



## Sociální pedagogika | Social Education

ISSN 1805-8825

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**To cite this article:** Javier, V., Kimaro, L. R., & Caramazza, G. (2022). The empowerment of women students from deprived backgrounds through education for social transformation – A study of Tangaza University College, Nairobi, East Africa. *Sociální pedagogika / Social Education*, 10(1), 16–29. <https://doi.org/10.7441/soced.2022.10.01.01>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.7441/soced.2022.10.01.01>



Published online: 15 April 2022



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# The empowerment of female students from deprived backgrounds through education for social transformation – A study of Tangaza University College, Nairobi, East Africa

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**Abstract:** The research focused on the empowerment of female students for social transformation at Tangaza University College, whose core values consist of Catholic social teachings. The college provides higher education to young people who would otherwise not have the opportunity for higher studies. Of the 2,000+ college students, 1,500 receive partial or full scholarships. The aim of the study was to find out how Tangaza fulfils its mission of educating for social transformation, from the responses of female students from low to very low income families. These are in two groups: female students mostly from squatter areas in the city of Nairobi, and the women religious, who primarily come from villages where primary and secondary education is sadly inadequate. The study makes use of a synthesis of theories of empowerment compiled by a social scientist, Mann Hyung Hur. The results showed how Tangaza's education for social transformation has empowered its female students in the three areas of personal growth, job competence and social responsibility. However, there are differing degrees of empowerment among the three categories. An analysis is done of the differences between the three areas of empowerment, and recommendations are made. The sample population consists of women graduates of Tangaza University College from the academic years 2010-2017.

**Keywords:** women graduates, empowerment, social transformation, education, personal growth, growth in competence, growth in social responsibility

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## Posílení postavení studentek ze znevýhodněného prostředí prostřednictvím vzdělávání pro společenskou transformaci – studie Tangaza University College, Nairobi, východní Afrika

**Abstrakt:** Výzkum se zaměřil na posílení postavení studentek za účelem společenské transformace na Tangaza University College, jejíž základní hodnoty jsou tvořeny katolickou sociální naukou. Tato vysoká škola poskytuje vysokoškolské vzdělání mladým lidem, kteří by jinak neměli možnost studovat na vysoké škole. Z více než 2 000 vysokoškolských studentů jich 1 500 dostává

částečné nebo plné stipendium. Cílem studie bylo zjistit, jak Tangaza naplňuje své poslání vzdělávat k společenské transformaci, a to na základě odpovědí studentek z rodin s nízkými až velmi nízkými příjmy. Jedná se o dvě skupiny: studentky převážně z oblastí squattů ve městě Nairobi a věřící ženy pocházející především z vesnic, kde je základní a střední vzdělání žalostně nedostatečné. Tato studie využívá syntézu teorií posílení postavení vypracovanou sociologem Mannem Hyung Hurem. Výsledky ukázaly, jak vzdělávání pro společenskou transformaci na vysoké škole Tangaza posílilo postavení jejích studentek ve třech oblastech: osobním růstu, pracovních dovednostech a společenské odpovědnosti. V těchto třech kategoriích však existují různé stupně posílení postavení. Byla provedena analýza rozdílů mezi těmito třemi oblastmi posílení a byla formulována doporučení. Zkoumaný vzorek tvoří absolventky Tangaza University College z období školních let 2010-2017.

**Klíčová slova:** absolventky, posílení postavení, společenská transformace, vzdělávání, osobní růst, zvyšování dovedností, zvyšování společenské odpovědnosti

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 A learning environment that empowers women

Of today's 750 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women (UNESCO, 2018). Education is a ground-breaking factor in women's empowerment because it enables them to undertake the changes that can lead to discovering their potential, and exercising their innate gifts for the life of their families and communities. There is vast evidence for this in the personal, social, economic and health domains. And yet statistics show that of the 75 percent of girls who start primary school in Africa, only eight percent finish the secondary level. This means that in sub-Saharan Africa, 33.3 million girls of primary and lower secondary school age are out of school (UNESCO, 2018).

The social researcher Murphy-Graham defines empowered women as those who have developed the capacity to take action towards personal and social transformation because they have been enabled to critically examine their lives and broader society (Murphy-Graham & Lloyd, 2016). The countries that have realized the contribution of women to social and economic development have taken steps to empower them by prioritizing their education and involving them in decision-making processes (Pachaiyappan, 2014).

For transformative education to address gender equity, countries must work actively, intentionally and proactively. There is ample international experience of the impact of education in changing the deeply-rooted social and cultural attitudes and practices that underlie poor living conditions (Singh, 2015). Therefore, it is important to build a supportive environment where women feel able to question their own beliefs and practices (Medel-Anonuevo, 2010).

