn is that it is a continual process of action, reflection, self-insight and interaction with others.

According to Candy (1990), there is no agreed upon definition of learning to learn. Rather, learning to learn is defined according to how one has framed the concept, and this varies across discipline and philosophical orientation. He provides the following compilation of definitions: Smith (1991:19) states that "learning-how-to-learn involves possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters".

METHODOLOGY

An auto-ethnographic approach was used. According to Ellis and Bochner, (2000) the researcher is able to draw connections from his or her personal life to the lives of others or extend understanding about a particular culture or society while utilising an auto-ethnographic approach. Questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews were integrated and conducted with students who studied at an ODL (Unisa) and DE (UP) focusing on the research question "How technology impacted their learning through ODL/DE".

For this study, a purposive convenient sampling of 200 was drawn of which 117 women who studied at Unisa an ODL institution were interviewed and 58 women who studies at the University of Pretoria (UP) at a Distance Education (DE) Unit. Amongst the 200 participants, there were 25 women who dropped out and they highlighted their attitude towards studying through ODL and DE. Also 100 questionnaires were sent out and 83 were returned. These women were randomly selected. Questionnaires were distributed to participants in the survey. Participation was voluntary and participants' personal information was not revealed.

Validity and Reliability

All participants were informed about the research study in a way that was assumed to be clear and understandable to them. The research questions were formulated clearly and presented to the respondents in written form to avoid ambiguity.

Ethical Issues

Participants in this study participated voluntarily. Names of participants remained anonymous and all the information received from participating groups was treated as highly confidential. The significance of the research study was clearly explained to the participants. The participants were also afforded an opportunity to ask questions. In this research study, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw if they so wished.

The established agreement did not place participants under the obligation to continue participating in the project if they were no longer interested.

All participants in any kind of research should have the right to confidentiality. The researcher assured the participants that sensitive data was to be held in the strictest confidence in order to protect their anonymity.

The research was therefore conducted with respect and concern for the dignity and welfare of the informants. The individual's right to decline to participate was respected in this study. The researchers ensured that the purpose and activities of the research were clearly explained to the participants. The researcher ensured that promises and commitments were honoured by safeguarding participants' identities.

PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND

In terms of ethnic and cultural background diverse women students contributed to the findings of this research. There were four categories of women who were generous enough to give me their time and their insights were a varied group, ranging in age from 28 to 35-52. The first category, 43 (21.5%) of the participants are undergraduates who are single, with no children living by themselves.

They are primary and secondary schools teachers while the second category 57 (28.5%) are graduates who are married, living with the in-laws and they have three children each. This category is composed of Head of Departments (HOD's) and Principals at both primary and secondary schools.

The third group of the participants, 68 (34.0%) hold Honours degree, married and has five children, ranging in age from 7 to 25 years of age. They are Managers of Further Education and Training Colleges (FETs) and Colleges of Education. The last category 32 (16.0%) are Postgraduate, unmarried and divorced. They have no children and they hold high positions in the Government Departments.

The Questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire was selected as the most appropriate tool for two reasons: (a) because it is an effective small-scale research tool and (b) because "the knowledge needed is controlled by the questions, therefore it affords a good deal of precision and clarity" (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

As Cohen and Manion (1994) state, "surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or determining the relationships which exist between specific events". In addition, given the size of the study and number of people involved a questionnaire was particularly appropriate for collecting data in a relatively quick and inexpensive manner (Bell 1999).

Furthermore, because they are anonymous questionnaires encourage respondents to be honest. Seliger and Shohamy (2000) believe that they provide data that are more “uniform” and “accurate” than that obtained by other methods.

In an effort to maximise the response rate, the questionnaire was designed to be deliberately short. These questions were open-ended questions to avoid respondents feeling pressured to write too much.

Processing the Data

In processing the questionnaire data and following Cohen and Manion (1994) the returned self-completion questionnaires were checked for completeness accuracy and uniformity. It was discovered that each respondent had answered every question and furthermore that all questions were answered accurately (in the sense that appropriate answers had been given to the questions). Respondents also interpreted the instructions and questions uniformly (Table 1).

