

**EFFICACY OF ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING: LESSONS FROM THE HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR SISTERS IN AFRICA PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

Online distance learning is a feasible strategy to provide access to higher education for women in Africa. By reaching across borders, partnerships between African and American universities can be used to remove barriers to educational attainment for women in the developing countries. Using the case of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation-funded Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program, this qualitative study describes the perceptions and experiences of 18 women from Kenya and Uganda enrolled in HESA's online teacher education program. The study investigates the effectiveness of HESA as a means to provide college education for women in Africa. Findings indicate that participants developed capacities to demystify technology and defy the odds, and successfully navigated online learning barriers. The support systems provided to them by faculty and administrators allowed them to persist and to successfully complete one year of online classes. The cohort system model provided them with a peer support mechanism, and the availability of resources from the American university duly supplied them with up-to-date research and educational materials. Technology should be utilized to afford underprivileged persons an education.