

ODL University Inclusion Experiences of Students with Disadvantages in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *The study's focus is on students with disabilities and the marginalised. Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson (2005) assert that universities are arbiters of social justice. However, despite paradigm shift to the philosophical call for schools for all the disadvantaged students continue to face social injustice and inclusive disparities at universities. Using ten purposively selected disadvantaged students, the study engaged the qualitative approach based on the ethnographic design to elicit inclusion experiences of the disadvantaged ODL students with a view to obtain best inclusive practices from their stories. In-depth interviews with unstructured questions, unstructured observations and document analysis were used to collect data. The collected data was coded into themes and patterns emerging from the experiences. The study revealed that most marginalised students dropped out of ODL either in their first year or second year due to failure to raise enough fees while students with disabilities showed that their learning moral was destroyed by lack of relevant provisions to their needs. Thus, they suggested that now that Zimbabwe ratified the UNCRPD on the 23 September 2013 provisions should stay available in anticipation of admitting students with various disabilities.*

Keywords: *ODL, experiences. Inclusion, Detrimental effects*

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of inclusive practices ushered in a new participation dispensation into the university systems such as, Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions with a view to improve the governance of disadvantaged students. The principle of inclusion gives opportunities to access higher education (HE) and to succeed in learning using either the conventional or open distance learning (ODL) mode. Both ODL and inclusion philosophies are experiencing a rapid growth worldwide. As observed by the researcher, for decades elitism has impacted negatives on the principle of inclusion. This is evidenced by exclusive types of assessments and the elitist schools for the wealthy only that still exist today. In this study students with disabilities include people who are deaf; visually impaired; physically challenged; mentally challenged; the epileptic, just to mention a few. The term disadvantaged covers people with disabilities and the poor who fail to meet the educational expenses of HE. Thus the term disadvantage shall be applied interchangeably in this study with the term disability. ODL education is praised for meeting

educational diversity. Has ODL escaped from elitism? Using participants from the first and purely ODL institution in Zimbabwe, that is, Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), the study intends to stare debates on factors contributing to unequal and exclusive education in ODL systems.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Higher education (HE) represents the acme of epistemologies. It is usually considered an imperative opportunity to a better future (Chataika, 2010). In further view, Department for Education Skills (DES) (2002) postulates that those who have degree qualifications have better chances of job promotion compared to non-graduates. Does this include people with disadvantages and /or disabilities? The elite are the dominant people who are privileged and are influential to change things to suit selves. Usually elitists endorse the exclusion of the minority or certain groups of people. For example, establishment of elitist schools for a particular class of

people is likely to exclude the disadvantaged. If so how are ODL institutions accommodating the people with disadvantages so that they enjoy the same opportunities and benefits as the elite? Inclusion means total involvement with provision for most needed needs. This entails that there was scramble for HE and training resulting in higher education failing to accommodate applicants. Take note that it does not necessarily mean that all the graduates got employed. Since 1995 there has been a rapid expansion of higher education systems in Zimbabwe. This was in response to huge demands that have increased since independence.

Studies estimate that every year, Zimbabwe has excess of more than 8,000 students who meet the criteria but fail to secure a university place (Kamurivo, 2007 in Chataika, 2010). It was counted a worse off situation for people who are disabled and disadvantaged. Zimbabwean authorities came together to decide how the issue could be solved. They resolved that ODL was the only philosophy that could help the situation. Thus, Zimbabwe launched an ODL institution at Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in 1999 but still the underrepresentation of people who are disadvantaged remains. Most people with disadvantages do not complete their education and when they complete high school education they usually do not meet HE admission criteria Brett (2010). Thus they are considered vulnerable to exclusion. There seems to lack interest in developing policy for students who are disadvantaged in HE. This lack of policy on HE means institution of higher learning cannot invest in the elimination of barriers such as exclusion. Lack of interest in developing policy on education of students with disabilities may be attributed to poor attitude, ignorance, professional protectionism towards segregated education, antagonism towards inclusive education (Khan, 2013; Kochung, 2011). On the other hand pressures from the elitist philosophy are said to control HE to be selective in their enrolment to keep their reputation. Also little research has been done on the influence of elitism on ODL inclusive education.

