Socio-cultural Factors Affecting Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministry of Education: A Case of Embu and Tharaka-Nithi County

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish socio-cultural factors affecting gender mainstreaming in the ministry of education. The study used descriptive survey research design. The target population consisted of the county and sub-county gender coordinators and the heads of public secondary schools. Embu and Tharaka-Nithi was selected purposively because of low transition rate from primary to secondary schools. A total of 211 respondents were sampled through purposive and random sampling techniques. A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect primary data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the properties of the mass data that were collected from the respondents. Factor analysis method was used to determine the factors that were used in the study namely; strength of strategies, gender mainstreaming strategies, gender policy in education, gender disparities in education and understanding of the policy which were used in logistic regression analysis. Logit regression was used to determine the effect of the factors on gender mainstreaming. Among the five factors, only one factor (gender disparities in education) affected gender mainstreaming negatively. All other predictor variables: strength of strategies; gender mainstreaming strategies; gender policy in education and understanding of gender policy in education affected gender mainstreaming positively. From the findings, it is evident that Gender policy in education is not being implemented effectively in the public secondary schools and there are several factors affecting gender mainstreaming in the education sector which includes; inadequate commitment from top-down to the institution, gender concept was not well understood, inadequate training and awareness for teachers, gender imbalance and inadequate training for Board of Governors and Parents Teachers Association, inadequate resources and socio-cultural factors. The study concluded that the school heads, teachers and

management were ill-prepared for the policy implementation, there is inadequate support, training and awareness. Also, there is poor system of monitoring and evaluation. More so, policies and strategies outlined for secondary schools are appropriate and satisfactory but requires balancing between boys and girls.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming, Gender equality, Gender equity, Equal opportunity, Implementation

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (1997) Gender mainstreaming is defined as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. More so, it is a principle that means bringing gender into the main stream and into all decision making and organisational work.

Commonwealth Secretariat (999) said that gender mainstreaming is women and men having equitable access to resources which includes opportunities and rewards. This means equal participation on what shapes the society and sharing equitably the benefits of development. They should both have an opportunity to influence who does what in society in terms of who owns and can own, who has access to jobs and income, who controls the society's resources and institutions, who makes decisions and who sets priorities. Gender mainstreaming does not restrict efforts of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures for the purpose of achieving equality by ensuring at the planning stage effects on men and women is considered. This is done by systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effects when defining and implementing them (Hannan, 2004; UNIFEM, 2009).

1.1 Gender Mainstreaming in Education

Universally, education is known to play a key role in sustainable, social and economic development. Despite the many approaches to development, education is said to be a priority area for attention worthy investment of resources. Benefits of education are well known because it improves the quality of life, improves health, enables people to get paid employment, helps to increase productivity in the market and any other work, it reduces poverty and increases political participation (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999). Such benefits should be experienced by both women and men in a fair and equitable manner. This shows how education has a major role in addressing issues of gender equality and equity. Educational institutions prepares and feed the employment sector with employees; therefore, issues of inequalities should be addressed and dealt with from elementary school throughout all levels of education. This creates equal opportunities for women and men in all areas. The overall goal of education should be to provide a level field ie equal opportunities for both women and men, equal access and participation for girls and boys, men and women in

learning and management of education at all levels (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

Education enables both women and men to know and be aware of the new opportunities that await for them. Men and women are able to acquire higher levels of education which makes them better equipped for the labour market. Education helps to reduce the wide range of biases that are found in society and traditional perceptions. This enables men and women to have opportunities to attain financial security and opportunities in higher positions of management. Education also, builds capacities for equal access to trade, entrepreneurial development, credit and finance (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

2. Theoretical Framework for Socio-cultural Factors Affecting Gender Mainstreaming

Squires (2003) identified culture as a challenge. Mainstreaming gender equality issue is concerned with challenging the status quo-that is changing how people think, relate and work, making changes on some long-held belief about the role and value of both men and women. Change is challenging for most people where to some it is exciting and offering new opportunities, however, naturally there is a strong resistance to change. Many people are comfortable with the way things are feeling they are already fine as they are and therefore do not see nor understand the need for change. Those who feel that they might 'lose' in the change they resist it. For any change to succeed top management must be involved and ready. This a proven fact around the world and especially in relation to achieving gender equality. To achieve change, primary actors must be willing to acknowledge and speak about what needs to change and how to do it, and must be firm in promoting change for gender equality.