The 2018 Human Development Index (HDI) report by the United Nations Development Program recognizes that one of the greatest obstacles to human development is gender inequality. The average HDI for women worldwide is six percent lower than that for men. The widest gaps are in countries in the low development category, to which sub-Saharan Africa belongs. At the current rates of progress, it could take over 200 years to bridge the enormous economic gender gap across the world (UNDP, 2018).

Among students in sub-Saharan African universities, the relative number of women in tertiary education remains small. A study made on the factors influencing the access of women to university education outlined social-cultural practices, educational policies, academic performance and socio-economic status as primary barriers. Education policy makers should make every effort to ensure that the education of the small proportion of women who do receive university education is empowering (Ndukuyu, 2014).

An example is how a business, as part of its corporate responsibility, partners with a university to empower women. The Bank of America partnered with Cornell University to establish the Institute for Women's Entrepreneurship. From 2018, approximately 10,000 women entrepreneurs gained, through online classes, critical skills and resources needed to grow their businesses. It has also formed them into an active network of women entrepreneurs and social innovators. Their interaction with each other as women entrepreneurs has been a source of significant learning. It is notable that the founder of Cornell University, which has a strong social orientation, had religious roots as a Quaker (Bank of America, 2021). This is an example of how religious people can be at the forefront of challenging the hostile attitudes and practices of religious traditionalists, who resist having women step out of traditional roles (Dennis, 2010).

## 1.2 Tangaza University College

Tangaza started as a school of theology in 1986 for congregations of religious men, who pooled their resources for the training of their young men. However, very quickly different congregations started various institutes, according to their charisms. This opened up Tangaza to being co-educational, as religious and lay women became part of its student population.

With the Church's social teaching at the core of an education for social transformation, it offers standard criteria for committed Christian action. This includes the awareness and greater integration of the social agenda in the consciousness of the school, and the mission of women's religious congregations, as 50% of the female students of Tangaza are religious women (Tangaza University College, 2018).

Table 1

*Comparison of Tangaza's core values with catholic social teaching (USCCB, n.d.)*

Tangaza University College's values	Seven themes of catholic social teaching
1. Preferential option for the poor	1. Option for the poor and vulnerable
2. Integrity and transparency	2. Rights and responsibilities
3. Justice and peace	3. The dignity of work and the rights of workers
4. Respect and protection of human dignity and sanctity of human life	4. Life and the dignity of the human being
5. Respect and promotion of cultural diversity and inter-religious dialogue	5. Call to family, community, and participation
6. Partnership and collaboration for mutual synergy	6. Solidarity
	7. Concern for God's creation

In the context of the mission of a Catholic educational institution, the hypothesis is that Tangaza University College empowers its female students to be agents of social transformation wherever they are.

## 2 Religious and lay women students of Tangaza

### 2.1 Background of the lay female students

With Tangaza's core value being an option for the poor, the majority of its female students are those that come from deprived backgrounds. A look at the background of these female students shows that about 40% of the lay female students come from the 2.5 million slum dwellers that represent 60% of Nairobi's population. They come primarily from Kibera, the biggest slum in Africa, which accommodates some 250,000 people. Like any slum area, Kibera is plagued by the problems of land/tenancy rights, housing, water, electricity, health clinics, education, employment and security. Kibera is located near the business centre in Nairobi, and so up to 50% of the available, and fairly unskilled, workforce is employed there. However, the unemployment rate continues to be at an all-time high of 50%. The strong, cheap and local alcoholic brew, drugs, and glue sniffing are increasing problems, especially among the unemployed youth, who are easily hooked. This in turn leads to problems of violence, crime, rapes, etc. Many girls become pregnant, with about 50% of 16 to 25-year-old girls becoming pregnant, which results in many cases of abortion. This can be very dangerous, particularly in such a poor area as Kibera. Also, there are many tensions related to tribal differences between tenants, who are primarily the Luo, Luhya, and the Kikuyu landlords who own the shacks for rent (APHRC, 2014).

### 2.2 Background of the religious female students

African women religious are growing in numbers in Africa. Today, African sisters make up 11 percent of the world's 71,567 women religious. Apart from Asia, Africa is the only continent where there has been an increase in the number of women religious (Ngundo & Wiggins, 2017).

However, there are challenges that face the religious congregations of African women. They work on a continent that is marked by the ravages of war, ethnic conflict, injustice, political instability, rampant corruption and terrorism. The sisters provide spiritual and material assistance in health care, education, pastoral care and advocacy.

