

GENDER EQUITY AND ACCESS IN KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: AN EXAMINATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of analysis centering on the impact of affirmative action policy that of female enrolment in public universities as a means of achieving gender parity in university admissions. Despite progress that have been towards equality of opportunity between female and male, there are several indicators that show the persistence of gender inequality in universities. Analysis of enrolment data and review of Joint Admissions Board documents and government reports and policy debates show that, gender parity in public university education is still elu action policy implementation. Female students continue to be disproportionately represented at 38% and are effectively excluded from physical sciences and technologically oriented degree courses such as mechanical engineering, geospatial engineering, mathematics, computer science, microprocessor technology and instrumentation where their participation rate is below 8.0%. Affirmative action policy which h in the gender parity debate should be seen as one of the strategies that can be used to correct gender imbalances but not as a panacea for achieving gender parity. It has to be supported with other multi-sectorial policies and legislations (The Kenya Constitution 2010). As a temporary interventio to be discontinued once the inequalities and inequities experienced by a particular gender group, in this case female students, as a result of longstanding cultural and structural barriers, leading to

inadequate access to educational opportunities is corrected. The analysis of the gender gap allows us to understand the scope of gender inequalities in provision of university education and what could be done about it.

Keywords: *Affirmative action policy, gen*

Introduction

One of the main concerns of progressive minded organizations, institutions and governments is how to eliminate gender discrimination that exists in all aspects of life. It has become a major objective of both educational and social policy and educators have advanced educational arguments supporting affirmative act

1976). Although gender inequity has slightly narrowed down over the years the imbalances between female and male is evident in all spheres of life. The debate on gender equity and access to university education is nothing new among scholars, practitioners, educators and policy makers. In the educational context equity means fairness and impartiality in the distribution of education opport benefits of education are equally d females and males, different socio-economic and ethnic groups with the

aim of reducing and ultimately eliminating disparities, inequalities and discrimination among individuals and social groups in economic, political and social life. Determination of equity issues in education therefore involves not only facts but normative judgments as well (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall.1985; OECD, 1972; McMahan, 1997). Kenya has continued to periodically review the philosophy and objectives of its education system through commissions and working parties established by the Government with the principal objective of providing an effective

and efficient education that serves devoid of social injustices and disparities between regions, sexes, social and economic groups and that equalises economic opportunities among all the citizens.

The education reviews have been guided by a number of important policy and statutory documents which together with various Acts of Parliament constitute the legal framework of Kenya's education system.

These landmark documents that continue to shape the present and future trends of education include: The Sessional paper No., 1 of 2005 on Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research; the Sessional Paper on African Socialism and its Application in Kenya of 1965; the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies(NCEOP) of 1976; the Presidential Working Party on the Second University in Kenya Report of 1982; Sessional Paper No.6 of 1988 on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond; and the Report on Totally Integrated Quality Education Training (TIQET) of 1999 amongst others. The debate on equity and equality of educational opportunity is not about to go away any time soon. The Kenyan constitution that was promulgated in 2010 acknowledges the need to legislate for gender equity through affirmative action in order to ensu members of elective or appointive The Constitution, 2010 further defi man and a woman and continues to further assert under article 27(30) that

“Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, Benefits associated with access to all without arbitrary discrimination. According to Kinyanjui (2007)

there is lack of systematic and comprehensive studies on equity in provision of higher education. Accordingly policy research oriented as to who gets higher education in Kenya at various levels is needed.

The gender dimensions of educational participation.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) figures (NER) to the male NER) reveal a near gender parity enrolment between boys and girls at primary school level. In 2005 for example primary GPI was 0.99 (Otieno and Colclough). Th marginal difference between male and female net enrolment ratios (NERs) at this level. However, proportion of girls’ enrolment begins to decline progressively as the girls’ transit to the secondary and university systems. In 2005 for example, transition rate of girls to secondary was 54.2 and that of boys stood at 57.7. Female enrolment begins to seriously lag behind that of males by a disproportionately large margin by the time students enroll in the university. The phenomenon of declining female enrolment

as they move up to the education ladder is a feature not unique to Kenyan education system but appears to be the case as well in education systems of other developing countries. This makes aggregate distributive impact of the education transfer from secondary to university regressive.