The concept of gender provides an analytical framework that does not focus on women but on the process that recreates and reinforces inequalities between women and men. Inequalities between women and men are not only a cost to women but to society as a whole and must be regarded as societal issues rather than 'women's concerns'. Gender mainstreaming is not just about adding women into existing processes and programmes, but it is about reshaping the processes and programmes to reflect the vision, interests and needs of women in order to produce gender-equitable outcomes (United Nations, 1997). Major focus of gender mainstreaming is changing internal processes of organizations in order to achieve changes with the objective of advancing the position of women and gender equality. In societies, it will always be found that the roles, responsibilities and influence of women and men are usually unequal although the nature and extent of inequality varies from society to society. In most cases women are disadvantaged and men are privileged because of the way gender roles are organized in societies (Moser & Clark, 2001). Gender inequality in any society prevents women and men, girls and boys from participating fully, enjoying and exercising their human rights and this leads to great loss in human potential (Rivers & Aggleton, 1999). This explains why gender equality should be at the centre of work in order to eliminate poverty and promote human rights in organizations and society. Gender equality and equity are considered as the conditions for full and free enjoyment and realisation of human rights.

History shows that society almost all societies are characterized by bias where the male norm is taken as the norm for society which is used for reference in policies and structures. This

plays a role in social construction of gender which contains an unequal relationship. Male domination makes women to be considered less in many aspects of life- the tasks, roles, functions and values where men are highly valued than women. Naturally, men and women are different but these differences should not be used to discriminate against women. The differences between them should not used when sharing power in the economy and during policy-making processes. To have gender equality, measures should be taken that would make both men and women have equal opportunities, enjoy the same rights and privileges. Also, equal decisions in all aspects including religion, ethnicity, race or sexual orientations. This needs to be taken into account in all public policy (Rivers & Aggleton, 1999) because gender equality policies addresses gender imbalances by taking into account the specific needs of both women and men.

Gender mainstreaming involves more and new actors in gender issues in order to build and equal society. It recognises that gender equality issues exists at all levels, in all sectors, and this is why it involves all members of society This focus accelerates and strengthens the process of transforming gender relations to gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is an important aspect of good governance which seeks to ensure that all institutions, policies and programs meet the needs and interests of both women and men. More so, distribute benefits equitably between women and men and also contributes to social, economic and cultural progress which leads to greater fairness, equity and justice for women and men. This enhances accountability of governments to achieve results for all citizens (UN, 1997; Rivers & Aggleton, 1999; Moser & Clark, 2001).

Gender mainstreaming works on changing policies and institutions so that they can promote gender equality. It works on adjusting the attitudes of individuals, organizations and systems. Gender mainstreaming is a transformative process which involves rethinking social values and development goals to meet the needs of both women and men. As a result, there will be fairness, justice and fair use of resources that will help to realize organizations and society full potential. Gender mainstreaming; therefore, must be understood as a complex, multi-dimensional and long term process that focuses on the needs of both women and men in order to achieve the optimal development of the society (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

According to Witts and Associates (2007), ElimuYetu Coalition (2005) and Kane (2004) cultural beliefs and practises interfere with schooling, either interrupting it temporarily or preventing married girls to attend school. Cultural beliefs are real and must be well understood because educational interventions often challenge deeply held convictions. Either the culture will win out, or unintended consequences will emerge from forced cultural change. This complex relationship may present as barriers to educational policy and priorities or they may be useful in serving educational goals. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is necessary.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed in this study. Pinsonneaut et al., (1993) asserted that a descriptive research design is used to ascertain facts not to test theory and helps to produce data that answers questions concerning current status of the subject of the study.

3.1.1 Population of the Study and Sampling Design

The target population comprised the ministry of education officials in the provincial and district gender unit coordinators and heads of public secondary schools in Eastern province. This gave a target population of six hundred and ninety-nine (699). The sampling frame was drawn from the ministry of education and from the Kenya education directory. These were the provincial and district gender unit coordinators, and heads of public secondary schools who are responsible and accountable for the gender policy at the school level (Service providers) according to the Gender policy in education implementation structure. Eastern province had twenty-nine (29) districts and nine (9) districts were used in the study which was thirty per cent (30%) of the total districts. According to Gupta (2005), a sample size of 30% is appropriate for research. Also, Zachary and Craig (2006) asserted that a sample size of 30% is statistically significant. The nine districts were selected through simple random sampling techniques which mean that each and every district in the province was given an equal chance of selection. There were six hundred and sixty-nine (669) public schools in Eastern province and two hundred and one (201) public secondary schools were used in the study. The 201 public secondary schools were selected from the list of all the public secondary schools in Eastern province which represented 30% of all the public secondary schools in the province.