In spite of their dedicated work, the religious women and their congregations face challenges. Among them is the poverty of their families, who now have expectations that their daughter has left them for religious life and therefore deprived them of the dowry that they could have received if she had been married. Added to this is the reality of the HIV-AIDS pandemic, which has left close family members with orphaned siblings, nephews and nieces.

Another challenge of religious communities is sustainability – being able to provide adequately for the basic needs and education of the young women who join religious life. There is a need to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for their demanding work (Ngundo & Wiggins, 2017).

As they now come and begin their studies at Tangaza University College, these two groups of respondents, though seemingly worlds apart, share the common background of a lack of quality basic education.

## 3 Research methods

### 3.1 Theoretical framework – Components and processes of empowerment

After a comprehensive study of all empowerment literature, and taking as his starting point Paolo Freire's theory of empowerment through liberating education, the Korean professor Mann Hyung Hur of Chung-Ang University, Department of Social Services, arrived at a synthesis of various theories of empowerment (Hur, 2006).

Empowerment is both personal and collective and can be summarized into five development stages and four cognitive elements. People grow in individual empowerment when they can overcome their psychological and personal issues. They then have a decision-making ability that puts them on the path of self-determination and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the four factors of purpose, competence, capacity for decision-making, and impact, make up the components of personal empowerment (Hur, 2006).

People develop collective empowerment when they can work together for social change by surmounting barriers to their development (Staples, 1990). It is through collective action against existing power structures, which either enable or constrain them, that groups become empowered (Parpart et al., 2002). It is essential that empowerment be both personal and collective if it is to lead to social transformation.

The challenge of this theory lies in ensuring that personal empowerment does not simply stop at personal development but leads to group collective empowerment. In practice, individual empowerment must go hand-in-hand with collective empowerment (Dover, 1999).

### 3.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shows how the processes and components of individual and collective empowerment embodied in the theory interrogate Tangaza's vision-mission, values, educational philosophy, and approach. These will constitute the independent variables of the study. Dependent on them is the empowerment of Tangaza's female students, which enables them to work for social transformation. This constitutes therefore the dependent variable of the study. Intervening variables are the number of years the woman graduate has spent at Tangaza, in what course and in which institute she was enrolled, and her level of involvement in both curricular and co-curricular activities meant for her education.

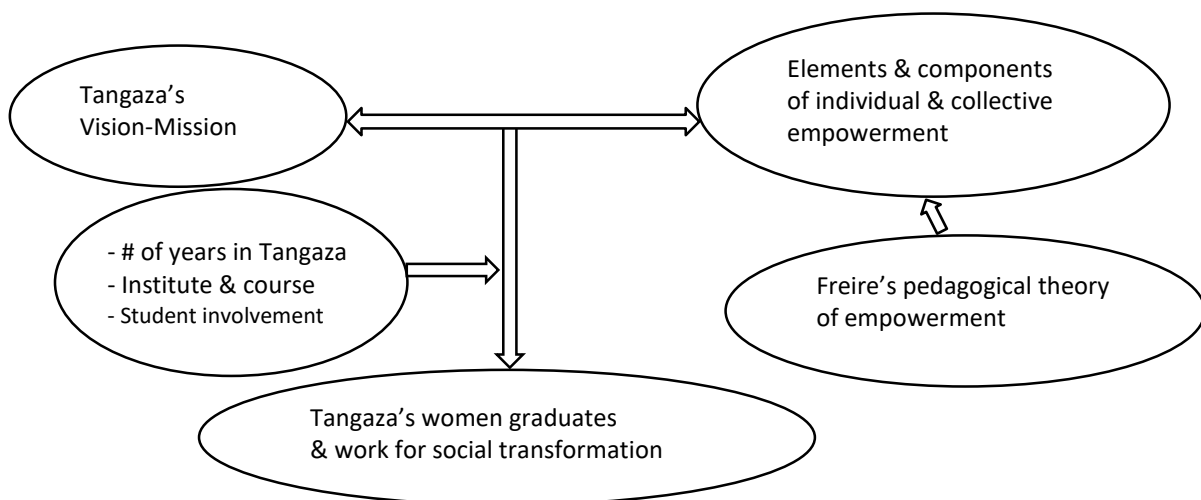


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

### 3.3 Population of the study

The graduates were of a wide age range, 22-50 years old, because Tangaza receives both fresh secondary school graduates as well as working people and professionals wishing to upgrade themselves academically or develop a second career. Tangaza has always had a bias for offering opportunities to poor but deserving students.



### 3.4 Description of sampling procedures

Of the 1,379 women graduates in the period 2010-2017, there were 705 who had email addresses in the list of their various institutes. This became the total population of the study, as they were the only ones whom it was possible to reach. Since some of the email addresses were listed from over eight years back, there was a risk that the respondents had changed email addresses and therefore could not be reached. To supplement this, a second source was graduates who returned to do further studies, and a third source was through the religious congregations of the sisters who did not respond to their email addresses.

