



Increasing Women Access In TVET Through ODL Programme: A Case Of Thika Technical Training Institute In Kiambu County , Kenya

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Abstract

Statistics from Thika Institutional sex disaggregated baseline survey (2014) clearly showed that 65% were males and 35% were females. This clearly shows there is a gap as far as women participation in technical education is concerned. Few girls enrol and complete technical education than men. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the successes of ODL programme in increasing women access to technical education. Some of the specific objectives of the paper include: finding out causes of low female participation in TVET, examine ODL programme in skills training for the formal sector and non-formal sector. Further, the study will examine challenges and solutions of implementing ODL programme for skills training. Data will be collected using desktop research and participatory discussions with the heads of department, FSD champion and departmental FSD champions. The participants cut across the mainstream academic departments. The findings and recommendations will assist in enhancing female participation in technical education hence address the problem of female disparity in TVET institute

Key Words

Access, Women, ODL, Technical Education, TVET

List of abbreviations & Acronyms

COLCommon Wealth of learning

FSD..... Flexible Skills Development

FAB.....Flexible and blended learning

ODL.....Open Distance Learning

TVET.....Technical Vocational & Entrepreneurship Training

TVSD.....Technical Vocational Skills Development

WITED....Women in Technical Education

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Gender and TVET in Kenya

Today, TVET is regarded as an instrument in creating new employment opportunities and income-generating activities in the formal and non-formal sectors of the economy, the need for which has become more acute due to the financial crisis. TVET can play an important role in economic development and poverty reduction if due attention is given to customizing or targeting education and training provision to local needs.

Traditionally TVET was regarded to be a provision reserved for the male gender. This belief has resulted in serious omissions in national government development plans where women are given a raw deal. Consequently, most of the TVET facilities such as dormitories are planned without taking into consideration the female gender. Coupled with this cultural belief among most of the communities in Kenya, women are discouraged from enrolling for vocational career training opportunities. Enrolment data from TVET institutions indicate that women comprise of 30% of the total enrolment but only 5% of the 30% are in Vocational areas such as Engineering and Building Construction to name a few. The remaining 25% enrol in women traditional courses such as secretarial, nursing and hospitalities. Women according to the 1999 national census constitute 55% of the total national population. The Kenya Government for the last three years has embarked on gender in TVET promotion activities. The target is to increase women enrolment from the current 5% to 30% (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2003).

1.2 ODL and TVET in Kenya

Distance education (sometimes referred to as 'distributed learning' or 'distance learning') is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone geographically removed from the learner, with all or most of the communication between teachers and learners being conducted through electronic or print medium. In addition, Open learning and distance education refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. Open and distance learning (ODL) is a way of combining work and family responsibilities with educational opportunities

At the moment, Kenya has no programme through long distance learning (Kerre, 1997). It is currently being developed. A major fear has been expressed by experts that TVET is still traditional in content and at most irrelevant to modern societal needs (Kerre, 1997). Due to the limited places available in TVET institutions, only a small proportion of eligible school leavers are absorbed. Every year, 55 percent of those graduating from the primary school level join technical institution, while the balance join the labour market directly, there is need to target this group for skills development through TIVET institutions as these have the potential to create the critical human resource needed for technological transformation of the country. For many trainees TVET programmes are terminal. It is imperative therefore that the existing education structure is reviewed in order to establish opportunities that link TIVET programmes with programmes at higher levels of education and training. This will have the potential of enhancing training and the attractiveness of the TIVET programme to learners and parents who consider TVET as sub standard (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2003). The lower status still ascribed to TVET and the high cost associated with TVET programmes has pushed enrolments towards service oriented theoretical programmes. It is cheaper to mount training courses in accounts and secretarial studies than putting up workshops and equipping them for technical subjects.

To address the problems of TVET, the Government has initiated TVET reforms. The reform started with rapid appraisal of TVET system, which was followed by a validation workshop of key stakeholders who adopted the findings and 214 recommendations of the rapid appraisal team. A national symposium was held in November 2003 involving all stakeholders. The objective of the symposium was to review TVET status in Kenya and build a consensus

1.3 Thika TTI and TVET

Thika Technical Training Institute (Thika TTI) is a government Tertiary Institution under the Ministry of Higher Education. The Institute offers both Technical and Business courses at certificate and Diploma levels.

Thika T.T.I is one of the Key institutions that work with the Common Wealth of Learning (COL) to adopt flexible and blended (FaB) delivery approaches in technical and vocational skills development (TVSD). Common Wealth of Learning (COL) is working with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) to strengthen institutional capacity to adopt flexible and blended (FaB) delivery approaches.