Table: 1
Breakdown of questionnaires dispatched

Name of the University	Number Dispatched	Number Returned	% Returned
University of South Africa	68	52	47.2%
University of Pretoria	42	31	28.2%
Total	110	83	75.5%

The respondents who are Unisa and UP students who were randomly sampled, composed of a diverse group regarding demographic, educational, employment, living and learning information. From the sample, I discovered that there were 25 (22.7%) students who dropped out their studies and they indicated that the reasons for dropping out were associated with barriers in ODL/DE.

The good news is that, 14 (56%) decided to continue with studies while 11 (44%) didn't show any interest in continuing to studying through ODL/DE. It was observed from the sample study that 75.5% of the women were highly motivated sharing how technology impacted their learning through ODL/DE, how barriers brought in perseverance and the way they managed to integrate the ODL/DE environments into their real life situations.

The results further suggest that technology breaks the separation and loneliness of students/lecturers and between students themselves. This is a clear indication that life is full of choices and women can be successful in their studies and liberated from barriers. The respondents were so keen to participate in the focus group interviews and to complete a questionnaire looking forward towards women's liberation through technology in ODL/DE. From the high response rate 75.5%, one concludes that technology assisted women in integrating ODL/DE environments into real life situations for the success of their studies.

I would like to remind women that technology has come to stay as the backbone of communication in ODL/DE teaching methodology. The response rate was calculated by



comparing the number of questionnaires analysed with the number distributed to ODL and DE students (Table 2).

Table: 2
Summary of questionnaire response rate

Number of questionnaires distributed	110
Number of questionnaires returned	83
Response rate	75.5%

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESPONSES

The execution of this research produced a mass of raw data. The data had to be accurately collected and systematically organized to facilitate analysis.

The analysis of responses from the questions in the questionnaires and interview schedule were more complex because of being open-ended items. After the responses had been categorised, the results were transferred to summary data sheets. Recording of the data in a systematic manner facilitated examination of the data as well as analysis. The information gained from the interview schedule provides further insight. The interviewees were given the opportunity to give their views on the impact of technology in breaking barriers towards women's liberation in ODL/DE, suggestions for improvement and recommendations. Their contributions, since they were drawn from practical experiences, are valuable and are included in this study. The total number of questionnaires distributed were 110 and 83 were returned. The percentage response was 75.5%, contributing to the reliability of the data obtained. It was very interesting when the participants were sharing how technology impacted their learning while they were furthering their studies through ODL/DE.

The findings presented show that the majority of respondents suggested the effectiveness of keeping updated by studying through ODL/DE. This study has shown that technology can be used as a tool to break barriers ODL/DE to liberate women when managed appropriately.

Response of the Respondents As Regards How Technology Impacted Their Learning Through ODL/DE

The majority of the respondents (81.9%) indicated that technology helped them to change their learning for the better whereas 15.4% mentioned that technology frustrated them and dropped out and 2.7% expressed no opinion.

From the data it is evident that if more women can have technology access, most ODL/DE students would tend to change their study methods.

It is apparent from these responses that the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that technology changed their thinking about studying through ODL/DE.

The first categories of the respondents 21.5% are undergraduates, single, with no children, living by themselves are educators in primary and secondary schools. They highlighted that after they graduated, they planned to continue with their studies because they can meet other students online. They further indicated that they have taken several distance learning Modules/Courses, and they consider themselves experienced distance learners.

Regarding the second group of participants in the study, 28.5% who are graduates, married, living with the in-laws and having three children each, they are Head of Departments (HOD's) and Principals at Primary and Secondary Schools. They were distance learning student in different departments at UP and Unisa. Presently, they have taken a variety of Bed/Honours degrees with the plan to obtain Bed and Honours degrees online.

Third group of the participants 34.0%, are married and have five children, ranging in age from 7 to 25 years of age. They are Managers of Further Education and Training Colleges (FETs) and Colleges of Education. They are students in different programmes, and they are writing Masters Dissertations. They reported that after they graduate, they plan progress on to a Doctoral program. They prefer to study through ODL/DE institutions and they are planning to take more because technology has empowered them and they are liberated from going to face-to-face class. It is interesting to note that 16.0% of the participants are postgraduate, unmarried and divorced. They have no children and they hold high positions in the Government Departments. They registered for Doctoral programmes.

They indicated that the use of technology in ODL/DE saves much of travelling because they can drop their chapter in the dropbox where their supervisors will keep them updated.

