

**Title:** Gender and participation in undergraduate programmes in Kenyan public universities 1970-1994

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**Abstract:** An enormous gender gap continues to exist in access to university education and performance at university level. One of the tasks of this study was to investigate gender disparities in total enrollment in undergraduate programs with special focus on enrollment by females in science and technical oriented faculties. It was also to determine the level of overall performance in terms of males and females at the end of undergraduate programs. Where differences were observed, the study attempted to investigate factors which influence such disparities with a view to suggesting possible intervention strategies to gender imbalances in access and participation in university education. The study covered selected undergraduate programs at the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta and Moi University. This study was treated to both quantitative and qualitative approach. The instruments used in data collection included a questionnaire, interviews and documentary sources. Data on total enrollment of students in universities, and their distribution in various faculties and levels of performance by gender was analysed quantitatively and presented in the text in the form of frequency polygons, bar graphs, and simple tables. The information gathered from questionnaire and interviews were thematically analyzed and presented in the form of voices and tables. The main findings of the study were as follows: - (a) Female participation in the context of total enrollment in undergraduate programs is low due to the following limiting factors: - Public universities like the University of Nairobi and Moi University offer more science and technical oriented than Arts based degree courses. These courses do not appeal to the majority of females hence more males than females opt for these programs while females cluster in Arts based courses. Other factors, which contribute to low enrollment by females in university education, were identified as poverty, unwanted pregnancy, early marriage, lack of intrinsic motivation, low performance at secondary education level, over emphasis on science and technical subjects, household chores and lack of role models; (b) Gender disparities is more evident in science and technical based faculties. This is because these programs are traditionally known to be male dominated while arts based courses tend to attract the majority of females. Factors which influence low enrolment by females in science and technical oriented faculties were identified as negative attitude by females in science and technical subjects, unsatisfactory performance in these subjects at secondary school level, societal discrimination against females in these areas of study, poorly equipped laboratories, lack of career guidance and fewer number of girls' schools which offer science and technical based subjects and (c) Results on performance revealed that there is no big difference in levels of performance by gender. However, it was noted that performance by females could be negatively influenced by factors such as inferiority complex as a result of low level of females perception of their status and role in the society. Culturally prescribed roles of females make them more likely than boys to be burdened with household chores which take precedence over studies than for their male colleagues. Sexual harassment from a cross section of male lecturers and student colleagues has a dehumanizing effect which may result in females developing a distorted image of themselves as worthless 'Sex objects', a factor which negates good performance in education.

Finally, lack of guidance and counseling results in social overtones like early marriage before completion of university programs and consequent child care which has a competing demand on the females study time. This study made the following recommendations as intervention strategies towards gender parity: - (a) The government should eliminate gender gap in education by creating and supporting policies and programs which ensure girls survival at low levels of education e.g. re-entry by females who leave school due to pregnancy or lack of school fees. (b) The curriculum at secondary school level should discourage gender typing of subjects and should instead cater for girls students by enhancing their values, skills and attitudes. (c) Gender sensitization programs on benefits of access to higher education by females is crucial and should target students, parents, educators, curriculum developers and Administrative personnel. (d) Ensure that girls schools have well equipped laboratories in order to give girls appetite to learn pure science subjects. (e) There is need for effective training of teachers with regard to career guidance and counseling. (f) Establish access to high quality and appropriate family planning and counseling services in all public universities. (g) Introduce technical education in all girls' secondary schools in order to equip girls with knowledge, skills and attitudes on technical subjects.