The Role of ODL System in Promotion and Protection of the Right to Education for Women in Tanzania: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Right to education is both constitutional and human right protected in the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania. Being a constitutional right, education ought to be protected and promoted by the state apparatuses so as to ensure optimum utilization of it. Among others, establishing academic institutions is one amongst initiatives implemented by the governments to ensure access to education for all. Women being one sect of the population, considered to be disadvantageous group in the country for enjoyment of rights, including right to education. Since its inception in 1992 the Open University of Tanzania distinguished itself from traditional conventional academic institutions in the country, for adopting the ODL system that allow beneficiaries to study while continuing with other roles. Its main focus is to be a leading academic institution for affordable and quality education for all. Having the phrase 'for all' signifies among others, highly respect for gender and other disadvantageous groups in terms of physical disability and those who couldn't secure access to full time study schedules in conventional Universities. This paper highlights the role played by ODL system in insuring the protection and promotion of the rights to education for women. In discussion the paper provides analysis of achievements made by ODL system in providing quality and affordable education for women vis a vis other conventional academic institutions. The hypothesis this paper intends to prove is that, ODL system is the best and reliable alternative for women to attain their educational rights once faced challenges for not being accepted in the conventional systems.

Key terms: ODL, Promotion and Protection, Right to education and Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

The notion of Open and Distance Learning (hereinafter to be referred to as ODL) does not need technical or experimental tests to define. However, the notion / phrase ODL can be defined differently from different angles on which a person has decided to target it. Technically, one can deduce the meaning of ODL from two main concepts. The first concept is Distance Education and the second concept is Open Learning. The combination of these two concepts leads to what is now known as ODL. The concept Distance Education is defined to mean the ability to study from the distance, while Open Learning can be defining as the ability for anyone to access the educational offer from where s/he is, or it. There are several bodies established for the purposes of coordinating ODL from the national, regional as well as international level. One of those bodies is the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).

ICDE is the leading global membership organization for open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning, and draws its membership from institutions, educational authorities. ICDE plays an active role in policy formulation; it has actively engaged in helping to set the Education 2030 agenda. The agenda has been formulated to make sure that the goals are achieved in respect to attain "*inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all'*. Reading between lines this objective / agenda statement one witnesses the inclusion of the word 'all'. Having the word 'for all' within the agenda statement was not framed for cosmetic purposes rather it was inserted for specific purpose. In a very technical sense this is construed to mean both men and women of the world population. This has been reflected in several institutions dealing with ODL for example Open University of Tanzania (OUT) which   is geared towards affordable quality education for all. The vision statement of the OUT states "To be leading World Class University in the delivery of affordable Quality education through Open and distance Learning, Dynamic Knowledge Generation and Application" Having all stated at hand it has been paramount to think as to how such notion has been reflected in reality. To what extent does women has been accommodated in the ODL system as an alternative mode of delivery for attaining access and enjoying the right to education which curtailed by extra ordinary hindrances in the conventional systems? While thinking such reflection it clicked to minds of the authors that right to education is both constitutional and human right for every person in Tanzania. The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania provides among others that every person has the right to access education, and every citizen

shall be free to pursue education in a field of his choice, merit and ability, to the highest level (Article 11 (2) of the URT Constitution 1977 as amended from time to time). The same Constitution provides further that, every person has the right to access of education and every citizen shall be free to pursue education and technique (Article 11 (3) of the URT Constitution Op Cit).

Global Perspectives for Women Rights to Education
Access to Education is an internationally recognized human right. The norms and principles of gender equality and non-discrimination are at the core of all fundamental human rights treaties. International human rights law prohibits discrimination against women in the area of education.

- In accordance with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to education".
- Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires States parties to undertake "to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights" set forth in that treaty, including the right to education.
- Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, details a number of measures which should be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education.
- UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education also bans discrimination in education on the basis of sex, referring to all types and levels of education, and includes access to education, the standard and quality of education, and the conditions under which it is given.
- The Beijing Platform of Action of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995,
  recognized education as a basic human right and an essential tool for achieving more equal relations between women and men. States committed to ensuring a number of strategic objectives, including: equal access to education, the closing of the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and development of non-discriminatory education and training by developing and using curriculums, textbooks and teaching aids free of sex-stereotyping.
- Millennium Development Goal 2 calls for universal primary education. MDG 3 to "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women", has as one of its targets: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015 (UN Human rights office of High Commission.