The goal of ODL is to reach-out to all people. Why is it remaining a challenge? How does elitism philosophy influence ODL inclusive practices in Zimbabwean HE? The author's experiences as an ODL lecturer plus related literature review shall also contribute towards this debate. The following research questions were used to address the debate; 1) What does inclusive ODL philosophy entail? 2) How does elitism influence ODL philosophies in higher education? 3) What challenges confront inclusive ODL philosophies in HE? 4) How may inclusive ODL philosophies help improve teaching and learning strategies in HE? Driven by such questions and

observations the study investigates the extent to which the ODL services are surviving in systems that both include and exclude people with disadvantages. It is quite a while since ODL started that reach-out to all complains are not expected. To my surprise this reach-out only serviced those affording financially and physically. Only the elite seem to access it. Thus the study investigated, Inclusive ODL philosophy practices vis-à-vis elitist philosophies in higher education.

This study is hoped to create high ODL opportunities for people with disadvantages. More people who are disadvantaged shall be reached out. This shall give them better chances of job promotion compared to non-graduates as previously alluded. The study is expected to create great awareness for policy makers, the public, the people with disadvantages and the ODL institutions. Some institutions are likely to revisit their vision, mission and goals to incorporate clear ODL inclusive practices despite their colonised mentality on elitism.

3. WHAT IS ODL?

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is a reach-out delivery philosophy with potential output to deliver to the entire nation and even the hard to reach population such as people with disadvantages and/or disabilities. It is a nascent phenomenon. The key aim of ODL is to bring education to clients's door steps. Through this mode educational opportunities are dispersed to a large geographical population in and outside Zimbabwe. ODL is practiced in many countries to provide study opportunities for those who cannot or do not wish to participate in classroom teaching and learning. Masalela (undated) saw ODL as a flexible and appropriate mode to deliver inclusive education. Inclusion is a dynamic approach of responding positively to student diversity and of seeing individual differences not as a problem but as opportunity for enriching learning (UNESCO, 2005). It can be described as a catalyst for change. In view to this Moodley (2002) and Save the Children's Funds (SFC) (1995) maintain that inclusive education incorporates the principle of access for all learners including the disadvantaged such as people with disabilities and

the marginalised. ODL serves a similar purpose, since it also addresses the educational needs of a diversified society. But is it fully fulfilling this service in respect to inclusion of people with disadvantages? .

4. NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

As already elaborated ODL reaches out to diversified clientele and in essence this philosophy is indirectly practicing inclusive practices. Does the elitism system give room to such practices? Students who enroll in HE institutions are expected to come through high school. However, too often high expectations and requirements with a view to maintain quality education sometimes compromise the essence of inclusive ODL practices. While education is the hope for enlightenment of people who are marginalised its goals are usually derailed by such perceptions. As a result HE inclusive practices are facing lots of challenges. Barriers to HE inclusion are many, as cited by Kochung (2011; Kerr and West, 2010) some of them include; negative attitudes towards people who are disadvantaged and disabled, discriminative policies and practices. A focus group discussions carried out in 2005 and 2006 from twelve African countries by Ncube Macfadyen (2006) raised similar findings.

Traditionally in the African society education included every member on equal basis within his or her community and everyone participated at his or her own level. In essence this was inclusive education (Kochung, 2011). The indigenous systems respected individuals and did not permit any person to suffer because of differences. It promoted equity and social justice. However, currently the traditional expectations are overlooked because of western influence. The elitist philosophy plays a part in creating first and second class citizens. This marks the beginning of inequality in the name of providing quality education (Kochung, 2011). Thus hiding in the name of setting standards, inequality in HE continuous to exist as a norm. Exclusion of students who are disadvantaged in HE seems there to stay at the expense of maintaining quality. Thus universities end up excluding members of society whose learning needs demand adjustments and more provisions. Hopefully this study will provide answers, as to how the ODL system can significantly include the excluded.