It is not lost to the public that despite increase in public spending in university education disparities in female access still persist making social and educational objectives of equity and equality of educational opportunities hard to achieve. This means that more male continue to enroll in publicly subsidized, labour-market rewarding university education. According to Levin (1976) this kind of bias means that female persons are denied equality of educational access, the equality of educational participation, the equality of education results and equality of educational effects upon life chances.

Equalizing Opportunities in University Admission

Serious efforts to address the gender equity and access problem in public universities can be traced the Joint Admission Board (JAB) of 1989. A sub-committee specifically to address to public universities was appointed under the Chairmanship of Prof. F.J

Gichaga when it was realized that enrolment particularly of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, disadvantaged districts and gender (female) was lagging behind those of other groups and were in danger of effectively being excluded from university education. Several other JAB sub-committees were later constituted to address this perennial and tenacious problem of inequality in university participation notably: the Prof. F. A Karani committee of 1995; 1997; Prof. B.A Ogot committee of 2001; Prof. J.T. Kaimenyi committee of 2005; Prof. Barasa Khwa Otsyula, committee of 2006; Prof. Josephine Ngaira committee of 2007; and the Prof. J.T. Kaimenyi committee of 2011. These committees

determinedly recommended implementat in university admissions and came up with criteria for doing it. They

recommended lowering of university entry cut-off points by two points and subject cluster points to specif compensation has been made and female representation is at least more than 30% of enrolment.

The application of affirmative act beginnings notably in President's Kennedy Executive Order 10925 of March 6, 1961 that led to the creation of the Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity with the view to ensuring that hiring and employment practices were free from bias (Dastoor and Ippolito, 2006). Within the context of University a understood to mean "a deliberate policy that gives special privileges to certain groups of people in order to correct the inequalities and inequities which they have experienced, usually as a result of longstanding cultural and structural barriers, leading to inadequate access to opportunities. It's a temporary policy measure, which the imbalances and should be withd has been made' (Prof. Ogot's Committee Report, 2001) . The Kenya

Constitution 2010 defines affirmat designed to overcome or ameliorate an inequity or the systematic denial or infringement of a right or fund the provision of the Kenya Constitution 2010all public universities are demanded by law to ensure that that students admitted into the university and those that are enrolled in various degree programmes are not only based on merit but also achieve "*the not less than one third rule of either gender*" requirement in order to achieve legal equality between men and women. Despite progress towards equality of opportunity between female and male, there are several indicators that show the persistence of gender inequality in the universities as examined below.

Impact of affirmative action cri

According to JAB records the overall enrolment ratio of male to female students in public universities be action was 75:25. After its implementation, the ratio steadily increased and currently stands on average at 62: 38. This scenario is demonstrated by gender enrolment trends at Moi University since its inception in 1984 presented in table 1 below.

Table 1**Gender Enrolment Trends - 1984/1985 - 2013/2014**

S. NO	ACADEMIC YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	%BY GENDER	
					M	F
1	1984/1985	76	7	83	92	8
2	1985/1986	42	6	48	88	12
3	1986/1987	108	13	121	89	11
4	1987/1988	552	146	698	79	21
5	1988/1989	887	302	1189	75	25
6	1989/1990	725	331	1056	69	31
7	1990/1991	1154	356	1510	76	24
8	1991/1992	1171	512	1683	70	30
9	1992/1993	1275	492	1767	72	28
10	1993/1994	1175	518	1693	69	31
11	1994/1995	1189	558	1747	68	32
12	1995/1996	1224	685	1909	64	36
13	1996/1997	1150	612	1762	65	35
14	1997/1998	1591	806	2397	66	34
15	1998/1999	1817	959	2776	66	34
16	1999/2000	1646	892	2538	65	35
17	2000/2001	1807	929	2736	66	34
18	2001/2002	2246	1161	3407	62	38
19	2002/2003	2046	1231	3277	63	38
20	2003/2004	1459	862	2321	61	39
21	2004/2005	1077	683	1760	62	38
22	2005/2006	1267	788	2055	66	34
23	2006/2007	1281	673	1954	59	41
24	2007/2008	2023	1381	3404	63	41
25	2008/2009	2079	1200	3279	56	44
26	2009/2010	1893	1486	3379	57	43

