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**EQUALITY AND EQUITY ISSUES RELATING TO ONLINE TEACHING IN  
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING**

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**ABSTRACT**

There is an increasing concern on the major gap that exists in the level of equality and equity that emanates from online learning. During the Covid lockdown that occurred worldwide four years ago, online teaching and learning was adopted as the most viable avenue to ensure continuity of learning. It was an alternative that produced both equality and equity challenges from the onset.

The objective of this desktop research is to address the gender issues around equality among the different sexes of university students in the same home. It focused on which gender was allowed time to concentrate on learning and why. Was the male child allowed to concentrate with studies while the female interrupted to perform other duties amidst learning. Was fairness practiced or were there discrepancies in how parents administered online learning? Equity which is a by-product emanating from the process, will only focus on the effect of preferential treatment on one gender over the other on how that would in turn hamper with the future opportunities of the affected gender. A cross sectional review of recent studies was analyzed to compare results and draw conclusions which led to certain possible positive recommendations on curbing the effects post lockdown as well as prevention of reoccurrence of the same incase of any future pandemic or global lockdown. The essence is to recognize that each person may have different circumstances but resources and time must be allocated equally to enable all reach an equal outcome.

**Keywords:** Equality, Equity, Disability, Online Teaching.

**INTRODUCTION**

According to Collins English Dictionary, equity is the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone. On the other hand, equality according to Cambridge dictionary is a situation in which men and women, people of different races, religions, etc. are all treated fairly and have the same opportunities. Tamara Tate and Mark Waschuer (2022) did research on "Equity in Online Learning". They concluded that there were equity issues that needed to be addressed. These issues included access to upto date computer, broadband internet access, skills needed or teachers trained to effectively conduct classes online. This study was not gender related and was also done in the USA which is a developed country with different dynamics. On the other hand, there was a study done by Udeme Samwel Jacob, JacePillay, Bdaine Oyundoyin and John Oyundoyin (May, 2022) who did research in Nigeria that was dealing with, "Barriers to and Benefits of Online Learning Among Special Education Undergraduates". This was research done on

undergraduate students in the University of Ibadan. The findings show there was a great difference between male and female based on their online detractors. This research would give more clarity to these detractors. The research clearly wants to find out if there was a difference in the treatment of the different genders in the online learning.

### **Problem Statement**

Online learning although took a central role during the COVID pandemic has now become a key way of university teaching using the eLearning platform. It has become central especially in institutions of higher learning universities are thinking of incorporating online teaching as part of their regular teaching it would be great if they can take into considerations the gender equity and equality aspects that will be shared from the findings of this study. Being an aspect that just took root during COVID 19, there is limited data if any that can help decision making and especially considering the Kenyan context.

The findings of this study will benefit management of universities and institutions of higher learning for they are the main groups that will undertake online learning due to the fact that many of the working class would want to upgrade thus taking online classes to cope with their work schedules. This will help the management to decide the best way to implement the online classes. Another group that will benefit are the students themselves who will hopefully have more equal and equitable education.

### **Research Objectives**

The research will be guided by the following objectives;

1. To examine the gender issues related to equality in online teaching in institutions of higher learning.
2. To explore the gender issues dealing with equity in online teaching in Institutions of higher learning.
3. To analyze the disparity in treatment of those with disability in online teaching of Institutions of higher learning.
4. Recommend ways to improve online learning in institutions of Higher learning.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section seeks to locate the study in the context of other studies so as to identify the gaps that may arise. Issues to be discussed evolve around gender issues related to equality, equity and disabilities. Recommendations will be made in areas requiring improvement and adjustments.

#### **Gender Issues Related to Equality in Online teaching in Institutions of Higher Learning**

Globally, institutions of higher learning have been greatly charged with proactively identifying, addressing and removing systemic barriers that affect equity, equality and disability in their policies and environments such as discrimination, gender identity, gender expression and disability (Wolbring G & Ngunyen A, 2023). This study was conducted in Canada in University of Calgary. As regards equality, marginalized groups at the university had a higher propensity to feel excluded more than included due to the already prevailing conditions even before the Covid-19 lockdown. The prevailing circumstances exist at the workplace, community and family level. Study designs evolved

around reviews as they addressed specific research questions. Eventually, it was recommended that systemic changes were necessary in the workplace as well as in the wider research ecosystem.

In Africa, the home of most developing countries, the situation has been the same pre lockdown, during and post covid era. Online teaching has been greatly been confronted with issues of equality. Orlando, T et al (2023) have given an overview of what has been the case with Portugal, which reflects a scenario of the developing nations. Besides, some world economies still struggle with online teaching depending on the neighbourhoods at stake. Globally, and continentally equality issues around online teaching is caused by poverty, unsafe migration, gender-based violence, discrimination, trauma, war, trafficking, lack of awareness and access to basic education, electricity distribution, internet accessibility and connectivity, accessibility to learning materials, tools and infrastructure, region of schools and types of school.