One of the Thika TTI objectives is increasing access in education to women. In line with this, COL has initiated the following programs

i) WITED project

There has been very low women enrolment in TVET institutions hence the need to increase women enrolment thus, the WITED Chapter Initiative.

The WITED Chapter has the following set objectives that will be achieved through the coordination of the WITED Chapter coordinator.

1. To increase female enrolment in all the training programs taking place in Thika T.T.I.
2. Promoting equity in education
3. To empower women and girls with formal and non-formal skills for economic development
4. To improve quality of life of women and girls.

ii) ODL programme :

Thika TTI started an Open Distance Learning programme in 2014 . So, girls who are employed , those in self-employment and the married ones are able to access education through distance learning. So far, over seventy ladies have enrolled for distance learning programme. They are pursuing courses such as Community Development, Human Resource management, Procurement and Supplies Chain Management and Business Administration

The ODL institutional policy is complete and approved. Through the ODL programmes both formal and non-formal short courses are operational The institution has a Flexible Skills department and FAB laboratory that coordinates the courses A number of staff have gone through some form of training on open and distance learning sponsored and supported by COL. A number of short courses such as training on entrepreneurial skills and finance management for youth and women in youth and enterprise who can benefit from these flexible courses in the community are being prepared currently by the FSD Department and the intention is to offer these courses through ODL. However, there are challenges which include; the teaching staff not appreciating ODL as a mode of learning as well as the institution not having a library and learning resource centre that can facilitate ODL. The institution intends to roll out sensitization to enable them understand and appreciate learning through ODL.

The ODL program continues to cater for the needs of the youth who have been locked out of the formal system for various reasons. Moreover, programmes become more acceptable to learners when they promote diversity as an enriching element in the teaching and learning processes. In Kenya, for example, the government has introduced a youth enterprise fund which has become popular among the youth in the non-formal sector. Unfortunately, those who benefit most from the fund are youth who have had some formal education and have acquired useful skills for business. TVET through ODL can design programmes to cater for women who may not have the qualifications to access the funds because of lack of appropriate technical and life skills which can help them carry out business activities.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Despite good intentions stipulated in TVET policy in Kenya on access and equity for all marginalized groups ,women notwithstanding ,low female enrolment continue to be the norm in TVET institutions .Female enrolment in Kenya constitutes 44 % in TVET institutions 4562 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2003). As such there is a gap that need to be filled through such programmes as Distance learning. Unfortunately , such an ODL programme miss out in TVET institutions in Kenya (Kerre, 1997).

Statistics from Thika Institutional sex disaggregated baseline survey (2014) clearly showed that there is a gap as far as women participation in technical education is concerned. The number of Males was : 1,238 = 65 % , while the number of females was : 670 =

35% These statistics show gender inequality in enrolment in technical education. Therefore, the need to increase female participation in this discipline to bridge the gap that exists between gender in technical education. The gap reflects the need in securing the advancement of women and the elimination of gender-based discrimination, particularly in the fields of education and employment (Entsua-Mensah, 2006).

It is clear that much is needed to encourage females to enter into technical education. The paper is therefore concerned about the causes of low participatory rate of females in technical education, how ODL programme bridges this gap in Thika TTI and find out the challenges of implementing ODL programme hence give recommendations.

2.1 Methodology

The paper is informed by existing literature and largely by participatory discussions with the heads of the ten academic departments at the institute, FSD champion at the institute and departmental FSD champions .The writer introduced objectives of the paper to prompt particular topics of discussion. Participants also came up with additional topics and questions based upon their experiences on the topics of discussion.

2.2 The discussion was guided by the following objectives:

- i) Causes of low female participation in TVET
- ii) Successes of ODL programme in increasing women access in TVET
- iii) Challenges of implementing the ODL programme in Thika TTI
- iv) Recommendations

3.1 Summary of Discussions, conclusions and Recommendations

i) Causes of low female participation

During the discussions, it emerged that causes could be categorized as governmental, societal factors and school environment factors. Governmental causes discussed include policy related factors, that is, lack of goals and adequate monitoring of gender equity. In this regard, though the policy on gender equity exists, it is hardly implemented and there are inadequate monitoring and evaluation efforts thus gender parity continues to exist in TVET institutions. The gender parity is further enhanced by discriminative labour laws. Some organizations and companies prefer the male employees to the female ones due to their biological dispensation especially in high ranking positions that require much energy and this automatically puts the females at a disadvantage. Other factors include poor TVET scholarships for female TVET students and Inflexible selection and entry requirements.