Considering all these constraints, a self-eliminating sample was used, with the questionnaire being distributed to all those on the mailing list of the different institutes. The same was done with the religious congregations that could be reached through Tangaza. The participants among the graduates who have continued studying responded voluntarily. After examining the questionnaires that were returned, the valid ones were identified. The questionnaires were sent three times to the 705 available email addresses, and about 200 physical copies of the questionnaires were sent out to religious congregations with Tangaza graduates, and to graduates who returned for further studies.

The sample size of the target population was determined using the table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). From a total population of 705, rounded to 750, women graduates who could be reached through their email addresses from the seven institutes, the sample required is 254.

A formula used to determine the sample size of a target population that is less than 10,000 (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) showed that to be statistically valid, a response of at least 190 questionnaires was considered necessary to achieve acceptable confidence in the results. There were 205 valid questionnaires used to make the study statistically valid, with an excess of 15 respondents.

### 3.5 Research design and description of data-collection instruments

The research makes use of the non-probability convenience sample. It is interpretive and descriptive research, as it obtained information to show the current state of empowerment on the three components of personal growth, growth in job competence and growth in social responsibility (WSSU, 2021).

The elements of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) were formulated from the vision-mission and the core values of Tangaza, as well as the components for individual and collective empowerment in Hur's theoretical framework. Document review was also used as a way of collecting data by going over existing records, manuals and programmes relevant to the study. Participant observation, where the researcher not only watched but actively participated in the pursuits of the research participants, was also used. Being a part-time faculty member, the researcher could easily enter into the activities of the participants' environment, while at the same time making observations and taking notes. This also allowed for informal conversations with students. The advantages of participant observation were being able to have access to the site of the study, interacting with the research participants under scrutiny, and being able to obtain an adequate quantity of information related to the study (Williams, 2016).

### 3.6 Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the women graduates focused on the indicators of both personal and collective empowerment that they were experiencing in their current personal and work life; they also included the indicators of the values and educational outcomes that Tangaza espouses and that enabled them to do their share in the work of social transformation.

The central tendency showed what is normal or "average" among the responses of the participants. The use of the mode for central tendency showed the most repetitive value for the items in the questionnaire.

Construct validity was used to test whether inferences can be justifiably made from the questions developed. The calculation of construct validity for each of the three categories of the questionnaire is shown below.

Category 1:  $AVE = 5.538/11 = 0.503$ . Convergent validity is  $\geq .05$  and therefore positive. Divergent validity =  $\sqrt{0.503} = 0.709$  which is  $\geq$  the coefficient of 0.05. The indicators of Category 1 in the questionnaire are valid.

Category 2:  $AVE = 5.106/8 = 0.63825$ . Convergent validity is  $\geq .05$  and therefore positive. Divergent validity =  $\sqrt{0.63825} = 0.799$  which is  $\geq$  the coefficient of 0.05. The indicators of Category 2 in the questionnaire are valid.

Category 3:  $AVE = 10.931/20 = 0.547$ . Convergent validity is  $\geq .05$  and therefore positive. Divergent validity =  $\sqrt{0.547} = 0.7396$  which is  $\geq$  the coefficient of 0.05. The indicators of Category 3 in the questionnaire are valid.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used as a measure of internal consistency or reliability. The questionnaire for the women graduates had three categories of indicators. The first had to do with personal growth, which had 11 items and had an  $\alpha = .089$ . The second category, on growth in social responsibility, had eight items and had an  $\alpha = .862$ . The third category, on growth in competence, had 20 items and had an  $\alpha = .862$ . All three categories showed relatively high internal consistency.

## 4 Results and analysis of findings

This section presents the results of the questionnaire and an analysis of the three components of the empowerment of the female students, covering personal growth, growth in social responsibility, and growth in professional competence. A fourth theme is a comparison of the responses among the three categories.

### 4.1 Theme 1: Empowering women students through personal growth

Theme 1 is developed from the responses of the women graduates to the first of the three categories of empowerment, namely personal growth. This is crucial because empowerment starts with personal empowerment. As Freire and other theorists have asserted, empowerment is a reflexive process and it is the individual, herself, who primarily initiates and sustains it.

The summary of responses that indicated personal growth showed that 80% ( $n = 164$ ) of women graduates claim to have experienced personal growth, as well as growth in preparedness for their jobs.

