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Original Article

### Affirmative Action Policies and Female Education in Gulu University: An African Philosophical Perspective

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The implementation and impact of Affirmative Action policies on female education at Gulu University remain low. Affirmative Action policies are vital in changing the community's perspective on female education in Higher Education. Despite the implementation of the Affirmative Action policies in Gulu University, their impact remained low. This study involved 524 participants using a cross-sectional research design based on mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Whereas Affirmative Action had a significant effect on female Education nationally, it was not the case in Gulu University. For instance, more male students are admitted and registered compared to their female counterparts. At graduation, which is the completion and exit point, fewer females graduate compared to males. Records and literature showed that the policy worked for categories of females from specific regions, districts, and schools. The study established that most females who had benefited from Affirmative Action were not from Northern Uganda's districts and schools. For the past five years, the percentage of female students' enrolment has ranged between 35.6% to 39.4 %. Furthermore, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Graduation of Gulu University, 34.5% females graduated compared to 65.5% males. This is an indicator that the affirmative Action policy seems not to equally benefit females in Higher Education. Whereas this is an improvement in the enrolment of female students, their completion rate remains a challenge. This does not synchronise with the African philosophy of contextualising African solutions through the 'Africa we want'. This study informs policy-making in countries grappling with the challenges of female education in higher institutions of learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Affirmative Action Policies in Higher Education admission take into consideration race, ethnicity, religion, and numerous groups, with women included. Therefore, Affirmative action in Higher Education admissions takes into consideration a student being part of an underrepresented group that is discriminated against in the broader society (Warikoo & Allen, 2019). Affirmative action is a public policy enacted to address problems of access to education and employment for racial minorities and women (Hogan, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and Sports (2015) reported that Affirmative Action policies in Uganda have been vital in changing community perspectives on female education through considering equity. This has further transformed the way society thinks about females' pursuit of Higher Education, as seen in the number of females enrolled in Higher Institutions. The government has heavily invested in female education through the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), Equal Classroom, National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE), the 1.5-point program and quota system among others to ensure that no one is left out of education (Odaga, 2020).

This study was guided by the following questions: 1) What are the Affirmative Action policies toward female Education at Gulu University from 2013 to 2023? 2) How have the Affirmative Action Policies on female Education been implemented at Gulu University? 3) What are the effects of the

Affirmative Action policy on female education at Gulu University?

## Conceptualising Affirmative Action Policy towards Female Education

Affirmative action has been conceptualised by different scholars and countries in various ways. It includes the following:

In the early 1970s, Walter J. Leonard, an administrator at Harvard University, invented the "Harvard Plan" one of the most effective affirmative Action programs, which became the model for other universities in the country. This led to the increased enrolment of female students from all over the world into universities in the United States (Craig, 2023). In India, the quota system was the first recorded affirmative action policy for progressive state governments, such as Mysore in South India, Baroda and Kolhapur in Western India, after attaining Independence from Britain in 1947 (Bertrand *et al.*, 2010).

After India's independence in 1947, the government planned to create a more incorporated society for the historically discriminated castes, and so it established a "reservation" system that gave access for students, including females, in universities. Thus, policy towards female education ( Nakayiwa *et al.*, 2020). Ethiopia introduced the Affirmative Action policy known as Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) [2015/16- 2019/20] that stresses gender parity at all educational levels and women's contribution in the general growth of the country. This was to improve the enrolment of

women or females in Higher Education (Nakayiwa *et al.*, 2020).

In 1990, the Government of Uganda introduced the Affirmative Action policy in the governance of Higher Education. From 1991, qualified women were entitled to bonus points of 1.5 for college admission. This was to increase the participation of women in Higher Education (Odaga, 2020). Available data at the district and college levels indicated that there is a specific group of women to whom the country's Affirmative Action Policy was most effective. Thus, 66% of the women population would not have been submitted for Higher Education had it not been for the Affirmative Action Policy (Odaga, 2020).

In 2005, a quota system was introduced and implemented in a way that 25% of all government-sponsored Public University educational opportunities were to be allocated through a district population quota-based system and seventy-five percent through the National merit system (Oketch, 2016). The Gulu University Gender Policy (2017) aims to address gender disparity, which was evident in most of the activities of the University, including admission of students, especially in science programmes. In these programmes, it was evident that a few female students were leading in the science classes and their careers (Gulu University, 2022).

The Constitution of Uganda (1995), with amendments in 2005, Section 4(32), requires the State to guarantee gender balance and fair representation of marginalised groups on all Constitutional organs. It obligates the State to take affirmative action in favour of groups marginalised based on historical prejudices, socio-cultural negative attitudes, and practices. The Government of Uganda has established a Higher Education Students' Financing Board (HESFB) to provide financial support to students who are unable to afford the cost of Higher Education. The board provides loans to students who meet the eligibility criteria, including those from disadvantaged

backgrounds in the country's universities. However, this only favours those students (females) who are pursuing programmes that are approved under Affirmative Action (Republic of Uganda, 2014).

According to Gulu University (2022), Gender mainstreaming is one of the Affirmative Action Policies in Gulu University. It aims at supporting and ensuring gender equality and equity within Gulu University. The Effort to foster gender mainstreaming at the University is anchored on the critical understanding that every academic institution has a responsibility of ensuring that there is an overall culture of diversity and gender sensitivity through an institutional commitment to democracy, justice and social relevance and the development of specific mechanisms and practices to achieve these objectives to make the environment conducive for the people especially women who pass through a lot of discrimination.