According to the discussions, societal causes are related to the living conditions of women, such as their time pressures imposed by domestic duties and responsibilities. Regardless of their background, women continue to bear most child-rearing and domestic duties. Home and childcare duties strongly restrict the time-management opportunities, mobility and flexibility necessary for women's full participation in education and training. After periods of child bearing, women often lose their previous connection to the labour market, and are therefore dependent on re-training opportunities. To reduce the related problems of family duties and time allocation for women, the discussion highlighted that there is an urgent need for supportive actions through different policies and stakeholders.

Further, due to gender and cultural biases Female unemployment is higher than that of their male counterparts. Young women account for large numbers of the unemployed .This trend can be attributed to the fact that most communities in Kenya prefer to educate the boy child as compared to the girl child. It emerged that poor customary laws and norms impede women to greater extent than men from obtaining land, credit, productive inputs, education, information, and health care. Regardless of these poor customary laws and norms, labor market also exhibit discriminatory policies, structural barriers and other prejudices that inhibit majority of female youth from entering and staying in the job market.

More so, Society Perceived differences in male and female roles and capabilities, inculcated through socialization at home and family that is, parents give different tasks to boys and girls. At home boys are given toys boxes and cars to play with while girls role play cooking, sewing and dressing dollies.

School environment factors were discussed as, Gender biased TVET curriculum materials, attitudes of male teachers towards girls in science and technology classes.

Lack of women role models in professorial and high administrative positions in medicine, engineering, technical as well as mathematics and science in tertiary institutions

Technical and technological studies often have large attendance requirement, for practical skills or laboratory based work

Masculine image of science projected in text books, media and popular assumptions.

The avoidance of science and mathematics makes it difficult for girls to perform well in technical courses, which require some background knowledge in mathematics and science.

Teaching methods and curriculum content used by teachers show girls clearly the work group they belong to.

ii) **Successes of ODL programme in increasing female participation in TVET**

The discussions revealed the successes of ODL programme in Thika TTI. Thika TTI started a distance learning programme in 2014. So, girls who are employed and those in self-employment and married are able to access education through distance learning. So far, we have over seventy ladies who have enrolled for distance learning programme. They are pursuing courses such as community development, Human Resource management, procurement and supplies management and Business Administration. This has increased female enrolment in technical education. Female students are able to access technical skills under whatever circumstances. They are no longer disadvantaged due to pregnancy, marital status early marriages or nay other inhibitive prevailing circumstances. ODL programme has also Promoted innovation and opportunities for women and lifelong learning. It exposes women to opportunities of acquiring skills so as to improve their livelihoods.

ODL materials that are gender sensitive have been developed for the distance learners. A learning management system (moodle) is underway which will make it easy for the learners to access resource materials with ease.

Besides, a flexible open learning programme for the non-formal sector is operational. Over 1,500 Female students in Jua Kali sector have been trained on short courses such as baking, soap making, catering customer care, and entrepreneurship skills among others.

iii) **Challenges of implementing ODL programme in Thika TTI**

During the discussions ,the following challenges emerged :

Inadequate trained Capacity to man the ODL programme in terms of ODL material preparation and implementation. Another challenge is that a lot of infrastructure is needed hence finances are needed for capacity building, marketing the programme, developing and uploading materials.

It emerged that the National ODL policy is not yet recognized and its underway hence poses challenge as lecturers remain conservative and therefore resistant to change. They want to maintain the status quo.

A serious challenge comes in training engineering causes as developing practical skills materials is difficult and there are no on-job training sites for experience.

The LMS (moodle) remains a challenge as clouding the programme and maintain it is expensive. This is aggravated by poor internet connection.

3.2 Conclusion

TVET reforms should embrace ODL option, it should form a basis of developing national policies that address the challenges of technical/vocational education and training to support economic development and the creation of national wealth as a contribution to poverty eradication as well as address the issue of educational opportunities for all.

There is need to overcome the challenges so that issues of female participation in both formal and non-formal technical skills are addressed Therefore, a framework should be developed along this line in order to provide a credible system of certification of skills that are portable and recognized across enterprises, sectors, industries and educational institutions, whether public or private for all.

3.3 Recommendations:

- More awareness campaigns should be carried out to enlighten communities on the need to give their children equal treatment in terms of education. There should be laws that govern employment in the different sectors of the economy to ensure that gender parity is observed. Labour laws should also be more considerate and give a balance between work and family life. Employment policies need to be designed with a focus on gender as this will reduce the rates of female youth unemployment in the country
- The government should hasten the formulation of the national ODL policy so that the programme can be recognized in TVET institutions.
- Reforms in TVET should be carried out in order to integrate ODL in all the TVET institutions.
- The government should allocate more funds to technical education in order to meet the high cost of ODL programme designing and implementation.
- Partnerships should be encouraged so that some of the challenges are handled in order to make ODL programme efficient and effective.

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