In the qualitative portion of the questionnaire, respondents identified four areas that gave them their significant experiences of empowerment as women at Tangaza. These were: 1. The celebration of Women's Day – *"The speeches on the rights of women and the call for greater equality were empowering for me"*; 2. The courses on leadership as well as the conferences sponsored by the Tangaza Leaders' Guild (TLG); 3. The lived experience of actually being a leader or mentor, whether in the institute, in a class or a club *"Exercising my role as a leader in group discussions and in my institute taught me how to stand up and give talks"*; 4. The celebration of Cultural Day, where the female students play a major part in the events and presentations.

To the question of how Tangaza can further help women to be empowered, most answers revolved around the need to give more leadership positions to women, making them participants in decision-making. Seminars and workshops that were motivational and affirming, provided information on current issues, and built capabilities, were considered vital.

An unexpected result is the response of the 45% ( $n = 92$ ) of women graduates who come from deprived backgrounds. They are first-generation college students studying to lift themselves out of poverty. It is important for a college to accurately gauge, support, and inspire women who arrive for higher education with vastly different levels of self-esteem, skills and empowerment (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2009).



It is worth noting that a significant number of the women staff at Tangaza are graduates who have developed precisely from this starting point. They are powerful role models for the female students and are living proof of how Tangaza has empowered them.

Another unexpected outcome is the discrepancy between the responses of women religious and laywomen. The majority of religious women rated the different empowerment indicators with “To an exemplary” and “To a significant degree” while the laywomen who were Certificate and Diploma graduates were mainly the ones who rated “Not at all” or “To a small degree” in the different empowerment items. For one, this could be because religious women generally have more opportunities for education and further professional studies. Still another factor could be that the lay women have stayed only one or two years at Tangaza. Another reality is that religious women usually have had an experience of working at a mission.

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Empowerment through growth in collective empowerment or social responsibility**

Individual and collective empowerment mutually contribute to each other’s growth. This will have implications for the ability of students to network and to organize groups. The goal of individual empowerment should join together with that of collective empowerment to avoid being stuck in a narrow idea of empowerment as merely an individual affair (Dover, 1999).

The summary shows that 70% (n = 143) indicated a positive response to growth in social responsibility. Their responses to the question about what learning experience was most helpful to their growth in social awareness centred on sessions and activities that provided group work with marginalized groups through their attachments or internships. *“I learned commitment while working with children with cerebral palsy during my internship and saw the care they need.” “Sharing with a group of women who were HIV-positive made me feel empowered by their determination to live and care for their families.”* This type of action research was very formative for them, as was their involvement in clubs like the Justice and Peace club, which provided a venue for active social concern. Studying the Catholic social teachings and social ethics was both important and challenging for them. *“The class on Catholic social teaching and social ethics made me aware of my Christian responsibility to work for change.”* The sharing in the class also led to a sense of personal empowerment and growth in interpersonal relationships. It is important to note that learning Catholic social teaching, along with exercising leadership roles, is a good combination of the theory and practice of social responsibility.

A suggestion they made is to have an active alumni desk that would bring back graduates to share their experiences. They also pinpointed the need for training and exposure to situations that will help them learn more about social issues. They saw the need to learn from others as well as the need to develop technology and practical skills.

The female students’ responses to the questionnaires showed their growth in social responsibility related to their involvement in school and their present jobs. *“The talk about peaceful co-existence with different ethnicities and nationalities at Tangaza to address the post-election violence was a big help for me. Nonviolence starts from within.”* They felt they had become more critically aware of social issues and become more involved by mobilizing others for collective action, as well as helping better the lives of the disadvantaged.

Of course, their experience as students at this time is still limited. It is hoped that the principles and skills they learn will lead them to continue to be critically engaged in social change wherever they find themselves. Their responses to the eight items under the second category, on growth in social responsibility, showed their growth in collective empowerment. This is shown in their experience of a sense of belonging, participation in the community, the capacity to lead an organization, and community building, with 70% (n = 148) of them acknowledging their growth in this area.

The faculty's responses showed how they have raised the consciousness of students about social issues in their classes, promoted concern for the disadvantaged, and encouraged students to do advocacy work. They have also integrated a service component into their course. A pedagogy that has taken deep root at Tangaza is the pastoral cycle. It is applied in various forms and degrees of intensity by the institutes.

#### 4.3 Theme 3: Empowered through growth in job competence

Among the key components in the theoretical synthesis of the processes and components of empowerment is developing individuals' competencies. A summary of the women graduates' responses to the 20 items under the category of competence in their workplace showed that 76% (n = 156) said they have grown in academic success, self-efficacy, self-confidence, leadership competence, and coalition building. This shows growth to a significant degree in the category of competence. The responses of students to the questions related to their growth in competence showed that it is important that they feel they are competent in the work they do and feel proud of it. Competence requires life-long learning, which takes place through the graduates' participation in ongoing educational programs and on-the-job training. This competence shows itself in their transformative effect on people and their capacity to participate in crucial decision-making processes, as well as in helping develop policies for the accomplishment of the organization's goals.