### **The Implementation of Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education**

In South Africa, civil unrest based on ethnic disparity incited a national agenda to improve racial equality. The Apartheid leaders in South Africa had created an agenda that continued separation and inequality over local and racial divides, like colonial rulers had done in other parts of Africa and Asia. The South African black majority was disqualified from politics under the apartheid government for almost a century. After the collapse of apartheid in 1994, South Africa under Nelson Mandela began to reconstruct the country, to eliminate inequality as a priority on their agenda. Thus, Affirmative Action in Higher Institutions of learning was one way by which the government addressed racial discrepancy (Warikoo & Allen, 2019).

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (2019), there has been a formulation of gender-responsive policies prioritising gender mainstreaming as a key to achieving equality in the education sector. According to the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, and the Education for

All commitments, the education sector underlines gender parity as one of the priority aspects to achieve. This is seen with the increased enrolment of females in Higher Education compared to the earlier years (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019).

The Revised Education Sector Strategic Plan (2007 – 2015) re-echoes the need to deal with gender disparities and address barriers to female education (Education and Sports, 2019). The MoES sector committed itself to mainstreaming gender in education as a cross-cutting issue, developed a Gender in Education Policy (2009), and developed programmes particularly to promote female education. Some of these programmes include curriculum reviews to include gender, creating gender gender-responsive school environment, construction of separate sanitary facilities for females, promoting sex education in some course units of religion.

The Government of Uganda introduced the 1.5 points system to ensure that all females joining the University were given the opportunity. The policy resulted in over 66% of the women population yearly joining Higher Education in Uganda. However, according to the Western region, only 26% of the women are qualified for the policy, the central region has 40% women, the Eastern region 26% and the Northern region has only 8%. Thus, the positive effect of the policy is seen in the central, eastern, and western regions of Uganda (Odaga, 2020).

At Gulu University, Affirmative Action is effective in a way that the enrolment of female students has been gradually increasing every academic year. For instance, in the year of 2013/ 2014 the percentage was (56. 2%), 2015-2016 (62.3%), 2016-2017 (63.3%), and 2017-2020 were 75.116% (Nabaasa, 2023). However, the number of male enrolments in all these academic years outnumbered those of females despite the Affirmative Action policy on female education in the University (Nabaasa, 2023).

In the academic years of 2013/2014 to 2019/2010, the number of females graduating increased compared to other years of studies due to the Affirmative Action Policy. However, the policy faces some challenges in that not all female students graduate, and the University and the government have failed to follow up with students who have dropped out. In Gulu University, the implementation of Affirmative Action policies in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery have an average female -male enrolment ratio of 15:85, Bachelor of Science in Bio-systems Engineering at 10:90, Bachelor of Science Education (Physical) at 14:86, Bachelor of Quantitative Economics 23:77 and Bachelor of Science Education (Biological) at 20:80. According to the statistics of 2016/2017 to 2019/2020, the enrolment ratio of Female to Male students in sampled Humanities programme were as follows: Bachelor of Development Studies 52:48 and Bachelor of Arts Educations 59:41 (Gulu University, 2022). It indicates that more female students enrol for Arts and Humanities, while the Male students' enrolment is higher in the sciences.

### **The Effects of Affirmative Action Policy on Female Education**

Affirmative action as a public policy in America was introduced to give access to education for racial minorities and females. Affirmative action in the circumstance of higher education is the contemplation of a student's race and gender as a method for admission to academic institutions who might have been denied admission which decision made top administrators at liberal arts colleges in charge of admissions policies begin to give some special consideration to the circumstances of racial minorities and women who had been excluded from access to opportunity in universities. Hence, it increased the number of degrees awarded to African Americans (Stulberg & Chen, 2014).

Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia considers the Affirmative Action policy as a modified entrance criterion and preferential treatment in the choice of subjects. Similarly, preferential treatment is cited in

the University for students with disabilities who are assigned to the department of their first choice, provided that they meet the minimum requirements (Areikin, 2019).

In Uganda, the Affirmative Action policy was first implemented in the governance of Higher Education in 1990. From 1991, qualified women were entitled to bonus points of 1.5 for college admission. This increased the enrolment and participation of women in Higher Education (Odaga, 2019).

Furthermore, there has been an open obligation to address problems of sexuality and menstruation as a school issue. This is reflected in remarkable promotion of menstrual management practices through putting condoms and pads in toilets, provision of counselling services by the medical unit doctors and University Councillor, teaching the females how to make sanitary pads, separating washrooms and changing rooms, thus initiatives to move sexuality and menstrual issues from the area of secret maturation, to the public domain (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). A shift from the cultural norms of considering the discussion of sexuality and menstruation taboo.

Affirmative Action policy enables colleges to use holistic reviews to consider gender as one of the requirements needed for enrolment. Hence, it gives better chances to females to be considered while in admission to University (Connor & Sara, 2019). It has increased females' Access to Education. Due to the Affirmative Action policy on female education in Uganda, like a 1.5 points advantage for female entry into the University. There has been a great increase in the enrolment of females acquiring education in universities every year. For instance, 62.1% (2013-2014) and by 2022/2023, over 63.3% of females were enrolled in the University (Nabaasa, 2023).

According to Hogan (2019), Affirmative action exhibited trouble for university administrators in the United States. It was considered an instrument to exploit the range of students on their campuses.

Furthermore, there are diverse state-to-state supplies that were to be met, such as federal mandates against isolation, but there were legal cases that have affected the way Higher Education administrators must fulfil the laws and mandates.

Additionally, there are court-endorsed guidelines requiring the fulfilment of an authoritarian process when using race as a factor. For instance, in the Regents of the University of California, there are state-to-state disparities in bans removing the use of race in implementing the Affirmative Action policy. All these rules state the admission policies to boost racial diversity. However, these strategies do not lay down how to design and build programs and policies that guarantee racial diversity on their campuses, while observing the boundaries of the law. Hence negative impact of the Affirmative Action policy (Hogan, 2019).