Right to Education to Women in Tanzania

Access to education and gender parity are two of the Millennium Goals in Sub-Saharan Africa. There has been a huge increase in access to primary education for girls although as we go up to secondary and tertiary level the rate remains considerably lower (Johson, 2011). With African traditions women are more susceptible to being prevented from attending schools at younger ages than their counter male counterparts. This becomes a foundational factor for a progressive low access to other levels of education for women. Though there is recognition of the importance of education to women as declared in different political forums, publications and policies; little has been done to improve opportunities for women in higher education. While women are not denied the opportunity to continue with their education, structural limitations and prejudice exist resulting from social, economic and cultural set-up of our community (Bhalalusesa, 2000).

Indeed, by considering the nature of women in relation to enforcement of the above mentioned constitutional right to education; then the authors of this article decided the sphere to which this article rests. Therefore, the proceeding parts of this article examine the role of ODL system in promotion and protection of the right to education for women in Tanzania. For drawing conclusion on the way forward this article will rest on exploring the noted challenges and future prospects of ODL in Tanzania using OUT and other two conventional universities. The two conventional universities used in this article as case studies are the University of Dodoma and St John University - Dodoma Campus for comparison purposes, particularly on accessibility and successful completion of studies. For clarity the article starts by examining genesis and most important features of ODL system in order to have a gist how it differs with conventional systems.

Genesis and Modality of ODL System

Different scholars consider that distance education is one amongst the education system which existed for over past thirty millennia. One scholar quoted to have confirmed that Distance Education is reputed as a very old approach to teaching and learning. He observed that Distance Education began about 3000BC with the invention of the art of writing in Mesopotamia in present day Iraq (Neville, 2012). In Africa, ODL can be traced through establishment of various institutions like University of South Africa (UNISA) which is the largest ODL institution in the Continent and the longest standing dedicated distance education University in the world. The University enroll

nearly one-third of all South African students. It was founded in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope; the institution became the first public university in the world to teach exclusively by means of distance education in 1946. Throughout the years, UNISA was perhaps the only university in South Africa to have provided all people with access to education, irrespective of race, colour or creed. One of the main aims of UNISA is to harness the new and emerging potential in information and communication technology to catapult the university into a truly digital future.[6] In Tanzania the government under the leadership of the Late Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere (First President of the United Republic of Tanzania) had a long established interest in exploiting the Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

This mode of delivery particularly for university level education started with the Anglo-Tanzanian study report titled "Education Media in Tanzania: Their Role in Development" of 1979. The report recommended establishment of a Correspondence Institute at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). Establishment of OUT was based on the recommendations of the Kuhanga committee (appointed by the then Minister for Education and Culture in 1988) that produced the Kuhanga report, which was in turn adopted by the Government of Tanzania and led to the ultimate establishment of OUT in 1993 following enactment of the OUT's founding Act No. 17 of 1992 (Memba, 2010). The vision of the Open University of Tanzania is to be a leading world class university in the delivery of affordable, quality education through open and distance learning, dynamic knowledge generation and application. Among the major functions of OUT is "to provide opportunities for higher education to a broader segment of the population through open and distance learning and residence learning. The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) has come a long way since its establishment in 1992, as a national institution of higher learning that specializes in Open and Distance Learning. Already, there are centres in all regions of mainland Tanzania and two coordinating centres in Zanzibar – Unguja and Pemba Islands. In place is another coordinating centre in Kenya, through Egerton University. The desire for continued growth and improvement of OUT infrastructure is still there but the biggest challenge remains in the political will of the government support to the University. ODL institutions like OUT ought to be assisted by their respective Governments to ensure they reap maximum benefits.

The Main Differences between ODL and Conventional System

To realize the main differences between ODL and conventional education system one has to explore albeit briefly the main features of ODL. Indeed, there are several salient features of ODL compared to Conventional systems, however for the purposes of this article the following have been selected to represent others: -

The First Feature of ODL is 'Open Accessibility'

ODL entails a student-centred approach that gives students flexibility and choice over what, when, where and how they learn. ODL opens the academic boundaries to all in need of education and educable. An essential characteristic of Open Learning is the removal of barriers to learning, where technologies and mode of delivery that are available to everyone need to be used. With pure ODL a student (learner must access all learning facilities from both approaches for a given course/programme. For instance, a student must have a hard copy of the reading material, a text book, a CD containing Digital materials, web-links to access E-resources. The limited learning resources provided by the University must be complemented by use of open educational resources widely available in the internet.

