

RESILIENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been widely embraced as a system for increased access to Higher Education in Africa. In the context of Teacher Education and Professional Development, Less Developed Countries like Malawi stand to benefit from the skilled work force as well as quality education for the increased number of students succeeding from primary to secondary school. However, majority of teachers enrolled in ODL face innumerable challenges. They risk their careers, burdened by family and work commitments and receive minimal support from colleges, family and their employers. This does not only affect their concentration in their studies but also the quality of education they receive from such institutions. However, recognizing that fewer opportunities exist for such teachers to upgrade through conventional means, fostering resilience for them to continue studies through ODL remains is vital. Resilience in education entail the intensified probability of success in school and other life accomplishments, regardless of the environmental difficulties (Weller & Anderson, 2013). Therefore, this review aimed at examining the challenges and the resilient practices for teachers pursuing Teacher Education and Professional Development Through ODL. Using thematic analysis on several journal articles, research papers, allied newspapers and reports on ODL for teachers in Malawi and the world at large for challenges and ways that foster sustaining teachers who study through ODL. Therefore, this review perceives resilience in the form of support, identification of best practices and appropriate support features for ODL stand to help ease the pressure on teachers pursuing ODL as way of upgrading themselves.

KEYWORDS: Open And Distance Learning, Professional Development, Resilience, Teacher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Africa face a daunting challenge in championing for increased access to Higher Education through conventional modes. This is because such modes

of training have been confronted by limited number of admissions due to shortage of

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accommodation and classrooms for students (Danaher & Umar, 2010). Recently, a shift towards ODL has been perceived as a step forward in addressing admission challenges. ODL is described as a system of learning that releases students from restrictions of time and place at the same time offering flexible learning opportunities (Bee, 2011). In Sub-Saharan Africa, ODL came into being with the aim of reducing the shortage of qualified teachers mainly in primary schools (Perraton, 2010). Subsequently, it was not surprising to note three public, single-mode universities, namely the University of South Africa, Zimbabwe Open University and the Open University of Tanzania to enroll thousands of students by the year 2009 (SADC Secretariat, 2009). Likewise, in Malawi, introduction of ODL programs at Domasi College of Education and Mzuzu University provided education to under qualified teachers in government to upgrade their academic and professional qualification (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016; Msiska, 2013). This trend came against the background of Malawi having only 39% of qualified teachers to teach in secondary schools by the year 2004 (Kadzamira, 2016). Subsequently, Malawi recorded success story in terms of beefing qualified teacher strained under ODL. ODL in Malawi produced 18000 trained teachers in early 2000 a target that might have been achieved in over 12 years using conventional mode of teacher education (Biao, 2012). Furthermore, strategically, ODL has helped a lot in solving the problem of creation of vacuum by teachers doing training through full time mode. This has further helped reduce the challenge for teachers who were subjected to rejection once they apply for study leave (NationOnline, 2013). Hence, ODL provide hope to teachers whom in countless circumstances do not have an opportunity to be afforded full time study leave from their work places. It is not surprising that in Ghana, ODL was introduced by Higher Education Institutions in order to reduce the teachers' tussle in receiving paid study leave to study fulltime (Kumi-Yeboah, Blankson, &

YoungIII, 2014). Moreover, increased enrollment in secondary schools and the appetite for teachers to upgrade themselves has seen the emerging ODL programs become a relief in Malawi (Chimpololo, 2010). It has been further contended by Murphy and Manzanares (2012) that teachers enroll in ODL for education improvement, increased knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogy and growth of practical skills. In this regard, ODL apparently help teachers impart innovatively with them to teach and learn with flexibility, have open learning, independent learning, student-centered teaching, online teaching and learn with technology (Isabirye & Moloji, 2016). Furthermore, when government is involved in supporting ODL, it has been seen to increase access to learning and training opportunities in the process providing better prospects for updating, retraining and personal enrichment for teachers under the study (SADC Secretariat, 2009). Similarly, Shohel (2012) observed that ODL is there for professional training and admission to qualifications that advances teachers skills and knowledge. Regardless of perceived advantages, teachers still face numerous challenges in pursuit for ODL (Chimpololo, 2010; Rena, 2007). It is in view of this that the paper examines these challenges and existing resilient measures that can ensure relief for teachers pursuing ODL as their professional development program.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH ODL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In view of the current status, teachers pursuing ODL as teacher education and professional development are faced with unfathomable bottlenecks. A number of these challenges are inherent in the institutional, community and individual aspects of the system of ODL. Such difficulties have become worse in Less Developed Countries, with them requiring both short term and long term responses to their redress.