A summary of the responses of a sample of 44 faculty members, regarding the content and methodology they used to empower students, showed that 84.3% of them have fostered, among 20 identified skills that were asked in the questionnaire, self-confidence, communication skills, teamwork, inclusivity, and awareness of social issues. For their qualitative answers, they identified building self-esteem, nurturing the students' talents, fostering diversity and inclusivity, and developing their research and innovation skills, as major ways they engaged the female students in order to empower them.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Comparison of the three categories of empowerment

It is instructive at this juncture to make a comparison of how the three categories of personal growth, growth in social responsibility, and growth in competence stand in relation to each other. While interconnected, each category does have distinct indicators that identify growth in each area.

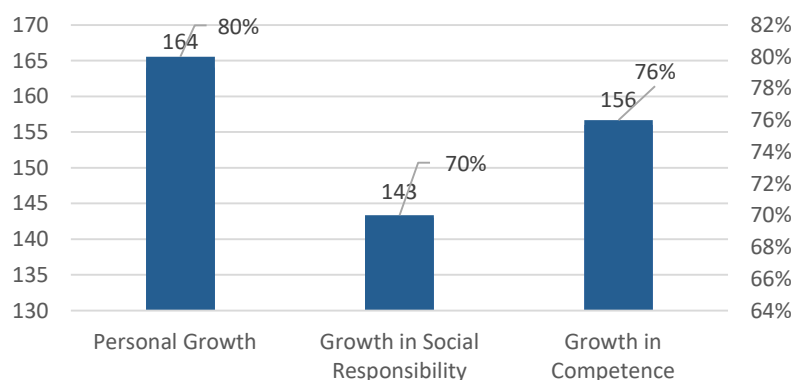


Figure 2 Comparison of levels of growth in the three categories of empowerment

It is significant to note that among the three categories in the questionnaire, personal growth, with 80% (n = 164), had the highest score, followed by growth in competence, with 76% (n = 156), and growth in social responsibility, coming in last with 70% (n = 143). This shows that the challenge lies in continuing to strengthen programs that will foster greater social responsibility and collective empowerment in the students. Otherwise, empowerment could remain only on a personal level and not lead to the more challenging enterprise of collective empowerment for social transformation.

That the areas of personal growth and growth in competence showed a higher score is understandable, because these two categories are primarily skills the individual herself develops as the primary agent. On the other hand, growth in social responsibility or collective empowerment has to do with interdependence and interpersonal skills that involve engaging with others. This, therefore, makes it a more challenging category to develop. Thus the hypothesis, though supported by the findings, nevertheless reveals the need on two levels. One is a more in-depth analysis of the pedagogical method needed to develop social responsibility. For a clientele where the majority come from more deprived backgrounds, the students needed to achieve an aggregate of personal development and competence skills before moving on towards greater social commitment. These were students coming from families where they were the first generation of university graduates. Maslow's later motivational theory recognizes this, when he regards the self-transcendent need to commit to a cause as a higher-level motivation beyond one's basic, psychological, and self-fulfilment needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Secondly, for effective impact in their respective communities, there is a need for a greater effort at helping students learn, internalize and practice social engagement skills. Though coming from deprived backgrounds, they need the exposure and training to address critical social issues needing advocacy.

At the same time, it is good to remember that empowerment includes the ability of women to make self-determined choices (Esplen et al., 2006). Poverty is not gender-blind. There are historical, cultural and institutional causes, as well as political and economic forces, that lead to the feminization of poverty.

The third indicator, with a comparatively lower rating, belonged to the category of growth in social responsibility and had to do with *being more involved in trying to resolve issues affecting the nation*. Training for advocacy in development work, as compared to the delivery of concrete services, is never an easy venture (Birik, 2014). And clearly, since African governments are resistant to issues of advocacy, such as press freedom, public participation through debate, transparency and the rule of law, advocacy work is an uphill climb (Fadope, 2008). This makes involvement with national issues through advocacy work something difficult for students to undertake.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

The finding shows that Tangaza fosters the empowerment of its female students in all three areas of personal growth, growth in social responsibility and growth in competence, to a significant degree. These categories comprise empowerment for social transformation, which includes both individual and collective empowerment.