27	2010/2011(KCSE 2009)	2123	1604	3727	55	45
28	2011/2012(KCSE 2010)	2236	1839	4075	55	45
29	2012/2013(KCSE 2011)	2622	1883	4505	58	42
30	2013/2014(KCSE 2012)	3142	2650	5792	54	46
TOTAL		43083	25565	68648	63%	37%

Source: Moi University Admissions o

The effect of affirmative action o enrolled in various degree programmes in public universities can be demonstrated using 2011 Kenya Cert (KCSE) candidates. Table 2, 3&4 bel action criteria in which female candidates with two points below the

cut-off points were admitted to public universities. As indicated 41, 996 candidates who qualified for ad points of 63 and 61 for females and were eligible to enroll in 778 degree programmes offered in 31 public un colleges. However, 35,147 candidates who had complete choices were

used for the purposes of this analysis.

Table 2
Placement by Gender before Applicat

Progra mme	Candidates with choices	Candidates Placed	Male Placed	% Male	FM placed	%FM Placed
778	35, 147	28,986	18,585	64	10, 401	36

Source: Joint Admission Board Records 2011

In this admission scenario either gender achieves more than one third placement, with female being disproportionately represented at 36% and

male at 64%. When affirmative action cut-off for female candidates by 2 points while maintaining that of male candidates at 63 the number of female candidates entering university increases marginally by 1% from 36%(10, 401) to 37%(11,156) as indicated in table 2 below.

Table2: Placement by Gender after Ap Action of 2 points, 2011

Programmes

Candidates

with choices

candidates Placed

Male

Placed % Male

Female placed

% Female Placed

778 35,

147 30,

224

19,068

63

11,156

37

Source: Joint Admission Board Records 2011

A detailed examination of candidates admitted into various degree programmes, however, reveals a skewed distribution as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Degree Placement by Gender into Programmes, 2011

Category	Number of programmes	Percentage
Programmes with placement of either gender >30%	348	45%
Programmes with female candidates <30%	294	38%
Programmes with male candidates <30%	73	9%
Programmes without any candidates	74	9%
Programmes with excess placement	327	42%
Total	778	100%

Source: Joint Admission Board Records 2011

Table 4 presents admission to seven public universities according to gender for 4 academic years (2006/2007, 2008/2009, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013). It shows that there was a successive increase in the proportion of female students enrolled in each public university that is largely attributed to affirmative action and partly to inc for university admissions year after year.

Table 4:
Student admission according to gender, 2006/2007-2012/2013

	2006/ 2007		2008/ 2009		2011/ 2012		2012/ 2013	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)
University of Nairobi	1819 (67)	914 (33)	2723 (70)	1167 (30)	2626 (59)	1821 (41)	3022 (63)	1810 (37)
Kenyatta Univ.	1558 (66)	819 (34)	2123 (68)	1005 (32)	2293 (55)	1898 (45)	2543 (58)	1833 (42)
Jomo Kenyatta Univ. Of sc &techn	512 (78)	148 (22)	880 (76)	279 (24)	1033 (67)	518 (33)	1175 (67)	587 (33)
Maseno Univ.	551 (67)	275 (33)	604 (67)	293 (33)	1272 (65)	680 (35)	1550 (64)	867 (36)
Moi Univ.	1281 (67)	623 (33)	2070 (63)	1200 (37)	2236 (55)	1839 (45)	2622 (58)	1883 (42)
Egerton Univ.	977 (72)	384 (28)	1269 (68)	655 (32)	1684 (61)	1076 (39)	1862 (62)	1143 (38)
Masinde Muliro Univ. Of S c.& Techn.	283 (79)	74 (21)	389 (77)	117 (23)	734 (68)	343 (32)	984 (69)	446 (31)

Source: Joint Admission Board Records 2011

The additional number of undergraduate female students who got admitted into public universities due to affi

academic years was 529 in the 2006; 1070 in 2007; 1378 in 2008; 1694 in 2009; and 1943 in 2010.