3.1.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection tools used in this study was a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was the main data collection tool and it was used to obtain data from the public secondary school heads who are responsible and accountable for the implementation of the Gender policy in education. The questions were structured in a five-point Likert rate scale which was meant to guide respondent's opinion, attitude and perception in regard to gender mainstreaming (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The interview schedule was administered to the provincial and district gender coordinators. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) interview schedule can be administered easily and can be used to obtain desired and reliable information. The interview schedule comprised of the open format type which was able to give in-depth details.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Social-cultural Factors

The respondents were asked to rate how socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, domestic labour and female genital mutilation affect gender mainstreaming in the education sector. **50.3%** of the respondents said its effect was very much, 31.1% said much, 15.8%

remained neutral, 1.7% said little while 1.1% said very little. This clearly shows that socio-cultural factors affect gender mainstreaming. This supports the findings of Eurydice (2009) that agrees key factors that hinder attempts to reduce and eventually eliminate gender disparities include social, cultural, religious beliefs, attitudes and practices.
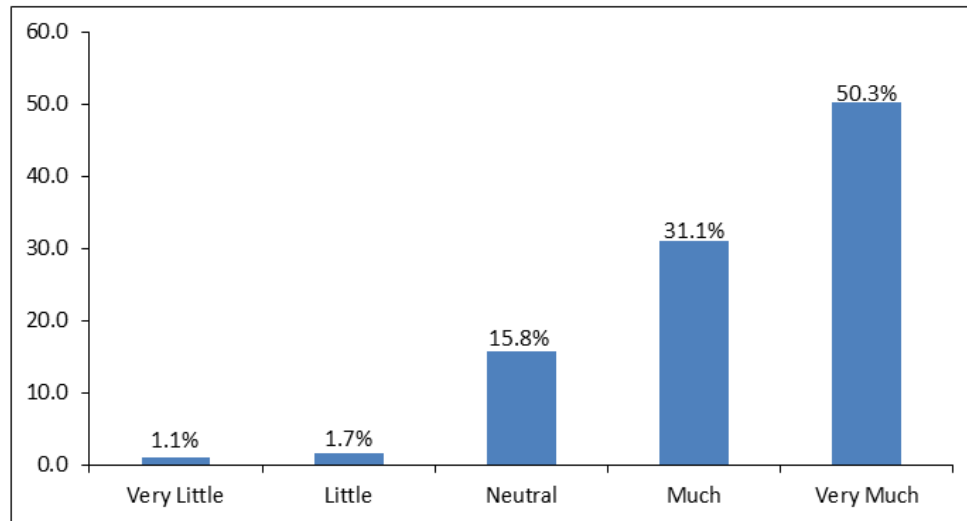

Figure 1. Socio-Cultural factors

4.1.2 Equal Participation for Boys and Girls

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of equal participation for boys and girls as a strategy for achieving gender mainstreaming. 36.2% out of 194 respondents said it was very strong, 33.0% said strong, 20.5% remained neutral, and 7.0% said weak while 3.3% said very weak. The finding shows that this is a very strong strategy for achieving gender mainstreaming. This agrees with the findings of EDC (2007) and Council of Europe (2004) that policies should provide equal access to education and work to eliminate gender disparities. They should support implementation of plans and programmes of action to ensure quality education and improved enrolment and retention rates for both boys and girls and elimination of gender discrimination and gender stereotypes in education curricula, and throughout education process.
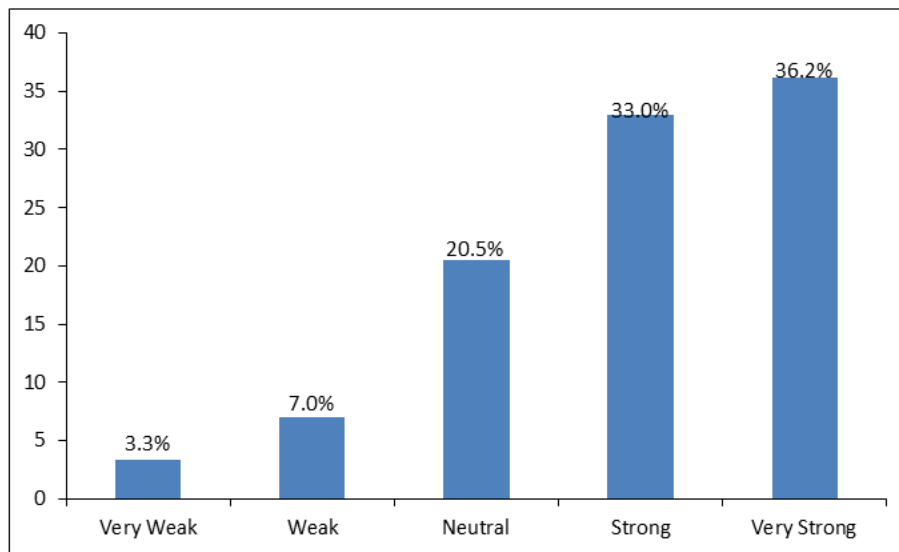
Figure 2. Equal participation for boys and girls