According to Odaga (2019), Affirmative Action Policy practices an unfair phenomenon of distribution in Public Universities where educational opportunities are given in the four regions and 112 districts out of the 135 in Uganda. The Affirmative Action Policy tends to favour a specific category of people, and so does not reach its intended target. Despite the introduction of the district Quota-based Policy in 2005, the distribution system did not work for students from the underprivileged rural schools and districts of Uganda. Thus, the benefit of the Affirmative Action Policy is limited to a particular category of women.

In a study carried out on Affirmative Action Policy in African Universities, it was reported that about 28% of women in Academic and research positions benefited. This means that other females are left out, and the policy does not promote equality (Nakayiwa *et al.*, 2020). The Gulu University statistics of female students who are admitted and enrolled through the Affirmative Action policy since 2002/2003 have been generally low compared to their male counterparts in the science programmes. Over the period 2016/2017 to 2019/2020, the average number of enrolled females to males was



24:76, which is not considerably different from the graduate proportion of 28:72, indicating that the 1.5 Affirmative Action points awarded to females have not had a significant effect on increasing enrolment in STEM programs at Gulu University (Gulu University, 2022).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The mixed-methods research approach and cross-sectional research design were used in this study. This was to collect different information from the selected participants on Affirmative Action Policies at the same time. In this study, the target population was 3,978, and using the Krejcie & Morgan table (1970), 524 participants were sampled. Primary and secondary materials on Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education at Gulu University were analysed. The primary materials included statistical reports, Affirmative Action Policies, reports from female students, the lecturers, the Academic Registrar, and the University Council members. The secondary sources included peer-reviewed articles and books on affirmative action and Higher Education, such as Gulu University Gender Mainstreaming Policy, Gulu University Statistical Abstract, and Gulu University STEM Admission Policy.

In data analysis, after the data collection, the data were assembled, organised and analysed arithmetically and descriptively according to themes. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to come up with the graphs, percentages, charts, and tables to show the discoveries of the study.

Quantitatively, the researcher presented the data in graphs and frequency tables using Microsoft Excel. This was to come up with opinions that were significant and less significant in the data set and exhibited observations on the variables, as well as relationships that existed between the variables. Furthermore, the feedback obtained from participants' questionnaires and Elicitation exercises were computed into percentages and frequency sums and later it was abridged and

tabulated for easy presentation, analysis and explanation.

Qualitatively, the researcher wrote down information from the field so as to keep the accuracy and uniformity of the findings. Information obtained from elicitation exercises that were used to estimate the participants' acquaintance with Affirmative Action policies on female education at Gulu University was recorded to guarantee a detailed investigation and explanation of the study variables.

## FINDINGS

The findings and discussions were drawn from data collected from students, Gulu University Council members, the Dean of Students, the Academic Registrar, female student representatives, and lecturers of Gulu University. The findings were presented in a descriptive manner, capturing respondents' opinions, feelings, and responses. This provided contextual details about participants' circumstances and helped to point out the relevant findings on Affirmative Action Policies on female education at Gulu University. To ensure confidentiality, the study participants were coded. For example, R1O1 and R12O1, as respondents one (1) and twelve (12) on objective one, respectively. The data is presented and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively in major themes.

### Objective One: The Affirmative Action Policies towards Female Education at Gulu University

The first theme that emerged from the participants was the Affirmative Action Policies at Gulu University. This was discussed below according to my findings.

#### *Gender Mainstreaming*

From the review of the Gulu University Affirmative Action Policy, this study established that the policy was vital in ensuring gender equality and equity within the University. Efforts to foster gender mainstreaming at the University are based on the critical understanding that as an academic

institution, it has to ensure that there is an overall culture of diversity and gender sensitivity through an institutional commitment to democracy, justice, and social relevance, and the development of specific mechanisms and practices to achieve these objectives. This is because men and women do not have the same treatment in the community and possess different needs. Therefore, the University has to ensure that they are included in all projects and other plans of the University.

Also, in an oral interview with R2O1, a focal person in the gender mainstreaming unit at Gulu University confirmed that;

*“Since the beginning of our operation, our focus at Gulu University has been to ensure that we have a balanced atmosphere for both our female and male students. We want equal opportunities and treatment for everyone irrespective of their gender. We want zero cases of sexual harassment because in any higher institution of learning and a busy environment like Gulu University, cases of sexual harassment are inevitable. Most often, people think gender mainstreaming is only targeting females, and in this particular setting, our female students and staff. This is vague because we care and focus on the male students as well. Therefore, whenever the university intends to design and implement any policies, plans, programmes, activities and projects, we come*

*in to offer the necessary support and guidance to ensure that both female and male students, administrative, academic and support staff enjoy equal opportunities in a non-discriminatory manner.”*

The finding shows that Affirmative Action Policies do exist at Gulu University. This was evidenced by the following:

### **Gender Mainstreaming Unit**

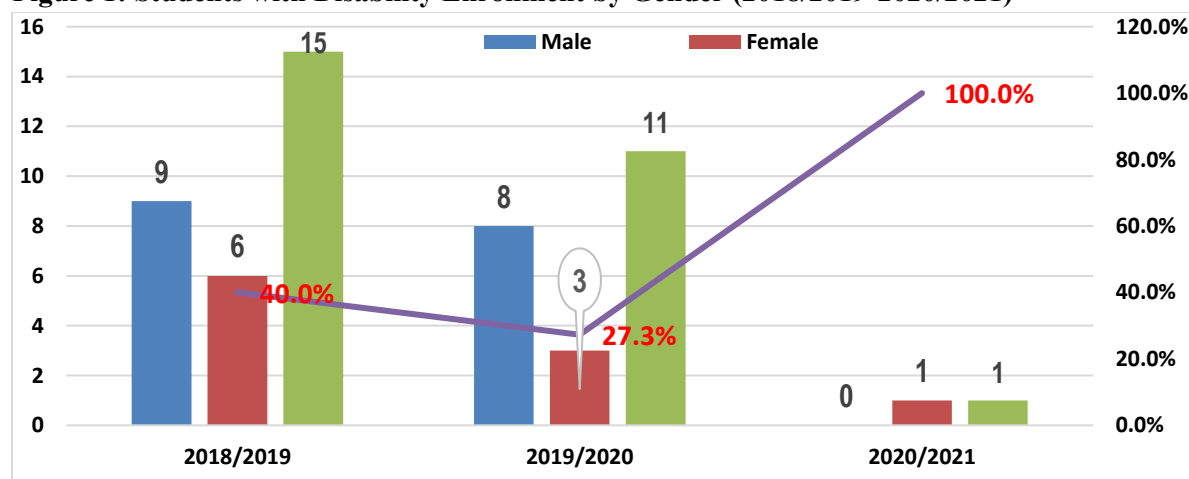
A gender mainstreaming unit has been established and is operational. It oversees the gender components in the University.

### **Affirmative Action Policy on Disability**

The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UTOIA) present an obligation to universities to admit students with disabilities through Affirmative Action in Public Universities such as: Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Gulu University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Busitema University, Muni University, Kabale University, Lira University, and Soroti University. The study established that Gulu University admits students with physical disabilities and impairments through the scheme.

The statistical data on enrolment by gender of disabled students is illustrated in the graph below:

**Figure 1: Students with Disability Enrollment by Gender (2018/2019-2020/2021)**



*Source: Dean of Students Office, Gulu University*

The students are given special treatment to enable them to excel in their studies. The University has constructed learning and administrative units with ramps to enable disabled students to get easy access to the lecture rooms and other facilities.

### ***The STEM Affirmative Action Admissions Policy***

The study revealed that the University's admission programmes are guided by the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) policy. The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001 (as amended in 2003 and 2006), Section 28(3) particularly, requires Public Universities to ensure that their students' admission process and all undertakings consider the STEM Policy which govern admissions to STEM related undergraduate programmes offered by Gulu University under Direct, Higher Education Access Certificate, Diploma and Mature Age Entry Schemes. Gulu University, therefore, adopted the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) affirmative action policy. This policy was developed and implemented on 15th June 2022, with a focus on STEM undergraduate programmes in the four disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and any other subject that falls under these four disciplines.

The STEM Policy is guided by three (3) objectives, which include;

i. To increase the number of female students pursuing STEM programmes at GU, to reduce the gender gap in students' enrolment for STEM undergraduate programmes.

ii. To introduce the Quota System of a minimum 30:70 ratio while admitting female and male students for STEM undergraduate programmes at GU.

iii. To enhance the proportionate representation of female and male students in all programmes of GU.

The study also discovered that the policy is guided by five principles; (a) operating beyond the affirmative action of the additional 1.5, which was approved in 1990 to benefit girls entering public universities, (b) introduction of a 30:70 Quota System for both government and private sponsorship schemes across STEM programmes for both male and female students joining GU, and (c) admissions having two cut-off points for STEM programmes at GU, with male applicants having different cut-off points from the female, to allow them compete among themselves.

Based on the above findings, it is clear that this policy has provided a levelled ground for both male and female students who are admitted to the University, as demonstrated in the table below;

**Table 1: Showing <sup>i</sup>Students Enrolled under STEM in Gulu University**

YEARS	STEM	Percentage of STEM
2016	527	34.24%
2017	544	32.54%
2018	367	26.48%
2019	570	36.82%
2020	622	40.84%
2021	377	33.57%
2022	370	29.72%

**Source:** Academic Registrar Department, Gulu University

### ***The 1.5 Scheme***

In 1990, the Government of Uganda introduced the 1.5 Point policy that was to be added to the cut-off points of females joining the University. In the

findings, the female applicants benefit from the 1.5 bonus at Gulu University, which is given every academic year to new students who are being admitted.



### ***District Quota System***

Similarly, the Gulu District Education Officer noted that in 2005, a district quota system was introduced in which twenty-five percent of all government-sponsored Public University educational opportunities are allocated through a district population quota-based system and seventy-five percent through the National Merit System. The beneficiaries are selected based on their performance by a joint board of the public universities. Therefore, Gulu University is implementing the policy, which is benefiting the female students in the STEM Programs.

### ***Affirmative Action in Grants and Scholarships***

Efforts to stimulate change have taken the form of financial assistance such as grants, scholarships, and other support earmarked to help with access to higher education opportunities for students who have failed to access higher education. Gulu University cooperates with and provides opportunities to different Organisations and projects that are willing to support their students in the University. This includes DANIDA (Building Stronger Universities, UPCHAIN), Master Cards, and the State House, among others, which encourage equity in the award of grants and scholarships.

### ***Affirmative Action Policy for Undergraduate Programmes***

The study established that Gulu University gives opportunities to students who would like to join the institution for their undergraduate programmes. Such Students who meet all the University admission requirements are granted admission for the undergraduate programme.

### ***Conclusion***

Therefore, Affirmative Action policies such as Affirmative Action for Disability, Gender Mainstreaming, District Quota System, the 1.5 System, among others, exist at Gulu University, and female students who qualified were admitted and

benefited. This has therefore mostly favoured the females, enabling them to enrol and complete their studies in the different courses they have been admitted for at Gulu University.

### ***Objective Two: The Implementation of Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education in Gulu University***

The study established that there were various ways in which Affirmative Action policies were implemented at the University.

