April 2012

Volume 1
Number 1

http://www.wojde.org

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From the Editor

Dear readers of intWOJDE

Welcome to the first issue of the Women Online Journal of Distance Education, intWOJDE, an online publication in Eskisehir, Turkey.

The intWOJDE reflects that the disciplines of Women position, benefits, advantages and disadvantages in Distance Education/Learning, Open Learning areas are interdependent with one another, as education and technology increasingly affects our system, students, colleagues, distance educators, administrators, researchers and our own professional practice.

The first issue of the intWOJDE appeared at the begin of April, 20121 as Vol:1 Number: 1. The intWOJDE will aim to establish new channels of communication the for the women in distance education world in general from all of the world.

Among the goals of the TOJDE are to share experiences on effective use of distance education in formal and non-formal education, to provide a communication network among distance education experts in order to able to define new strategies for dealing with the issues of distance education for women. In international scope, this scholarly e-journal will publish refereed articles, researches, case studies, book/conference reviews focusing on the women issues and challenges of providing research and information services to women learners participated or enrolled at any of level of distance education. It will particularly strive to meet the continuing education needs of practitioners by providing a forum for the discussion of extended learning policies and practices, and trends in information technologies as they impact the delivery of any kind of the student support services for distance learners and institutions.

This first edition features articles ranging from theoretical to practical studies, across a wide range of interests and topics. In this issue is published 5 articles, by 9 authors from 4 different countries are placed. These published articles are from Nigeria, Russia and USA and Zimbawe

Our first article, entitled OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: An Alternative University Education for Women At The Zimbabwe Open University, written by Tichaona MAPOLISA and Chipo CHIRIMUUTA, from the Zimbabwe Open University, ZIMBABWE. In their descriptive study metion end examined that study extent to which open and distance learning(ODL) is an alternative university education for women at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). it explored 50 ZOU staff, that is , 12 female academic and nine clerks- and 1 7 male academic staff and 12 clerical staff who were all purposively sampled. The study was a qualitative in nature. Its research strategy was a case study. Data were gathered using open-ended questionnaires. The study found out that most women had been deprived of university education because of the absence of ODL university education before 1993. Cultural and historical factors used to elbow women out of the conventional university education. The study concluded that lack of university education for women could be a drawback for the production of the human capital. It also concluded that lack of university education for women was a letdown to national development. The study recommended the need for Ministry of higher and tertiary education stake holders to allocate recourses to ODL university education for women. The study could be extended to other ODL tertiary education institutions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries for the sake of comparison using other research methodologies.

Second article from USA written by Khitam AZAIZA, from Dr. Nova Southeastern University, Fishler School of Education, USA on "WOMEN'S DIALOG AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A University in the Arab World". Her study puroses to identify the

relationship between the Arab women's dialog and their perceptions of distance education, their personal relevance with the distance education paradigm, and their life affiliations within a distance education environment. *Aspects of* Moore's Transactional Distance Theory were investigated in this study. Transactional distance education occurs in an environment when teachers and learners are separated. This separation deals with learners' and teachers' behaviors and affects both. This study is a descriptive study employed a mix of methods. A sample of 150 active female learners at the Al-Quds Open University in Paletsine-Gaza Strip Branch was surveyed. A response rate of 80% was obtained. Furthermore, eight females from the responses were telephone interviewed. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were calculated to identify significant relationships of life affiliations, personal relevance satisfaction, and perception of distance education dimensions towards female students' dialog in a distance education setting. The findings indicated that life affiliations had no significant differences on the women's dialog measures through distance education. However, the personal relevance and the perceptions about distance education were significantly related to the concept of women's dialog.

The third article arrived again from Zimbawe and titled as "CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY: A Case of Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions", and written by Enna Sukutai GUDHLANGA, from Sian Newsome MAGADZA and her colleague Onias MAFA, from Zimbabwe Open University Bulawayo Region, ZIMBABWE. This paper recognizes that women's participation in higher education is very low. Women's marginalization in higher education stems from the traditional patriarchal tendencies, customary law and colonialism. The paper discusses the opportunities and challenges that female students face in trying to access distance education in Zimbabwe. Female students are under-represented at ZOU, the sole open and distance learning institution in Zimbabwe. The female student population is worsened by the fact that a larger proportion of them than male students drop out. The reasons for this are multiple but revolve around women's multiple roles of home keeper, wife and mother. The paper focuses on Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions in order to compare a rural and an urban set up. Data was collected from ZOU students and lecturers through in-depth interviews. It is hoped the paper will bring to the fore the various challenges that female students encounter and finally emerge with some possible intervention strategies that could help increase the number of female students' participation in distance education.

The Gender approach to development (GAD) will also guide this study. GAD analysis highlights the incentives and constraints associated with the work of women and men and highlights differences in their roles, workloads, access to resources and decision making opportunities, the impact of interventions on them and the implications for planning and implementation. The gender approach to development advocates for the lessening of social inequalities between men and women. Gender as a policy criterion has been found to reduce poverty, raises farm efficiency and improves natural resources management (Ellis, 2000). It also emphasizes participatory approaches as a tool to empower women through their articulation of their needs, rights and capabilities. Communities should be encouraged to embrace the gender approach when focusing on development issues in communities. Once women are empowered and have the social and economic resources the quality of life of their households improves. If women therefore contribute so much to the social well-being of families in particular and communities in general it is therefore necessary for policy makers to develop policies that enable communities to improve women's access to resources like distance education.

The forth one is titled as "DISTANCE EDUCATION AS A WOMEN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY IN AFRICA" and written by Felix Kayode OLAKULEIN and Olugbenga David OJO From National Open University of Nigeria, NIGERIA. They mentioned in their study

that women emancipation through empowerment all over the world is at its peak and Africans generally are not left out. It is an attempt to make sure that women's voices are heard and are given their right places in the scheme of things. Nonetheless, the issue of educational attainment of women considering the low level of girls' education in Africa is at a negative variance to attaining women position since certain educational attainments are required to function effectively in the various available organs; be it work place, group or committees of local or international standing. This paper therefore stresses the use of open and distance institution in Nigeria as an avenue to attain knowledge and education that would put women in a better stead toward achieving their aims and aspirations.

The fifth article written by Galina ARTYUSHINA and Olga SHEYPAK from Moscow, RUSSIA. This article analyzes the modern situation with the gender problem at one of the Russian technological universities -"MATI- Russian State Technological University named after K.E.Tsiolkovsky" and discusses the reasons of imbalance between women and men in student, postgraduate and teacher population.

Dear readers, int.WOJDE wishes to add new sections in its body as "Notes for Editor" and a ""Review" in its future issues as soon as possible. So we are waiting materials for these sections too in due course.

You can reach us online either directly at http://www.wojde.org To receive further information and to send your recommendations and remarks, or to submit articles for consideration, please contact intWOJDE Secretariat at the below address or e-mail us at intwojde@gmail.com

Hope to stay in touch and wishingto meet in our next Issue, 1st of July 2012

Cordially,

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OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING:
An Alternative University Education
for Women At The Zimbabwe Open University

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the extent to which open and distance learning(ODL) is an alternative university education for women at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). it explored 50 ZOU staff , that is , 12 female academic and nine clerks- and 1 7 male academic staff and 12 clerical staff who were all purposively sampled. The study was a qualitative in nature. Its research strategy was a case study. Data were gathered using open-ended questionnaires. The study found out that most women had been deprived of university education because of the absence of ODL university education before 1993. Cultural and historical factors used to elbow women out of the conventional university education. The study concluded that lack of university education for women could be a drawback for the production of the human capital. It also concluded that lack of university education for women was a letdown to national development. The study recommended the need for Ministry of higher and tertiary education stake holders to allocate recourses to ODL university education for women. The study could be extended to other ODL tertiary education institutions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries for the sake of comparison using other research methodologies.

Keywords: Southern African Development Community (SADC); conventional university education; education for women; Zimbabwe Open University.

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that some African societies have had a tendency to perpetuate gender inequality in terms of educating the boy-child at the expense of the girl-child. Regardless of winds of civilization that have swept past the African continent, the girl-child's access to educational opportunities has remained a dream rather than a reality. This contradicts the fact that African populations are characterized by more females than males, for example, the 1998 Population and Housing Census registered 9 933 868 people of which 51 percent were females and 49 percent were males, with a population growth of 2 percent per annum (National Statistical Office, 2000 in Maluwa-Banda,2003), it is imperative that the subject of depriving the African girl-child education be given priority in the wake of the need to deliberately drive towards poverty alleviation and eradication in Zimbabwe.

Where women students continue to lag behind in educational achievement and access, particularly at the secondary, tertiary and university levels, where girls' enrolment,

completion and achievement rates are lower, it becomes a big concern when we talk about the role of education of the youth in poverty alleviation, regardless of gender (Huggins and Randell, 2007). Educating both sexes should be viewed as an investment into the future.

Negative societal attitudes and practices that stifle girl-child access to education should never be ignored if ever African societies entertain any hopes to escape from poverty. This paper therefore attempts to remove the stigma that surrounds the subject about girl-child education by focusing on those practices that promote equality and economic empowerment of women. This is critical in our society, which is grappling with effects of poverty. It is therefore the intention of this paper to urge society to dissociate itself from the practices of marginalizing the women from university education. To underscore this fact, Maluwa-Banda (2003:4) points out that, "The elimination or eradication of poverty and progress towards sustainable development will only take place with increased and improved levels of education". If ever poverty is to be eliminated, then university education should be central to the achievement of equality in society, including between men and women (Fant, 2008).It was in the interests of this paper to explore the extent to which open and distance learning is an alternative university education at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Women have been deprived of university education for a very long time. Reasons for such deprivation have been varied. This paper intended to investigate the degree to which open and distance learning is an alternative university education for women at the Zimbabwe Open University. Thus, the study intended to answer the question: How is open and distance learning an alternative university education for women at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU)?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study intends to provide answers to the following sub-questions:

➤ Which factors deprived women university education in Zimbabwe?
➤ How does lack of university education for women cost ZOU and the country at large?
➤ How is open and distance learning university education beneficial to women and the economy at the ZOU?
➤ What could be possible effects of open and distance learning university education for women to ZOU and the economy?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study was significant in a number of ways. First, it would contribute to the existing body of knowledge by adding new knowledge regarding the degree to which open and distance education could be an alternative university education for women at the ZOU.

Second, the findings could inform policy makers of the need to priorities university education for women if ever their countries are to develop.

Third, findings from this study would go a long way in extending frontiers of knowledge regarding benefits and costs of open and distance education with particular reference to the ZOU. Furthermore, knowledge from the conduct of this study would make ODL policy makers reap benefits from providing university education to women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that Appear to Deprive Women University Education

Factors which seem to stifle access to university education are far from resulting from colonial and post-independence policies. Despite these factors, it is common cause that some few girls have had access to education. While this deprivation of the women within the context of education has been largely viewed as emanating from pre-independence and post-independence policies, there are also cultural factors that need be taken cognisance of. Seemingly relevant to the Zimbabwean situation, Wolf and Odonkor (1998) argue that the cultural dimension that often draw boundaries for changes are not specific while customs and traditions which form an integral part of a people usually are used to perpetuate situations which subordinate women to men. Different cultures construct gender categories differently and symbolize male, female and their relations differently; there is little doubt that distinctions along gender lines are universally made (Fant, 2008). Historic marginalisation is one other considered factor that may hinder the African girl-child's education. Gender-based curriculum and teaching methods, according to Huggins and Randell (2007) and Fant (2008) appear to be a major barrier to girls' education as the education exists in a masculinised school environment: curriculum, classroom buildings, and assessment methods, among other attributes-are all consistently tailored to male students. Moreover, in Rwanda, there is a lack of female teachers or role models for girls (Huggins and Randell, 2007). These findings did not particularize ODL situations. They were consistent with conventional university institutions. The focus of this study was to investigate the degree to which ODL was an alternative for women university education at the ZOU.

Benefits of Women University Education

In Abdi (2006), people greatly value education not necessarily for its direct utilitarian or economic purposes only, but for its overall contributions to the socio-cultural and other community based advancements. University education has the capacity to bestow the individual and the society at large. In the same direction, Folson (2006) exhorts that education has led to the creation socio-political consciousness among people in both rural and urban areas.

Also Sweetman (2001) notes that the overall capacities of communities to prepare for and cope with future disasters will be enhanced through harnessing the resources and active participation of both women and men. On the same wavelength, education is argued to be one of the cornerstones of development in any given country. All levels of education should be accessed by every individual who needs education. Education should never be accessed along gender lines (Moyo, 2003; Zvobgo, 2000). UNICEF (2007) and Summers (1994) concur that any investment in the girl child education is one of the greatest pathways for economic development. UNICEF (2007) found out that an educated woman gains a higher status and self efficacy than an uneducated one.

These findings lacked context specificity of ODL situations, although they indicated benefits of women university education in the context of conventional university situations.

Costs of Lack of Women University Education

While university education has some benefits, lack of women university education has some costs to ODL institutions and the country. A nation with women who lack university education lacks human capital, progress in terms of decision making, nutritional health, sanitary health, hygienic standards and productivity (Abdi, 2006; Folson, 2006; Sweetman, 2001).Women without university education lacks political consciousness (Todaro and Smith, 2005). Klassen (1999), for example, carried out a study on: "Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development?"-and found out that the growth

rates in East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East had different growth rates attributed to gender inequality in basic education. Furthermore, Datt and Martin (2002) found out that low education has been costly to India's poor, depriving them of the capacity to participate in economic growth opportunities. These findings managed to point out costs of lack of women university education, but they did not relate them to ODL university education. It was in the interests of this paper to find out the degree to which such findings were applicable to the ZOU situations.

METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative study was used in this study because it is interactive (Silverman, 2006).The study employed a qualitative case study research strategy. This case study was chosen because it enables researchers to study phenomenon in greater depth in order to reach deeper understanding (Cresswell, 2005).Twelve female academic staff and nine clerks – and 17 male academic staff and 12 clerical staff who were all purposively sampled. Purposive sampling makes use of research participants who possess desirable research characteristics (Seale, 2006). The study employed the interview method which comprised open-ended questions that sought descriptive and narrative responses regarding phenomenon understudy (Thomas and Nelson, 2001).The research data were analysed and discussed using themes that emerged from the study.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The discussion of the research findings are preceded by the description of the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The findings are to be discussed in line with the following themes:

➢ Factors which deprived women of university education in Zimbabwe.
➢ Costs of lack of university education for women to ZOU and the country at large.
➢ How open and distance learning university education beneficial to women and the economy at the ZOU.
➢ Possible negative effects of ODL university education for women at the ZOU.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Most (58%) of the research participants were male, while the rest were female. The average age of the research participants was 44, 6 years. Thirty percent of the research participants belonged to the Faculty of Arts and Education, while 28% belonged to the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, 22% belonged to the Faculty of Science and Technology- and 20% belonged to the Faculty of Commerce and Law.

Thirty two percent of the research participants indicated that they were Programme Leaders based at the ZOU's National Centre. Another 32% revealed that they were lecturers (Regional Programme Leaders) based at the Harare Region. Clerical staff both at the National Centre and Harare Region constituted the other 36%.

DISCUSSION OF THE ACTUAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Factors that Deprived Women of University Education
In connection with the factors that elbowed women out of the university education, three findings emerged from the study.

The majority (98%) of the research participants indicated that most women had been deprived of university education because of the absence of ODL university education prior to 1993. One participant indicated that it was pretty hard for women to access university education at conventional universities. Another participant pointed out that conventional university education was quite expensive for some parents and the fees were beyond their capacity to finance their girl children's education. These findings imply that non-availability of ODL university institution before 1993 kept women out university education. These findings were consistent with previous research findings by Huggins and Randell (2007), who observe that Rwandese girls and women have historically been marginalized from the education system, and from participating in public life more broadly because girls' schools were introduced a full 40 years after boys'.

The same authors go on to say initially, girls' education focused on developing skills which reinforced their socialized roles such as secretarial skills, home economics and general hygiene-while boys were prepared to be co-partners in administration activities and other development. Young men also enjoyed favoured more access at higher levels and in different fields, including administration, science and technology than their female counterparts. Perhaps this may to explain why most of the post-independent Zimbabwe's key posts in the Public Sector, Industry and Commerce were a preserve of men.

Seventy percent of the research participants indicated that prior to 1993, cultural factors stifled women university education. Different cultures construct gender categories differently and symbolize male, female and their relations differently; there is little doubt that distinctions along gender lines are universally made (Fant, 2008). Cultures view their gender differently. Pauline and Tembon (1999) say that socio-cultural attitudes and traditions often determine the status of girls will eventually marry and become house wives means that mothers consider what they learn at home as important, if not important than what they learn at school.

Therefore, according to Fant (2008), the norm would be for girls to stay closer to their mothers as they grow up and learn household skills to stay closer to their mothers and learn household skills and behaviors to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers. In some Zimbabwean societies, girls are not allowed to go to school. Girls are born for boys. It is enough for a girl if she knows how to cook and how to keep houses well. The belief in sending the girl-child to school would be a sign of impoverishing her family, while at the same time enriching her future in-laws. In some cases, where families are financially challenged, given the opportunity to send either the boy-child or the girl-child to school, they tend to prefer to send the former to the latter. There is a tendency of believing that the boy-child has more capacity, responsibility and authority to look after their families, relatives and communities even after they get married.

However, in view of rapid urbanization, this could be contestable on the grounds that some boy-children appear to be settling in the cities, thereby, neglecting their assumed responsibilities. To make matters worse, some boys have detached themselves from rural areas, thereby, exacerbating poverty levels in their societies. What is apparent from a progressive society's point of view is the fact that access to education should never be gender discriminatory.

Fifty percent of the research participants felt that fewer women than men received university education by conventional means because conventional university environments largely favored men. These findings appear to be compatible with earlier findings by Huggins and Randell (2007) and Fant (2008) who found out that gender-based curriculum and teaching methods appear to be a major barrier in girls' education as the education exists in a masculinised school environment: curriculum, classroom buildings, and assessment methods, among other attributes-are all consistently tailored

to male students. Moreover, in Rwanda, there is a lack of female teachers or role models for girls (Huggins and Randell, 2007). This scenario is somehow different at the ZOU Regional Centers which are staffed with more male lecturers than their female counterparts. What remains to be explored in future studies is the degree to which how well female lecturers at the ZOU have the capacity, influence and commitment to play and provide the role model for the ZOU's female staff.

Costs of Lack of University Education for Women

Regarding costs of lack of women university education, the study came up with four critical findings.

All participants were content that lack of university education could worsen the gender disparities in regard to access to higher education. Four research participants concurred that depriving women university education created classes along gender lines in which the upper class was made up of men, while the lower class belonged to women .By implication, this lack of university education would relegate women to second class citizens. They would be subservient and submissive to their male counterparts in all spheres of life.

Also, all research participants revealed that lack of university education for women could be a drawback towards the production of the human capital.

Two research participants pointed out that women without university education could not equal their male accomplices with university education in terms of skills and expertise. Such women would not compete with men on labour market .Men would be more marketable in terms of trainability and employability. Majority (90%) of the research participants were of the view that lack of university education for women in Zimbabwe could be drawback to the development of the country. One tenth of the research participants lamented that keeping women at an arm's length in terms of provision of university education was tantamount to banning them actively taking part in matters relating to their community and national development.

These findings seem to be comparable with Sweetman's (2001) observations which indicated that women without university education lack confidence to fully participate in their economy. Most (95%) of the research participants indicated that women who lack university education at their organization had limited chances of getting promoted.

One research participant indicated that women without university education could not easily climb up the ladder at one's workplace. These findings were with the present researchers' lines of thought that without university education it would be hard for women to hope the ladder of progress employment-wise. In other words, such women would be deserted by upward professional mobility at the workplace. They would not be able to hop the ladder of progress.

Benefits of ODL University Education for Women

With regards to how open and distance learning could be an alternative to university education for women at the ZOU, the ensuing findings which are be realized through the benefits of exposing women to university education through ODL emerged:

All research participants' commended the ZOU's practice of educating its employees' spouses and children for free. Ninty percent of the research participants pointed out that this practice was not gender discriminatory because it catered for both male and female spouses and biological children of the ZOU personnel. By so doing, more women are bound to have increasingly large access to university education.

Sixty percent of the research participants indicated that more women could be education at the ZOU if they are given a market driven incentive of charging fees that are slightly lower than those of males. Anything between 90%-95% could attract more female students to the ZOU. As researchers we largely subscribe to these findings on the understanding that ZOU's student enrolments would be boosted since Zimbabwe has more female citizens than male one*s.*

Through embarking on e-tutoring, 75% of the research participants indicated that ODL could be an alternative for university education for women at the ZOU. If resources permit, ZOU may work hand in hand with the corporate world, government and donors to source and supply students with laptops so that learners can undertake their studies at home. We are sure that in not so distant future, more women would prefer ODL university education if they manage to access laptops with internet services. This would enable them to study at their own pace and in the comfort of their home. Under such a scenario, the society is bound earn non-monetary rewards educating women through ODL. Wolfe and Haveman (2002) have suggested the following list of non-monetary societal benefits of higher education. Firstly non-average labour market remuneration, such as fringe benefits and the quality of working conditions are positively affected by educational attainment levels.

In the Zimbabwean scenario, workers with the lower education attainment levels tend to have poorer working conditions because if they complain they risk getting fired and replaced at an instant. Good examples of such workers are grounds personnel and general hand cargo loaders whose skills are not as indispensable as those of medical doctors and university lecturers Secondly, consumer choices are more rational and efficient. Here, the society is endowed with sublime requisite decision-making skills which enable people to budget properly and desist from impulse buying. One other non-monetary societal benefit is that job searches are more extensive among the more highly educated, resulting in a better match between the Individual and the company, which enhances efficiency. In other words people with more education and skills are more marketable on the job market. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Zimbabwean professionals such as nurses, teachers, doctors and university lecturers are on high demand regionally and internationally.

In addition to job researches, savings rates are higher among the more highly educated. The more highly educated have the propensity to save funds in planning their future welfare than their less educated compatriots. They do so, by buying company shares investing in paid-up shares, unit trusts and opening fixed deposits accounts to name a few means of investment. Furthermore, research and development activities are more common and numerous in regions with high educational attainment. Educated people are bleeds with sound problem-solving skills to deal with societal problems in an economy. Less criminal behaviour and lower incarceration rates occur among the more highly educated .Charitable giving increases educational attainment. In Zimbabwe, scholarships, bursaries and vocational training loans help to realize this societal benefit. Social cohesion is higher among the more highly educated, as reflected in higher voting rates. Informed and involved voters are the foundation of a democratic society, and education helps develop skills for a democracy.

Most (80%) of the research participants were content that through study circles in district centres more women would realise that ODL is an alternative to conventional university education. As the present researchers, we feel that it is through increased interaction by students with their counterparts at district and cluster study circles that more women and their spouses will be motivated to value the need for women to take up the ODL opportunities at the ZOU.

Majority (90%) of the research participants indicated that different companies have a role to play in making women realise that ODL university education is the in thing. It may be necessary for companies to provide sponsorship for their female employees. This would benefit the companies because their employees would not leave their work in order to get educated. They would continued working while they would be increasing their knowledge, skills, competencies and expertise needed by their work .As researchers we tend to agree with these observations on the grounds that the ODL. University education for women would make them more productive and competent as they will be putting theory into practice. Society can reap monetary benefits from educating women through ODL. While widely discussed; relatively few authors have attempted to quantify social monetary gains of higher education investments. One way to do so is to examine whether regional economies with greater proportions of college trained workers exhibit evidence of prosperity that may be attributed to higher levels of educational attainment (Macerinskiene and Vaiksnoraite, 2006:84).One other societal monetary benefit of HCT is advanced by Moretti (2004) who states that there is great relationship between labourforce shares of college graduates and the wages attained by all workers. Also the productivity in the industries tends to rely on the attainment of HCT. Boiler Makers and Fitter and Turners in Zimbabwe might become more productive and better paid by getting university education. Glasier, Mare, Cities and Skills (2001) examined wages in cities – identifying effects that accrue to those cities with higher education and skill levels.. Results point to the position that spillovers that manifest themselves in a faster growth and higher wages as educated people interact.

Another monetary social benefit is the extent to which the university graduates earn and spend more than those without a degree (Mortenson, 1999). In Zimbabwe, the government collects tax revenue from university graduates which represent a social good. The taxes paid by university graduates repay the society costs of their education several times over. There is an economic sense in doing so because university graduates would have been educated using other citizens' taxes.

Moretti (2004) contends that higher wages in areas of educational attainment is the enhancement of productivity that comes with a workforce with more education and skills. Locally, the human capital such as medical doctors, engineers and managers with more HCT are assumed to be more productive, skilled and competent. Therefore, they are bound to earn higher salaries, bonuses and allowances than unskilled workers. According to Lucas (1988), productive spillovers are large enough to explain the difference between the poor and the countries. The spillovers provide a basis for public investment and endeavors that increases the number of ODL university graduates in the workforce. The quest for better monetary returns largely motivated many Zimbabwean professionals to attain their work-related degrees through the Zimbabwe Open University. Not only did they look forward to get more pay, their promotion chances were better enhanced and they were also to be self-actualised.

Possible Challenges to ODL University Education for Women at the ZOU
While the HCT of women through ODL has both individual and societal monetary and non-monetary benefits, it is not devoid of some criticisms.

First, most (85%) of the research participants felt that over -education eroded their qualifications. In agreement with these findings, Machin (1999) states that throughout 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s the times series pattern of the relative supply of the highly educated workers and wage changes shows that there is a dampening down of wages in response to increased supply. Over the years in Zimbabwe, similar jobs have been filled by increasingly qualified staff as more people with higher qualifications have emerged from the education system. Professionals' qualifications have emerged from the

education system. Professionals' qualifications tend to lose value with time. This goes a long way towards explaining the semantic shift in relation of diplomas (Abdi, 2006).

Closely related to the dampening down of wages in response to increased supply, 90 % of the research participants felt that the process of expansion in higher education tends to expose variations in certifying effects of university diplomas as the number of candidates joining the employment market outstrips the number of graduate jobs that are available. This explains the growing use of notions of "sub-employed under-employed" graduates or an over-educated labourforce. Local three examples can be drawn from the education sector: first, a Masters Graduate teacher in charge of a primary school class is very under-employed. Second, a post – graduate degree teacher handling a secondary school class is also very under-employed. Last, a lecturer with a doctorate teaching at a Teachers' Education College is absolutely under-employed. In all the examples, the graduate educationists are surely underutilized because they might not exhibit their best shot at a wrong job.

The assumption that social return in human capital exceeds private return in a nation has been played down by the current brain drain in Zimbabwe. There have been proportional increases in social returns to complement the heavy social costs incurred by the state to its citizens (Folson, 2006). By the same token, Todaro (1997:309) laments, "The specialists reap benefits from poor nations to contribute further economic growth of already affluent nations".

This tends to cripple the nation's economy when one considers the fact tertiary and university education received by these specialists is dearer than primary and university education undermining the Government's hope of getting more social returns after having given tertiary education very high subsidies.

Most (80%) of the research participants were content that the falling living standards and high costs of living are inducing human capital of university educated personnel. Zimbabwe has been experiencing economic recession since 2000.

According to Ravenstein in Chimbombo and Mutukudzi (2000), one can argue that lack of economic development has forced skilled labourforce to migrate out of the country. There has been no solace for the patriotic human capital remain in Zimbabwe to loyally and diligently work for Zimbabwe, inflation, high rates of taxation and foreign exchange have been hard-hitting them leading to very high costs of living.

In essence, the consequence of this continual decline in living standards might prompt migration of this remnant human capital to more industrialized nations which have very high paying jobs regardless of them being professional or menial.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the above findings the following summary and conclusions suffice.

➢ **Lack of ODL university education opportunities prior to 1993 deprived women of university education. When given the same human rights and opportunities through ODL as those of men, women begin to receive more education, and thus increasing the overall human capital of the country. The human capital is assumed to be a vehicle for nation to drive poverty away as people will be gainfully employed and having very high earnings. Education is considered as a basic human right and is closely related to virtually all dimensions namely, physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, morally,**

economically and politically. Through education women know what is best for them rather than what men claim to be best for women. They know very well how to use education as a weapon to fight against poverty.