4.1.3 Gender Sensitization against Social Cultural Practices

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of gender sensitization against social cultural activities such as early marriages and female genital mutilation as a strategy towards achieving gender mainstreaming. 4.8 shows that 33.2% respondents said that it was a strong strategy, 32.6% said very strong, 21.7% remained neutral, and 8.2% said weak while 4.3% was very weak. Gender sensitization creates awareness and helps to acknowledge thus enhancing gender mainstreaming. It also supports the findings of Witts and Associates (2007) that cultural beliefs are real and must be well understood because educational interventions often challenge deep convictions.
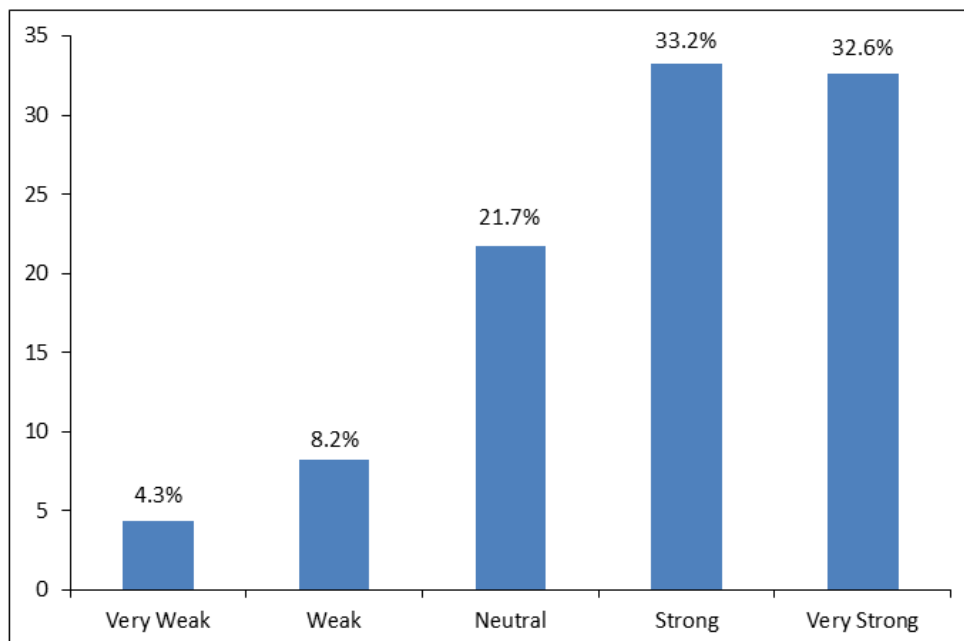