In most African countries it is noted that HE systems are autonomous and at free will to address some groups of diversity. What institutions of HE choose to include, exclude or denigrate makes differences to inclusive education. Social justice and inclusion are values enshrined in the UNCRPD. They however lack epistemological inclusion implementation procedures. Inclusion aims to address social inequity and exclusionary practices (Shava, 2013). The elite dominant and are in favour of excluding others using the set parameters. This is evidence to educationists that colonialism did not end with independence because its effects are still deeply embedded within systems and universities. Such suppression is seen as normal by western epistemologies. Acceptance of the disadvantaged people is seen as pseudo practices. This was seen as compromising quality. The ODL system is expected to accept all. How does it fulfill this obligation in an elitist society?

5. POLICY ISSUES

The main challenge to implementation of inclusive education is policy issue (Mitchell, 2010). While some African countries have made political declarations, commitments particularly through the adoptions of the UNCRPD other countries have no legal frameworks and policies to support inclusive practices. It is therefore not surprising that in most African countries, inclusive education is still at a very low level. In Zimbabwe a number of government policy issues are consistent with intent of inclusive education through the 1987 Education Act and the Disabled Persons Act (DPA) amended in 1996. In addition this, there are various supportive circulars from the Primary and Secondary Education sectors. The DPA requires that all students, regardless of race, religion, gender, creed and disability, have access to basic education. The inclusive education circular amended in 2006 is vague on its commitment to inclusive practices in HE. As a result most human rights policies enacted in most African countries only exist on paper and are hardly translatable into practice because they are unclear. Institutions are more often evaluated against their own self defined missions than against an institutional model that is defined by a regulatory agency (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). Globalisation is the key reality to the profound influences to HE. This gives way to lip-services and ad hoc services.

There seem to lack interest in developing policy for students who are disadvantaged in HE. This lack of policy on HE means institution of higher learning cannot invest in the elimination of exclusive barriers. Lack of interest in developing policy on education of students with disabilities may be attributed to poor attitude, ignorance, professional protectionism towards segregated education, antagonism towards inclusive education (Khan, 2013; Kochung, 2011). These are other gaps that need addressing.

6. SIGN AND SYMPTOMS OF ELITISM

Universities lack policy on inclusive education and are hardly prepared to enrol students who are disadvantaged in order to keep the set reputation high (Kochung, 1994). Lack of enforcing rules is therefore likely to negatively impact on inclusive practices. There is also need to have strict transitional processes when students move from primary to secondary and further to HE (Evangelou, 2008). In view of this Shava (2013) says it justifies why there is need for knowledge reconstruction, the critical scrutiny of existing paradigms, epistemological foundations of existing paradigms and identification of the limitations to ODL inclusive practices. ODL institutions need to engage proactively. Elite education often inculcates a false sense of self worth. Agreeably Perry and Francis (2010) say elite institutions encourage their students to flatter self for being there and for what being there can do for them. This has in some instances closed the mind of some Africans, as to who they are, where they come from, their values and the accommodation of others in their circles.

Resources are developed with the elite in mind. Too many resources are devoted to the elite such as infrastructures and many other materials. Resource denial is likely to make people with disadvantages feel included for the sake of it. Inequality among national HE systems as well as within countries has increased in the past decade (Altbach et al, 2009). The ranking of academic institutions and degree programmes add this tension (Moodley, 2002). ODL addresses all hence it needs to improve its provisions for all too. Quality assurance in HE has risen to the top of the policy agenda in many nations (Moodley, 2002). If not well handled its purpose may be spoiled too. It implies that there is also need to quality assure how HE is addressing diversity. This may be supported by our Biblical saying, 'My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge (Hosea4:6p, 810)' but it never says because of lack of limbs, poverty or any other disability. Hope this study will help us understand and clear misconceptions.

7. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was employed to collect data. The study employed one of the qualitative designs termed ethnography. Denzin and Lincoln, (2000) and Creswell (1994) define qualitative as an inquiry process of understanding human behaviour or social problems. Ethnography is a qualitative research method which answers the question how true and how useful. Both procedures were most suitable for this study because they described and interpreted in detail the experiences of the research participants in their contexts and even brought up unanticipated knowledge. For example, how true is ODL influenced by elitism? How may the collected evidence be profitably used? The study investigated the experiences of the disadvantaged and people with disabilities with a few to answer such questions.

8. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population for the study included all the disadvantaged students and people with various disabilities. The study selected nine willing disadvantaged and students with disabilities who had completed and/or were in training from Harare regional centre using snowball sampling. These are a minority population so snowballing managed to locate them. The study sample included two students with visual impairments, two with physical challenges, two with fine motor challenges, two from disadvantaged families and one with hard of hearing challenges. The hard of hearing student automatically participated because he was the only one with disclosed hearing difficulties. The centre was also selected because of its accessibility and proximity to a diversified population. Participants were obtained through snowballing until point of saturation in findings was reached.

9. INSTRUMENTATION

Observations, in-depth-interviews and document analysis are other qualitative methods of collecting data. Thus in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions, unstructured observations and document analysis were used to collect data for this study. Observations were questioned to cross check their meanings. Participant's consent was sought. Those willing to participate in the study signed consent forms. The researcher made plans with each of them as to where and when they could meet for interviews. The researcher took note of peculiar behaviours and probed questions in some instances to check their meanings. Some of these participants did not meet the scheduled interview times. The researcher had to wait for their arrival. This was one of the researcher's challenges but it trained her to be patient in research work.

10. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data was collected through ethnography fieldwork where the selected sample responded to semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were modified through probing questions. Similar structures were used to read observed behaviours. The instrument continued to take care of emerging issues, assumptions and arisings from the related literature. The responses were summarised and placed into emerging themes and patterns.

11. DATA ANALYSIS

The gathered data was re-analysed, closely scrutinized and arranged to clean it up. The themes were continually assessed to take note of any variations, distortions, similarities and differences. The responses were further analysed establishing the extent to which they answered research questions and arising assumptions from related literature reviews. Data was then put into emerging themes which included; poverty and disability, lack of provisions, negative attitudes, experiences of the disadvantaged and people with disabilities. The themes were further discussed under the research questions, arising related literature reviews and assumptions.

12. EMERGING FINDINGS

The emerging findings were discussed under the following themes; poverty and disability, lack of provisions, negative attitudes, experiences of the disadvantaged and people with disabilities.

13. POVERTY AND DISABILITY

The study discovered that both students from generally poor families and those with children with disabilities were victims of poverty. They struggled to meet the educational needs of their children. This is evidenced by the findings; 'I come from a poor family. It was by God's grace for my parents to pay for my first year fees. They thought they were going to afford but the fees kept going up that I had to drop out after my first year to give a chance to my siblings'. The other echoed:

I enrolled into HE but I was physically disabled and at the same time came from a very poor family. I was intelligent but lack of fees finances made me not further in training. Since ODL is there to live and has no age limit I hope to resume studies when my siblings completed their education and start working.

Another participant reported; 'ODL institutions have little care over their students. Whatever is going on in our lives out of their site is none of their business. As a result they rarely make follow ups on us'.

'My brother was not accepted in the selected area of study because of lack of Maths. Universities should develop courses that do not require Maths and English as prerequisites. These are some of our prospective future leaders.'

This entails that ODL should attempt to meet the talent needs of all people including those without English or Maths. As observed by the researcher the courses should be development oriented.

14. LACK OF PROVISIONS

Lack of provisions was highlighted as one of the challenges. Thus one student narrated;

'I am physically disadvantaged. I have completed MBA as an ODL student but the infrastructure of my institution was very unfriendly because it did not have escalators but steps. For anything I wanted I had to remain downstairs and send a spokesperson to speak needs on my behalf. We are blocked by the infrastructures before entry or even before we meet the university staff.'

Another echoed; 'I have fine motor challenges and I take long to write a single sentence. I get so frustrated when I remain writing while others leave the exam room or write in a secluded room. I wish the university had some technical devices. With technical provisions I can compete with peers.'