### ***Accessibility of Classroom Materials***

The participants highlighted that the University has provided free access to all classrooms to the female students in the University. This includes: furniture, blackboards, writing materials, speakers, and rooms that can enable the female students to attend their classes easily. A student participant with an impairment disability stated that:

*“When I came to Gulu University and i presented my problem through writing to the DVC, that I have complication with my eyes, i was given instruction that in case my eye glass has any problem they will be able to change it for me, then also am given reading materials that are of big font size that help me see clearly what is on the script. The lecturers also allow me to sit in dark corners during exam time for examinations since my eyes are affected by lights easily. This treatment has been very vital in that my performances have improved greatly.”*

Another student with physical disability narrated that:

*“The University has made it easier for us to access most classrooms by making the entrance flat without any steps, and this makes movement easy for us and also during examination time, we are given an extra 45 minutes to finish up our assignment as it is policy given by the university.”*

A participant also added that,

*“As female students, we are given equal opportunity with the males to access all classroom materials just like any other sex. This has made the institution conducive for our learning.”*

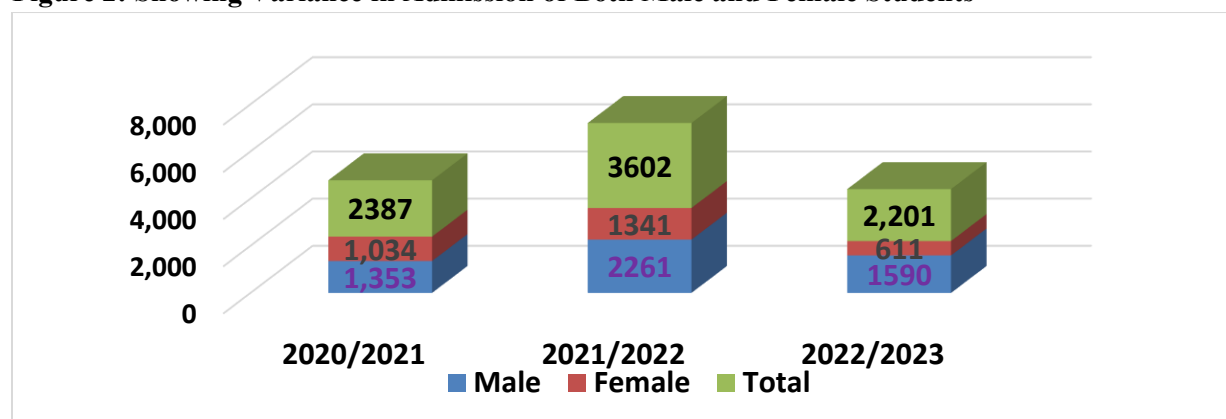
These quotations indicate that the females, irrespective of their ability, are given chances as per

affirmative Action policies on female education in Gulu University.

### **Admission of Female Students**

Gulu University has taken the initiative of admitting female students into the University every academic year, and this is presented by the image below as per the Admission Policy in the University, as seen in the graph below.

**Figure 2: Showing Variance in Admission of Both Male and Female Students**



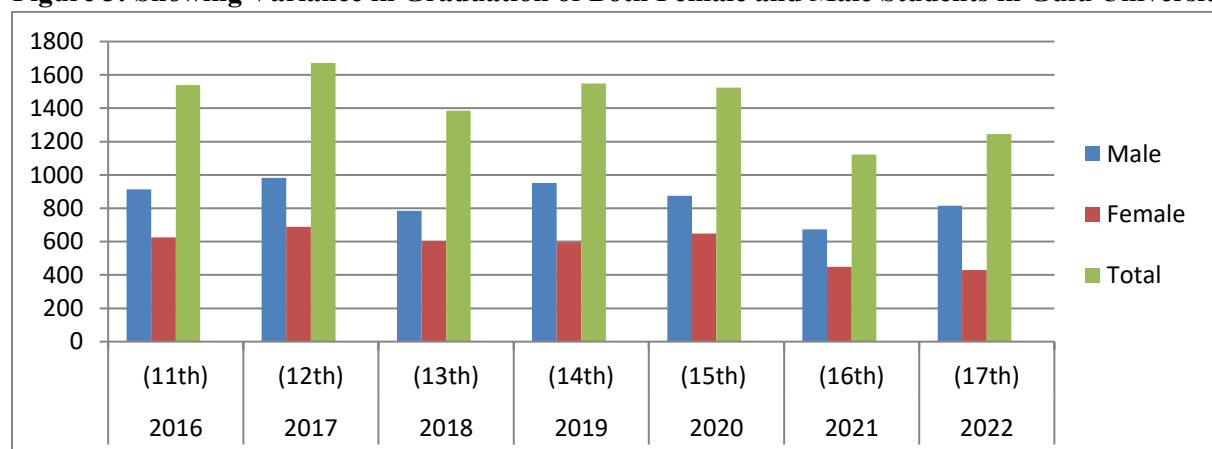
**Source:** Gulu University statistical data

The total number of females admitted from 2020 to the academic year 2023 is presented using the orange colour in the image. This shows that Gulu University is committed to implementing the Affirmative Action Policy on female education.

### **Graduation of Female Students**

The findings have indicated that Gulu University has taken the initiative of graduating female students after the completion of their academic programs, as described in the bar graph below:

**Figure 3: Showing Variance in Graduation of Both Female and Male Students in Gulu University**



**Source:** Modified by the researcher

The graph indicates that in 2020, more than half of the female students who were admitted graduated with a total number of 648 in the 15<sup>th</sup> graduation, and a total number of 449 female students graduated in 2021, and 429 in 2022. This shows that there has been a progressive implementation of Affirmative Action Policy towards female education in Gulu University, as the number of female students who graduated rose in 2020. However, it slightly declined in 2021 and 2022 due to the effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic and lock down which hit both the education and economic sectors, hence a slight decrease in the number of students who graduated.