Gender imbalances in academic programmes

Despite the application of affirmative action, females are effectively excluded from physical sciences and technologically

oriented degree courses such as mechanical engineering, geospatial engineering, mathematics, computer science, microprocessor technology and instrumentation which clearly remain masculine. Enrolment data for 2011/2012 admissions shows, for example, that electronic and computer engineering at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology had a male/female ratio of 95.24:4.76 while mechanical engineering at the University of Nairobi had a ratio of 91.8:8.2. In a recent advertisement carried in the Daily Nation Newspaper on Friday, 9th May 2014 the Chairman of the newly established Kenya Universities and Colleges Placement Service, a successor of JAB, Prof. David Ndeti took cognizance of the equity issue in the new admissions procedure, attempts will be made to ensure gender and

regional equity. For example, deliberate attempts will be made to ensure that more female students join courses such as engineering, medicine and other technology-based disciplines, further added... "Our admissions system has been designed to ensure equity and fairness in terms of gender, region, physical abilities and course. The objective is to give each of his or her interest and ability appears set to continue with the affirmative action and has lowered entry requirements to B- for females and B for males

with a cut-off of 58 and 60 respectively.

Conclusion

Affirmative action is a concept that is one of the strategies that can promote equal opportunities for both genders, female and male and is a temporary measure which is to be discontinued once existing inequalities and inequities experienced by a particular group or groups have been addressed. Affirmative action policy in admission of female students into public universities has achieved some measure of success in increasing the overall proportion of

female enrolment from a male/female ratio of 75:25 a decade ago to the current ratio of 72:38 gender equity. However, gender parity still remains elusive.

Also enrolment of girls in physical sciences and technology based courses is still very low despite decades of criteria. Recent enrolment figures s

Bachelor of Science (Electrical and Electronic Engineering) and 8.00% in Bachelor of Science(Computer Technology) at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology; 8.2% in Bachelor of Science(Mechanical Engineering)at the University of Nairobi; 13.4% in Bachelor of Science(Software Engineering)at Kenyatta University;0.0% in Bachelor of Technology(Technical and Applied Physics), 4.17% in Bachelor of Technology(Mechanical Engineering Technology) and 5.00% in Bachelor of Technology(Industrial and Applied Chemistry) and 6.06% in Bachelor of Engineering(Civil Engineering) all at Kenya Polytechnic University College.

There are also other strategies which could be considered in support of the current gender affirmative ac strategy can assist to reduce existing regional gender imbalances.

This can be achieved by giving priority when university campuses are being established to counties in socio-economically disadvantaged areas such as those in Arid and Semi-Arid regions. In this way not only more universities places will be created but it will also attract and give opportunity to disadvantaged students from minority groups, gender, poor and marginalized communities access to university education that they would not otherwise get in the highly competitive degree programmes such as sciences, medicine, engineering and law offered in older universities.

Establishment of the Open University online courses to be offered without students taking up residence in the

residential universities as is the case now with most public universities.

Other gender equity intervention measures that will enhance participation of females in university education include mentorship programmes,

targeted scholarships, and introduce progression structure in universities, mainstreaming gender in university curricula, and affirmative action for physically, visually and hearing impaired students.

The problem of gender equity and access is a much broader issue and cannot be effectively corrected at the point of entry into the university. Far greater constraint of equity and access to higher education is due to selectively with respect to progress through primary and into and through secondary education. It is a systemic problem which requires a multi-faceted approach and intervention that addresses female access, retention, completion rates and gender disparities in school outcomes at lower levels of the education system, that is, at both primary and secondary school levels. Barriers such as poverty, remoteness, environmental handicaps, early marriage practices, higher opportunity cost of the girl child, gender stereotyping in economic roles and other cultural, social and religious related barriers need to be effectively addressed at both national and county levels of government.

To sustain these initiatives the government should create appropriate mechanisms to monitor progress towards realization of equality of opportunity between female and male in support of the attainment of gender parity objective.

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