A hard of hearing student who dropped out due to failure to raise fees for his second year reported;

I was promised free education but things changed during enrolling. Also universities preach about engaging sign language interpreters which they never do. As a result my inclusion had a lot of challenges, such as unfriendly teaching styles, teaching while walking about or giving back to the class yet I depended on speechreading. On the other hand all colleges are rejecting my wife who is profoundly deaf because she has 5 'O' Levels including a 'B' in Maths but does not have English yet very talented technically.

The study highlights how lack of provisions impacts on the inclusion of people with disadvantages in an ODL system.

15. EXPERIENCES OF THE MARGINALISED AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Through in-depth interviews and observations the following experiences were shared; 'Being used to own Brailled key readers at primary and secondary education I had great difficulties in operating at university level where I had to only depend on the assistance's read out.'

Another visually challenged participant narrated:

When inclusion was always spoken about and debated, we did not hesitate to enroll thinking that we were going to be included as promised by policies, circulars and news papers. But when we joined the university things looked different, we operated without Braille books. Only our assignments and exams were Brailled. Thus I had to engage an assistant to read out to me all modules. ODL itself is a very noble idea but it needs a positive institutional heart and a government with feelings for the lower elites.

One with physical impairments expressed:

I have to phone my coordinator to tell him that I am downstairs. However I patiently wait there until someone comes to my rescue to collect my modules, assignments and/or take up my query to the responsible offices. For how long shall we go on like this without schools for all? When will innovations be enforced on behalf of people with disabilities? Are the university authorities aware of what we go through?

One disadvantaged student reported:

I was one term off the register because of insufficient fees. I then resumed my studies just for a term and went off for another term again without registering. Nobody dared to find out where I was on each incident. I am now in my final year semester but I have managed to go through a lot of financial difficulties without even moral support. My passes are excellent. While I appreciate the flexibility of the system I am unhappy with the communication and caring systems of our institution. I suggest that you take any absenteeism as a matter of concern.

The shared experiences are very vital to this study. Through learning these experiences there are possibilities of developing solutions and improving situations.

16. NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

One of the participants though emotional expressed;

ODL should be the best delivery mode for us because we study in our context but lack of provisions is a sign of negative attitude towards us. My lecturer cannot Braille or even transcribe my Brailled assignments. I cannot discuss assignment queries with him/her. I have gathered that

my assignments are transcribed by a Braille specialist from another Faculty and Department but this specialist is not my subject specialists? All these stories disturb my learning and makes me feel unwanted. They also make me question my assignment Grades.

Another participant said; ‘Infrastructure barriers hinder us from health interaction with our lecturers. The institution keeps promising to relocate to accessible structures without much effort. ODL contributes a lot to a country’s developments. Government should give the strongest financial support to ODL education.’

One disadvantaged student said,

Most scholarships are given to undeserving families. The poor families remain poor as their children drop-out from school. How can the intelligent disadvantaged students who come from very poor families access these scholarships? I suggest that authorities should let scholarships go where they are mostly needed. And I also suggest that ODL institutions exploit technical strategies at an affordable cost for the benefit of all students.

Participants emotionally express their expectations and needs. Government is urged to financial support to ODL. Hence institutional and personal attitude changes are highlighted as essential to inclusion of people with disadvantages into the ODL system.

17. DISCUSSIONS

The discussions attempt to address the research questions and where possible support them with related literature basing on the findings. They also in some in stances address arisings from related literature and arising assumptions.

18. WHAT DOES INCLUSIVE ODL PHILOSOPHY ENTAILS?

The study findings reveal that every person matters. It acknowledges that learning is broader than formal learning as it can occur everywhere at a rural or urban home, at workplace and so forth. That is, it occurs in one’s context as expressed by one participant in the preceding findings. This is supported by Moodley (2002) who suggests ODL should create inclusive ethos that collaborate and stimulate learning and teaching where everyone is valued. One participant asked, ‘...Are the university authorities aware of what we go through?’ The institutional ODL ethos should also guide the decisions and policies of authorities. Moodley (2002) further suggested that, without changing institutional cultures a sustainable change is not likely to occur. Thus commitment and support of management cannot be compromised if ODL is to meet its inclusive vision and goals.