OUT for instance has adopted the Blended mode of delivery where both face to face, online interaction and E-learning is used. Moodle platform is the E-learning platform to access online forum discussions where instructors interact with students, announcements, assignments, and assessments are accessible to all registered stakeholders wherever they are. In addition to e-learning platforms OUT also operates through regional centres and coordination centres at district levels. Currently Tests and exams are done at regional and district levels, but in near future planned to be done online, all these aim at bringing support services closer to clients. These services are accessible wherever a student is and not bound to geographical locations.

The 'Freedom of Time' to meet Programme Requirements

ODL system allows for a learner to study on his/her own pace. This has been made possible through freedom in taking a number of units preferred by a student, and the university conducting several examination sessions during the academic year. Learners are not constrained to write examinations in a particular period. Another enabling feature is On Demand Examination (ODEX), where a student requests an examination whenever he/she is ready to attempt it, to enable a student complete programme requirements. Field

practices, projects and research activities also consider students' convenient times and places. Face to face sessions, and Students Progress Portfolio assessments are conducted at regional and coordination centres to enable student study whenever s/he wants. In Contrast to conversional systems, a student is bound to a specified period of time to complete his or her programme, with specific examination sessions and locational restrictions. Otherwise a student can be forced to postpone studies and forced to spend another year to complete a study or miss the opportunity all together.

The Third Distinguishable Feature is the 'Maximum Flexibility'

In ODL system there is maximum flexibilities on two main aspects one contact hours to students and number of years within which a student is required to complete the studies. A student at ODL study at his or her own decided pace and make their own decisions about the learning path that is to be followed for their program. OUT for instance offers a maximum of 8 years for a programme completion. This considers the nature of learners who study while continuing with other obligations. The ODL system allows for postponement of studies if a learner has other bounding obligations including employment tasks or going for professional training then can resume studies afterwards. Comparatively, in conversional Universities the programmes are done in a specified period of time mostly being 3-5 years with courses allocations per semesters. This requires a student to attend the specified courses per semester and missing the semester may lead to termination of his/her studies or carry overs which require extra resources to the student. Another flexibility feature of ODL is on service provision. In OUT for instance a registered student can attempt exams and other support services in any regional centre where he/she will be found at that particular time, an element which is missing in Conversional Universities.

 'Freedom of Place' in which a Person wants to Study
In ODL students are not required to fulfill a residency requirement at the host institution. Students in ODL system are not required to leave their home or work place as they pursue a program of study. So being a student at a University from a different region, country or continent is 100% possible to pursue and complete studies without being physically present in the academic institution. The Open University of Tanzania for instance has established centres in all regions of Tanzania, in its efforts to implement its mission. Furthermore, the University has established operating examinations at some of the districts in mainland Tanzania. The districts with examinations centres include but are not limited to; Mpwapwa, Korogwe, Mwanga, Karatu, Mbulu,

Mafinga, Makete, Mbinga, Masasi, Kibondo, Kasulu, Chato, Ngara, Lushoto, Karagwe, Tukuyu, and Ukerewe, Kondoa and Kiteto. All these aim at bringing support services closer to clients. OUT has also established centres abroad for instance in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Namibia. However, a student studying with OUT has a freedom to be served in any regional centre where s/he is in a particular time, that is s/he is not restricted to a certain regional centre. A student can access OUT services online and from any angle provided s/he is registered and has met all requirements for registration.

Another Feature is the 'Open Programming and Delivery Modalities
There are different blended modalities for programs and most of them are open. Previously OUT adopted three delivery modes to include; Distance, Evening and Executive. In Distance mode learners are studying on their own most of time after orientation and being given study guides and learning materials. Learning materials are provided in form of both hard copies and in soft copies; also available on OUT website under e-learning Management System (eLMS). Students receive academic advices, attend face to face sessions where they meet with academic staff, provided with support services through regional and coordination centres. They finally sit for their examinations as scheduled in the University almanac. Evening mode were executed in few regional centres with high concentration of students where students attend classes in evening times more like conversional system. Executive mode being professional oriented were run through face to face sessions in specified period of time and locations. Recently the University decided to merge the three delivery modes into a 'Blended mode" or 'Hybrid Mode' to make it more flexible and available to everybody in need of learning.

Transparency in Learning and Assessment Process
The interactive delivery modes like Moodle enable lecturers or instructors to discuss with students whatever they want to discuss. At the same time those people in administrative positions like faculty Deans, Heads of Departments, Deputy Vice chancellors can follow such discussions. This has lead to transparency as well as accountability in learning process.