Therefore, their view examines the challenges globally in general and Malawi specifically, that teachers face as they do teacher education and professional development through ODL.

FAMILY COMMITMENT

One notable aspect of ODL program is its openness to admission even with adult students who ideally have family commitments. However, such students repeatedly face family burden in pursuit of meeting family needs while at the same time doing their studies (Rwejuna, 2013). Although Pozdnyakova and Pozdnyakov (2017) observed that adult students in ODL have high level of motivation, great focus in their studies, great experience and readiness for independence and critical thinking; family commitment was viewed to be a greater challenge. Consequently, these wide range of responsibilities make them lose concentration in their academic work in due course discouraging them in their studies (Rena, 2007).

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Teachers who upgrade through ODL in most cases fund tuition fee, accommodation, stationary among others on their own. In Malawian context, where teachers come from public institutions, little is realized to support such teachers for such noble cause in terms of financial support towards their study (Chimpololo, 2010). Therefore, such constraints together with family commitment lead to tiredness which culminate into stress among teachers pursuing ODL (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). Conversely, inability to pay tuition make it difficult for universities to run ODL programs to meet the needs of the growing teachers who gain admission in universities via ODL (Asabere & Enguah, 2012; Murphy & Zhiri, 1992,). The case of Tanzania reveals the plight of ODL students where they struggle to pay for tuition fees against the background of their family's economic needs (Rwejuna, 2013). They further face challenges in

raising transportation costs for face to face sessions, tests and practical sessions (Niwagila, 2014). Moreover, those who have not fully paid school fees hardly get admission and sit for examinations. The financial problem among ODL students is also compounded by lack of support from their employers. For instance, in a study done with students of Zimbabwe Open University, 40% of students were denied access to write examination, due to lack of fee support from their employers (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron, 2015).

LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

Similar to financial challenge is lack of political will to support teachers doing Professional Development through ODL. Despite the fact that ODL is seen to be a cost effective way of upgrading more teachers (Danaher & Umar, 2010), in countries like Malawi, ODL remain to be underfunded. Reports reveal that, although ODL was part of the *National Education Sector Plan*, it did not receive any priority in terms of funding from the national budget (Chimpololo, 2010). Thus, the sector was offered only *63 million Malawi Kwacha*, representing only 0.3 % of the total education sector allocation hence making it hard for ODL implementation to be a success. Worse still, teachers pursuing ODL are demotivated by lack of loans to help them in their studies by their employers (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). This however, is in contrast to their commitment to have their educational status upgraded for the benefit of students (Nation Online, 2013).

AGE GAP

Being open, ODL offer teachers of varying age to venture into Professional Development without age restrictions. However, while this remain to be a strength, age gap for teachers pursuing ODL remain a challenge. (Jakobsdóttir, McKeown, & Hoven, 2010) observed that, older ODL students prefer face-to-face teaching as a way of

instruction in their studies. However, this is not always been the case with ODL systems where there is less time for face to face sessions (Samkange, 2014). Consequently, in such cases, online services become an alternative (Miliszewska, 2017). Unfortunately, the age gap manifests into lack knowledge on use of online services by older students therefore affecting the delivery of instruction (Bee, 2011).