The study acknowledges ODL as a flexible system. This is explained by participants who said, ‘I appreciate the flexibility of the system...’ and the other who also said, ‘Since ODL is there to live and has no age limit I hope to resume studies when my siblings completed their education and start working.’ This justifies that the ODL philosophy is meant to be inclusive and to address diversity. As observed by the researcher, for decades elitism has impacted negatives on the principle of inclusion. This is evidenced by exclusive types of assessments and the elitist schools for the wealthy only that still exist today. Another good example is the presence of students who are disabled and disadvantaged in secondary schools but very insignificant numbers at universities. This signifies some concern in both conventional and ODL University inclusive practices.

19. HOW DOES ELITISM INFLUENCE ODL PHILOSOPHIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The findings reflect that when one attains high school it is not the passport to university education. One has to meet set entry prerequisites. As explained by the findings Maths and English are the most missed qualifications yet they are key prerequisites to university entry in most cases. The study reveals that institutions set entry parameters like Maths and English. These were set by the traditional elitist systems. They sound difficulty to shake off. In view of this the philosopher William Deresiewicz suggested that our universities had forgotten the reason they exist for, which is to make minds and not careers. Agreeably Moodley (2002) suggests that universities set parameters to maintain their reputation and ranks. Who determines these parameters? It is the elitist system which thinks possession of these means excellent human products. Is this true? It seems institutions react out of fear that they will destroy their reputation

by taking into their systems people with disadvantages. Thus systems are selective in their admissions. This has exacerbated the division between the haves and have nots (Altbach et al, 2009) which Kochung (2011) describes as first and second class citizens.

On the other hand Moodley (2002) further suggest that entry parameters quality assure the public and companies of the marketability of the qualification they will obtain from a particular institution. As observed by the researcher, this is exemplified by parents, employers and the public who demand some kind of certification and qualifications the institutions award before their child enrolls or before they accept an employee. They may compare them or make public comments which may affect the reputation of an institution. Thus, some universities may not admit people who are marginalised thinking that they will affect their reputation. In addition to this, literature notes with concern, that, poor people with disability are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability as each is a cause and a consequence of the other. As observed by the researcher the system is not sympathetic to such situations. Thus some participants complained, ‘...I then resumed my studies just for a term and went off for another term again without registering. Nobody dared to find out where I was on each incident.’ The study also cited unfair distribution of scholarships as a contributing factor to elitism as reported by this narration, ‘Most scholarships are given to undersrving families. The poor families remain poor as their children drop-out from universities...’

20. WHAT CHALLENGES CONFRONT INCLUSIVE ODL PHILOSOPHIES IN HE?

The researcher suggests that students need to be made aware that the specialist Braille lecturer does not mark but he/she interprets or transcribes only and sends to the subject specialists for making. Another challenge was lack of provisions as pointed out by the findings, ‘When inclusion was always spoken about and debated, we did not hesitate to enroll thinking that we were going to be included as promised by policies, circulars and news papers. But when we joined the university things looked different, we operated without Braille books...’ The main challenge to implementation of inclusive education is policy issue. Agreeably Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika (2007) found that, there is no specific legislation for inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Another challenge is that, lecturers are not skilled to deal with matters of the disadvantaged or people with disabilities. This is evidenced by the participant who reported, ‘ODL should be the best delivery mode for us because we study in our context but lack of provisions is a sign of negative attitude towards us. My lecturer cannot Braille or even transcribe my Brailled assignments.’ One may be made to conclude that HE institutions are built and developed without people with disadvantages in plan. Quality assurance if not well managed may promote exclusion. Students who are disadvantaged were excluded with a view that they would water down existing standards. This is traditional elitist mentality. Strong links exist between disability and poverty. Poverty is both cause and consequence of disability (Zimmer, 2008; Elwan, 1999) and vice versa.