### 5.1 Challenges in the empowerment of women students for social transformation at Tangaza University College

The responses to the questionnaires showed the empowerment that women graduates have received from their education at Tangaza. However, a closer look at the three categories of empowerment indicators showed that social responsibility had a lower score as compared to personal growth and growth in competence. This entails helping faculty and students to develop a critical awareness of both the individual and socio-political contexts, in order to enable them to work for social change. The women graduates need to overcome traditional cultural values and practices regarding their capacity to take on mobilizing and leadership roles.

One appeal that surfaced in the responses of the female students is for support in helping them with job placement or funding for their business initiatives. This is a reflection of the state of Kenya's economy, where more than a third (39%) of Kenya's youth are unemployed. Tangaza has begun to address this with a job fair and an annual entrepreneurial workshop. Partnerships with corporations could help start-ups among women entrepreneurs. Sumani (2021) cites a Global Entrepreneurship report that shows how sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of women entrepreneurship in the

world, with approximately 26% of female adults running businesses. This shows the great potential in supporting the business initiatives of the women graduates.

A possible study could also be made just focusing on the growing number of women religious students, and how Tangaza's education in empowerment for social transformation influences them in their mission. They are the "foot soldiers" in implementing the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The research would be helpful for the direction of their congregations' missions as well.

Catholic social teaching, at the heart of Tangaza's core values, is a unique contribution of the Catholic faith and mission toward the students' awareness of their social responsibility. Their experience of internships in organizations working with the marginalized leaves a mark on the graduates, which transforms them. The poor evangelize them and make them capable of committing themselves to carrying out "their decisive action in their little sphere" (Assomption-france, 2018).

From encounters with the students and an interview with the Dean of Students, it was clear that there is a tendency to overlook the needs of lay male students from deprived backgrounds. They have the same problems as the women. Since they are fewer in number proportionate to the women (outside of the School of Theology), they often have to fend for themselves. Hence, while this study is on the empowerment of female students, it is important to recognize that the problem of poverty among students cuts across genders and will need attention.

The fact that the questionnaire focused on the empowerment of female students and on social transformation came as a bit of a surprise to the respondents. What this shows is that education given at Tangaza focuses on social transformation as an overall method of empowering all students, male or female. Despite this seeming gap of intentionality, it is commendable to see how the women graduates have recognized, to a significant degree, that they have been empowered in the three areas of personal growth, competence, and social responsibility.

For women to effectively engage in social transformation, they need both personal and collective empowerment.

## 5.2 Recommendations

This section on recommendations is built on the findings of the study. They are essentially twofold: those directed to Tangaza in terms of policy and practice, and those for subsequent research or implementation of the theory.

### 5.2.1 Recommendations for Tangaza University College

The difficulty in tracing and getting in touch with Tangaza alumni raised awareness of the need for an active follow-up of Tangaza alumni. As one dean admitted, *"Once you allow a year or two to pass without getting in touch with your graduates, you have lost them."* Tangaza is addressing this now with the establishment of a Tangaza-wide alumni office.

As it continues to transition to becoming a university, one challenge for Tangaza regards its organizational structure. From being a seminary college initiated by male religious congregations, its organizational structure needs to evolve and embody the growing numbers of its new stakeholders, i.e., the female students, the women's religious congregations, the lay students, and their sponsors. For the moment, key policy and decision-making bodies in the system are still predominantly composed of male members.

It is true that Tangaza has offered academic scholarships to women faculty members to help develop them. However, it still needs to be proactive in taking initiatives to bring in women's more participative and relational leadership style (Singh, 2015).

One appeal that surfaced in the responses of the female students is for support in helping them with job placement or funding for their business initiatives. Partnerships with corporations could help

women entrepreneurs with start-ups to enhance their abilities, knowledge and resources, in order to develop and run a thriving business.

Part of Tangaza's richness lies in its diversity, with the eight institutes being run by different religious congregations. The challenge is to integrate these institutes and build a unified Tangaza culture. Adopting various good strategies from the different institutes could eventually lead to the adoption of best practices, forming a core that will be the trademark of Tangaza graduates.

In the implementation of strategies for social transformation, there is a need for lecturers to work collectively with the wider community. Consciousness-raising must start with the faculty, which will require them to have both theoretical knowledge and experience in deepening learning, especially in the area of social responsibility.

Another dimension to transmitting the mission of social transformation is through programmes of continuing education, offered to the wider community beyond Kenya and the continent. The experience of online teaching and learning during the pandemic lockdown has opened up possibilities of reaching a wider audience beyond Tangaza's physically-based students.

A further challenge is that, of the eight institutes/centres at Tangaza, only one, the Centre for Leadership and Management, has been under the leadership of religious women since its inception. How might the charisms of the religious women's congregations be harnessed to enrich Tangaza with new initiatives, just as it has done with the charisms of the male congregations?