Figure 3. Sensitization against social cultural practices

4.1.4 Gender Policy in Education and Gender Disparity

Respondents were asked to state if Gender policy in education was capable of bridging gender disparities in access, retention, completion, performance and transition. 65.4% of the respondents remained neutral, 14.8% said much,12.6% said little, 5.5% very much while 1.7% said very little. This finding shows that gender policy in education cannot alone bridge gender disparities in the Kenya's national education system. Efforts should be made by all the stakeholders. Gender mainstreaming is a corporate activity not a one man's game but involves support and commitment by all actors. This is in agreement with the findings of Squires (2002) that gender mainstreaming cannot be achieved by specific groups or few people working alone. It can only be achieved by broad commitment and action by all stakeholders. Gender policy in education (Republic of Kenya, 2007) also advocates that the government and other education stakeholders should take to efforts to address the identified gender inequalities.
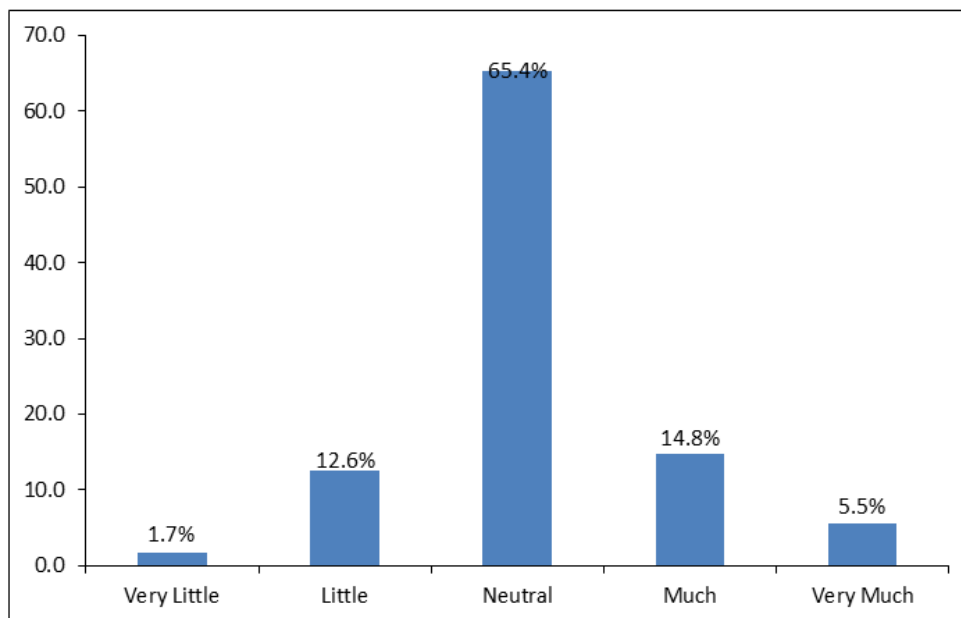

Figure 4. Gender policy in education and gender disparities

4.1.5 Policy Balance between Boys and Girls

The respondents were asked whether secondary schools gender policy outlined in the Gender policy in education (Republic of Kenya, 2007) was balanced between boys and girls. 72% respondents said that the policy was unbalanced for both boys and girls, 17% said that it was balanced, 7% opted to remain neutral while 2% said either that the policy was very unbalanced or very balanced. This finding is congruent with UN (2007) that gender analysis must make a practical contribution towards explaining the differences in men's and women's, boy's and girl's lives and then be used to make policies and programmes that reduce inequalities. More so, looking at the relationship between men and women in their access to and control over resources, there should be decisions and policies that guarantee equal access to education and elimination of gender disparities in education.
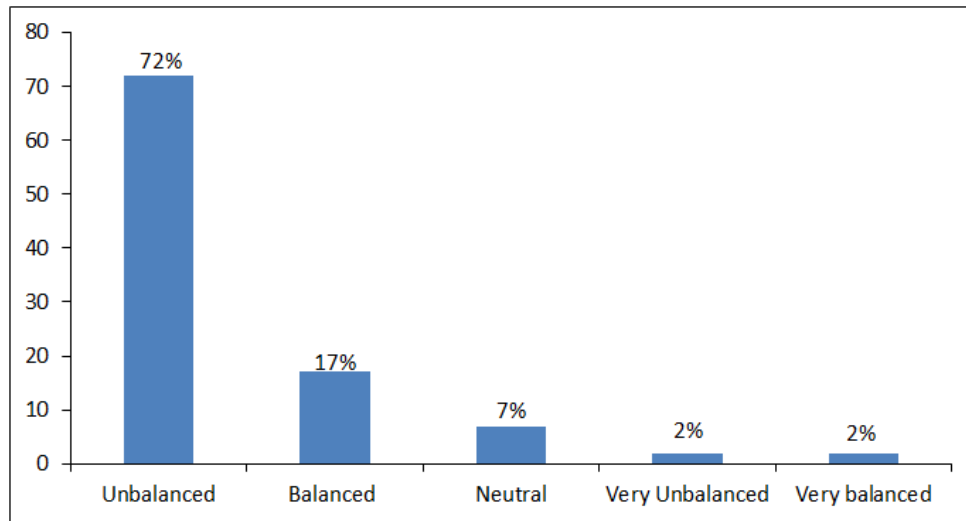
Figure 5. Policy Balance between boys and girls