The study reveals that poverty makes people struggle to meet further education and development needs as pointed out by one of the participants ‘...at the same time I came from a very poor family. I was intelligent but lack of fees payment made me not register into training.’ All learners despite their educational level deserve quality education and training for lifelong learning. Agreeably UNESCO (2003) suggests that inclusion should be linked to the mission of the education systems larger and not to a specific group. ODL Universities need to move from the modern systems to provide accessible services for all students. The study suggests that government should put systems in place that finance and morally support people with disadvantages as a sign of care and support for all.

21. HOW MAY INCLUSIVE ODL PHILOSOPHIES HELP IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN HE?

The key findings from the study were that ODL institutions should stay prepared in anticipation to admit and teach students with disabilities. This is only possible if clear inclusive policies are in place. The study considered ODL as a flexible and an appropriate approach to inclusive education which should not be influenced by elitism. It encourages ODL institutions to go by their vision, mission and goals. While the study appreciates quality assurance caution must be taken to manage it. The researcher’s observations alerts readers of this study to note that, while competition has always been a force in academia and can produce excellence it can also contribute to decline of

the vision, mission and traditional values. ODL institutions should continue to serve its education for all goals despite in-grained elitist philosophies. As observed by the researcher, when equipped the so called disadvantaged can compete parallel with the so called elite. What it means is that there should be buy in of inclusion by all stakeholders. For it to occur it should be implemented with proper attitudes, accommodation and adaptations. Can ODL narrow the gap in educational diversity and inequality? It may manage if, as observed by the researcher, clear detailed implementation procedures are put in place and also if ODL institutions equip learners with provisions that meet their educational needs.

The study emphasises that universities need to move from the modern systems to provide accessible services for all students. The elite have a lot to learn from the marginalised. The marginalised also hold talents that the so called elite may not have. Bottle neck system envelops the talents of the disadvantaged. ODL Universities are encouraged by this study to make provisions for all including the disadvantaged to have their reputation felt. Agreeably Shava, (2013) says HE must help erode the inherited socially structural inequities and provide access opportunities through research, teaching and learning.

Education systems need to be more realistic and conscious of diversification in order to close the social class gap in education. Constant checks on experiences can help institutions improve their services. The experiences put institutions into the picture of students' needs and institutional attitudes. However despite the highlighted challenges, the study appraises the ODL mode as the best because one continues to leave in his/her environment with necessary adaptations while studying. Standards of the system are not compromised because students with disabilities remain in their contexts.

22. CONCLUSION

The study describes ODL as elitist because of its resources that are more concentrated on the privileged such as infrastructures and learning materials. The other reason for such a description is the very insignificant admission of people with disadvantages into ODL institutions, yet they are claimed the best for people with disadvantages or disabilities. This makes ODL cease to fully meet its goals of open access to masses with the prerequisites despite their conditions. Institutions are then reminded to be sensitive to diversity. According to study findings the concept of inclusion is based on human rights, equal opportunity, social justice and participation. Seemingly given the right opportunities all students can develop their potential. It also revealed that by setting high parameters the system is subtly excluding the intelligent student but without Maths and/ or English. The study conclusively suggests that political will is pertinent to ingrain inclusion into our practices. ODL institutions are encouraged to stay prepared in anticipation to admission of student with disadvantages or disabilities. They must unveil the opportunities for hope, regardless of barriers and obstacles.

23. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings it is recommended that:

- ODL institutions make constant purposive follow ups on their students.
- ODL institution is bound by legislation to include the qualifying people with disadvantages and/or disabilities.
- ODL institutions stay ready and prepared to accommodate all types of people with disadvantages.
- They make provisions for diversified groups of people.
- They provide programmes that accommodate a wide spectrum of talents but may not necessarily have Maths and/or English as prerequisites.
- Elitist mentality be neutralized through ODL inclusive practices.
- ODL institutions be quality assured on the inclusive practices.
- ODL maintains its motto which says, everyone matters.

- Scholarships be distributed to people with disadvantages and / or disabilities.
- ODL institutions fully use technical strategies to meet their purpose.

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