LACK OF ADEQUATE ORIENTATION

Apart from age gap, studies reveal lack of adequate orientation on ODL programs for students. Difficulties on how to handle studies is reported to challenge teachers pursuing ODL. Such students are observed to concentrate on reading towards the examination period, (Fojtík, 2018) making their studies superficial. This further render them unable to do well and master what they are supposed to cover within their semester. Ideally, home study in ODL is crucial as knowledge gathered is to benefit their professional development. Lack of orientation on how to manage study has render students unable to complete tasks (Fojtík, 2018). Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica (2004) contend that, making sure that distance students receive orientation on learning materials and other expectations would help them know their responsibilities and limits while learning at a distance.

IN-ABSENCE OF LECTURE-STUDENT INTERACTION

As with face to face mode of teaching, interaction between lecturers and students pursuing ODL is crucial. In some instances, it has been observed that absence of lecture and students interaction is seen to be a major challenge (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016) in facilitation of learning for ODL students. This among others subject students to stress while pursuing teacher education programs through ODL (Rena, 2007). Research establish that, link between lecturers and students

pursuing ODL is vital with its absence creating challenges with regards to evaluation of students' work (Ohene & Essuman, 2014) .

DEFICIENT LIBRARY MATERIALS

Pursuing ODL with little or no relevant library materials for home study is worrisome in as far as quality of learning for students is concerned (Chimpololo, 2010). Library materials are crucial for studies in institutions of higher learning. Since ODL requires the student to study from a distance, they need library for study resources. However, the major drawback in Less Developed Countries is fewer library resources talk less of having relevant books for their program of study. Thus, the importance of library services to ODL students need not to be emphasized, its unavailability to the vicinity of students strain their economic and cultural capital (Niwagila, 2014). Chimpololo (2010) observed that a number of colleges offering ODL in Malawi for Teacher Education program rely on 12 National libraries out of 28 districts countrywide. Rwejuna (2013) perceived that, accessibility of study materials for students in remote locations with their lecturers and libraries affect their completion rates. Apparently, lack of study materials or late delivery wholesomely affect students' concentration in their studies. Delay in study material distribution affect students psychologically as they appear not prepared for their studies (Musingafi et al, 2015). Therefore, with perceived distance and remoteness of some of the areas in Malawi, this makes it impossible for students have access to library services. Thus, they may only rely on online materials of which in itself is a challenge as it may not be available or at the same time cost of data being exorbitant (Danaher & Umar, 2010).

LACK OF STUDENT SUPPORT

The nature of ODL necessitates efficient and timely student support. Deficient in all these entail the quality of education being

compromised. In cases where students' support is lacking, students generally feel insecure, face feedback difficulties from their lecturers and absence of the peers make them more vulnerable to drop out than conventional students (TheCommonWealthofLearning, 2002). Student support in ODL is assumed to be grouped into two, academic and administrative with the former involving tutorials, advising and counselling and the latter relating to enrolment, admission, registration, record keeping, information as well as provision and delivery of reading materials (The Common Wealth of Learning, 2002). Similarly, in numerous circumstances, lack of mentoring from lecturers is found to be challenge in the delivery of ODL. Segoe (2014) observed that, tutoring is crucial in ODL with it providing developmental feedback, coaching and mentoring. It makes the course materials clearer to the students, increases enrollment and avert the cases of attrition (Segoe, 2014). Support in the form of study centers is appropriate, thus its unavailability in various locales greatly affect students' studies, a thing to continue haunt ODL delivery in SADC region (SADC Secretariat, 2009). Ideally, support in the area of study materials in Malawi has been limited to print. Both Mzuzu university and Domasi College of Education, observed that, the main media for learning for home study is print media (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016; Msiska, 2013). However, recently, timely delivery of such study materials has been found unattainable a situation that leaves students in dilemma (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). Hence, Risenga (2010) observed that, chances for students to successfully complete home study assignments depend on the time period from when they receive the study materials; with late delivery to negatively impact their studies.

