Improvising Learning Technologies to Increase Women Access and Success in Higher Education and Manage Family Roles for Development

By: Dr. Edith Mhehe, Founding Dean and lecturer, Faculty of Education, Open University of Tanzania.

Email: rmanjayo@ymail.com

Abstract

My paper explains a double achievement accomplished by Tanzanian women through improvising "learning technologies" to combat women learning difficulties.

Mhehe (2002) research, "Women's Enrolment and Participation Issues at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)" indicate women education barriers to originate from communities' social cultural factors: poor educational and social background, cultural expectations for girls and women, women only issues, lack of support for girls education, lack of role models for girls in society, and control of women lives.

In my research achieving OUT Women Focus Group comprehend that only women can tell strategies for enabling women effective learning. This standpoint was reached when the Group noted that despite Tanzania's declaration to develop Tanzanians through education the Participation ratio of women was much less that of men.

The Group knowing that education is "key" to people's livelihood, and that President Mkapa (1995) inaugurating extra OUT offices at TIRDO premises urged women to invest their intellects in ODL for it is their only hope for attaining higher education, they dedicated efforts to liberate underachieving women through better education access and success for their development. They formed a women students' NGO with a Community Education Support Service Center Circle in Dar-Es-Salaam to help coordinate and resocialize by mentoring educationally, socially and economically underachieving women and girls countrywide towards this realization.

Burge and Haughey (2001) explained use of "learning technologies" to encompass not only use of tools such as audio, print, video, and computer applications, but also their wider concept involving their creative and informed applications and social effects. This links well with the Women Focus Group idea of creating the Women Community Education Support Service Center Circle as "Learning Technology" to enable women to manage better their education access and success and their family roles.

Introduction

Since independence (1961) Tanzanian government chose education to develop its citizens (Nyerere, 1968, p. 49). To realize the intent the government embarked on opening more schools, teacher colleges, adult education programs; nationalized the private schools; and declared free education and DE as solution to overcome her education problems (Nyerere, in Young et al., 1980)

By 1980s, Tanzania's educational policies included education for all through Universal Primary Education, expansion on adult literacy classes, and DE. The World Bank (1988) reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania had the most successful educational innovations including in-service teacher-training, DE programs policies on increased community involvement in building and management of schools, and development of education with production programs. UNICEF (1989, p. 94) records showed that by 1980 Tanzania had almost achieved the UPE under its defined target, and that the country had the highest rate of adult literacy of any African country south of the Sahara. However, to date most women

do not achieve in accessing and succeeding education as men particularly university education where most women combine studying and family roles.

Increasingly conventional universities initiate female "pre-university entry qualification" programs in the effort to include equitable number of women. But such efforts increase small numbers of women. Young, Peraton, Jenkins, and Dodds (1980) explained that DE offer a
counter to the traditional classroom, and it is more economical. They said DE is more effective
 than the conventional education for it brings immediate and relevant educational resources to millions who would otherwise lack education and shares the world's educational resources.
Zindi and Acoin (1995) explained that for African countries with financial constraints in
education DE is the solution if properly managed and organized; is capable of catering for individual needs because it is flexible. People marginalized by conventional education system such as women with children, workers and disabled people can study by DE because of its flexibility.

Research Methodology

My Ph.D. study "Women enrolment and participation issues at the Open University of Tanzania (2002)," indicate major barriers to women effective learning are base in the social cultural factors: poor educational and social background, cultural expectations for girls and women, women only issues, lack of support for girls education, lack of role models for girls in society, and control of women lives. Hence, for Tanzanian to develop equitably its citizens through education it should make deliberate efforts to mitigate these barriers.

My study conducted between 1997 and 2000 covered 17 Tanzania regions, interviewed and discussed with 280 OUT women students, over 60 OUT personnel (regional directors, Dean of students, faculty deans, lecturers, and top executive officers); 18 Ph.D. achieving women educationists from conventional universities, and 30 non-student-women qualified to enroll for degree programs with the OUT but were unable due to various limitations. I collected and analyzed several OUT documents; organized one day each two Focus Groups of 32 OUT women students who spoke well in the 17 regions and their close relatives and friends, and 21 OUT Regional Directors. The findings from my research indicate that social cultural factors are the major barriers of women education.

Social Cultural Factors

Tanzanians are strongly grounded in over 120 tribal cultures on the basis of gender-roles, property ownership, and aspects of life values counting as necessary for man/woman to be accepted and respected as normal person in the tribe. The social-cultural context of women's lives constraint women schooling. Women interviewees mentioned that strong cultural expectations for women is placed in early marriage, child bearing and rearing, male control of women's lives in society and marginal societal support for girls'/women's education concerns.