### 5.2.2 Recommendations for further research

The processes or stages of empowerment used in this research came from a synthesis of theories in the social sciences applied to a variety of social settings. Freire, moreover, developed his pedagogy in the context of people liberating themselves from oppression. Systematizing methodologies of conscientizing in an academic setting will respond to the challenge of African Catholic universities of educating students committed to academic excellence and service to the poor.

There is also the challenge of harnessing the potential of alternative media to counteract the power relations of partisan and tribal politics and make it redefine communication media. This is especially true because Tangaza has an Institute of Social Communications.

One gift, and also a responsibility, is the pronounced diversity of the very multicultural student and faculty population, which highlights the importance of the impact of graduates in Africa and around the world. Undertaking these different recommendations could help Tangaza fulfil its identity and mission to be 'Tangaza fumbo la imani' (Proclaim the mystery of the faith) as it empowers its students to be the much-needed ethical servant leaders for today's Africa.

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## Appendix 1. Questionnaire to 2010-2017 Women Graduates of Tangaza University College

Tick one of the boxes that best corresponds to your experience when you were a student at Tangaza:

1 = Not at all      2 = To a small degree      3 = To an average degree      4 = To a significant degree      5 = To an exemplary degree

A. Personal growth	1	2	3	4	5
1. Tangaza helped me to know myself more. 2. Tangaza helped me to grow in self-confidence. 3. Tangaza helped me grow in living ethically. 4. At Tangaza, I gained knowledge that prepared me for my present job. 5. At Tangaza, I gained skills that prepared me to be effective in my present job. 6. At Tangaza, I developed my ability to make decisions. 7. Tangaza helped me have self-mastery. 8. Tangaza helped me have self-control. 9. Tangaza helped me grow in my faith and prayer life. 10. Tangaza helped me develop interpersonal skills. 11. Tangaza taught me how to work in a group.					

B. Growth in social responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
1. Tangaza helped me become more aware of the connection between my faith and my social responsibility. 2. At Tangaza, I became more critically aware of social issues needing transformation. 3. At Tangaza, I became more involved in trying to resolve issues affecting the nation. 4. During my years at Tangaza, I was involved in student activities. 5. As a student, I exercised a leadership role to build the class/institute. 6. As a student, I influenced others to be involved in school activities. 7. As a student, I spoke out in situations needing to be addressed. 8. As a student, I learned to network with groups other than just my own immediate group.					

C. In my present place of work: Growth in competence	1	2	3	4	5
1. I feel competent in what I am doing. 2. I feel proud of the work I do. 3. I participate in training programs. 4. I continue to learn and grow in my job. 5. I work well with a team. 6. I share useful information with my colleagues. 7. I communicate well with my team. 8. I have a transformative effect on people.					

9. I participate in crucial decision-making processes.
10. I help develop policies for the accomplishment of the organization's goals.
11. I speak out on issues I feel strongly about.
12. I am able to prevent violence to myself in my home.
13. I am able to prevent violence to others in my place of work.
14. I am able to exercise my legal rights when necessary.
15. I am able to deal with difficulties and problems in my life.
16. I belong to an organization outside of my job.
17. I help build a community spirit in my place of work.
18. I am able to mobilize others to collective action.
19. I help better the lives of the disadvantaged in my work and outside of it.
20. I feel I am contributing to building a more just and humane social order.

1.
  - a. Did your studies at Tangaza help you grow in your faith life? Yes ☐ No ☐
  - b. If Yes, what was it that most helped you grow in your faith?
  - c. What are your recommendations for Tangaza to better help students grow in their faith life?
2.
  - a. Can you name an event/course as a student at Tangaza when you felt you were empowered as a woman? What was it about the event that made you feel empowered?
  - b. How else could Tangaza help female students become empowered to take their place and make their contribution in society?
3.
  - a. Can you name a learning experience that most helped you grow in social awareness and in commitment to work for social change? What was it about that experience that made you grow in social responsibility?
  - b. Do you have other suggestions for ways Tangaza can help female students like you grow in social responsibility when they go out to take their place in the world?

Thank you for filling in the data below needed for the study.

Institute

Course taken (certificate, diploma, degree, masters):

Religious Sister ☐ Lay ☐

Date of studies at Tangaza (e.g. 2010-2013):

Age:

- ☐ 20-30                      ☐ 41-50  
☐ 31-40                      ☐ 51+

List and a brief description of work (whether one or several) after graduation from Tangaza:

Year:	Name and description of work:	Type of organization (religious, government, NGO, self-employed, business, etc.):	Rate level of job satisfaction (1-5, with 1 as unhappy to 5 as very happy):
			Brief reason for your rating:

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