4.1.6 Re-admissions of Girls Who Drop out Due to Pregnancy

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of re-admission of girls who get pregnancy as a strategy for achieving gender mainstreaming. Figure 4.9 indicates the responses. 35.3% respondents said it was strong, 34.2% said very strong, 17.4% remained neutral, 9.2% said weak and 3.9% said very weak. This shows that this is a strategy that can effectively achieve gender mainstreaming by enabling out-of-school girls access secondary education. This finding agrees with that of Onyando and Omondi (2008) that teenage pregnancy was a major hindrance to education and when girls are supported to return to school, they are able to complete school and get access to opportunities in life.
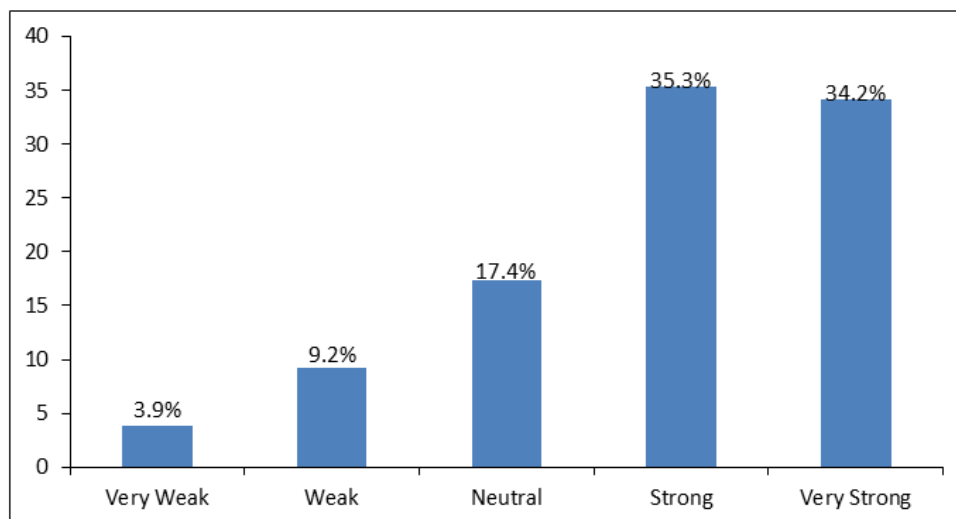

Figure 6. Re-admissions of girls who drop out

4.1.7 Establishing Centres of Excellence

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of establishing the centres of excellence to serve as model schools as a strategy for enhancing equality. 36.8% of the respondents rated

this strategy as strong, 31.3% as very strong, 14.3% opted to remain neutral, 13.7% said it was weak and 4.1% said very weak. This finding is in agreement with the findings of the Council of Europe (2004) that centres of excellence demonstrate total commitment to gender equality issues and practice in the context of schooling-to challenge negative stereotyping of young people. This enhances a culture in the school and classroom where intellectual, cultural and aesthetic accomplishment by both boys and girls.
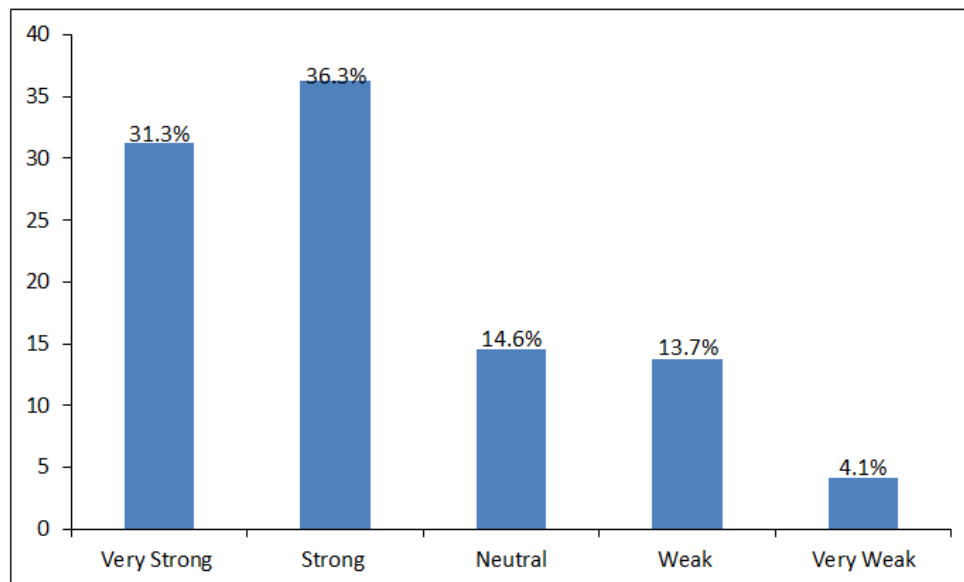