Poor education and social background

My research indicates that majority of women applying for OUT degree programs are under qualified than the men. Further, girls' upbringing creates poor socialization and awareness in life coping skills because traditions prevent them from mixing in public to protect their virginity and encourage the culturally desired femininity characteristics of being shy, tender, soft, and non argumentative respected for marriage purposely helping men easily control women in the society. In addition, traditions demand housework to be women's only responsibility as such day scholar girls spend much time in housework supporting their mothers as well being modeled for marriage roles. Hence, women's social life and education is limited and demands mitigation planned in the education programs for "women re-socialization and academic remedial tuitions" to enable women competence with men to access and succeed in education endeavor.

In justifying the establishment of OUT the Minister for Education emphasized OUT importance in filling the gap left by conventional universities by opening up university learning opportunities for the less advantaged in higher education especially women. President Mkapa, giving an opening speech on the occasion of inaugurating additional working space for the OUT at TIRDO stressed the OUT's special mission of promoting education of Tanzanian women. He reiterated the fact that for many women, distance education is their only hope for attaining higher education, he urged the OUT to make extra

efforts to ensure that women avail themselves of this alternative path towards investing in their (own) intellectual development (Mkapa, 1996). Ansere, (1992) suggested that African countries should opt for distance education as an alternative since conventional education cannot meet the needs of the public demand for education. He said that distance education has brought into higher education new groups of people such as rural people and women who for a long time have been underrepresented.

Cultural expectations for girls and women

Culturally Tanzanians consider university education fitting and benefiting men more than women because education empower public interaction, enable good income regarded men roles only as main bread-winners of their families, therefore most families prefer educating sons and consider daughters for marriage. So, culturally Tanzanians believe that educating girls is to destroy their marry-ability, their family and societal roles, and investing in other people's families. Tanzanians think women have enough tasks to do in their family (child bearing and upbringing, house work, care for the husband, the sick and disabled). As such adding studying and or employment will limit the woman full time in her family roles. In this perspective, women who juggle family roles, studying and/or employment are considered deviant, not achieving well in their family roles, and do not get respected as fulfilling wives and/or mothers.

OUT male regional directors' Focus Group noted that OUT women students lack consciousness sensitization, encouragement, and provision of their basic rights to education. They observed that most women believe marriage and family roles are most respectable and fulfilling for them. They thought the women belief is a vicious circle inherited from past generation's culture. It aims at prohibiting women from getting more educated than their husbands so that they easily accept being rooted in family roles.

Women Focus Group noted that culture and traditions make African communities feel educating girls destroys their marry-ability values and prevent their traditional quality of being groomed for dowry. One OUT woman student explained that her father forced her to marriage at grade thirteen as such she had to struggle on her own as married woman OUT student in order to achieve her university education which she aspired since her childhood. Five girls at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam pre-entry program told me they had been pregnant some stage in their secondary education, but their mother's willingness to care for the babies enabled them go back to school. They were grateful for the chance and working hard not to disappoint their mothers. They said their mothers could decide to help them with the babies because they were single parenting. They commented that if they had their fathers in the family the fathers would not allow them go back to school, also would push them out of the family. Among the girls four were in the top ten students. This is encouraging it indicates that if girls are helped to access and remain in school, they are able to make full use of their intellectual abilities for success. OUT woman, Founding Dean, Science Faculty commented that if women could be provided with the technology that can help them with their family chores most women are able to study well as most men can do. The South African Institute for Distance Education, (1995) states that education and training are basic human rights the state has an obligation to protect and advance these rights so that all citizens irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to the society (p. 25). Hence, Tanzania government, policy makers, education planners and educators are still to find "a Women Fit Technology" that can support better women family roles in order to help women manage better their studies as men can do for women alone cannot do it (Mhehe, 2002).

Women only issues

Achieving woman artist explained that women have too many "women only" issues embedded in women multi roles, culture, and traditions. The society subtly encourages men and society to force young girls into earl marriage. Men deliberately plan to get cheap women for production, re-production, and care for them. Men believe caring for offspring is women role only.

The Women Focus group complained that women assigned roles are repetitive, tedious, time consuming and unpaid, as such the tasks occupy mind, time, and energy throughout the year; limiting most women academic, social aspiration, and financial entrepreneurship, thus lowering their power and status in society; while men normally have specific paid tasks; time and energy to socialize, think/reflect/meditate, plan, organize, execute, relax, refresh their mind to gain motivation for studying, retention and be creative to plan ahead to earn them social, financial political power and status in society.