➢ Cultural and historical factors stifled women university education in conventional universities before 1993. When given more human rights and opportunities, women begin to receive more education, and thus increasing the overall human capital of the country.

➢ Conventional universities' facilities favoured men such that women were elbowed out of the university education system. Education through ODL empowers women in the same way it does to men. When women are empowered, they are bound to help some countries to increase and sustain economic development. This will help nations to escape from poverty.

➢ Lack of university education for women could worsen the already existing gender disparities in regard to access to higher education. When given more educational opportunities through ODL, more women are seen to be able to act more responsibly in helping people in the family and in their societies.

➢ Lack of university education for women is a drawback to human capital development. Education is considered as a basic human right and is closely related to virtually all dimensions namely, physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, morally, economically and politically. Through education women know what is best for them rather than what men claim to be best for women. They know very well how to use education as a weapon to fight against poverty.

➢ Lack of university education for women is a hindrance for the development of the country. When better educated, more women appear to be in control of their lives and are more successful in bringing down rapid population growth because they tend to have more than family planning issues. The belief is that large families are generally prone to poverty. They tend to lack basic needs.

➢ Lack of university education among women presented them with limited chances of promotability and trainability.

➢ ODL university education at the ZOU is open to all people regardless of all forms of discrimination. This paper bears in mind that the relationship between the provision non-gender discriminatory education and poverty is quite clear. Educated people including women tend to have higher earning potential and are better able to improve the quality of their lives. Such people are less likely to be marginalized within their societies. Lack of university education for women through ODL results in gender based poverty.

➢ Women student enrolments could be boosted if female students pay relatively lower fees than male students.

➢ E-tutoring may also boost female students at the ZOU since anybody will be able to undertake one's studies in the comfort of one's home.

➢ Study circles in district centers may make more women students realise that ODL university education is a worthwhile alternative to conventional university.

➢ Different companies and the corporate world can play a big part by sponsoring women students undertaking studies at the ZOU.

➢ Mass university education erodes qualifications.

➢ Availability of more university graduates on the labour market usually outstrips the number of jobs available in the labour market.

➢ More university education coupled with high cost of living, lack of jobs, poor working conditions and poor living standards induce human capital flight.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing summary and conclusions the study recommends the need for:

➢ **Stakeholders of the Higher and Tertiary Education Ministry comprising the government, the corporate world, business community, mining and farming enterprises, donors and Non- Governmental Organizations allocate adequate resources to ODL university education for women.**

➢ **Resuscitating adult learning programmes through study circles at cluster and district centers that may enhance literacy and numeracy among adult women learners.**

➢ **The practice of ensuring that the government monitors ODL female student enrolments and provides adequate support schemes to prevent high female student dropout rates. This implies monitoring completion rates in order to increase them.**

➢ **Putting in place a broad based economic growth and development strategy in favour of the poor and that supports women empowerment.**

➢ **Emphasising the gender and human rights approach to HIV and AIDS interventions at all levels of is central to poverty alleviation. This can be done through exposing women to ODL university education.**

➢ **Building the national capacity to mainstream gender and HIV and AIDS into national policies and programmes is crucial in mapping strategies to curb poverty through ODL university education for women.**

➢ **Carrying out country wide advocacy campaigns to eliminate negative societal and cultural attitudes that deprive women access to university education is a critical approach to handle and minimise poverty.**

➢ **Providing adequate information on what it costs to eliminate existing gaps between men and women in terms of access to educational opportunities regarding university education.**

➢ **Considering that findings of the present study are far from being exhaustive since the study has been largely qualitative. Therefore; further research using quantitative research approach needs to be carried out at national scale targeting selected tertiary education institutions throughout the country. This may go a long way in generating meaningful, credible, authentic and valid knowledge.**

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WOMEN'S DIALOG AND DISTANCE LEARNING:
A University in the Arab World

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between the Arab women's dialog and their perceptions of distance education, their personal relevance with the distance education paradigm, and their life affiliations within a distance education environment.

Aspects of Moore's Transactional Distance Theory were investigated in this study. Transactional distance education occurs in an environment when teachers and learners are separated. This separation deals with learners' and teachers' behaviors and affects both.

This study is a descriptive study employed a mix of methods. A sample of 150 active female learners at the Al-Quds Open University in Paletsine-Gaza Strip Branch was surveyed. A response rate of 80% was obtained. Furthermore, eight females from the responses were telephone interviewed. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were calculated to identify significant relationships of life affiliations, personal relevance satisfaction, and perception of distance education dimensions towards female students' dialog in a distance education setting. The findings indicated that life affiliations had no significant differences on the women's dialog measures through distance education. However, the personal relevance and the perceptions about distance education were significantly related to the concept of women's dialog.

Keywords: Aspects of Moore's; the women's dialog; transactional distance theory; women in distance education.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education is a growing trend in all regions of the world. There are more than 850 institutions around the world delivering education at a distance (Alsunbul, 2002; D'Orise & Day, 2006). Enrollments have increased tremendously since 1995 (Hunter, 2007). The majority of distance learners are adult women (Hunter, 2007). Currently, there are more than 3.48 million online students in United States of America, and probably more than 10 million enrolled students who receive distance education services across the world (Storey & Tebes, 2008). Distance education has a very short history in the Arab world (Abdul Gani & Al Otaibi, n.d.).

Dual, single, and virtual are three modes of open distance learning institutions in the Arab world: Dual Mode refers to institutions that have offered education through distance as well as on-campus. UNSECO (2002, 25) stated, "in dual mode, institutions there may be an administrative staff whose sole responsibilities are distance education, but usually it is the teachers of the parent body who provide the teaching".

The Open Learning Centers in Egypt, the Distance Education Center of Juba University in Sudan, and the Open Learning Centers in Syria are examples of Arab institutions that have offered distance education using the dual mode (Abdul Gani & Al Otaibi, n.d.; Mohamed, 2005).

Single Mode refers to institutions that have dedicated their activities based on the need for distance education. UNSECO (2002, 25) stated, "single mode institutions are those in which distance education is the sole mission, to which teachers and administrative staff are exclusively dedicated, course development, instruction, evaluation and other educational processes are tailored to the distant learner". Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in Palestine is an example of a single mode distance education university that aims to meet the needs of Palestinian students (Abdul Gani & Al Otaibi, n.d.; Mohamed, 2005).

Virtual Mode refers to institutions that have offered distance education totally online such as Syrian Virtual University (SVU) (Abdul Gani & Al Otaibi, n.d.; Mohamed, 2005). Al-Radhi (2008, para 17) stated, "virtual refers to local universities that aim to provide world-class education without boundaries so that students do not have to leave their countries to study abroad".

Because of traditional, social, and religious affiliations (Velloso, 1996), the majority of women in rural areas within the Arab world cannot physically attend classes at traditional universities (Palestine Solidarity Campaign, 2007). Furthermore, one of the major obstacles that keep women from achieving higher educational degrees is that they get married at a young age right after high school, and become housewives.

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the relationship between the Arab women's dialog in a distance education setting, and satisfaction in meeting their personal goals (e.g., self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence). Furthermore, the study identified the impact of the Arab women's life affiliations (e.g., culture, society, and religion) on their dialog in a distance education environment.

The Arab women's perception of distance education was identified. The study took place in Palestine. Palestine is sometimes known as the Holy Land. Until 1948, the area was under British rule and was called Palestine. In 1948, the state of Israel was established, and since then battles have been fought over the land (Bergan, 2000). People in Palestine face daily challenges in achieving an education because of the political environment (Lorenzetti, 2007).

EFFECTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION ON WOMEN

Distance education has been seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals. Due to its flexibility, innovative learning methods are needed (Hammad, Sarie, & Al-Ayyoub, 2004; Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005; Kwapong, 2007). Education opens the opportunities and choices for women to work and to become more self-confident (Ojo & Olakulein, 2006). Bukhsh (2007) explained that education is the key factor in empowering women to take their rightful place in society.

Moreover, education gives status and confidence in decision-making. Studies showed that women with low educational levels are affected by limited career opportunities, and women who pursue higher education gain more career opportunities (Haque & Batool, 1999; Kwapong, 2007).

LEARNERS' DIALOG AND THEIR PERSONAL RELEVANCE SATISFACTION

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between learners' satisfaction and their interaction to distance education courses. Some of those studies supported the positive relationship between students' interaction and their satisfaction in an online course. (Biggs, 2006; Herbert, 2006; Jung et al., 2002; Kelsey & D'souza, 2004; Müller, 2008; Sahin, 2007; Stein et al., 2005; Swan, 2003). Other studies did not support the

importance of teacher-to-learner interaction or learner-to- learner interaction in a distance learning setting (Anderson, 2003; Sabry & Baldwin, 2003; Shehab, 2007; Wyatt, 2005). The satisfaction of women as learners occurs from interactions with their classmates and instructors (Furst-Bowe, 2002; Müller, 2008; Kwapong, 2007; Richardson & Swan, 2003). Müller's study (2008) found that women often felt burdened by taking care of children and other family members at the same time as working and continuing their education via distance. Interaction gave women the ability to improve their personal growth. Teachers' support is extremely helpful in increasing individual students' confidence and competence to accomplish educational goals in a learning environment (Makoe, 2007). A study of 400 distance women learners from a university in Ghana was conducted by Kwapong (2007). This study indicated that, by nature, women learn best in groups and interaction. Their confidence and personal satisfaction increase when they interact with their teachers and peers. In general, women are satisfied with distance learning. This learning seems to enable women to balance school, work, and family demands (Furst-Bowe, 2002).

Learners' Dialog and Life Affiliations

Cultural context has an impact on learners' interactions in distance education settings (Usun, 2006). Cultural values have powerful constraints on individual behavior which could limit achieving goals and the success of reflective practices in the academic arena (Richardson, 2004). Kramarae (2003) pointed out that students often find the lack of social aspects can be a challenge for women for self-direction in a distance learning environment. Kramarae (2003) noted in the "Digital Divide" portion of her study that many communication differences seem to be cultural or individual, not gender- based. Although, some students expressed problems with gender and communication, many students addressed other factors, such as culture and age, had more significant barriers to online communication.

Studies found that there are relationships between learners' success in any academic environment and certain emotional, social, and academic supports (Ford, 2003; Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005). Ford's study (2003) indicated that culture affiliations influence learners' interactions. Gokool-Ramdoo (2005) reported a significant relationship between societal support and women interaction in a distance education environment. In Ghana, due to social and economic issues, women have limited access to higher education (Kwapong, 2007).

Islam supports education for both males and females. Islam has not held women back when it comes to obtaining an education (Rogers & Howell, 2004; Academy for Educational Development, 2002). Muslim countries, like Indonesia, Nigeria, China, and some Arab-Islamic governments make good use of education (Rogers & Howell, 2004).

However, in rural areas, women are kept from access to education due to the Islamic practice of Purdah, a custom that confines them to their homes unless escorted by a chaperone (Ojo & Olakulein, 2006).

In the Muslim culture, societies obey a strict code of behavior where women are protected from public display (Richardson, 2004).

Muslim women have less education because of social and cultural restrictions. Assil (2005, 53) stated:

Kuwaiti women, despite their social advancement throughout the years, continue to be legally defined as family members, whose rights and responsibilities are circumscribed by their roles as mothers, wives and daughters and are still subject to the discretions of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. … While some do go abroad for a university education, a

much greater number of women in Kuwait are not permitted to do so by their families or husbands, and furthermore, cannot obtain travel documents and visas without their father's authorization to do so.

Al-Harthi (2005) reported on a study that was conducted to provide experiences in distance education of Arab graduate students pursuing degree programs in the United States. The following are the highlighted findings of Al-Harthi's (2005) study:

➢ Muslim women felt more comfortable participating in distance education than face-to-face courses. Distance education would make it easier for Muslim women to participate in educational settings in the Arab Gulf States.
➢ In the Arab culture, the relationship between genders is limited not only by religion, but by cultural traditions as well.
➢ Cultural differences can influence the dialog in a distance education environment.
➢ Learners' Dialog and Perception

Numerous studies indicated that students generally hold a positive perception towards distance learning (Anderson & Haddad, 2005; Koohang & Durante, 2003; Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006a). Interaction plays an important role with learners' perception and helps them become more involved in the learning process (Black, 2005; Moody, 2004; Sahin, 2008; Steinman, 2007). Steinman (2007, 46) asserted that "perceptions of online courses can be negative if they experience large transactional distance with the instructor and with other students and can influence whether a student will stay in or drop out of a class."

There is a high relationship between students' perception and their dialog in a distance learning environment (Barnard, Paton & Rose, 2007; Huang, 2002; Picciano, 2002). Students who have high levels of communication and collaboration tend to have more positive perceptions (Barnard, Paton, & Rose, 2007). Communication can affect how students perceive their online education experience (Moody, 2004).

Interaction between teachers and students is needed in a successful online course.

Interaction with other students and instructors can help online learners to achieve more out of their classes.

Instructors of online learning play important roles in creating a comfortable distance learning environment (Sargeant et al., 2006).

THE METHOD

Theoretical Framework
Theory is important to conduct a study in the area of distance education because it directly impacts the practice in the field (Shehab, 2007). Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) appeared in 1972 (Moore, 1997), which was the basis for this study. TDT provides a framework of the pedagogy of distance education in an environment when teachers and learners are separated. According to the theory, the degree of communication between any learner and an instructor is never exactly the same. The TDT is a continuous rather than a discrete variable, a relative rather than an absolute term.

It identifies and describes teaching and learning approaches that do not take place in a specific site. Instructors and learners take place in different locations via distance education.

Structure, dialog, and learner autonomy are the core variables of TDT. Shehab (2007, 35) stated that "the purpose of the theory of transactional distance was to summarize the different relationships and the strength of relationship among and between these variables that make up the transactional distance.

"According to Moore (1997; 2007), structure involves the actual design of the course and the use of various media such as printed materials, CD, or teleconferences. Adult learners are self-starters who decide to be involved in the course of study. Thus, the instructor needs to address learners' culture, so learners can share learning experiences (Simonson et al., 2009).

Autonomy involves learners and the ability to have a personal learning plan that refers to self-directedness. Individuals have different degrees of interactions that depend upon their degree of autonomy. Learners with high autonomy can cope with any degree of dialog.

