

Gender Constructions and Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study was conceived to explore the influence of gender constructions on academic achievement in public secondary schools with specific reference to Meru County, Kenya. It sought to provide satisfactory responses to the following overarching research questions: First, what role do social perceptions play in constructing feminine and masculine genders among male and female students in secondary schools? Second, how does the gender socialization process influence academic achievement for male and female students in secondary schools? Third, what challenges do male and female students face in schools based on their gender constructions? Fourth, what support mechanisms should the school system adopt to address the influence of gender constructions on academic achievement of male and female students in secondary schools? Fifth, to what extent do gender constructions influence academic achievement of male and female students in secondary schools? The study employed a mixed method approach that combined elements of qualitative and quantitative aspects. This research employed a descriptive survey design to explore how gender constructions influence academic achievement in secondary schools. Naturalistic design was also used to generate in-depth information from study participants in their natural environment. Data was collected using various methods including; administering questionnaires to 500 randomly sampled male and female students in 85 schools; held focus group discussions with male and female students' participants in 10 schools; interviewed 85 principals, 171 teachers, 92 parents and 8 education officers. Quantitative data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential analysis using SPSS version 20. Qualitative data analysis employed thematic vi analysis that entailed analysing transcripts of focus group discussions and data generated from interviews. The main findings of this study include inter-alia, that femininity and masculinity influence the academic achievement of male and female students in diverse ways. For instance, although school retention is higher for girls, boys are more likely to perform better than girls in KCSE. Correspondingly, Form Three is a level at which most boys get disadvantaged in secondary education because, perhaps it is where masculinity becomes more pronounced. Upon carrying out a correlation analysis, a negative coefficient was obtained that indicated an inverse relationship between gender constructions and performance. Despite revealing a weak relationship between gender constructions and academic performance, it was nonetheless significant enough to reject the null hypothesis, which stated that; there is no significant relationship between gender constructions and academic performance. Findings of this study have implications for the formulation of gender policies and programs in education. Recommendations for addressing aspects of gender constructions that negatively influence academic performance were made. These included; a critical examination at the decreasing disadvantaged position of the boy- child in education; proactive measures to

mitigate the influence of feminine-based factors that impact negatively on girls' education; gender- balanced policies in education to bridge gender gaps in subject preference and performance along gender lines; alongside strengthening girlfocused programs, it is also imperative to institute boy-empowerment support mechanisms such as programs for discussing male- centred topics and equipping them with skills that enable them navigate masculinity, while enhancing academic achievement.

Keywords: Gender Constructions, Academic Achievement, Public Secondary Schools, Meru County, Kenya

Full text: <http://ir.cuea.edu/jspui/bitstream/1/88/1/Susan%20Lyria%20Karuti.pdf>