The Women Focus Group also observed the education of wives of rich men is low, the wives are not taking trouble to educate themselves although money would not be their problem. The wives are satisfied with marriage in rich family where their husbands are providing for. The husbands' concern is to own beautiful wife/wives bearing and caring children and the family property for them. Hence, the family chores have become traditionally "woman responsibility only," which most women accept while most men demand their wives to assume the role upon marriage for this is what they married them for, also, expectation of society, further traditions reinforce the relationship as such women alone cannot change it because the society thinks it is ideal relationship for man and wife. This way women education is limited by traditions that determine ideal life for men and women in the society and anything different is considered awkward and not acceptable.

An OUT female administrator explained that the ways women get oppressed in society is not yet well researched as such effective mitigation is unknown. She said that some NGO's, relatives, governments, and religious institutions could help in mitigation but the culture and traditions are powerful to stop any mitigation attempts. One achieving woman lecturer at University of Dar-Es-Salaam explained that her observation is that it seems the government subtly controls men in society and expects men to tactfully assume control of women in their families. She said that her observation comes from her experience since childhood that the government does not put and or re-enforce law(s) controlling women oppression while men assume ultimate power and decision in all matters in the family and society. Hence, in this perspective it is necessary women observe Thomson (1983) who explained that,

> Unless women think much deeply about themselves, make sense of their experiences and expectations in reference to their own needs and interests, and consider strategies of redefining the relationship with men in ways which will change the distribution of power and oppression to one of equality and respect, learning new roles will continue to be a poor substitute for the practice of freedom and liberation. (p. 106)

Lack of support for girls' education
FAWE achieving woman educationist explained that from childhood there are many, multiple and complex constraints, from different sources that limit girls/women education. Major ones are women do not own anything including their own children so they are alone in life. As children their father has final say, in marriage the husband, as such they do not aspire high for anything because parents, teachers, religion, society in general do not sensitize, motivate, encourage, or support their concerns as they do for boys. The adolescence socialization done by illiterate elderly female relatives creates vicious circles of ignorant young females in society which make many girls/women believe that marriage is more important for them, men are more intelligent, men should not be questioned and women should not be heard in public. When young girls believe in such notions naturally they lose their self-esteem, aspiration s, confidence, and personal capabilities do not get fully developed. Hence, in many families and society there are no ideal women role-models for young girls.

Tanzania's First President, Julius Nyerere, cited in Young and Peraton (1980, p. 1) urged Tanzanians to invest in education for it has the power to liberate people. He said that man can only liberate himself or develop himself. He cannot be liberated or developed by another. For man makes himself. It is his ability to act deliberately for a self-determined purpose, which distinguishes him from the other animals. The expansion of his own consciousness, and therefore of his power over himself, his environment, and his society, must therefore ultimately be what we mean by development.

Lack of role models for girls in society

Traditions consider the status of women in the family and society lower to that of men because women traditional assigned roles are not highly respected as those for men. This is to say women traditional assigned roles deny them social respect, financial and political power, therefore lower their social status in society; also, women as mothers fail to be good role models for their daughters to emulate as sons can emulate their fathers for high power and status in the family and society in decision making. Most girls grow up lacking the vision and aspiration to compete for access and or success not only in education but in many development areas because their mothers are not models as many fathers are for sons. As such most girls naturally accept low social status. They live to be told, directed, lead, guided, advised,

encouraged, pushed to help them access and succeed not only in education but for anything in life. This means for most women there is need for re-socialization of their upbringing, and improvement of their academic competence to change their mind set to help them make sense of what is real development for them (Thompson, 1983).

Control of women Lives

The achieving woman artist explained that girls/women are disadvantaged in their education and life in general. They are controlled by denying them the power to decide or owning anything. In this perspective the women focus group questioned in their discussions on 11th July, 1999, "how can women voice out their education problems?" They suggested that the OUT be advised to use her achieving women students in regional centers to form OUT NGO to coordinate and unite the academically underachieving women in Tanzania and together find ways of role-modeling them in re-socialization and remedial academic tuitions. One OUT woman educationist told me that the technology that Tanzanian women need in order to study well as men are doing is the technologies that can help women finish quickly their house chore to get time and energy to study." (Mhehe, 2002), while a second year OUT woman student told me that when she tries to study after the house chore her brain and her whole body gets tired, her eyes closes and she cannot remember what she has read. (Mhehe, 2002)

Conclusion

Women are marginalized from formal education and expected to participate in nation building by

giving birth and rising children, taking care of husbands, and the family chores. Quite a number of women today have shown notable ability to participate in the public sector of well paying professions as most men are doing, and are skillfully juggling them well with their traditional assigned roles in the family and society while continuing their higher education. Hence, if availed with women-fit, effective learning technologies women can seize better their educational opportunities as most men are doing, for as Burge and Haughey (2001) explained that the use of "learning technologies" do not encompass only the use of tools such as audio, print, video, and computer applications, but also their wider concept involving their creative and informed applications and social effects.

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