### ***Access to the Libraries and Laboratories***

A participant noted that:

*“The University has provided free access to the libraries and the laboratories, and as an IT student, I have access to the computer laboratories for my practices and other research. I also go to the library anytime in case I want to read or do some research. This has made my life easy as far as my academics are concerned.”*

Another student also agreed with the participant's statement by saying,

*“I am a student under the STEM program. I can say that the University has provided various equipment needed to carry out my practices in the science laboratories, and also at times I am guided by the Lab technician who ensures that I am carrying out the right practical.”*

The presentations above show that Gulu University is fulfilling the objectives of Affirmative Action policies as far as female education is concerned.

### ***Access to the Female-based Initiatives***

The University is ensuring that the females have the best initiatives that can help them as they acquire their education at Gulu University. In FGD, a participant stated that:

*“I was surprised when I reported to Gulu University and during the orientation week, I went into the toilets on the side of females and found the place having sanitary buckets and also Condoms. I had to ask a continuing student who told me that they are put there so that when one wants to use them, they can easily access them without shying away. This is because it can help control the risk of contracting sexual diseases.”*

Another student participant also reported that:

*“I love Gulu University for the availability of enough toilets in almost every faculty, plus sitting toilets for the disabled, which some universities do not have. This has favoured us females, including the disabled.”*

This gives them the psycho-social support through a conducive environment.

### **Objective Three: The Effects of Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education at Gulu University**

The findings, according to the participants, show that Affirmative Action has both positive and negative effects on female education. This is cited in the themes below according to the participant's analysis.

#### ***Admission and Enrolment of Students at the University***

The finding showed that due to Affirmative Action policies at Gulu University, there has been a great enrolment of female students in every academic year. This is because of the 1.5 system added to the points of females when joining the University. It has favoured most females who were supposed to be cut off to be admitted. That is to say, in academic year 2020/2021, 1,034, 2021/2022, 1341 females and in 2022/2023, 611 females. This shows that Affirmative Action is effective in female education. However, the number of females admitted kept on reducing yearly.

### Awareness Rising

It was reported that to raise awareness, Gulu University has put in place a talking environment around campus to create awareness of reproductive health, diseases such as HIV, among others. The students and staff are always sensitised about the rights of students with disability and other special needs and the treatment they should be accorded, so that the university environment and its activities do not place them at a disadvantage. This is also seen in the rules and regulations books of the University.

### Examination Modification

The participants gave their opinion concerning examination modification based on the female-related challenges, which either made them miss examinations or drop out during the semester. They stated that in case one misses exams due to pregnancy-related sickness, child labour, or a child falling sick, the policy allows her to request a special examination or resume when the course is next offered or examined. This has helped to reduce dropout rates among female students.

### Access to Leadership

Affirmative Action has greatly impacted female leadership as they acquire education at Gulu University. For example, R29O3, a female student leader, emphasised that:

*“As a woman, I didn’t know I would be allowed to stand as a GRC (Guild Representative Council) in my faculty because most of my competitors were male and I was the only lady. After the voting, they declared me the winner, and I was so happy.”*

This indicates that Gender Mainstreaming as an Affirmative Action policy is taking place at Gulu University, levelling the ground for equal representation by both male and female students, and elevating female students to higher elective positions at the University.

### Completion and Graduation of Females

Affirmative action policies have enhanced female education through timely completion and graduation at Gulu University. The number of female graduates from the various faculties is improving yearly, as shown in the table below:

**Table 4: Showing Graduation by Faculty/Institute, Gender**

YEAR	GENDER	FBDS	FOM	FEH	FOL	FAE	FOS	IPSS	Total
2016	M	404	161	197	9	52	91	0	914
	F	304	118	149	4	22	28	0	625
	TT	<b>708</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1539</b>
2017	M	458	198	242	0	18	63	4	983
	F	384	144	137	0	6	18	0	689
	TT	<b>842</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1672</b>
2018	M	397	98	193	2	54	49	1	794
	F	367	60	140	7	14	13	1	602
	TT	<b>764</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1396</b>
2019	M	371	230	237	7	41	60	5	951
	F	317	93	140	6	15	22	4	597
	TT	<b>688</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1548</b>
2020	M	302	184	261	0	86	38	4	875
	F	279	137	183	0	27	20	2	648
	TT	<b>581</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1523</b>

YEAR	GENDER	FBDS	FOM	FEH	FOL	FAE	FOS	IPSS	Total
2021	M	234	88	239	0	72	40	1	674
	F	194	17	172	0	42	23	1	449
	TT	<b>428</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1123</b>
2022	M	220	77	387	15	58	56	3	816
	F	188	25	143	24	31	15	3	429
	TT	<b>408</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1245</b>

**Source:** Academic Registrar Department

The Table shows that much as the females graduating every year, the numbers also kept on declining, as in 2016, there were 625 and in 2022, only 429 graduated. This shows that the Affirmative Action policy has challenges which have to be addressed in order for it to fulfil its objective of all females joining the University and completing their course at the expected time.