On the other hand, learners with low autonomy need a high degree of dialog to minimize the transactional distance (Moore, 1997). Dialog involves communication and interaction between learners and teachers.

Dialog occurs in different formats. Anderson (2007) addressed those dialog formats as the following:

- Learner-to-teacher interaction occurs when a teacher starts to gather information and discovers as much as possible about the learner. Interaction between a teacher and learners also occurs through emails or via telephones. Students need to feel comfortable and want to be able to get in touch with their instructor as it is needed. The teacher, on the other hand, needs to encourage students and make them feel that he/she is always ready to help.
- Learner-to-learner interaction occurs when a learner is working with group of two or more on a project, the instructor divides the students into sub clusters (or groups) and individual assignments are peer reviewed.
- Learner-to-content interaction occurs when all available technologies are used to provide a variety of media for student interaction such as text, audio, graphics, or video.

There were studies which were conducted about the relationship between learners' perceptions of transactional distance and their satisfaction in a distance education setting (Huang, 2000; Sahin, 2006; Shehab, 2007). Huang (2000) found that there is a positive significant relationship between interface (delivery system) and interaction, course structure, and learner autonomy dimensions. Shehab (2007) investigated the relationship between learners' satisfaction and the perception dimensions such as the course interaction, the learner's autonomy provided in the course, the course structure, the quality of instructional methods, and the course interface. Shehab (2007) found that there is a significant relationship between learner autonomy, interaction, course structure and learners' satisfaction.

However, Sahin (2006) pointed out that transactional distance theory is somewhat weak in explaining the course structure.

Research Design

A descriptive study and correlational research design was used in this study. Themes were identified to determine possible significant relationships between the concept of Women's Dialog (WD) dimension and other dimensions (i.e., Women's Personal Relevance

and Satisfaction (WPRS), Women's Life Affiliations (WLA), and Women's Perception of Distance Learning (WPDL).

The data was analyzed to identify significant relationships among those themes and the female students' dialog in a distance education setting based on the TDT defined by Moore (1997).

Instruments

Two Instruments were adapted in this study. One instrument is Distance Education Learning Environment Survey (DELES), which was developed and validated by Walker (2003)*.* The survey was used to measure distance learning environment aspects including students' interaction (dialog), instructors' support, students' personal relevance satisfaction, and students' perceptions of their distance learning environment. A 5-point Likert-type set of ordered alternatives (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always) was used to provide the respondents' feedback.

A section was added to the original instrument to gather basic demographic data such as age, gender, marital status, religion, and employment status. Walker's (2003) instrument consists of 34 statements about practices in a distance learning environment. Besides demographic information, only 25 statements from Walker's instrument and six statements from Hopper's (2000) questionnaire were used for developing the Women Dialog and Distance Learning Survey (WDDLS). The content validity for WDDLS was examined by experts in distance education. Content validity is not determined by a formula or computations but by expert evaluation (Fink (2002; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The survey was sent to seven professors at Nova Southeastern University to evaluate the content validity of the instrument. The purpose of doing this pilot study was to:

➢ Identify the extent to which the instrument covered all objectives of the research.
➢ Get experts' feedback on the format of the questionnaire.
➢ Identify the clarity of each item to the reader.
➢ Identify the appropriateness of each item in reference to its dimension indicator.
➢ Rank the importance of each item according to its relevance dimension in order to reduce the number of questions if needed.

The survey revisions were made in accordance with pilot testers' feedback. In the introduction section, a few words were added to explain some of the terms such as personal relevance. The demographic section was updated; additional questions were added to be more specific about the religion statement, and two of the statements were discarded or modified for consistency. The reliability was conducted by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which estimates the internal consistency reliability. The reliability score was 0.85, which is considered a high degree of internal consistency.

The other instrument is an in-depth semi-structured telephone interview. The purpose of using this interview was to provide "reasonably standard data across respondents, but for greater depth than can be obtained from a structured interview" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, 246). Only 11 questions were adapted from Hopper's (2000) questionnaire, which consists of 64 questions. The 11 questions were distributed under three subsections with reference to life affiliation, personal relevance satisfaction, and women's dialog; and a section of demographic information was added.

Participants

The WDDLS participation was distributed voluntary to female students who were enrolled in June, 2009 at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in Palestine, Gaza Strip center. This institution offers blended format (distance and face-to-face) courses and programs. Participants' responses were not necessarily representative of other female learners in

the QOU. This may cause lack of representation of rural areas or different centers that may have significant input. In addition, the sample for this study was derived from a center of an institution that has 22 centers across Gaza Strip and the West Bank; the results may not be generalized to other female learners. Thus, the analysis of the data presented general patterns but does not give detailed statistical information.

Procedures

The study employed qualitative and quantitative research techniques to identify themes (e.g., life affiliations, personal relevance satisfaction, and perception of distance learning) and their impact on women's perceptions of the distance learning interaction. The simple random sampling was presented by distributing the survey to the first 150 female students who were on the campus. Due to the political issues that are occurring in Palestine and to the participants' limited access to technology, the study was conducted through distance.

A manager, who was one of the male students on the campus, was authorized to administrate the study. The WDDLS and a consent form for conducting the telephone interview were sent to the manager through email. The WDDLS was distributed in Arabic to the 150 female students. Participants were asked to fill out the survey voluntarily, sign the consent form if they are interested in participating in the telephone interview, and insert the completed survey and the consent form in their envelope. To increase the rate of engagement, the manager explained the importance of the study for women in higher education and encouraged them to participate and return the completed survey at their convenience. Completed surveys were gathered and mailed to the researcher. Statistical analyses were conducted such as descriptive and Pearson correlations.

From the 120 respondents to the WDDLS, only nine females signed the interview consent form to participate with the telephone interview, but the researcher was able to contact only eight subjects. The interview was scheduled for the selected participants and lasted for approximately twenty minutes. The telephone interviews were recorded. The data was collected in Arabic and translated into English manually. The analysis of the telephone interview data followed thematic and emerged techniques (Burke & Miller, 2001; Gall et al., 2007). The process of analyzing the data was:

➢ Codes were assigned to individual participants to respect their privacy and confidentiality.
➢ Identification of themes were performed manually and determined based on the predefined questionnaire sections.
➢ The identified themes were emerged into logical dimensions of similar phenomena.
➢ Dimensions were analyzed to answer the research questions.
➢ The results were compared to the existing research literature to confirm fit.

RESULT FINDINGS

This section reports the findings from the 120 (80%) research respondents who completed the WDDLS and the eight telephone interviews for those who agreed to participate in. Analyses were conducted for descriptive tests and Pearson correlations (r). Data analyses were performed using SPSS version 14.

Demographic Description

The demographic questions asked about age, educational level, marital status, number of children, religion, and employment status. The findings indicated that the majority of Palestinian females who attaint higher education through distance are averaged in age of 25 years old ; singles; do not have children; unemployed; and embracing Islam (see Table 1., Table 2.).

Table 1.
Mean and SD of Participants' Age

	N	*M*	*SD*
Age	**118**	**24.56**	**6.27**

Note. **N=120, two participants chose not to provide their age. Minimum age=18, and maximum age=53.**

Research Question 1
What ıs The Relationship Between Women's Dialog And
Their Personal Relevance Satisfaction İn A Distance Education Environment?
To respond to this question, respondents were asked to complete a Likert-type scale (Never=1, seldom=2, sometimes=3, often=4, always=5) and select the appropriate scale for the 13 statements of the WD dimension and the four statements of the WPRS dimension (see Table 3) that applied to them. The purpose of WD was to explore the concept of women's dialog (Instructor-Interaction & Other fellow Student-Interaction) while the purpose of the WPRS was to measure respondents' personal relevance, confidence, and self-esteem in a distance learning environment. Pearson Correlation (r) was examined among WD, WPRS, and the continuous variables (e.g., age, educational level, and number of children) as presented in Table 4.

The findings indicated that there is a positive significant correlation (r=.32) at the $p < .01$ level of women's personal relevance satisfaction toward the concept of their dialog in a distance learning environment. There was not any significant correlation between the continuous variables and both WD and WPRS dimensions (see Table 4).

The more students (regardless of their age, educational level, or number of children they have) interact with instructors and fellow students, the highest personal relevance satisfaction (e.g, confidence, self esteem, and self worth) they will gain.

Table 2.
Frequently and Percentage for Educational Level, Religion,
Employed, Marital Status, and Number of Children per Participant

Variables	*N*	*%*
Educational Level		
Level – 1	**7**	**5.9**
Level – 2	**25**	**21**
Level – 3	**54**	**45.4**
Level – 4	**33**	**27.7**
Religion		
Islam	**119**	**99.2**
Christianity	**1**	**0.8**
Employed		
Yes	**27**	**22.5**
No	**92**	**76.7**
Marital Status		
Single	**81**	**67.5**
Married	**32**	**26.7**
Divorced	**6**	**5.0**
Widow	**1**	**0.8**
Children		

Yes	**31**	**25.8**
No	**89**	**74.2**
Number of Children		
One	**6**	**20.0**
Two	**4**	**13.3**
Three	**9**	**30.0**
Four	**3**	**10.0**
Six	**3**	**10.0**
Seven	**3**	**10.0**
Eight	**2**	**6.7**

Note. **N=120. One participant chose not to provide her educational level, and another one did not indicate her employed status. N=30 for number of children reported of those who had children, one participant did not indicate the number of her children. Level – 1=first academic year in the program, Level – 2=second academic year in the program, Level – 3=third academic year in the program, and Level – 4=fourth academic year in the program.**

Table 3.
Mean, SD, for the WD, WPRS, WLA, and WPDL dimensions

	N	**# of items**	*M*	*SD*
WD	**117**	**13**	**3.35**	**.64**
WPRS	**119**	**4**	**3.90**	**.65**
WLA	**118**	**6**	**3.04**	**1.19**
WPDL	**116**	**8**	**3.11**	**.94**

Note. **N=120, three participants chose not to complete all women's dialog statements, one participant chose not to complete all women's personal relevance and satisfaction**

statements, two participants chose not to complete all life affiliations statements, and four participants chose not to complete all women's perception of distance learning statements. WD=Women's Dialog, WPRS =Women's Personal Relevance Satisfaction, WLA=Women's Life Affiliations, and WPDLWomen's Perception of Distance Learning.

Furthermore, the interviewed women emphasized the importance of their interaction to instructors and local fellow students through face-to-face or distance. Learners' interaction with instructors helps them to improve their encouragement, motivation and the quality of learning outcome. Students' satisfaction of their interactions with their instructor related to learning outcome. The more students interact with instructors, the easier the class's preparation will be. Women in the study were asked to describe the nature of their interactions with their instructor from main campus and through distance. They asserted:

I do see the instructor applies an important role in distance education to motivate and encourage the students. I am in my third year, if I did not observe the motivation and the responses to my questions, I would not continue. Also, through the university portable, there are always discussion sessions between the students and the instructor and I found them very helpful. **(AB, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

My interaction with my instructors helped a lot in increasing my GPA. Instructors' interaction helps to increase the quality level of education. Students need the instructors' interaction; it is necessary. **(NR, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

I feel separation, I do not know my instructors, I do not have any interaction between me and the instructor and that effect me. Big different between a student who have a teacher

support and help and other one do not have any interaction with the instructor. It is very challenging. **(SH, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

Students expressed that they have an adequate satisfaction about their interaction with local fellow students. Students' satisfaction with their fellow students applies more toward building social relationships and networking. The more interaction between students, the highest personal relevance satisfaction (e.g., confidence, self esteem, and self worth) they will gain.

There are a social relationship and networking between students. ... Before any exams, we usually get together to learn from each other and review for the exams. ... Now I feel I am an active individual in my society, people value me more. My self-esteem has increased as well as my confidence. In the future, I will be a teacher and I will assist in building a better society. **(AB, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

Research Question 2
What Is The Relationship Between Women's Dialog
And Their Perceptions of Distance education?
To respond to this question, respondents were asked to complete a Likert-type scale (Never=1, seldom=2, sometimes=3, often=4, always=5) and select the appropriate scale for the 13 statements of the WD dimension and the eight statements of the WPDL dimension (see Table 3) that applied to them.

The WPDL dimension looked at how women perceived distance learning. Pearson Correlation (r) was examined among WD, WPDL, and the continuous variables (e.g., age, educational level, and number of children) as presented in Table 4. Correlation found to be positively significant (r=.32) at the $p < .01$ level of women's perceptions of distance education toward the concept of their dialog. There was not any significant correlation between the continuous variables and both WD and WPDL dimensions (see Table 4). Students who interact with instructors and peers tend to positively perceive distance learning environment. The analysis of telephone interview supported the quantitative results.

There is a positive relationship between learners' perceptions of distance education and their interaction with both students and instructors. Students who interact with instructors and peers tend to positively perceive distance learning environment. Interviewed women shared their perception of distance education:

Distance education was the solution for my situation as a wife and mother of three children. I do not have to attend the lecture. ...Distance education method is suitable for me. .. . Students who have questions need to contact the instructor through the university portable, emails, phone or even meeting in his/her office; ....instructor always responses to the questions... there is more interaction via distance than face-to-face. Instructors are very helpful via distance. I see this interaction is necessary and beneficial for students. .. There is very helpful and strong relationship between students. Before any exam, we usually get together to learn from each other and review for the exams. **(AB, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

Distance education helps me to think out of the box and to be independent. The instructor and students both has to collaborate...Distance education helps in many things. It gives opportunity for everyone to purse education. It is the solution for working and married women. Women who finished high school many years ago, now, they are attending the Open University... If I ask my instructors question, usually I get the answer, which is helpful. ....The interaction between students is very helpful. **(GH, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

Table 4.
Pearson correlation(r) for predicting the correlation among
WD, WPRS, WLA, WPDL, age, educational level, and number of children

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. WD	--	.32**	.03	.32**	-.03	.05	.25
2. WPRS		--	.11	.23*	.09	.02	.07
3. WLA			--	.14	-.07	.18	-.08
4. WPDL				--	.18	-.07	.06
5. Age					--	.28**	.68**
6. Educational Level						--	.03
7. # of Children							--

Note. * Donated the significant correlation at the *p* < .05 level (2-tailed), and ** donated the significant correlation at the *p* < .01 level (2-tailed). WD=Women's Dialog, WPRS =Women's Personal Relevance Satisfaction, WLA=Women's Life Affiliations, and WPDL=Women's Perception of Distance Learning.