COMMUNICATION AND ENERGY ISSUES

ODL involve wide range of technology being used in delivering instruction. Thus, where technology

namely, internet or any multimedia is involved, the challenge has been lack of availability of energy for the technology in most Less Developed Countries (Chimpololo, 2010). Therefore, where, students rely on night studies due to work commitments, power problems negatively affect their studies. Though, alternative energy has been seen to address this problem, Malawi is still faced with the challenge at household level with only 0.2 percent of total energy available in that form (Chimpololo, 2010). Furthermore, there is little technical knowhow which make people hardly use such alternative energy in the process (Msiska, 2013). Therefore, as (Perraton, 2010) puts it, the degree to which the use of technology is feasible to use, the more sophisticated communication technologies depends on the state of development of such technology at hand. Therefore, lack of innovations to bolster energy supplies would continue to affect the success of ODL for teachers in secondary schools in Malawi.

POOR RECORD MANAGEMENT

Lack of record management in colleges offering ODL has also been discovered as a challenge to ODL students. It has been learnt that there is gross misplacement of results due to poor record keeping by ODL institutions (Rwejuna, 2013). Worse still, if such a thing happens, the students are always on the receiving end of the penalty as they are forced to repeat the courses or examinations due to the missing records (Musingafi et al, 2015). This in itself is a challenges towards the success of ODL as professional development for teachers.

DELAYED FEEDBACK

Similarly, delayed feedback and lack of the instructor are also bottlenecks to the study of teachers through ODL (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron, 2015). In Malawi, delayed feedback on assignments and examination results has negatively affected education of teachers

pursuing ODL (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). Feedback has been reported to be a challenge in Eritrea with regards ODL (Rena, 2007). Similarly, where the lectures hardly have contact with their students, it makes difficult to provide support. This has also been compounded by cases of lost assignments which affects concentration of students (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron, 2015). Ideally, rapport among others giving feedback with regard to ODL is crucial in bringing responsibility in teachers pursuing ODL (Murphy & Manzanara, 2012).

OBSERVABLE IMPACT OF THE CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE IN ODL

In view of aforesaid challenges, high dropout remains to be one of the result of the challenges teachers experience while pursuing their Teacher Education and Professional Development through ODL. A case study by (Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb, & Moonesamy, 2003) cite this being worsened by unaffordability of course materials, time limitations during examination period, late delivery of materials, long distance travel to study centers, failure to participate in compulsory practicum, lack of learner support, lack of learning resources in study centers, lack of quality tutors, tutoring being assimilated to traditional teaching, lack of interaction between learners and tutors. As a result, student dropout rates in ODL for teachers in higher education systems is greater compared to face-to-face regular systems (Kuruppuarachchi & Karunanayake, 2017).

RESILIENT MEASURES FOR TEACHERS PURSUING ODL AS THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the observable challenges, the review sees an opportunity for teachers pursuing ODL in Less Developed Countries like Malawi. It envisages that the ever increasing enrollment in private and government secondary schools-provision of quality teacher education for

teachers through ODL is vital. The dwindling space for such teachers in colleges, and restrictive entry requirements among others age limit would remain a challenge thus making ODL an alternative. However, the apparent family and work commitments, institutional and administrative constraints that teachers face stands to be daunting tasks. Consequently, inculcation of resilience on such students and the associated provision of support could bring relief for ODL students. Here, resilience entail increased probability of success in school and other life accomplishments of ODL students regardless of their environmental difficulties (Weller & Anderson, 2013). Therefore, this section attempts to discuss the available resilient measures being practiced to provide cushion to the numerous challenges that teachers face in pursuit of their studies through ODL.