### ***Attitude of the Lecturer***

The study revealed that discrimination by lecturers towards female students still existed despite the awareness creation on the need for an inclusive environment among lecturers, non-academic staff, and students. The findings indicated that whereas the majority of the lecturers respected, guided, and supported the female students in their academic endeavours, there were cases of some male lecturers discriminating against the females during lectures through verbal harassment and sexual harassment, denying them their genuine marks for refusing to yield to pressures from the concerned lecturers. This was emphasised by participant R39O3, who stated that:

*“When I was in my year, I encountered a bad experience with one of the lecturers who asked if I could go out with him. But when I refused, he started chasing me away from his lectures. I feared sharing my experience and seeking help. However, when I got fed up with the act, I decided to stand up for myself and I asked him why he was chasing me away from his classroom when I am paying fees and I have the right to attend all the lectures? He then claimed that I am a very hard lady and not submissive. I*

*then warned him that if he was to continue, I would report him to the authorities. That is how I survived him, and yet he was rumoured to be living with HIV and was sighted collecting ARV at the hospital.”*

Participant R19O3 also reported that:

*“There was a time when a lecturer wanted my friend (female), but she refused. The lecturer requested us to convince her to accept him since we were her friends. We declined the request, and the lecturer to teach us a lesson decided to give us a retake, claiming that we didn’t perform our duty. This pained me so much because it was not our fault.”*

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **Objective One: Affirmative Action Policy towards Female Education**

#### ***Gender Mainstreaming***

The study found out that Gender mainstreaming was an important policy introduced and aimed at ensuring gender equality and equity within Gulu University especial in sharing of education facilities, leadership where by opportunities are given to females to lead the students and in academic year 2002/2003 a female Guild President was elected to head the Students and also a specific position of women representatives is given specifically to women and this empowers the females to stand up against stereotype that women cannot become leaders which was in line with the literature of (Ministry Of Education and Sports, 2013). The literature states that at the strategy level, the Ministry of Education and Sports greatly



considers gender mainstreaming to be a success in attaining parity in the education sector. Much as there is gender equality in some areas, such as leadership posts, equality in the use of the university facilities, there is still inequality in terms of female candidates in the position of the Guild President. Unlike the former elected female Guild President of academic year 2002/2023, the students of Gulu University have developed a belief that they cannot be ruled by a woman, and this has continued to happen to date, which the Gender Mainstreaming policy has failed to solve. This therefore shows that the Affirmative Action Policies have failed to perform their role in promoting gender equality among students in higher education.

#### ***Affirmative Action Policy for Disability***

On admission to public Universities, Section 28 of the Act provides for affirmative action for marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities. This confirms that the Act gives the chance of acquiring higher education to all people wishing to do so, including persons with disabilities (Emong, 2016). The author argues that all Affirmative Action policies are for all groups respectively, and this policy for disability is active within Gulu University. Furthermore, several female students have been enrolled at Gulu University and they successfully finished their studies, and this proves that the Affirmative Action policy for disability exists and is being implemented. However, some of the participants with special needs reported that the benefit that comes with the policy, such as replacement of eyeglasses, are only for government students, leaving out others, and not every disabled student is admitted to this university, such as the blind. Additionally, the policy exists but does not fully support the special needs students, and this was seen by the lack of well-trained lecturers or staff to handle them while acquiring education, which has led to poor performance among them.

The diagram above shows that female students who were enrolled in the 2018/2019 academic year were

6, and in academic year 2019/2020, they were 3 in number. This shows that the Affirmative Action policy for disability is being carried out in female education at Gulu University.

#### ***The STEM Affirmative Action Admissions Policy***

The University's admission programmes are guided by the STEM policy of the study. This is in line with the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, as amended in 2003 and 2006, Section 28(3), particularly, which requires public universities to ensure their students' admission process and all undertakings. Therefore, Gulu University adopted the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) affirmative action policy, and through this, several qualified females were admitted. The finding also revealed that the STEM policy has removed the stereotype that females had developed that they are weak and science subjects or courses belong only to men, because they are now seeing themselves doing the same course as the males, and some of them are even performing better than 87% of the male students. However, the ratio of girls to boys registered under this program is still very low, and the enrollment rate of females for the STEM programs is still very poor. This therefore shows that the AA policy under STEM has failed to meet its objectives.

The above policies have helped females to be admitted, enrolled, and also complete their studies, and the University has implemented other policies such as the Anti –Sexual Harassment Policy, which is to strengthen the existing Affirmative Action policies at Gulu University. However, female students' dropout cases are still being registered, calling for deliberate effort and measures to be taken to seal the leaking pipe through which females drop out of academia.

#### **Objective Two: The Implementation of the Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education at Gulu University from 2013 to 2023**

##### ***Accessibility of Classroom Materials***

Gulu University provides classroom materials to every faculty to make learning easy for the students. Gulu University is putting a lot of effort into ensuring that every faculty has enough classrooms that can accommodate all students, and by so doing, it is constructing more equipped learning facilities away from the main campus. This, in return, will be able to improve their learning environments of females, leading to full completion of their studies. Much as the institution implements Affirmative Action through the provision of classroom materials, there is still high scarcity, and it leaves most students not to benefit from these learning materials. That is, there are few classrooms and the available ones are small compared to the number of learners, especially students of education in most cases have nowhere they can attend their lessons, and this has made them miss classes and thus making the effect of Affirmative Action implementation not be fully achieved.

#### ***Admission of Female Students***

It was reported that Gulu University admits students every academic year under Affirmative Action policies, and all qualified females are given opportunities to enrol and complete their studies, which is in line with the Constitutional requirement. The National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006) states that “The Constitution of Uganda promotes equal chance to education for everyone”. However, the Affirmative Action policies favour a category of students, especially those who come from the privileged urban schools. The National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006) states that Affirmative Action policies, such as the District Quota System, are greatly connected to income and physical disparities, with children in deprived and vulnerable households being less likely to be enrolled in universities because there are determined gender and regional differences between the rich and the poor. At the regional level, Kampala had an adult literacy rate of 93% compared to the overall Central region’s rate of 80%, Western 67%, Eastern, 64% and Northern 59%. Then, in Gulu University, most

of the students admitted are from the central region and rich families and also in the Faculty of Medicine, most of the students come from the Central region and thus shows that the Affirmative Action policies favour a certain region, which is against the study of (Warikoo & Allen, 2019). In the literature, the writer emphasised the need to eliminate inequality and adopt equity as a government strategy to reconstruct the country. In post-apartheid South Africa, to eliminate inequality Affirmative Action policy in the Education sector, work, and other services were adopted after the fall of apartheid in 1994.