Research Question 3
What Is The Relationship Between Women's Dialog
And Their Life Affiliations Such As Society, Culture, And Religion?
To answer this question, respondents were asked to complete a Likert-type scale (Never=1, seldom=2, sometimes=3, often=4, always=5) and select the appropriate scale for the 13 statements of the WD dimension and the six statements of the WLA dimension (see Table 3) that applied to them. The WLA measured the impact of religion, culture, and society on women in a distance learning environment. Pearson Correlation (r) was examined among WD, WLA, and the continuous variables (e.g., age, educational level, and number of children) as shown in Table 4. Correlation found to be insignificant (r=.03) at the *p* < .01 level of life affiliation (e.g., religion, culture, and society) toward the concept of women's dialog. There was not any significant correlation between the continuous variables and both WD and WLA dimensions (see Table 4). In this study, life affiliations did not influence the dialog in a distance education environment.

All interviewed women supported the WDDLS results that life affiliations (e.g., religion, culture, and society) did not influence their involvement to attain higher education through distance. However, some students reported that religion, society, and culture in the Arab world put rules for collaboration between genders, which is limiting their interaction. One of the interviewed women expressed her feelings towards the influence of Islam on her education:

No, my religion did not influence me, but it may have an effect on others because the university is open, and both genders are mixed. Thus, some students said Muslim girls should not collaborate with boys. Prophet Mohammed Peace and prayers be upon him encouraged pursuing education anywhere in the world. I always apply the good things for my education. **(HB, personal communication, July 10, 2009)**

Society and culture had directly influenced the involvement of women, who were married and had children while attaining their education. Their domestic roles limited their involvements.

However, distance education was the solution for them. "Yes, the society and my living situations affect my involvement in the program. I am married and I have three children. Thus, distance education was the solution for me." (AB, personal communication, July 10, 2009). Overall, religion, society and culture may affect women's dialog in a traditional

(face-to-face) environment. Thus, distance learning was the solution to overcome this obstacle for most women.

My society did not influence my involvement in this program. My society provides verities of opportunities for women to pursue their education in any major. I preferred Al-Quds Open University because the university has freedom and flexibility. Each individual can maintain his/her schedule based on her situation. (NR, personal communication, July 10, 2009).

DISCUSSIONS

The study involved female students from a university in the Arab world. Thus, results of this study were generalized only to similar cultures at higher educational institutions in the Arab world. Due to political issues where the setting is located, the researcher conducted this study through distance supervising a male individual who distributed, collected, and mailed the instruments within six weeks due to the political situation in Gaza strip after the Israeli attack in January 2009. Having a male individual presenting the researcher was not necessarily covering various groups of women within the university because often females students do not collaborate with male students and that limited their participation in this study.

Responses to the demographic section in the quantitative instrument indicated that the majority of Palestinian females who attained higher education through distance are average in age of 25 years old, single; do not have children, unemployed, and embracing Islam. Perhaps, the demographic result is related to the economic and political issues that Palestinians people are facing in achieving their educational goals. Distance Open learning system is a solution for economic issues; it is a cost-effective and flexible way of educating people (Khan, n.d.). The use of open and distance education is no longer a matter of choice; it is the only option for some countries due to their social, cultural, economic, and political issues (Khan, n.d). It is very hard to travel from one area to another in Palestine due to security checking points, which cause transportation delays (Lorenzetti, 2007). Salah (1992) explained the mission of the university is to research, design, and implement a way to deliver quality education through distance to help Palestinian people overcome their environmental, political, social, and economical challenges.

In addition, female students who filled out the WDDLS were asked to sign a consent form if they were interested in the telephone interview instrument; only nine of 120 students agreed to sign the consent form and release their personal information due to politics and culture issues. Thus, having a telephone interview instead of face to face interview was not necessary for presenting the global women feedback of distance learning experience.

The findings further explored relationships among the different dimensions. A significantly positive correlation at the $p < .01$ level found between women's dialog and their personal relevance and satisfaction.

In addition, the qualitative instrument emphasized the importance of women's interaction to their instructors and local fellow students through face-to-face or distance. AB (personal communication, July 10, 2009) asserted:

However, I do see the instructor applies an important role in distance education to motivate and encourage the students. I am in my third year, if I did not observe the instructors' motivation and the responses to my questions, I wouldn't continue. Also, through the university portable, there are always discussion sessions between the students and the instructor and I found them very helpful.... There are a social

relationship and networking between students. ... Before any exam, students usually get together to learn from each other and review for the exams. ... Now, I feel I am an active individual in my society, people value me more. My self-esteem has increased as well as my confidence. In the future, I will be a teacher, and I will assist in building a better society.

Research pointed to the importance of learners' dialog towards their personal relevance and satisfaction. Multiple studies supported the positive relationship between students' interaction and their satisfaction in an online course (Biggs, 2006; Herbert, 2006; Jung et al., 2002; Kelsey & D'souza, 2004; Müller, 2008; Sahin, 2007; Stein et al., 2005; Swan, 2003). Students' satisfaction has been one important aspect of evaluating the effectiveness of distance learning (Khan, 2005).

A significantly positive correlation at the $p < .01$ level found between women's dialog and their perception of distance learning. In addition, the qualitative instrument reported a positive relationship between learners' perceptions of distance education and their interaction with both students and instructors.

Students who interact with instructors and peers tend to positively perceive distance learning environment. GH (personal communication, July 10, 2009) pointed:

Distance education helps me to be independent. The instructor and students both have to collaborate...Distance education gives opportunities for everyone to purse education. It is the solution for working and married women. Women who finished high school many years ago, now, they are attending the Open University... If I ask my instructors question, usually I get the answer, which is helpful. ....The interaction between students is very helpful.

The findings supported numerous studies that reported a positive relationship between learners' interaction and their perception towards distance learning (Anderson & Haddad, 2005; Black, 2005; Koohang & Durante, 2003; Moody, 2004; Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006a; Sahin, 2008; Steinman, 2007).This study examined the impact of life affiliation towards women's dialog in a distance learning environment. Correlation found to be insignificant at the $p < .01$ level of life affiliation (e.g., religion, culture, and society) towards the concept of women's their dialog.

However, the qualitative technique reported that religion, society, and culture in the Arab world are put rules for the collaboration between genders, which is limiting their interaction. In the Arab culture, where Islam is embraced, the relationship between genders is controlled not only by religion, but by cultural traditions as well (Al-Harthi, 2005).

Furthermore, women's domestic roles (e.g., children and spouse) limited their involvements in obtaining traditional education. However, distance education was the solution for them. "Yes, the society and my living situations affect my involvement in the program. I am married and I have three children.

Thus, distance education was the solution for me." (AB, personal communication, July 10, 2009). Overall, religion, society and culture may correlate towards women's dialog in a traditional (face-to-face) environment.

Thus, distance learning was the solution to overcome this obstacle for most women. Muslim women felt more comfortable participating in distance education than face-to-face courses. Distance education would make it easier for Muslim women to participate in

educational settings (Al-Harthi, 2005). In this study, life affiliations did not influence the dialog in a distance education environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of the quantitative and the qualitative study, the primary recommendation is the development of strategic plan by the university to improve learners' satisfaction in attaining their education via distance. This plan should include the following:

➢ Providing hand-on training for both students and faculty on the use of the Internet, so they can communicate comfortably.
➢ Having high-speed Internet connections to meet the educational needs.
➢ Providing professional development training for faculty on learners' support, encouragement and motivation to have a successful distance learning environment.
➢ Implementing varieties of communication tools among students and faculty such as chat, discussion board, phone, or emails.
➢ Implementing a plan to have all face-to-face lectures available online for students who unable to attend due to their employment status or domestic roles. Perhaps, lectures can be uploaded to the university portable for students to view them at their convenience.
➢ Invoking for reducing the transactional distance between the instructor and the students. Instructor should send emails on regular basis to remind the students that he/she is available there for them at a specific time. The instructor must provide feedback in timely manner, so students would not feel the separation.
➢ Providing technical support for students and faculty
➢ Equipping in the university's library with adequate resources that can be available for student as alternative materials of the textbooks.
➢ Training faculty members for utilizing new technology.
➢ Developing ongoing evaluation of learners' satisfaction and dialog, program effectiveness, and faculty skills in using technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research:

➢ Employ mixed methods to provide richer insights and raise more interesting questions for future research
➢ Apply the study in other Arabic cultures to determine the influences of diverse cultures towards the women's concept of dialog in a distance learning environment.
➢ Conduct separate studies to determine the effect of well trained faculty for distance education on women's perception and satisfaction in a distance learning environment.
➢ Conduct a comparison study that explores the impact of life affiliations towards the Arab women's dialog in a distance learning setting versus a traditional setting.
➢ Conduct a comparison study that address women's perception and satisfaction in a distance learning environment within two different cultures such as the Arab and the United States of America.
➢ Conduct separate studies to investigate the influences of Arabic family opinions on women's personal relevance and satisfaction in a distance learning environment.
➢ Evaluate computer's skill levels of the faculty in the QOU and the use of technology into their teaching through distance and the impact of those skills on learners' perception and satisfaction.
➢ Conduct separate study to determine the impact of the Arab women's motivation on their achievement and personal satisfaction in a distance learning environment.

➢ Conduct a separate study to address the importance of alternative materials beside the text books to deliver education in a distance learning environment.
➢ Review the survey and the interview questionnaire items along with the responses data to improve questions. Perhaps, more questions should be added to the WPRS dimension of the quantitative survey. This would increase the reliably of the survey.
➢ Promote the transactional distance theory for future studies that involve with understanding distance education. Jung (2001, 527) stated, "the transactional distance theory provides a useful conceptual framework for defining and understanding distance education in general and as a source of research hypothesis more specifically." Gorsky and Caspi (2005) pointed out that the transactional distance theory is conceptually important since it addresses that the essential distance in distance education is transactional, not spatial.

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Azaiza, K. (2011, January). Effectiveness of Distance Education on Women in the Arab World. *The 4th Conference on e-Learning Excellence in the Middle East. Proceedings of Conference,* Hamdan Bin Mohammed e-University (HBMeU), Dubai, UAE. pp. 209-222. ISBN 978-9948-15-947-6

Azaiza, K. (2010, January). Women's dialog and distance learning: A university in the Arab World. In a symposium for Female Higher Education-Trends and Perspectives. Symposium conducted at the meeting, of Taibah University, Saudi Arabia

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➢ Women's Dialog and Distance Learning in the Arab World. A Concurrent session, International Forum for Women in E-Learning Conference, Albuquerque, NW, December, 2010
➢ Women's Dialog and Distance Learning: A university in the Arab World.
  Poster Session, Conference on Global Leadership, Learning, and Research, Orlando, FL, July, 2010
➢ Women's Dialog and Distance Learning: A university in the Arab World. Paper presented at a symposium for Female Higher Education- Trends and Perspectives, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, 2010

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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY: A Case of Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions

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ABSTRACT

This paper recognizes that women's participation in higher education is very low. Women's marginalization in higher education stems from the traditional patriarchal tendencies, customary law and colonialism. The paper discusses the opportunities and challenges that female students face in trying to access distance education in Zimbabwe. Female students are under-represented at ZOU, the sole open and distance learning institution in Zimbabwe. The female student population is worsened by the fact that a larger proportion of them than male students drop out. The reasons for this are multiple but revolve around women's multiple roles of home keeper, wife and mother. The paper focuses on Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions in order to compare a rural and an urban set up. Data was collected from ZOU students and lecturers through in-depth interviews. It is hoped the paper will bring to the fore the various challenges that female students encounter and finally emerge with some possible intervention strategies that could help increase the number of female students' participation in distance education.

The Gender approach to development (GAD) will also guide this study. GAD analysis highlights the incentives and constraints associated with the work of women and men and highlights differences in their roles, workloads, access to resources and decision making opportunities, the impact of interventions on them and the implications for planning and implementation. The gender approach to development advocates for the lessening of social inequalities between men and women. Gender as a policy criterion has been found to reduce poverty, raises farm efficiency and improves natural resources management (Ellis, 2000). It also emphasises participatory approaches as a tool to empower women through their articulation of their needs, rights and capabilities. Communities should be encouraged to embrace the gender approach when focusing on development issues in communities. Once women are empowered and have the social and economic resources the quality of life of their households improves. If women therefore contribute so much to the social well-being of families in particular and communities in general it is therefore necessary for policy makers to develop policies that enable communities to improve women's access to resources like distance education.

Keywords: Zimbabwe Open University, an Open and Distance Learning.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when there is a drive for greater gender representation and participation throughout the Southern African region, it is imperative of education are problematic and this means seeking options to further their that women's access to education be addressed. For many women, access to traditional routes education while still being able

to fulfil their other roles within the family, paid employment and community. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) may fill the gap by affording opportunities to combine study with other areas of responsibility.

However in seeking to combine education with their other roles women face an array of social and physical challenges. The need for support from family, work and the university, through which they are engaged in the learning process, is critical in determining the success and completion of their course of study.

Opportunities Availed To Women Through Participation In Open And Distance Learning

UNESCO (2002) underscores the relationship between education and global economic, social and cultural development. Therefore in a knowledge-based society, economic advantage will accrue to individuals with knowledge, as they will be in a position to apply the knowledge in their work and daily living. At an International Research Conference hosted by Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in Harare (2011), knowledge was declared as the new currency in a knowledge-based society. For women in particular, the role of ODL in acquiring this new sought after currency is immense. Some of the opportunities open to women through participation in ODL are:

➢ More freedom of access, and thereby a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualifications;
➢ Overcome geographical barriers and other confining circumstances such as personal constraints, cultural and social barriers and lack of educational infrastructure;
➢ It is often a cheaper alternative to pursuing a course through conventional methods. As a result families (parents/husbands) may be motivated to let their daughters/spouses pursue ODL programmes; and
➢ Distance education may be combined with work;

The above benefits of ODL open to women all culminate in the empowerment of women. Anderson (1992) discusses empowerment as a policy approach to women in development. She sees this approach as 'focusing on increasing women's control over the choices in their lives'. She further states that,". . . it seeks to increase their self-reliance and self-confidence so they will become more active players in society. Through increased control over crucial material and non-material resources, women are expected to take steps to influence the direction of social and economic change", (Anderson, 1992: online). Education is probably the key form of non-material resource as it helps instil both greater knowledge and skills that may be applied to help access material resources or to enable them to be used effectively.