FINANCES

Financial problems remain to be the main issue in as far as provision and sustenance of ODL for teachers is concerned. Ideally, the remuneration that they receive compounded with family commitments affects funding for their studies. However, the adoption of Partnership Model is viewed to help deal with such a challenge. Kangai and Bukaliya (2011) acknowledge the challenge of finances for ODL students and adoption of the model that could help ease this challenge. This require, the need for collaboration of training colleges, the school and the government by letting colleges facilitate theory, whereas the school has to assist in administering teaching practice whereas the government provides funding. Thus, Tagoe (2014) acknowledges that the survival of ODL in both More Developed and Less Developed Countre largely depend on government support for quality ODL programs. However, the case of Malawi is quite different, more teachers enrolling in ODL lack funding for their studies regardless of their initiatives to upgrade themselves. Thus, while teachers may do

that in order to earn more pay after upgrading (Kumbani, 2017, Malenga, 2017) their upgrading status will go a long way in improving quality of education in Malawi hence the need for economic support from government. However, other institutions such as Mzuzu university to a certain extent offer teachers pursuing ODL leverage by allowing flexible payment of school fees (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). This therefore, would help ensuring teachers pursuing ODL do not drop out of school due to failure to pay school fees. Ohene and Essuman (2014) observed that flexibility in the payment of fees by ODL will go a long way in assisting them as many have children and family members to nurture.

AGE GAP

Age gap influence the acceptance and speed to embrace technology in ODL. Thus, studies have found that ODL lessons to teachers of varying age need to be preceded by computer literacy like computers, internet and even telephone if such students are to benefit much from online services embedded in ODL (Bee, 2011). This would therefore help avert situations where those who benefit from such technologies are those of younger age group (Puspitasari & Oetoyo, 2018). Worse still, in distant areas where ODL students leave has been seen to compounded by limited availability of computers (Miliszewska, 2017). Therefore, in this regard, provision of training in student motivation, learning habits and learning schemes for new students of varying age in ODL is crucial in addressing the challenges they may face in course of their study.

FLEXIBILITY OF ODL

Making ODL a flexible program has been found to ease the challenges that ODL student teachers face. Institutions like Domasi College of Education, have been found to let teachers have both professional and social commitments served with perceivable flexibility of study; the one not tied to a specific calendar (Rumajogee,

Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb, & Mooneesamy, 2003). This allow students to stop and resume studies without repeating the academic year. Therefore, offering ODL at the pace of the students is crucial in addressing some of the hiccups that students under the programme encounter (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). This entail lecturer to waiver students on time constraints. As observed by Chawinga and Zozie (2016), resilience for ODL teacher students would greatly depend on how flexible the programmes are structured, rapport by teachers and students as well as the freedom by students to control their learning

PROVISION OF REMOTE LIBRARY SUPPORT SERVICES

Doing education at a distance can be challenging, such that provision of thorough support would be ideal. It has been envisaged that the main task of any ODL provider is to design and offer distance educational experience that encourages learning (Dzakiria, 2005). Dealing with this challenge in a long run reduces school dropout a challenge faced by a number of Institutions offering. Thus, creating resilience inform of establishment of regional satellite centers would greatly address such challenges among students (Chawinga & Zozie, 2016). In addition, it has also been suggested that presence of lecturers in regional centers is ideal in advancing support for dispersed students (Mnyanyi & Mbwette, 2009). Furthermore, the move towards more school-based, particularly technology-oriented and integrated ODL courses calls for a greater level of support from experienced teachers locally as their mentors. A range of new courses are now appearing that integrate the school face to face meetings, learning tasks, learning materials, online meetings small group working, assessing and guiding for ODL students (Tertsunen, 2015; Shohel, 2012). Furthermore, it has been recommended that the introduction of ODL University or body to oversee the activities of institutions would greatly help in addressing

quality and effectiveness of ODL institutions in Malawi among others support services rendered (Kalongosola, 2018). In view of this, such bodies would help ensure that there is support being given for ODL students among other library wherever they are located.

