

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

**Senior Lecturer Tichaona MAPOLISA
National Programme Leader for the
Bachelor of Education (Educational Management)
Faculty of Arts in Education of the Zimbabwe Open University
Mount Pleasant Harare, ZIMBABWE**

**Lecturer Chipu CHIRIMUUTA
National Programme Leader for
African Languages Teaching
Faculty of Arts and Education,
Zimbabwe Open University. Harare, ZIMBABWE**

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 17 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 under study (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 to 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. Ninety 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 ones.

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.
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- 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.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



Tichaona MAPOLISA is a senior lecturer and National Programme Leader for the Bachelor of Education (Educational Management) in the Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). He has published two research articles with refereed journal of the African Symposium. He co-authored seven modules for the Department of Education, Development Studies and Youth Studies in Development. He has presented ten papers at the Africana Womanism Conference (UZ-16-17October

2010), LASU International Conference (12 -15 May 2011) and Zimbabwe Open University International Conference (16-17 June 2011). He has also presented two papers for the Zimbabwe Open University Vice Chancellor's day (17 May 2011) and two papers at the ACDE International Conference in Tanzania (13-15 July 2011).He is working on five full papers of the abstracts that were accepted by DEASA. He has content reviewed five modules for ZOU's Education Programmes.

Tichaona MAPOLISA

Senior lecturer and National Programme Leader in the
Faculty of Arts and Education of the Zimbabwe Open University,

PO Box MP1119 Mount Pleasant, Harare, ZIMBABWE

Email addresses: tichmapolisa@yahoo.co.uk OR tichmap@gmail.com

Chipo CHIRIMUUTA is a lecturer and National Programme Leader for African Languages teaching in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. She holds a dual Masters qualification in Linguistics and African Languages. She recently co-presented two conference papers at the International Conference of Africana Womanism (the University of Zimbabwe 1st Chapter) that was held between 27 and 29 October 2010 and one at the Zimbabwe Open University that was held between 16 and 17 June 2010 at Rainbow Towers, Harare.

Chipo CHIRIMUUTA

Zimbabwe Open University
P. O. Box MP 1119, Mt Pleasant,
Harare or by telephone: 263 4 791988; ZIMBABWE
Cell: +263 734 533 997.
Email: chirimuutac@gmail.com

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