Challenges Faced By Women In Open And Distance Learning

Women face challenges of multiple roles that may limit their ability to access traditional mediums of higher education that may mean leaving work, home, or family. Abiom (2008: online) opines that:

> *Men constitute the first and underlying cause of gender (and perhaps every other form of) inequality. . . . it has become the prevailing custom in many societies that the male, gradually but determinedly acquired and retained decision within the family and other institutes of the society. Making decisions in such private and public matters definitely translates into holding and retaining the power to control most affairs. And little surprise, such decisions of cause, would always be more beneficial to the male.*

Abiodun (2008) further argues that women, no matter how educated, do not belong to the Boys'/Men's clubs, where important information is shared and crucial decisions are made. Most of these decisions may result in the marginalisation of women.

Studies by Hochschild (1989 cited by the American Association of University Women accessed Jan 2008) involving research on women's work and family life, introduced the idea of the 'second shift', this being the home shift that women do following formal paid employment. This 'shift' involves tasks traditionally undertaken by women linked to family and community, including housework, and childcare. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) believes education forms a 'third shift', as more and more women see education as key to future opportunity and economic wellbeing and are embarking on distance education, adding study and research to their other roles. While studies by Hochschild and later by AAUW are based on research undertaken in the United States of America their findings are relatively universally applicable. Because of their multiple existing roles women are particularly 'vulnerable to negative effects of adding a new role such as student to their already busy lives' Cragg, Andrusyszyn and Fraser (2005).

For women through much of Africa and the less economically developed world, household and family tasks are particularly time consuming and onerous as they lack the labour saving devices of the U.S.A. or much of Europe, and Australia. Even most urban based Zimbabwean women are expected to play a leading role in household management and childcare, a role that completely outweighs the contribution of men in the same areas. The importance of the 'extended' family in social and traditional aspects of life may add a further facet to the work and caring roles of women. The extended family may provide a supportive role for women by helping spread the household tasks and providing other family members who can assume responsibility for childcare when the mother needs to study.

However the extended family can also place serious demands on the woman, particularly if she is a young, junior wife in a very traditional family with little understanding of the benefits and use of the study she is doing. As many professional women in Africa are rural based teachers, nurses and community based workers, distance education is ideal to allow them access to study and self-development possibilities.

EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IN ZIMBABWE

Statistics show that women were educationally disadvantaged in Zimbabwe (see Table:1)

Table: 1
Women Participation in Higher Education 1980-1992

Year	Teacher Education			University Education			Technical Education		
	Female	Total	%	Female	Total	%	Female	Total	%
1979	1,587	3,084	51.49	508	1,941	26.17			
1980	1,528	2,829	54.01	494	2,240	22.05			
1981	1,726	3,610	47.81	569	2,525	22.53	Data for these years is not available		
1982	2,142	4,873	43.96	680	3,091	22.00			
1983	2,646	6,502	40.70	805	3,620	22.24			
1984	3,177	7,734	41.08	933	4,131	22.59			
1985	2,496	5,513	45.27	1,110	4,742	23.41			
1986	3,607	8,649	41.70	1,400	5,886	23.79			
1987	5,455	14,450	37.75	1,676	6,873	24.39			
1988	7,003	16,167	43.32	699	1,930	25.07			
1989	6,713	16,231	41.36	2,235	9,288	24.06	3595	9385	38.31
1990	7,032	16,179	43.46	2,194	9,017	24.33	2660	10664	24.94
1991	6,037	13,492	44.75	2,140	8,635	24.78	3717	12684	29.30
1992	6,377	14,069	45.33	2,135	8,456	25.25	3277	11846	27.66
Total	57,526	33,308	44.43	18,809	78,144	23.76	13,249	44,579	30.05

Source: Statistical Year Book 1993

Analysis of the statistics for Zimbabwe, show a significant concentration of women in Teachers' Training Colleges that require only 5 'O' Level passes for admission into the programme. It also shows a remarkable decline in women's educational presence and achievement as higher levels of education are reached; university education enrolment which requires 'A' Level passes for admission has fewer women.

Also women seem to be interested in traditionally female professions like teaching and nursing and hence they shun from enrolling in Technical Education Colleges. This is because the educational barriers for girls and women appear to increase as they seek to pass to higher levels of the educational pyramid.

Most female students fail to make the jump from 'O' level (form four) to 'A' level (form six) and this explains the 23.7 % enrolment at university level compared to 44.4 % enrolment in Teachers' Training Colleges.

Many women leave school to marry and/or where training takes place it tends to be post-'O' level admission to teacher training or nursing. These groups are potential clients for Open and Distance Learning and it can provide a means to narrow the gender gap and bring more women into the pool of graduates, thereby enabling them to contribute more fully within their professions and within society as a whole. Hence ODL may provide a means to make women more visible within Zimbabwe. The onus is therefore on ODL institutions to make their programmes accessible and gender friendly in order to attract women students.

THE HISTORY AND ROLE OF ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is an Open and Distance Learning institution which was approved by the government of Zimbabwe through an Act of parliament. It is the only institution of higher learning established by government with a mandate to preserve, advance and transmit knowledge through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) (Nyaruwata, 2010). Its mandate reads: "To provide for research and courses of instruction, suitable to the needs of learners through a distance education system, and to take such other steps as may appear necessary and desirable for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge ..." (Government of Zimbabwe, 1999: 245). The Zimbabwe Open University started as the University of Zimbabwe, Centre for Distance Education in 1993 offering a Bachelor of Education in Educational Policy and Planning. It sought to upgrade those already in senior or administrative posts in the education system. In 1996 it became the University College of Distance Education and two further courses one in English and one in Agriculture were added soon after. In March 1999 it attained university status and started operating separately from the University of Zimbabwe. ZOU currently has four faculties namely, Arts and Education, Social Sciences, Commerce and Law, and Science and Technology. It offers a lot of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. The university has a main central campus in Harare. In addition to this, "there are 10 regional centres conveniently established in each province in order for it to be accessible to every potential student throughout the country" (Benza 2001:18). Of late it has added an 11th region; a Virtual Region which is also coordinated from Harare and caters for students who are abroad. These regions have enabled the university to decentralise and go beyond the traditional boundaries of tertiary education.

Table: 2
Zou Student Enrolment 2005-2011

Year	Male	Female	Total	%age Female
2005	11 997	8 485	20 482	41.4
2006	*	*	17 782	*
2007	*	*	19 694	*
2008	10 305	7 382	17 687	41.7
2009	9 699	6 586	16 295	40.4
2010	9 345	6 778	15 618	43.4
2011	5 196	4 301	9 497	45.6

*Gender Segregated Data not available
Source: *ZOU Statistics 2005-2011* compiled by M. Damson

From the onset women were a significant group in the student enrolment. A study of enrolment in the Zimbabwe Open University shows that there is quite a fair percentage of women participating in university education in Zimbabwe today. Table 2 shows enrolment patterns at ZOU by gender from 2005-2011.

Table: 2 shows a significant improvement in the number of women accessing higher education through ODL as compared to 23.76% in the early 90s. In 2006 and 2007 there was no information on gender segregated data.

However, from 2005 there has been a steady increase in women participating in ODL from 41.4% to 43.4%. In 2009 the figures dropped which was a reflection of the general economic environment in Zimbabwe during that time when most people could not afford to pay for ODL education which was then considered a luxury for people who were using their meagre resources to import basic commodities for household consumption.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Open and distance learning refers to a system and process of connecting students, teachers and learning resources when they are not in the same location' (American Association of University Women (AAUW) accessed 2008). It may take varied forms. In countries such as the United States of America and Canada, distance education is now primarily information technology based with on-line connections to materials, and tutors. In the less economically developed countries it takes a more correspondence approach, being more reliant on hard copies of modules and texts and occasional face-to-face contact between student groups and students and tutors.The growth of Open and Distance Learning in many countries has enabled women to access university education. Studies in both economically developed and less economically developed countries have shown women to be a dominant group in distance study.

In Pakistan Allama Iqbal Open University, female students consistently outnumbered their male colleagues in all Undergraduate and Masters programmes (Bukhush 2007). In a government document by the U.S. Senate (2001 cited in AAUW) the average distance learning student is said to be '34 years old, employed part-time...and is a woman'. Buhkush (2007: online)

> *Education is regarded as a key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face and the basic tool for empowering women and bringing them into the main stream of development. Education not only provides knowledge and skills to improve health and livelihoods, but it empowers women to take their right place in the society and development process. Education gives status and confidence in decision making. Educating women is the key to reducing poverty.*

Education may be seen as a basic tool to empower women and distance education, as the most accessible form of education for women. Empowerment and development may be perceived as going hand in hand.

Table: 3
Bulawayo Region Student Enrolment, January-June 2011

Faculty	Male	Female	Total
Arts & Education	85	138	223
Commerce & Law	195	98	293
Social Science	109	204	313
Science & Technology	64	42	106
Grand	453	482	935

Source: Bulawayo Region 2011 Statistical Records

Table: 4
Mat North Student enrolment, January-June 2011

Faculty	Male	Female	Total
Arts & Education	41	61	102
Commerce & Law	95	63	158
Social Science	67	89	157
Science & Technology	59	35	94
Grand	262	246	508

Source: Matabeleland North Region 2011 Statistical Records

Tables: 3 and 4 demonstrate that current enrolment patterns in the two regions of Matabeleland North and Bulawayo show that a good percentage of women are making use of the opportunities availed by ODL.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Open and Distance Learning equalises educational opportunities and breaks geographical barriers to accessing university education. This being the case, what are the challenges being experienced by women in ODL and what are opportunities being enjoyed by women participating in ODL at ZOU Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To investigate the opportunities open to women participating in ODL, the challenges being experienced and coming up with recommendations to ameliorate the predicaments of women participating in ODL.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

➢ What are the opportunities open to women participating in ODL at ZOU Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions?
➢ What are the challenges being experienced by women participating in ODL at ZOU Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions?
➢ How can the challenges being experienced by women participating in ODL at ZOU be ameliorated?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- ➢ **To investigate the opportunities open to women participating in ODL at ZOU Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions.**
- ➢ **To illuminate the challenges faced by women participating in ODL at ZOU Matabeleland North and Bulawayo Regions.**
- ➢ **To explore possible ways of circumventing the challenges being experienced by women in ODL.**

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's significance is that it will highlight the opportunities open to women participating in ODL, illuminate their challenges and suggest how to surmount the challenges.

If the findings are availed to policy makers and individuals having a say in the running of ODL institutions, may inform the promulgation of gender sensitive rules/regulations and policies in ODL.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study made use of qualitative methodology, adopting a case study research design. This study was considered apropos since it made it possible for investigators to conduct in-depth interviews and obtain the participants' emic perspectives, instead of reducing participants' view to figures. The study population consisted of ZOU's female students and student management coordinators from Bulawayo and Matabeleland North Regions. Student management coordinators were considered because at regional level, they are responsible for students' affairs, i.e., if students have any problems (academic or social) their first port of call at regional level, is the Students' Affairs office). Researchers felt that this office could provide some insights into challenges experienced by women in ODL.

The study sample consisted of 30 female students (15 from each of the two regions), and two co-ordinators responsible for student management (1 from each of the two regions). Purposive sampling was used. This made it possible to sample data-rich sources to address questions which informed the study. The justification for a predominantly female sample was informed by the realisation that: It is only the person putting on a tight fitting shoe who can explicitly tell you where it pinches most. The study was limited to women studying at ZOU's Bulawayo and Matabeleland North Regions, focusing on opportunities and challenges faced by women participating in ODL at ZOU and to coordinators responsible for student management in the two regions. Due to time factor, it was not possible to triangulate the methodologies as initially envisaged. In order to circumvent this limitation, sources of data were triangulated. This was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with female students, programme co-ordinators and co-ordinators responsible for student management in the two regions.

Appointments were made with participants, interviews conducted and recorded using a dictaphone, transcribed and partially analysed (field analysis) before the next interviews. This was to ensure that issues arising from the transcripts could be incorporated in the succeeding interviews.

Field notes were kept during fieldwork. Transcribed data was taken back to participants for verification before the major analysis. Once verification was done, data was analysed using the grounded theory. This entailed segmenting, coding, enumeration, and putting the coded data into sub-themes.

ACTUAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research Question 1
What are the opportunities open to women participating in ODL at ZOU?
The participants mentioned a number of opportunities. However the frequently mentioned opportunities were that ODL gave women opportunities to:

Further One's Education
Participants pointed out that due to certain circumstances many were not able to pursue their education beyond 'O' Level, therefore could not be enrolled in conventional universities whose entry qualifications are a certain number of points at 'A' Level. Therefore ODL afforded them the opportunity to acquire degrees through mature entry and Accredited Prior Learning (APL) for some.

Access to Intellectual Growth
Women felt that participation in learning activities such as presentations, research and thesis defence was good for their intellectual growth. Some of the women in school management testified that they had become excellent presenters at Heads of Schools' Meetings and Conferences courtesy of opportunities availed to them by ZOU.

Empowerment
Most participants concurred that ZOU, through ODL had empowered them. They pointed out they were capable of performing certain operations at their work places on their own. A good number of participants, pursuing postgraduate studies testified that their employers had recognised their achievements through promotions after acquiring undergraduate degrees at ZOU.

Opportunity to Enjoy Learning, While Holding A Fulltime Job
Participants concurred that ODL made it possible for them to remain gainfully employed, on full salaries, while studying to gain professional and intellectual growth. Most also pointed out that they were able to exploit other opportunities arising in their work places, since they had not taken study leave that would have taken them away from the developments at their work places.

- *Opportunity to enjoy some degree of flexibility:* Participants pointed out that ODL allows them some flexibility in planning their studies. They drew examples from Zimbabwe's economic situation, especially in 2007 and 2008 where the economic climate was unfavourable. Most women students discontinued their studies, only to resurface when the economic climate was conducive.