#### ***Graduation of Female Students***

The study confirmed that Affirmative Action Policies were being implemented, evidenced by the rate at which female students are completing studies and graduating every academic year at Gulu University. Gulu University Statistics Abstract of 2023 indicates that in 2020, 648 female students graduated at the 15th graduation, in 2021, a total number of 449 female students graduated, and 429 in 2022. However, there is still a big gap existing in the numbers of females graduating, whereby according to the above analysis, their numbers kept on reducing every year, and this shows that Affirmative Action failed to fulfil its objectives of the enrolled females graduating at the end of the course.

In summary of the above findings, Likewise, it was established that Government funding for female Education in the University is relatively small compared to the high rate at which the female students are being enrolled with other roles the university plays to provide access to education for 90 all including females and those with special needs like (the mothers, lame, blind among others). Therefore, because of limited resources available, the university fails to implement the planned policies aimed at promoting a conducive educational environment for female students. Due to inadequate resources, the University fails to provide the necessary teaching equipment,

accessible learning rooms, lesson spaces, and other buildings, among others, for carrying out learning processes. As a result, female students have failed to complete their courses as per the years they were supposed to.

### **Objective Three: The Effects of Affirmative Action Policies on Female Education at Gulu University from 2013 to 2023**

This area discusses the various effects of Affirmative Action Policies towards female education and they are both positive and negative.

#### ***Admission and Enrolment of Students at the University***

The study found that Gulu University admits female students every Academic year under the 1.5 system of Affirmative Action and the District Quota system, where every female, after acquiring the Uganda Advanced Certificate, is added 1.5 as a national merit to elevate them from accessing higher education and this has favoured most qualified female students to join the university. Whereas Gulu University is expanding and progressing, the gross enrolment rates of female students are still low and in their old histories, and this is in line with the study of Areikin (2018). The study disclosed that the enrolment of female students within universities remains exceedingly low. In this line, access to higher education for many female students in Uganda becomes a distant dream mainly, due to lack of support and preparation in the secondary and primary level, lack of financial support, and failure to follow up with the female students who left studies due to cultural aspects, diseases, death of the guardians who pay their fees, environmental pressure among others.

#### ***Scholarships for Sports Students***

In the Focus Group Discussion the participants mentioned the availability of scholarships where some students are given scholarships to study and finish their programs under games and Sports, Government, Master Cards, Building Stronger Universities and others that has widen chances to

many females who cannot pay their fees to access higher education at Gulu University and this is 91 supported by literature of (Odaga, 2019) where he stated that “dual-track” model of college admission was introduced and several students (4000 in total) are chosen on state sponsorship through the district quota system (1000 students) and the national merit system (3000 students) whilst another group, three to four times bigger, are enrolled as privately sponsored students. However, this was reported as an unfavourable factor because it favours only a few people, leaving out most of the needy female students. Likewise, the institution had limited financial and well-trained human resources to respond to the challenges of female students, such as guidance and counselling, special needs females, among others. The University could help those females who are vulnerable to sit for their exams due to a lack of tuition, but can pay later. Unfortunately, it was impossible for them to help. Instead, some of them were chased out of examination rooms, and some were taken to the University police station as per the academic year 2023.

The study also discovered inadequate sensitisation on challenges faced by female students' education and how the learning environment can involve stakeholders, plus all students irrespective of sex, the Institution administrators, and lecturers. This explicates the difficulties that students undergo when studying. Some of the students during the FGD raised concerns that most of the staffs have limited skills, readiness and capability to help female students with problems such as tuition, pregnancy and severe sickness and hence it will be very important for the University physical learning environment to be reconciling, comprehensive and promote the high self-esteem for the learners to completely take part and profit from the learning environment at university.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above findings of the present study, the researcher would like to conclude that Gulu

University is currently far from ready to ensure that the enrolled female students' study and finish their courses on time. However, this does not mean that the institution has no policy or provision that enables females to study and complete their courses and also persist successfully in their higher education adventure. Additionally, the investigator, by taking the current reality in the institution, would like to conclude that the situation for most of the female students in the Ugandan institutions will not improve in a short period unless extraordinary measures are taken by the Government, institutions, and other organisations towards their education. For ideal affirmative action to be realised, the institution needs an inclusive affirmative action reflected in its teaching, learning, and research, as well as planning, budgetary allocation, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation process.

### Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions on the respective study objectives, this study therefore puts forward the following recommendations;

- Provision of a children's shelter for female students who have given birth. The University should ensure that it caters to the females who have children by building a room for them where they can settle their children as they are going on with their classes. This was emphasised by most of the students.
- Expansion of accessibility to institutions of higher learning on the policy level. This calls for redressing unequal access to higher education. That is to say, the policy on the number of slots allocated for disabled applicants to university should be revised, given that the number of universities has kept increasing. Suffice it to note that Gulu University only has access to students who are lame and with visual impairments, but not blind students, and yet they would also like to study in the nearby institution, especially those who are in Northern Uganda. There are only 10

disabled students in almost every academic year, and leaving out the blind students, the number of applicants under the scheme has kept on increasing, and this is distributed among the current six public universities in Uganda, minus Gulu University. Therefore, many students qualify, but few are considered.

The University has to continuously create awareness and promote skills to staff so as to gain knowledge on how to handle students with their different educational problems, and also change their attitudes towards it.

A special needs student also added that the Government should ensure that well-trained staff for students who are blind are employed at the University and also, they should provide the needed learning materials for those students so that they are able to access education at Gulu University.

- A close and constant follow-up of the females who dropped out 94 The Government, together with the University Administrators, should carry out a follow-up on those females who fail to graduate or finish their courses. This will help them find solutions that can make the females come back and finish their programs.

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