Views of Respondents In Respect Of Educational Barriers

Many of the barriers women face in accessing ODL/DE using technology are the same as the ones they face when accessing education of any kind. This item examines the factors that inhibit OR hinders women from furthering their studies using technology in ODL/DE. The majority of the respondents (79.2%) highlighted different barriers around technology includes unfriendly learning environment, poor network connections, lack of computers and the fear of technologies.

The majority of the respondents (55.0%) from the sample are comfortable while students are studying in ODL/DE, while 30.8% of the respondents raised concern about different barriers connected to technology; a small percentage 14.2% expressed no opinion. Barriers of this kind can manifest themselves as negative experiences of learning, negative attitudes towards learning, anxiety about the results of learning. Just 33.5% of the of the drop out participants showed concern about the lack of Internet access saying that it is a barrier when they want to download or access some posted document.

The results suggest that almost all the students (78.3%) commented on time constraints as a barrier. They mentioned that all the time they feel tired due to work load they have. It is good to note that the respondents indicated that, if they try to study, they feel sleepy. If they try to force themselves to study, they read with very little understanding because the brain and the body are tired. A large percentage 63.2% of the married participants with children argued that they need some rest, but they cannot rest because at 4.30 am they are required to be up again to prepare for the family breakfast and go to a full day's work, while the those working for Government Department 26% don't have problems with time constraint and a small percentage (4.2%) of the unmarried expressed no opinion.

Response of the Respondents As Regards Perseverance

Life has taught me that perseverance is the mother of success. The researcher studies through correspondence from Matric (Grade 12) to Doctoral Degree. I am the product of Open Distance Learning, University of South Africa.

My BA is the only degree that I got from the University of Venda and the rest are from Unisa. Life has taught me that distance education gives women a second chance to step into the main systems of education, including higher education.

It allows women to earn and learn at the same time, as well as to fulfill family responsibilities. You can learn with no limits.

My personal ODL journey motivated 72.6% of the drop out participants and indicated that they are going to re-register with ODL/DE.

I was born in a rural village called Mauluma in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. I completed my primary education there and proceeded to Mphaphuli High School in an area called Sibasa. I studied from Form 1 to Form 3 and then proceeded to train as a primary school teacher at Tshisimani Training College.

I completed the Primary Teachers Course in 1977. I started my journey as a teacher in 1978. I got married but realized then that my qualifications were not enough. I then registered to write Form 5 (Matric) through correspondence. As a married woman, children were born on the way and taking care of the family. I remember in 1986, I was highly expecting when I wrote the exam in November, I couldn't even fit into the desk I was sitting at.

By that time I was doing my 3rd year of Bachelor of Arts, I got a supplementary and I was expected to write on 28 January 1987.

I gave birth on the 26 January 1987; fortunately it was a normal birth. The day of the examination my Dad had to come and remain with the baby as I was writing because by that time my husband was a Principal at Raluswielo Secondary School. When the results came out, I got 63%; this is the joy of perseverance and being supported by the family.

Views of Respondents In Respect of Integration Of ODL/DE Environments into Real Life Situations

The majority 72% of the participants managed to integrate the ODL/DE environment with their real life situation by facing and overcoming challenges of family, work commitments and the burden of studying alone by employing creative solutions and by complete perseverance.

Most of the participants 54.9% who have children indicated that they were all were motivated by the need to help or support others: their families, their colleagues and their local communities.

They further explained that they combined their studies with their need to care for their children who were also studying. My personal ODL journey demonstrate how women can draw their inspiration from friends or relatives who had also studied successfully, and were not put off by being older or slower at learning than their classmates.

The majority 68% of the four categories of the participants presented in this study confirmed that even though on the surface they experienced barriers while they were studying, there are still some "hidden" difficulties individuals need to overcome. One of these is the need to buy a personal laptop and the internet connection. This can often mean sacrificing activities because technology became a huge tool that makes it possible for distance students to manage studies in ODL/DE.

All the participants appeared to be very strong in character, as is evidenced by their ability to manage their time and cope with their multiple roles and personal adversities as

well as allowing for some time for their own relaxation. Another sign of their strength is their strong perseverance and determination to succeed in achieving the goals they set for themselves. 72.4% mentioned that determination helped them to persist through the difficult times of their studies.