Achievements of ODL System on Women Access to Right of Education; A Case of OUT
Considering the challenges of education and development, both in developing and developed countries, it is not surprising that open and distance learning is often seen as an important new approach and strategy which could make a

significant contribution towards resolving problems of access, quality and equity of education. It was resolved that when conventional systems and approaches cannot meet the needs and expectations of people then it is necessary to look for new strategies. Confidence seems to be growing that ODL is such a strategy. Taking OUT as a case study, since its inception in 1994, and its first graduation in 1999, the University have been enrolling and graduating a good number of students as shown in Table 1(a) & (b) bellow:

Table 1a Cumulative Enrolments as from 1994 to 2016/17

Category	Male	Female	Total
Non Degree	23,460	14,526	37,986
Bachelor	43,220	18,255	61,475
Postgraduate Diploma	3,041	1,296	4,337
Masters	15,092	5,802	20,894
Doctorate (PhD)	812	206	1,018
TOTAL	**85,625**	**40,085**	**125,710**

Source: OUT Rolling Strategic Plan 2018/19 – 2022/23

Table 1(b) Cumulative Figures of Graduates as from 1999 to November 2016/17

Category	Male	Female	Total
Non Degree	8,095	6,353	14,448
Bachelor	9,376	6,064	15,440
Postgraduate Diploma	517	3656	882
Masters	2,652	1,277	3,929
Doctorate (PhD)	101	27	128
TOTAL	**20,741**	**14,086**	**34,836**

Source: OUT Rolling Strategic Plan 2018/19 – 2022/23

From Tables 1(a) and (b) one could easily note the relative increase in enrolment for both men and women which is comparably larger than any single university in the country. This signifies the open access to a larger population as compared to conversional universities. Focusing on women enrolment, particularly on graduating numbers; Simple calculations (enrolled/graduate %) shows that women graduation rate is higher than men; 35% (FE) versus 24% (ME). From this finding OUT seems to be the affordable and the best alternative for women. Due to African traditional division of household tasks; women are more bound

to not to leave their home as compared to men. The best alternative for women' access to higher learning in the country remains ODL. ODL has played a great role in Tanzania education system to cure the mischief created by conventional education systems in respect to the right of education to women.

Comparative Analysis between OUT and two selected Conventional Universities in Tanzania

In the course of this study it was of paramount importance to make comparative analysis on intakes from sister universities. As stated earlier the other two conventional universities used in this article are the University of Dodoma and the St John University Dodoma campus This has been done considering among other factors the differences on delivering system as well as learning infrastructures from those compared universities. The study assumes in case all factors remain constant Open University will be at the top compared to all others.

Table 2 (a) Comparison Undergraduate Intakes (2010/2011 – 2014/2015) For Three Universities.

UNIVERSITY	2010/2011		2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1 SJUT	693	547 (44%)	925	662 (41%)	766	628 (45%)	622	610 (49%)	902	529 (36%)
2 UDOM	12261	6236 (33.7%)	10,040	5,737 (36.4)	8,648	4,728 (35.1%)	9,402	4,381 (31.8%)	13,258	5,195 (28.5%)
3 OUT	2507	1242 (33.1%}	2520	1164 (31.6%)	3107	1569 (33.6%)	3056	1668 (35.3%)	1617	2176 (57.4%)

Source: Admission Booklets from 3 Universities (STJU, UDOM OUT)

Table 2 (b) Comparison of Postgraduate Intake for 2 Public Universities

UNIVERSITY	2010/2011		2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1 UDOM	961	439 31.4%	789	541 40.7	843	561 40.0%	844	412 32.8%	871	347 28.5%
2 OUT	1502	577 (25.4%	1364	584 (28.3%)	2156	837 (28.6%)	2421	978 (28.8)	2149	1012 (32.0%)

Source: Admission Booklets from 3 Universities (STJU, UDOM, OUT)

From the presented data in Table 2 (a) and 2(b), one can establish that despite of different leverage on delivering system in terms of figures OUT produce high percentage of intake compared to UDOM (Table 1.3). This signifies that ODL system among others facilitate the opportunities for women to attain their education rights, not only for the undergraduate studies, but also higher degrees (Table 1.4).

Opportunities and Advantages of Women Education Rights Within the ODL System in Tanzania.