PROVISION OF FEEDBACK, COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Ideally, it has been observed that lack of feedback as a challenge in students pursuing ODL as their professional development. This has been influenced by lack of technological know-how as well as reluctance by lecturers or the support team in their institutions to assist them (Usun, 2004). In order, to help promotion of feedback and interaction, radio has been used for long period to deliver instruction and messages for students. For instance, at Open University of Tanzania radio, was suggested to be adopted of dual role of sending messages about opening, school fees and for face to face sessions, tutorials arrangements and practical sessions (Rwejuna, 2013). The advantage suggested of the radio is that it may be readily available among the people hence may not require much investments. Similarly, social media like Facebook Application have feedback ability, social learning features (Çetin, Özkaya, Keskin, & Özdemir, 2018) for students crucial in provision of communication between school and teachers upgrading through ODL. In cases of lack of proper records for examinations, Rwejuna (2013) discovered the need for a strengthened examination management system with regard to packing, marking, recording and editing scores for students to avert such challenges.

PROVISION OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Technological support for teachers pursuing ODL as their Professional Development is crucial for beneficiaries. It has been seen that, teachers have for long been the lone practicable

technology; however, radio has been used to support the dispersed audience in Mongolia where as in China the technological development has encouraged the use of video, satellite television, and internet links to help teachers pursuing ODL (Perraton, 2010). Thus, every country that champions studies through ODL shall need to lay down foundation for embracing technologies in colleges offering ODL. Provision of students' literacy courses on use of computers to ODL students before they begin their studies would be ultimate (Mnyanyi & Mbwette, 2017). Thus, evidence show that scores of students pursuing ODL in their first years of study are than those of generic students with the situation improving with time (Fojtík, 2018) with orientation of students to reduce such problems. Therefore, it has been observed that lack of orientation on the practical aspect of ODL lead to a number of students recording failure in their school work. Furthermore, the use of Web Based Learning as a technological tool is found to help provide interaction among lecturers and students, individual learning and self-study, construction of fresh knowledge based on the previous experiences (Ajithkumar, 2017). Therefore, emphasis on orienting teachers pursuing ODL in their studies is very crucial as lack of it result in stress which may require academic counselors (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). Such that establishment of counseling centers have also been observed to assist the scattered ODL students (Ohene & Essuman, 2014).

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

In the 21st century, ODL is closely associated with technology. Technology may entail use of as audio cassette, radio, televisions, CD Rom, DVD, SMS technology, video conferencing, satellite broadcasts and the Internet (Lubbe, 2010). Apparently, one of media is the use of low cost mobile phones. Courses like English are seen to improve with the use of mobile phones (Walsh, Woodward, Solly, & Shrestha, 2015). As used

elsewhere, phones can also help in delivering results and course materials through social networks. These while they may be effective requires organization and knowledge from the students concerned if they are to be successful. It has been highlighted that use of technology in ODL has the potential to narrow the physical and transactional distance between the student and the ODL institution (Lubbe, 2010). Furthermore, in a bid to ensure an efficient ODL system, provision of skills on the use of smartphones is ideal before its implementation among ODL students (Tuncay, 2016). Furthermore, it has been found that, ensuring sufficient production and delivery of study materials would help support the needs of students in ODL (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron, 2015). However, technology is faced with several challenges in a number of developing countries in terms of ease of use, maintenance and general lack of acceptance among people a thing that needs attitude change. Political will to embrace technology among other government funding in the area of technology is seen to help ODL be a welcome development for all people (Tagoe, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This review has established a number of challenges that teachers face while pursuing ODL. Financial and family commitments, age gap, lack of lecture-student interaction, poor record management, general lack of support and lack of political shall stand to affect this cost effective system of upgrading secondary school teachers in Malawi and Africa as a whole. Therefore, inculcation of resilience in teachers pursuing ODL would be crucial for sustenance of such programs in Institutions of Higher Learning. Resilience which may involve provision of support to students and instilling a spirit of endurance in the face of the numerous difficulties would be vital for ODL students. Moreover, provision installments in payment of fees, giving

orientation studies and the use of technology, political will to embrace technologies and making it possible for employers and family members to support ODL students would alleviate their challenges. Therefore, this shall go a long way in realizing the full potential of ODL programs for teacher education and professional development henceforth reducing the high teacher student ratio with well trained personnel.

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