Most 69.3% of the participants expressed their initial fears that they would not be able to cope with the work, but these were put to rest once they started their modules/courses and found that some of their classmates were other women just like them.

And 88.6% of the participants referred to the sense of the impact of technology breaking barriers towards women's liberation in ODL/DE they experienced through their studies. 71.3% of the participants shared with the group that forming study groups with their classmates was an important strategy to help them through integrating ODL/DE environment into their real life situation.

For all of the participants, their studies experience have brought about career-related rewards such as promotion, but the main benefits have been in their personal growth and the way they have been able to inspire their children, friends or colleagues to further their own education and to see technology.

All are wholehearted in saying that they would advise other women to follow their examples because this is what they call women empowerment.

Respondent's Reaction Pertaining To Attitude Of Dropout Towards Studying Through ODL/DE

The concern from the respondents 22.7% of the participants (dropouts) is about the availability and accessibility of lecturers. Students wanted to be able to contact a real person and to have their questions answered on time as while they are studying online. I suggest that since technology facilitates teaching and learning provided by ODL/DE it should be reliable and available to minimise frustrations and dropouts.

The internet has revolutionized education as it has other areas of life and much support can be provided online. When lecturers are linked to student's courses, they should make it a point to engage students and encourage them to interact with other students in the same course.

They further mentioned that distance lecturers/tutors don't have sympathy with students. They don't understand the degree of difficulties that distance students may have in pursuing their distance courses.

In reality, the process of students learning at a distance as revealed in the interviews is more complex than the conventional setting the reason being that the barriers that these distance students encounter

The following is a response the respondents raised "When you are studying online, there are questions that you want to ask the lecturer and is not possible to talk to him/her. You are lost most of the time when you are using technology.

That is the problem; technology lacks a human or personal touch. One will realise that the minute you post questions through email and don't get a reply 5 minutes, 15 minutes, an hour or more, you'll feel frustrated".

In the light of the response above it is hardly surprising that providing feedback is one of the most important tasks of the lecturer/tutor in ODL/DE. Feedback must be timely, clear,

specific and constructive. Smith (2004) reported that one of the things that students valued most was prompt and useful feedback.

Lentell (2003) quotes Jackson (2001:67): "Careful reading of student work is the core of teaching...if students realize you are paying close attention to their work, they feel a responsibility to pay close attention to you."

CONCLUSION

The results of the research highlighted a number of areas in which women felt let down by experiencing barriers while studying through ODL/DE, especially in terms of ignorance regarding technology as a tool to facilitate their learning and accessing learning materials. Most of the respondents 58.4% in the study after the focus group interview showed a brave spirit and they promised to persevere through all barriers that can emerge in order to hinder their successful and empowerment.

They are women who believed in the power of education to improve their lives and attitudes towards ODL/DE. It is exciting to realise that the respondents are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities as women; they can also become more competent professionally. Their self-esteem rose as a result of this confidence, and they became more aware that they are assets to their families and to society.

The responses of the students to the questionnaire have revealed that that technology assisted them in the process of engaging with their learning materials when they sometimes will receive their study materials very late.

They further highlighted that they managed to focus in their children who must be taken care of and household duties to be accomplished.

Most of the participants showed that they were unable to sacrifice their lives regarding: socialising with family and friends because they experienced times of doubt, despair and unhappiness.

They further indicated that sometimes their spouses and family members will lose patience. I was impressed to hear the comment, "I am going to re-register my degree and further my studies through ODL/DE. T

his focus group interview has provided me with a very high level of self-confidence. With this established confidence, I will work with different attitude. Yes, technology in ODL/DE breaks the barriers towards women's liberation in open distance learning, education is liberating."

The results indicated some areas in which further research would be useful and pinpointed areas where the university needed to evaluate its performance in relation to more computer labs in regions.

More needs to be done to enhance teaching and learning in facilitating student success through different support systems in order to ensure that ODL/DE institutions enjoy the throughput that they so desire.

The paper proposed the need for a closer relationship between the student and the lecturer/tutor and that these intermediary or go between support programmes can be of significant benefit in ensuring that they use Learning Management Systems that are managed and indeed reconciled with their expectations of what ODL/DE institutions should offer to its students.