There are cases in Kenya and South Africa where uneven distribution of resources for online education in institutions of higher learning is prevalent in spite of progressive policies that support gender and equality (Akala, B. (2019), & Uwezo Kenya (2020). Factors that affect equality have a direct bearing on equity as well. In both Kenya and South Africa, sexism, race and social class have affected equality in accessibility to online education in institutions of higher education for women in spite of the formalization efforts brought about by affirmative action (Owiti, 2020). According to Owiti and Uwezo Kenya in Kenya, the trend continues due to ignorance, demeaning cultural practices, teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse at home, household chores distribution and family responsibilities assigned, incest and overall, the deep-seated implications of patriarchy that relegates women and girls to private inferior spaces. Some of these factors were revived and elevated under the cover of the lockdown and trickled into the online equality. The boys may have been affected too but the girls were exposed to worse risks. This leads one to pursue the aspect of fairness well captured under the discussion on equity.

### **Gender Issues Dealing with Equity in Online Teaching in Institutions of Higher Learning**

Equity evolves around fairness and inclusion (Ressa 2021, Muyaka 2019, KNBS, 2019) and relates to equal opportunities every learner has, what they each need to enable them perform at an acceptable optimum level. Every learner deserved to have gadgets like mobile android phones, laptops accompanied with electricity and internet connectivity to be able to perform well (GIRL CENTRE 2022). Besides, exemption from household chores during class is considered as crucial for the achievement of the learner's potential and would be a major precursor in the eventual benefits of the entire process. It is assumed in this study that in the background of patriarchy girls were more predisposed to unfairness and exclusion due to the fact that they always had to participate in house chores more than boys (Akala, B, 2019 & Kathula, 2020).

Kenya's growth is not reflected in the gender balance in acquiring digital jobs. In the digital space, it is estimated that women only occupy 30% of the digital technology positions due to exclusion even in the institutions of higher learning (Luvanda, A, 2022). The pandemic

of covid-19 may have made inequities even more and may have worsened an already aggravated situation. The study would address itself to the extent to which resources for learning online were available and well personalized to the needs of the learners.

### **Disparity on treatment of those with disability in online teaching in Institutions of Higher Learning**

People living with disabilities were the most disadvantaged in online learning in lower as well higher institutions of learning due to the same reasons stated earlier. Yet their plight was worsened with the limited resources to purchase or adequately prepare for learning equipments (Ressa 2020). Persons living with different disabilities mainly relied on radio, televisions and mobiles that required a lot of concentration while at the same time attempting to sustain their health, functionality and sobriety in the home environment that were stressful due to changes in routine (Ressa 2021). They needed counselling, coaching, psycho social support and vital aids for sustained mental health which was not available during the lockdown. They missed their friends and teachers alike and certain equipment only available at school. They may have been subjected to other dangers such as gender-based violence, discrimination and stigma (Ressa, 2022). They lacked protection and were therefore equally exposed to sexual abuse and early pregnancy (Ajayi, 2020; Pop Council, 2021). They had to clean, fetch firewood, care for the sick and more. These competed with their time needed to attend to class assignments as compared to their male counterparts (Pop Council 2021).

Ali (2021) and Averett (2021) are in agreement that remote and elearning for students with disabilities whether primary, high schools or institutions of higher learning introduced novel sources of stress for both students and parents due to poor study skills, lack of self-advocacy skills, inadequate academic preparation skills, difficulty in understanding new information, communication and social skills, slow cognitive processing time and sequential processing of information.

Obura (2022), Kathula (2021), Wolbring (2023), Parasitau (2020) and Girls Centre (2022) are all in agreement that the disabled persons suffered more than the rest with the covid-19 lockdown. They cite: expensive mobile data bundles, inability to access services and manage the gadgets, health and social care inequalities, unsafe eating and drinking, communication barriers with teachers and worst of all; hearing, seeing, mentally impaired need. The mentally impaired require 98% facilitation such as dyslexia, autism and the captive of all disabilities that are not captured in books. Many are in the higher institutions of learning and were stranded at home as it were with their parents. Equitable education for the disabled was absolutely abandoned in the process of scramble to move classes online. The stampede ignored the plight of a very special category of the population. The disabled students were overlooked especially those with dependence on the teacher such as the blind, the deaf, low vision, and there are many that have compound disabilities of each of the mentioned above and more not mentioned in books. This leads us to the recommendation objective.