Research Question 2
What are the challenges being experienced by women participating in ODL at ZOU?
Notwithstanding the opportunities, women in ODL raised a number of challenges that they were encountering in ODL. Below are some of the challenges that occupied the centre stage:

Multiple Roles-Mother, Wife, Employee And Student
Participants unanimously agreed that their multiple roles were a big challenge. This challenge was linked to the wife's traditional role of caring for the home and the family. Participants pointed out that it becomes difficult to concentrate on one's studies ignoring the family. Difficulties were encountered in attending tutorials, consulting tutors and attending discussion groups.

Non-Supportive Spouses
While not prevalent, this challenge is a cause for concern. Some participants mentioned lack of understanding on the part of their spouses; others explained that spouses deny them the opportunity to attend group discussions, and to seek advice and guidance from male tutors. The two coordinators responsible for student management corroborated this issue. One of them cited an occasion where a female student approached him with a torn assignment. The student explained that her husband tore the assignment following some misunderstanding linked to non-performance of house chores and the student's ODL. The other coordinator also related an incident when a female student related to him that she was finding it difficult to revise for examinations, since the husband continuously came from the bedroom to switch off the lights as a way of telling the wife that she had to come to bed. The husband did not understand that the only time when the wife could study was when the children had retired to bed.

Time Constraint
This challenge was linked to the multiple roles of women. After performing all other duties tied to their other roles, women seem to be pressed for time when it came to their university studies.

As a result, some ended up;- missing assignment submission deadlines; failing to submit assignments, submitting sub-standard assignments, failing to attend tutorials and group discussions, obtaining low marks in their assignments, ill prepared for examinations, performing badly in their examinations, forming the greater percentage of student who repeat courses.

Financial Challenges
Participants pointed that it was not always easy to raise money for fees. Women tended to be the last in the families' financial packing order. Priority one was paying fees for the children. For married couples, if the husbands wanted to pursue studies, husbands gave themselves the second priority. In the event that funds were still available, then women were considered. The issue of transport to and from tutorials affected rural women students more than urban students.

Non-Supportive Supervisors
This concern was raised by most rural based women students. They complained that since most tutorials were being conducted on Saturdays, it was not always easy to get permission from their supervisors to leave their duty stations on Friday mornings (Most buses from the rural areas leave early in the morning to urban centres. Therefore if women were to be released after school on Friday, there would be no more transport to urban centres, where tutorials are normally conducted).

Affordability And Accessibility Of ICT
This concern was raised by most rural based participants. It should be appreciated that almost all the rural based ZOU students are government employees (teachers, nurses and agriculture extension workers, among others) salaries are far below the poverty datum line. Therefore, the costs associated with the purchase of ICT gadgets such as laptops are prohibitive).

While most participants had internet compatible cell phones, the cost of procuring data bundles from service providers such as ECONET and TELECEL were beyond their financial capacity. Accessing ICT facilities at ZOU's regional centres also hampered by transport costs and other logistics.

Technophobia

Most urban based participants had access to ZOU's regional centres' ICT facilities, as well as from private internet cafes. However, the challenge seemed to be that most elderly female students lacked skills to manipulate computers in search of information. This was exacerbated by the participants' phobia for ICT.

This argument is premised on the observation that despite the presence of ICT technicians staffing the ICT laboratories at regional centres, elderly women students hardly asked for assistance on how to use computers to access information, even for performing basic operations such as typing of assignments.

Research Question 3
How Can the Challenges Being Experienced By Women
Participating In ODL At ZOU Are Ameliorated?

Participants were requested to suggest solutions for the challenges they were experiencing in Open and Distance Learning. Below are some of the solutions that frequently cropped up:

➢ Being allowed a longer book borrowing period by the University;
➢ Being given more library pockets than their male counterparts, so that they can borrow more books, since they could not frequent the library at the same rate as their male counterparts;
➢ Participants suggested that since child-bearing is a national duty, they be allowed to write examinations from hospital in instances where they are due during examinations. Where this is not possible, they suggested that they should be allowed to defer their examinations to the next semester, so that they will be allowed to seat for the examinations without being asked to pay fees and going through the rigour of writing assignments;
➢ Decentralisation of tutorials to district level;
➢ Networking ZOU's district offices so that students are able to access ICT; and
➢ The University must allow spouses to attend orientation programmes for new students.

CONCLUSION

Basing on the findings, it can be concluded that:

➢ Open and Distance Learning has availed women a host of opportunities, that without it would have remained a pipe dream for most women. It has empowered most participating women and given them a second bite of the cherry.
➢ The above notwithstanding, there are a number of teething challenges limiting women's students' full exploitation of opportunities availed to them by Open and Distance Learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While women are accessing Degree programmes through ZOU there is a need to more consciously target them in course selection and formulation and when looking at the logistical aspects of study with the institution. There are a number of ways in which this may be done through the workings of the government of Zimbabwe and the institution itself, through the role of the institution in raising society's awareness of the advantages of educating women, and through focus on helping students derive maximum benefit from courses that are on offer.

National or Government Recommendations

- ➢ Developing constitutional reforms that provide for and guarantee the application of quotas for women as a basis for community, economic, political and educational representation.
- ➢ Introducing reforms of educational policies and electoral laws that allow a system that give more room to women.
- ➢ Gender sensitisation in schools and tertiary institutions. The school is viewed as one of the primary socialising agents (Haralambos, 1995). The government should introduce courses that are gender sensitive at all levels of the education system. Such would not perpetuate male dominance and female subordination in society (Gudhlanga and Chabaya, 2001).
- ➢ National media campaigns that showcase the achievements of female role models.
- ➢ Scholarship programmes that particularly target at promoting talented women should be boosted. Such scholarships would act as a realistic and effective means of ensuring that a greater lot of women, especially in rural areas would proceed to tertiary education including University (Makamure, 1996).

Institutional Recommendations

The institution may improve its accessibility and provision of courses for women through:

- ➢ Recognising ZOUs unique potential to cater for women students unable to access full time formal education.
- ➢ Generating a clear gender policy to operate within the institution. This should encompass policy covering gender issues across the board taking into account needs of staff and students and ensuring gender issues are considered in all facets of university life. Such a gender policy can inculcate some of the recommendations that were suggested by participants.
- ➢ Appointing a team that initially formulates policy and later assists in implementing and monitoring gender policies within the institution.
- ➢ Reviewing programmes offered and course content to ensure the needs of both female and male students are fully addressed.
- ➢ Introducing gender awareness training such as is used by some administrations and NGOs and making this part of the general institutional orientation.
- ➢ Recognising that universities can be radical open-minded forces for change but can also contain strongly conservative elements making strong policies necessary before innovation and change can take place.
- ➢ Finally, there is need to replicate the study, triangulating methodologies, collecting data from a sample drawn from all ZOU's ten regions. Findings and conclusions from such a major study can then be used to inform University Policy.

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DISTANCE EDUCATION AS A WOMEN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Women emancipation through empowerment all over the world is at its peak and Africans generally are not left out. It is an attempt to make sure that women's voices are heard and are given their right places in the scheme of things. Nonetheless, the issue of educational attainment of women considering the low level of girls' education in Africa is at a negative variance to attaining women position since certain educational attainments are required to function effectively in the various available organs; be it work place, group or committees of local or international standing. This paper therefore stresses the use of open and distance institution in Nigeria as an avenue to attain knowledge and education that would put women in a better stead toward achieving their aims and aspirations.

Keywords: Distance Education, Empowerment Strategy, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Studies over time have revealed that education is the most potent instrument for the emancipation of any group of people. Sambo also opined that mental freedom, which usually precedes all other forms of freedom, can only be guaranteed by an effective education system. This view was further crystallised by Okeke when she observed that education is a sure pathway to the liberation of the mind and the improvement of socio-economic status of people. History, the world over, is replete with the achievements of men folk and their contributions to the development processes and from time immemorial the position of women in the structure of society has never been considered on the same plain a s that of men, they have been regarded as a second-fiddle. It is on this believe that Ker argued that women all over the world have been categorized under the disadvantaged groups of people and society itself has systematically and consistently pursued the socialization of women into accepting the notion of disadvantaged group.

Given the preponderance of this categorization of women as a disadvantaged group of people, a social reengineering process is required to introduce equality through emancipation of the mind. This is where education has been found to be useful as a liberating force and agent of social change especially in developing countries like Nigeria. It is on this premise that the Open and Distance Learning scheme is hereby considered as an effective strategy for women empowerment, within the functional framework of the general lifelong education process.

ISSUES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualise their dreams and reach their greatest potentials due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society. It is the manifestation of an incontrovertible inequality, segregation or marginalization. "Empowerment involves challenging oppression which compels millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny them their human rights") submitted

that "to empower means to give power to, to give authority to, to enable a person or a group of persons gain power". Batliwa (1995) in her definition of the term empowerment stated that:

> *Empowerment is the process and the result of the process whereby the powerless or less powerful members of the society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge, resources, challenges and ideologies of discrimination and subordination and transform the institutions and structures through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated.*

The foregoing definitions show that empowerment implies that an individual or a group had hitherto lacked power or authority by circumstances, denial or default. The issue of women empowerment has become a part of popular debate. It has however been misconstrued in a myriad of ways; to a great majority empowerment suggests women's power to fight men, including their husbands. The very mention of the term empowerment generates strong emotional connotations that construe violent revolutionary action of some sort or the other, organised by the women against the established institutions. Since the days of yore, the oppression of women has been a major global dilemma and a source of concern to many international institutions like ECOWAS, UN, AU etc. The concept of empowerment based on assuaging the oppressions of the women has led to the establishment of the United Nations development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) whose primary role is to promote the participation of women at all levels of development planning and implementation. Recently in Nigeria, the federal ministry of education in conjunction with the UNICEF established a Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN). It is hoped that SAGEN will lead to a further expansion in the access of girls to education and ultimately the emancipation of women in Nigeria.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

The issues of women have been viewed differently in social relations including economic activities. This has formed a barrier even when democratic movements have sought to extend the base of participation of women. It will be fallacious to assume that the problems of Nigerian women have been totally solved through the various emancipation initiatives (Beijing conference 1975; 1985; 1995, International decade of women, Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls Education etc) or through the collaborative efforts of the various Government and Non-governmental Organisations. Certain inequalities and segregations, which have been established over the ages and reinforced through the male-dominated structures still persist inspite of the various instruments of the United Nations and the concerted efforts of the federal government and a number of NGOs on alleviating women discrimination.

Without gainsaying, illiteracy remains at the centre of women empowerment problems in Nigeria. Majority of the womenfolk and a large number of girls in this country are still grappling with the problems of basic reading and writing skills (Unicef 2003). The gross enrolment rate indicated that 71percent of out-of-school children are girls. The literacy rate for males is 58 percent but only 41 percent for females. The Human Development Report 2002 published by the United Nations development programme puts the statistics of illiterate women at 57 percent as against male's 43 percent. As seemingly insignificant as this difference may appear, it is completely unacceptable, if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be achieved.

In Nigeria, girls and women comprise about 49.69 percent (SAPA 1993) of the total population. Incidentally, about 61percent of the total female population are reported to be illiterates as against 37.7 percent illiterate male population. Women are discriminated against in access to education for social and economic reasons.

For instance, the Islamic practice of *Purdah* precludes many women from benefiting from school instructions and/or participating in economic activities, which are likely to elevate their positions. The most egregious segregation is probably the prevention of girls to go to school in some communities.

This has probably led to the greatest social harm of the twentieth century, when a whole group of females were denied access to education, on the basis of gender differences. There is palpably a deluge of problems besetting the Nigerian women, but all of them arise from illiteracy. This suggests therefore that a large part of the empowerment process is associated with education of the women themselves.

The root of the problem is the degree of importance women themselves have attached to education. Many of them believe that the life of a successful woman revolves around her children, her husband and domestic chores. This lack of personal ambition prevents her from thinking about pursuing other educational goals, which may have great influence on her life. In the case of the workingwomen in the cities, there had been a gradual predilection to abandon further training because of the demands work and family as well as the huge costs associated with pursuing higher studies in conventional school system or universities.

THE PLACE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Education according to Fafunwa (1974) refers to the sum total of experiences that a person acquires in partaking in everyday activities and how these experiences have served to make the individual a better person. Many social commentators hold the view that education is a sine qua non to any meaningful development process The impact of the level of educational attainment in any society and the corresponding level of development (in terms of the Science & Technology) is a true yardstick of this phenomenon. Majasan (1997) had asserted that 'Development in any society is anchored primarily to Education progress'. In a similar vein, Lockheed and Verspoor (1994) had earlier described education as a cornerstone of economic and social development. According to them, the future of the world and of individual nations hinges, more than ever before, on the capacity of individuals and countries to acquire, adapt, and advance knowledge.

Education has been viewed traditionally as a social leveller, it is the only instrument designed for piercing the social barrier that has been created by all other structures of society. The only effective way to meaningful contribute to the emancipation of women in Nigerian Society is to widen the access of the women and girls to quality education. There is the need to take the issue of women empowerment 'beyond mere rethorics'. It is quite easy to canvass for small credit loans for a few women, or negotiate a secondary political appointment for some others, just to align with the sentiments of the time. In fact, it is easy to pass legislations couched in very elegant language against women discriminations in all spheres of national life, but it is far easier and ultimately more cost effective to educate women. Creating access to quality formal education gives women a sense of belonging and their individuality will then be projected beside their husbands'.

According to the UNFPA (1994) education opens the opportunity and choice for women. When women are given the requisite education, relevant to their needs and environment,

they will gradually become more visible and recognised in the mainstream of activities both at home and in society at large.

Given the fact that education enhances a person's sense of self-worth, confidence and also creates an awareness of capacity, women will become more assertive of their roles in social activities and take initiatives for themselves rather than wait for the decisions to be made for them. It can also be surmised that their income-earning potential and development will rise with the new educational status. Another crucial advantage of women education is the role it plays in reducing women fertility levels and infant mortality. It is incontrovertible to state that the family of an educated woman tend to appear healthier than that of her non-educated counterpart.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AS A WOMEN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

The social realities in contemporary times has shown that the limitation in the access of many women to Education Opportunities which would have enhanced their empowerment is due chiefly to the inability of the learner and the instructor to be in face-to-face contact. There are above 880 million illiterate adults in the world (UNESCO 2002) who have been deprived access to education, because they are required to be present in the four walls of a conventional classroom before they can gain access to quality education.