Figure 7. Establishing centres of excellence

4.1.8 On the Provision of Teaching/Learning Materials

The respondents were asked to rank the provision of teaching/learning materials as a strategy to enhance gender equality. 35.3% of the respondents advocated it is a very strong strategy, 33.2% said it is strong, 11.8% opted to remain neutral, 16.0% weak and 3.7% very weak. Teaching and learning materials accessible to all students is the best way to change the attitude towards gender issues. This finding is in agreement with that of Eurydice (2009) that gender responsive teaching/ learning materials (pictures, images, illustrations and examples) creates awareness of gender equality among students and teachers. This helps to change the cultural attitudes and builds self esteem especially to girls, reduces bias and stereotyped images of men and women.
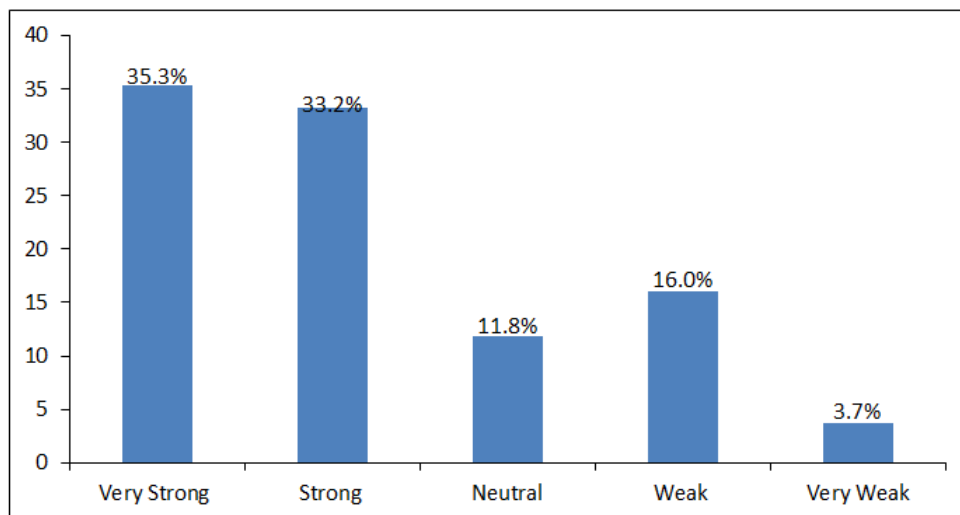
Figure 8: Provision of teaching / learning material

4.1.9 Engendering Curriculum

On engendering curriculum as a strategy for gender equality, 35.8% of the respondents said that engendering curriculum was a very strong strategy for gender equality, 27.3% said it was strong, 17.6% remained neutral, 15.0% said it was weak and 4.3% very weak. When the curriculum is gender balanced in all aspects it creates a level field for both boys and girls. This finding confirms that of Eurydice (2009) that gender perspective should permeate the whole curriculum and should be taken into consideration throughout all the subjects and areas.

4.1.10 Affirmative Action

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of affirmative action on bursaries and infrastructure as a strategy for gender equality. 39.3% of the respondents said that this was a very strong strategy for gender equality, 30.1% said it was strong, 16.7% said weak, 9.1% remained neutral and minority 4.8% said it was very weak. This finding is in agreement with that of Rao (2002) that gender infrastructure should put in place gender policies, gender units, increased female staff and managers, and additional resources for women's programs. It is also in agreement with EDC (2007), Witts and Associates (2007) that physical environment is part of learning institution environment and it encompasses all areas of the learning institutions which includes; buildings, ground and routes to and from the learning institution because they all affect the access to schools, and the quality of the educational experiences which affect girls and boys differently. Bursaries enhance enrolment, retention and achievement for both boys and girls. This is among incentive strategies that addresses barriers related to poverty and alleviate economic hardship on families. Kane (2004) states that the disparity between richer and poorer children in terms of education participation is greater than disparities between urban and rural children, or between boys and girls, although these, too, are considerable. Poverty is among the biggest barrier to girls participation in education.
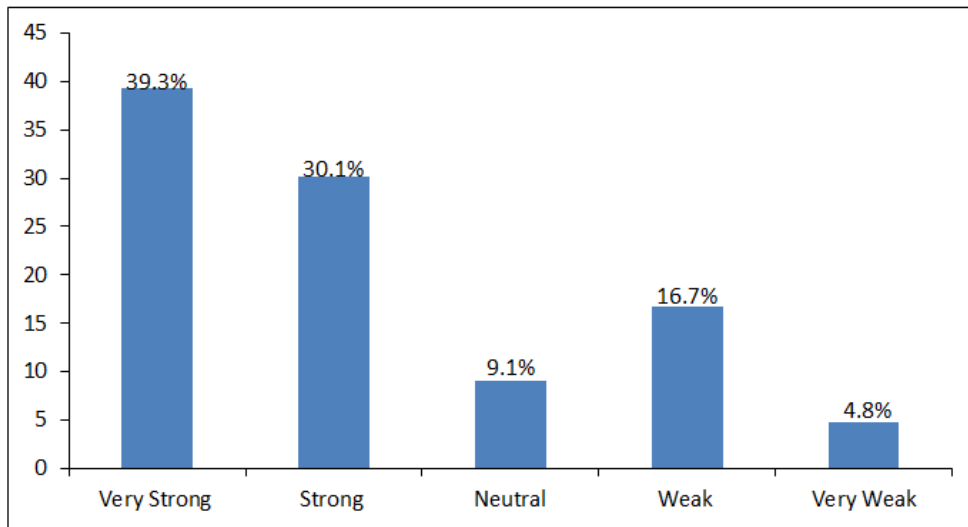
Figure 10. Affirmative action on bursaries and infrastructure