REFLECTION ON, IN AND FOR ACTION

This study indicates that technology is an instrument of breaking barriers towards women liberation in ODL/DE.

This research is an exposure to reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-for-action for women empowerment. ODL/DE has created opportunities for women to squeeze time out in order to learn and further their education. ODL is a genuine instrument in bringing social and economic transformation of women. There are different types of barriers or obstacles on the journey of life as women academics. Personal experience over these obstacles gave me confidence and motivated me to discover my passion. For women academics to be successful, they must have a seamless experience from braking through a barrier to the next.

Participants in this study improved their livelihoods in many respects because they chose their qualifications and influenced their learning. This also encouraged the group of women who were not studying to register through ODL. I want to encourage women by saying that they have a choice like I did; You can choose to accept and bow down to these barriers and limitations or you can choose to break them towards liberation.

Never become a victim of oppression like when I was working as a lecturer at a certain college between 1994 and 2001. I broke all the barriers and limitations used to challenge me and I am liberated from everything!

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHOR



Dr. Anniekie NNDOWISENI RAVHUDZULO is presently an Education College Consultant in the Directorate: Curriculum and Learning Development at the University of South Africa. She is passionate about Research. She attended and presented papers at national and int. conferences. She conducted training in quality learning materials development for Open and Distance Learning at the Women's University, Harare, Zimbabwe. In 2011 she gave a Congratulatory Speech during the Installation of the Unisa New Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof Mandla Makhanya. She worked for 16 Years teaching and lecturing experience, 8 years in School Development Planning, Project Management Training, 12 years as Education Consultant in the Directorate Curriculum and Learning Development, meaning that 36 years in Education Field. From October 2014, she is the Acting Deputy Director for the College of Education.

She holds a Doctoral Degree specializing in Didactics. She was privileged to address different Higher Learning Organizations, Government Departments. In 2013 she facilitated Unisa Chance to Advance workshop in Gugulethu Cape Town entitled "Empowering Women to Live Beyond Limits: A Pathway to Liberation". 2014 She facilitated Women Summit "A Woman Deserve To Live Her Fullest Life. She is an author of best selling motivational book "Nothing Lasts Forever Strategies to cope with pressures of life".

Anniekie NNDOWISENI RAVHUDZULO
University of South Africa,
P.O BOX 392, Unisa, Pretoria
0003, SOUTH AFRICA

Phone: +27 83 324 8184

Email: ravhuna@unisa.ac.za

REFERENCES

Bell, J. (1999). *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First time Researchers in Education and Social Science*. 3rd Edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Candy, P. (1990). How People Learn to Learn. In Smith, Robert, ed., *Learning To Learn Across The Lifespan*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. 4th Edition. London: Routledge.

COL (Commonwealth of Learning) (nd). "Open and Distance Learning (ODL) for Development". Accessed 8 May 2009.

<http://www.col.org/about/whatis/ODL/Pages/default.aspx>

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Indiresan, J. (1996). *Emerging Technologies in Open and Distance Education, Implications for Women in Women and Emerging Technologies'* editors Regina Papa and Yasodha Shanmuga Sundaram, British Council Division. Emerald Publishers, Chennai, 1996.

Jackson, M. (2001). Making a Mark. *Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2001.

Jung, I. (2008). ICT and quality assurance to support ubiquitous access to distance education: Promises, realities and recent breakthroughs. 5th EDEN Research Workshop 20th-30th Oct 2008 Paris France. slideshare.net/eden online

Keengwe, J., Onchwari, G. & Wachira, P. (2008). Computer technology integration and student learning: barriers and promise. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 17(6), 560–565.

Lentell, H. (2003). The importance of the tutor in open and distance learning. In: A Tait, R Mills (Eds.): *Rethinking Learner Support in Distance Education: Change and Continuity in an International Context*. London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 64-76.

McDonough, J. & McDonoug, H.S. (1997). *Research Methods for English Language Teachers*. London: Arnold.

Smith, A. (2004). Off-campus support in distance learning: How do our students define quality? *Quality Assurance in Education*, 12(1): 28–38.

Voogt, J. (2003). *Consequences of ICT for Aims, Contents, Processes and Environments of Learning*. In J. van den Akker, W. Kuiper, & U. Hameyer (Eds.), *Curriculum landscapes and trends* (blz. 217–236). Dordrecht: Kluwer.