### **Recommendations to Improve online teaching in Institutions of Higher Learning**

In light of the prevailing gaps above, positive recommendations were made. Firstly, there

was great need according to Luvanda (2022), for the governments to define and address the root cause of marginalisation and in Kenya a growing urgent necessity for digital technology advocacy for the regular student and for the disabled students in institutions of higher learning. Investing in software that is accessible to the disabled, should reflect in equipment supporting them from home, transport safety and elsewhere in the community, malls and streets. The voiceless and the invisible need mitigators so that they can also be equipped adequately to compete for their space in the global spheres as well. They may need empowering to locate their voices and visibility as well (MOE 2022, Wafula,P 2020), Mwebi(2021), Muyaka (2021),Owiti (2020).

Secondly, as regards equity, electricity, internet accessibility should be provided for all citizens who deserve fairness in accessing personalised resources to their needs so that they can also maximize and achieve the best potential. All citizens deserve access to equal opportunities in online teaching in institutions of higher learning.

Thirdly, there should be equal distribution between genders of accessibility to online teaching in institutions of higher learning. Women still seem to lag behind due to disparities in normal as well as online learning. The disabled women are exposed to worse cultural and patriarchal stigma and discrimination that affects their education speed and access. The covid-19 lockdown exposed structures and barriers that existed and worsened the conditions of different genders even if positive strides in self-growth were achieved (Muyaka 2019, CAK (2019), MOE (2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Study Area**

The research was a desk top research thus it was not restricted to any geographical area. Equality and equity issues relating to online teaching in institutions of higher learning was the emphasis of the research. The researchers sought to understand the gender issues especially dealing with equality and equity in academic setting with emphasis on institutions of higher learning. This became a concern especially during and after the COVID 19 pandemic.

### **Research Design**

Desk top research design was used in the study. Research on what others have done and stated about the equity and equality issues relating to online teaching in institutions of higher learning were analyzed, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.

### **Sample Size Determination**

The researchers undertook a desk top research and investigated to see what others have done and said about the subject. It is a new subject knowing that COVID 19 was first confirmed in Kenya and Africa as a whole in 2020. This could limit the number of studies that have been done on the topic. It was even harder to find studies that have been done at the Kenyan universities for most of the researches that have been done on the topic were for developed countries for they have implemented online learning for a while.

### Sampling Procedure

The research sought data from other studies that have been done and information that has been written by others in relation to the study.

### Ethical Considerations

Being a desk top research, the main ethical consideration is to acknowledge the various authors of the information that we have used.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teacher preparedness to handle equality matters was not given adequate attention pre lockdown as well as during and post. Online needs to be institutionalised and foundation grown so as to defy any future catastrophe.
2. Teachers require sensitization on equality in handling students at all levels and specific integration of the same in times of crisis. They may need an appendment in their teacher training colleges on the same emphasis.
3. Teachers need consistent reviews on the changing teaching trends of online and digital advocacy skills for themselves as well as for their students who may be voiceless and invisible. Empowered teachers would impact students positively.
4. Parents need expanded knowledge on home-schooling skills if they are literate. They need training and orientation on how to conduct schooling online and at home in case of a pandemic scenario. Home-schooling is not a totally new concept in many educational spaces. Here in Kenya, like America, Europe and Canada, there are many trained parents who practice home-schooling for special needs children and any other that would prefer the outfit at home. This is a learner centred approach that assists the learner to compete with himself/herself and work at their speed and require some supervision at that level and one of the school days they are allowed to go and interact with others to acquire social skills and life skills.
5. This approach blended with others and covered online will help arrest the impending threat of equity which evolves around fairness and developing a student who is confident in themselves and can draw out their potential and maximize on opportunities and resources available appropriately and articulate them personally and individually.
6. Parents and families with children with special needs need understanding and access to training on handling the special needs curriculum and children so that they can equip homes with the necessary requirements in case of a pandemic or any other crisis ensuing. Support groups for such parents and children can be established to enable them to coordinate how to care for such needs while taking breaks to avoid burn out.
7. Programs for caregivers are also very necessary in the communities so that caregivers can take breaks from special needs while leaving them with other caring people who are qualified to provide care.
8. Students at all levels need to be empowered to face tough times. They need preparedness for any crisis for adaptability. At the higher institutions of learning, students need to be involved in blended learning so that they can learn online if the teacher is not available physically. They should be able to accept such a reality which is beneficial for both the teacher and the students as well.

9. The ones with disabilities have a slightly longer journey. Yet that which can be done in the existing space and ability can be done immediately is still a great need to reorient teachers at all levels on the procedures of online teaching so as to know how to equip learners differently in case of crisis. Parents need empowering so that they can apply home schooling skills in case of disaster. Students at all levels should be acquainted with online learning and be prepared to adjust appropriately in case of any pandemic or lockdown.

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