Each day, the futility of this arrangement becomes clearer to most educational planners as the unfolding fact shows that the knowledge based society of the twenty-first century demands more effective methods of dissemination of Information/Knowledge. It is obvious that due to limitations in resources; both human and financial, the traditional conventional approach of teaching in classrooms can no longer satisfy the snowballing population of a country like Nigeria, which has estimated population of 120 million people (Common Country Assessment, 2001) and an average annual population growth rate of 2.3% (Mabogunje 1999). Clearly a realistic alternative is long overdue, and this is what has necessitated the introduction of the Open and Distance Learning Model otherwise referred to as Distance Education.

The term Open and Distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the leaner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure. The desire to anchor as much as possible to the train of globalization demands that all sectors of society must be literate and this kind of mass education can only be afforded through the distance-learning scheme. Jegede (2003) observed that all nations of the world desirous of a cost-effective, convenient, conducive, efficient and comprehensive way to educate all its citizens have embraced Open and Distance learning'.

The concept of open and distance education is a scheme that affords a nation the opportunity to effectively transmit educational benefits to all its citizens cheaply and more effectively, especially those hitherto unreached or denied access on the basis of one social consideration or the other. Nigeria women undoubtedly fall within this category and this system of education affords them the opportunity to pursue the gift of knowledge without contradicting any societal dictates. The uniqueness of distance education as a women empowerment strategy can be gleaned from the fact that it straddles so many facets of the social system.

First to be considered are the class of women who are full time house wives, many of who have never had access to formal education or had to give up school at early stages of their lives. Women in this group are not usually enthusiastic about formal education

because their husbands had indicated that they are to sit at home and take care of the home and the children. Such women are usually unable to leave their spouse and children to travel away to a conventional university system.

The challenges posed by this social system is far reaching, in the sense that the woman cannot venture out of the home to a formal school system where she can pursue the much craved training, skills development and education. Many of them have to be contented with seeing their dreams come alive in their children's lives and they unconsciously transfer their dreams to their children's lives.

Women in this category will definitely be grateful for distance education, since it allows them to sit at home and study for a programme without jeopardising their marriages or abandon their children. It is certainly a means of fulfilling the life dreams of many a woman who has been saddled with the function of a full time housewife. The issue of women education is essential for rural development and women are not well equipped to contribute their useful quota to the society as a result of illiteracy.

Another group of women, whose position is only slightly different from the previous group, are those women who have been denied the access to formal training provided by schools and colleges because of their obedience to the Islamic practice of *Purdah*. These women can still have access to qualitative education through the open and distance learning approach that allows them to pursue their education at a 'safe distance' from the instructors.

They can study, turn in assignments and write examinations after adequate arrangements have been made. A woman in purdah can be trained and given the opportunity to contribute her own quota to national development without disobeying any of the injunctions of her religion. Distance education is an alternative that affords this group of women access to quality study materials on any field of their choice without any of the barriers associated with the conventional system and her religious dedication.

A third group, which has, for long been suffering in silence, are the workingwomen. The plight of the workingwomen has been that of an unrecognised and unremunerated labour. In Nigeria, workingwomen tend to live unfulfilled lives, having their dreams aborted prematurely. After a college degree, a workingwoman finds herself in marriage and the demand of childbirth makes her postpone going back to school a little longer. By the time her last child will be out of primary school, she finds that the first is already grappling with the challenges of prepubescent years. Her family of creation and her family of procreation places so much social demands on her and her husband's family are not relentless in their demands. All these family duties make the workingwoman postpone furthering her education one more time. As the years roll by she finds that it is becoming increasingly difficult to actualise the dream of going back to school. The socio-economic factors against the family of a typical workingwoman in Nigeria today are multifarious. Society prefers that only the husband pursue further educational improvement while the funds available should be spent on taking care of the children. This of course is never to the best advantage of the workingwoman but she has to continue to suffer in silence. The open and distance learning mode of education is the sure answer to the prayers of many working women in Nigeria who could not abandon their families and their work to pursue better educational qualifications which will enhance their career progression. It allows them to pursue qualitative education that will improve on their sense of self-esteem in the estimation of their family friends and husbands. These can be achieved without jeopardising either the important family relationship or the relatively responsible position in her place of work that she has worked so hard to create.

The itinerant nomadic women are yet another group of women who could benefit immensely from this radical approach to instructional processes. The social dictates and the vocational practices of women in these nomadic societies require that they be always constantly on the move with there families. Their subsistence is based solely on this means and the educational pursuit is secondary, if at all it exists, to subsistence.

For generations, women in these societies have been denied access to quality education of whatever form due the peripatetic nature of their livelihood. Women in this category can benefit from the open and distance learning model if they are properly sensitised about the advantages that education holds for their lives their subsistence and their families.

Introducing the ODL scheme, which does not take them out of their social environments, yet seeks to deliver qualitative education about their social environment and other societies can then reinforce this.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, there seems to be no end to the palpable advantages of the distance learning system. The fore going shows that the functional implications and advantages of the scheme cover a broad spectrum of society such that everyone and anyone can benefit at no great a cost. While the focus of this work are primarily the women, the distance learning system holds great advantages for the entire society, almost anyone can benefit from this unique system of education.

The system however holds special implication for the women, especially in a developing society such as Nigeria. Lots of market women, traders, itinerant businesswomen, women in *Purdah*, working women as well as women and girls resident in the sub-rural societies could benefit from this scheme.

Another implication of the study is that it would go along way in increasing on the literacy level of Nigerians generally and the women especially. This observation confirms the assertion of Okeke (1995) that education is the most effective strategy for promoting women empowerment and the United Nations report on human development which states that in sub-saharan Africa education seems to be the only effective means of empowering women. The influence of quality education in these societies have been much discussed, it is a poverty reduction scheme, it can be used to sensitize women about family planning issues, HIV/AIDS issues, issues relating to peace and governance within their societies, primary health maternal and infant mortality as well as environmentally sustainable practices.

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WOMEN AT THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY IN RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the modern situation with the gender problem at one of the Russian technological universities -"MATI- Russian State Technological University named after K.E.Tsiolkovsky" and discusses the reasons of imbalance between women and men in student, postgraduate and teacher population.

Keywords: Technological university, gender problem analysis, women.

INTRODUCTION

In is well known that relationship between women and science and technology has always been rather difficult (Sheypak and all, 2003, pp.561-564). This becomes evident when we think that during the last century there were just sixteen female Nobel winners in science and technology. To understand the causes leading to this situation, we have to take into consideration different aspects causing women exclusion such as social, historical background, and even didactic obstacles (Pellizzari, 2004, pp. 270-275).

In Russia women broke the gender barrier of technology over 50 years ago. Nowadays there is no problem to recruit women into engineering education. We needn't inform schoolgirls about the advantages of technical studies. They make a rational choice by themselves. Girls, who choose engineering education, often do so because of their interest in technology. But it is a well known fact in Russia that later when girls become undergraduates and obtain a university degree and engineering qualification they realize that they will have to face a job in which they have to work harder than their male colleagues in order to prove their skills, even those who were brilliant students.

According to psychologists at the beginning school girls and boys are capable to carry out similar intellectual tasks, then why are there majority of men at technical departments? Some technical departments in Russian universities have female number lower than 5% of the total student population. The problem why only few women start and continue a career in engineering (the so-called women problem in technology) is being discussed (Wolffram, 2004, pp.281-286).

DATA DESCRIPTION

"MATI – Russian State Technological University named after K.E.Tsiolkovsky" was founded in 1932. It is a highly developed centre of education, science and culture where every years more than 1,000 specialists for aviation and space industry graduate from traditional technical departments or economical and humanities departments. MATI comprises seven faculties. They are: Aviation Technology; Aerocosmic Constructions and Technologies;

Information Systems and Technologies; Material Science and Material Technologies; Applied Mathematics, Mechanics and Information Technology; Engineering and Economics; Youth Policy and Social Technologies. There are 29 specialities at the university and they can be combined into 10 major groups (Table 1.).

Table 1.
Student population

		1995/1996			2000/2001			2005/2006			2010/2011
		total	female	%	total	female	%	total	female	%	total
	All specialities	6087	1661	27,3	7650	2752	36	8591	2685	31,3	7604
N	Major groups of specialities										
1	Applied mathematics	83	35	42,2	35	12	36,3	88	33	37,5	64
2	Physics	157	34	21,7	143	44	30,8	104	27	26	54
3	Metallurgical engineering	216	49	22,7	178	64	36	390	54	13,8	974
4	Aircraft engineering	397	45	11,3	254	55	21,6	1115	156	14	875
5	IT-technologies	173	55	31,8	245	57	23,3	47	15	31,9	123
6	Environment protection	142	79	56,4	227	132	58,1	98	48	49	273
7	Economics and Management	834	507	60,8	1438	911	63,4	1391	840	60,4	1711
8	TQM and Innovation management							102	25	24.5	407
9	Social technologies							49	32	65	137
10	Youth policy							15	6	40	45

We see that girl population leads in some groups of specialities. The number of girls is higher than 50% of student population. It is no wonder, because traditionally these specialities are more popular among girls, than boys, especially "Social Technologies" where percentage of girls is often more than 70%.

It is interesting to notice that percentage of girls eager to obtain degree in the field of applied mathematics, economics and management, environment protection and youth policy is constantly rather high (40-50%). Statistics show than these women find well-paid jobs in engineering offices easily and the majority of them are as successful as men.

As far as so-called "hard specialities" concerned we see incredibly low number of girls during the last fifteen years (13-23%). The decrease of interest of women in metallurgical engineering, aircraft engineering and more rarely in physics can be explained by the following reason. Real statistical data and the forecasts based on it show that young women with engineering education are not adopted to work at heavy industry factories, (even those who were excellent at the technical university) and this situation is unlikely to be changed in the nearest future in Russia.

We can also notice that the specialities "Total Quality Management" and "Innovation management" are rather young. Training of specialists in these fields began in Russia ten years ago. The interest of girls in these specialities is higher than in the case of "hard specialties", but not so high as in the case of economic specialties (~ 30%).

It is not a mystery that the most female as well as male students are trying to enter postgraduate courses to continue their scientific research. But as statistics show the majority of postgraduates at the technical university are still boys – 90%, and this number is always stable (Fig.1)

There is no fundamental background explaining the cause of imbalance in gender population within postgraduates in MATI. The only reason is rather vital and it is a specific social problem arisen only in Russia.
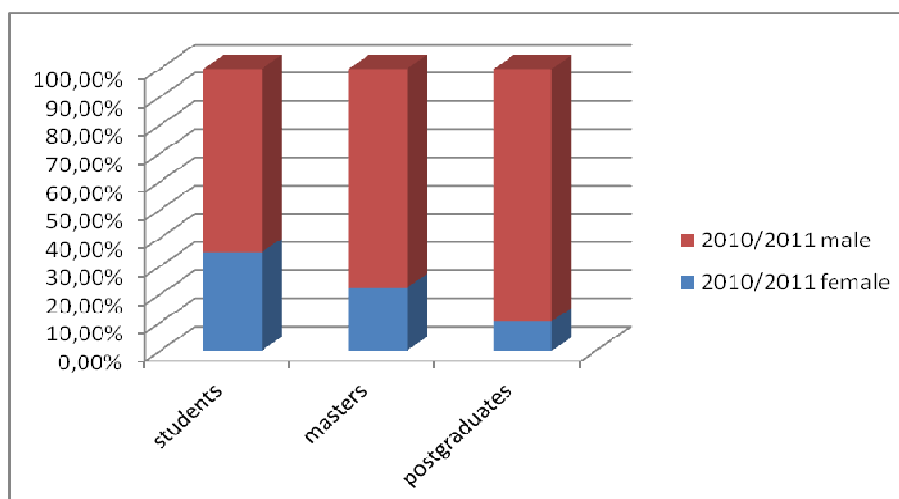

Figure 1.
Student, master and postgraduate population in 2010/2011 academic year

We can't deny the fact that in the beginning of 21st century there has been a growth of interest of women in scientific activity.

As a result the number of women teaching engineering has increased, too. During the last five years women-teachers showed persistence to obtain the highest scientific qualification both in the field of humanities as well as in natural sciences (Sazonova, 2005, pp. 422-423).

But statistical data show that men-teachers still outnumber women-teachers greatly and men-teachers with scientific degree predominate, too (Figure 2.).
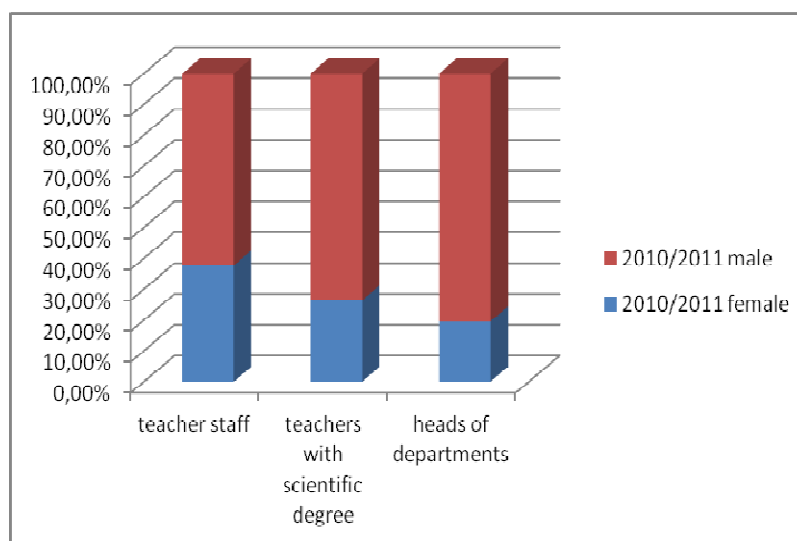
Figure 2.
Teacher population in 2010/2011 academic year

There are 50 departments in MATI: only eight (and not technical) of them are headed by women. Only three women of them are the doctors of science-the highest scientific qualification in Russia.

CONCLUSION

During the last fifteen years we have watched the growth of women population both among students and teachers at the technological university. But there are no forcible reasons to change the situation yet because of existing some psychological, social and economic peculiarities in Russia.

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