As discussed in section 2.1 ODL increase access and flexibility as well as the combination of work and education to learners. For employers it offers high quality and usually cost effective professional development in the workplace. It allows upgrading of skills, increased productivity and development of a new learning culture. In addition, it means sharing of costs, of training time, and increased portability of training. For governments the main potential is to increase the capacity and cost effectiveness of education and training systems, to reach target groups with limited access to conventional education and training, to support and enhance the quality and relevance of existing educational structures, to ensure the connection of educational institutions and curricula to the emerging networks and information resources, and to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2002). Different studies reveal among others that, there are some factors which upsetting women in education system in the country. On the other way those challenging factors are recognized and ideal opportunities for them (women) in pursuing the same education qualifications in the ODL system. These factors include; Biological, economic and social factors.

- **Biological factors of women (pregnancies, lactations, and marriages)**

These biological factors might be barriers for women attending schools or colleges under conversional system but minimally in ODL system. While in Conversional system being pregnant or lactating may have both structural and a psychological hindrance for a woman to pursue her studies to having negatively effect on her academic performance, In ODL these might not be a case as a woman can pursue her studies while pregnant or lactating as she is not required to travel to classes. If it happens particularly during attending examinations, there enabling environment as exam venues are always closer to their place of residence.

- **Economic factors of women (working and studying at the same time)**

As discussed under section 2.1, ODL learners are not required to postpone their duties or quite their jobs while studying. This enables learners to continue earning from their employments, businesses and other income generating activities. ODL also exclude accommodation costs and long travel distances, this reduces expenses involved in study programmes. OUT for instance, programme costs are relatively low as compared to conversional universities (need a comparative supporting figures). Employers are not obliged to offer study leaves or hire temporary laborers to fill gaps of those in studies. These facts become realities and favors women who are more constrained economically due to African traditional decision making systems and nature of women economic activities.

- **Social Factors (family and Social obligations)**

In African traditions, social obligations are more binding to women where in a household, women are the ones to taking care for infant children, nursing sick people, caring for old people as well as housing activities. Women's triple roles include; reproductive, productive and community managing roles. The taking or not taking into consideration of these roles can enhance or limit women's chances of taking advantage of development opportunities including decision to undertake studies. The reproductive role of women includes childbearing responsibilities and domestic tasks that take care and maintenance of the actual and future workforce of the family. The productive role of women relates to work performed by women and men for pay in cash or kind (market production, informal production, home production, subsistence production). The community managing role of women includes work mostly related to care and unpaid work, and provision of collective resources as water, healthcare, energy. In most societies, low-income women undertake all three roles, while men primarily undertake productive and community politics activities, which usually generate payment, status or power (EU Gender Advisory Services 2009 and 2010). Mhehe (2002) examined barriers to women participation at OUT. It was discovered that despite women students being interested to join ODL, they were affected by many barriers including institutional, cultural and work related barriers. A major challenge for women studying through ODL is time management; the ability to balance household duties, employment duties and their academics. However, Mhehe amongst others suggests that ODL system is the best for optimum attainment of education rights for women.

Prospects of ODL System towards Promotion of Women's Education Rights in Tanzania

- Some of the conventional universities starting now to provide blended ODL systems in some courses. A good example is Muhimbili University of Health Sciences which runs some of its programme in collaboration with OUT, where the examinations to its students are conducted in OUT Regional Centres. NACTE and Ministry of Education as well, has been conducting certificates and Diploma courses to Primary Teachers (DPTE Programme) in collaboration with OUT.

- Some of the foreign universities do offer ODL programs, these universities increase the chances and opportunities for both women and men to be enrolled and pursue academic qualifications in a competitive basis with the conventional universities.

- Technological advancement for instance the use of mobile phones as devices for web-based education is major contributor for ODL success hence open doors for everyone including women to access education. Though challenged with internet connectivity problems and affordability of the appropriate devices still availability of internet cafes up to district levels remains as alternatives.

- There are many prospects for the ODL mode of delivery in Tanzania and in the rest of Africa. These prospects may include the following: The ODL mode of delivery has room to be extended to other education and non-education sub-sectors as long as the political will. The performance of OUT over the 15 years of its existence has confirmed that it has made a difference in the education sector.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Due to the nature of women biologically, socially as well as economically, it can be concluded that the ODL system is the best suited to protects and promotes the rights of education to women worldwide and in Tanzania particularly. Facts and figures as presented in the comparative analysis as explained under section 3 of this article signifies the fact that good number of women has been enrolled and graduated comparatively more in ODL system compared to that of conventional universities. Both emotional and financial support is important ingredients for improvement of women access to ODL system for their empowerment.

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