4.1.11 On Enforcing Rules and Regulations

The respondents were asked to rank the strength of enforcing rules and regulations as a strategy for enhancing gender equality. 40.0% of respondents said that it was a very strong strategy for gender equality, 34.6% said strong, 14.6% remained neutral, 8.6% said it was weak and the minority 2.2% said it was very weak. This finding shows that enforcement of rules and regulations against sexual harassment in schools would create a good gender responsive environment, reduce intimidation and fear instilled especially on both girls and boys. This would create a conducive learning environment for all. This is in agreement with the findings of Eurydice (2009) which states that one priority of gender equality policies in education is to combat gender based violence and harassment in schools. An education system is an appropriate context where attitudes and values can be fostered with the intention of preventing violence and encouraging peaceful conflict resolution; therefore, prevention of violence and harassment should be a general principle of education system.
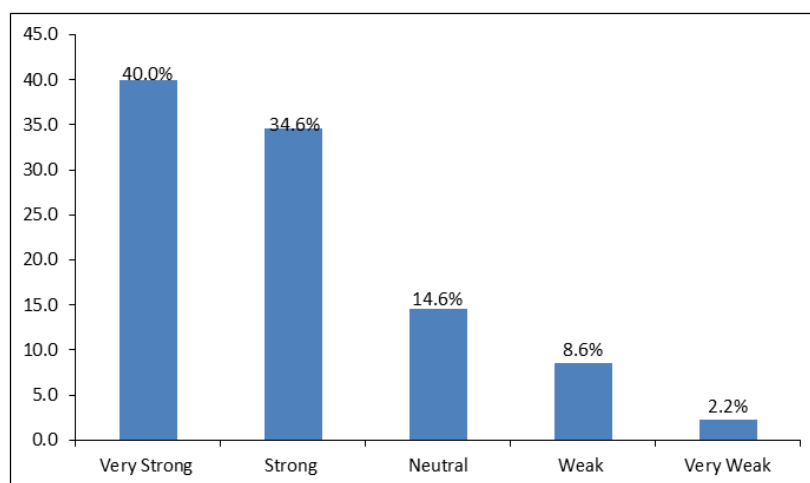

Figure 11. Enforcement of rules and regulations against sexual harassment

4.1.12 Ministry of Education Sensitization to Parents and Communities

The respondents were asked whether the ministry of education was sensitizing the parents and the communities on gender equality in schools. 46.2% of the respondents said very little, 36.0% said little, 12.9% remained neutral, 3.8% said much while 1.1% said very much. The findings reveal that sensitization was not done to parents and communities. The parents and communities are part of the stakeholders who have strong influence in both schools and communities, therefore, they should be considered as key stakeholders. This finding agrees with the findings of Squires (2002) that gender mainstreaming is a corporate activity which cannot be achieved by specific groups but a team of all stakeholders. It can be achieved where there is a strong broad commitment and action by all sectors and stakeholders. Gender mainstreaming can be effectively achieved from the bottom-line starting with the parents and communities through their leaders. It also confirms the findings of Council of Europe (2004) and Eurydice (2009) that schools exist within communities and are responsible for the education of children, therefore, they should influence the broader aspirations of the whole community. Schools should ensure that their mission, aims, objectives and policies are known and that the active participation of the members of the community is sought in assisting in the implementation of the policies. Support of the parents is vital in the promotion of gender equality but despite their important role, government's projects and initiatives that aim to inform and educate them about gender issues are rare. Government attempts to involve parents more closely in promoting gender equality initiatives in schools are even more limited in many countries.
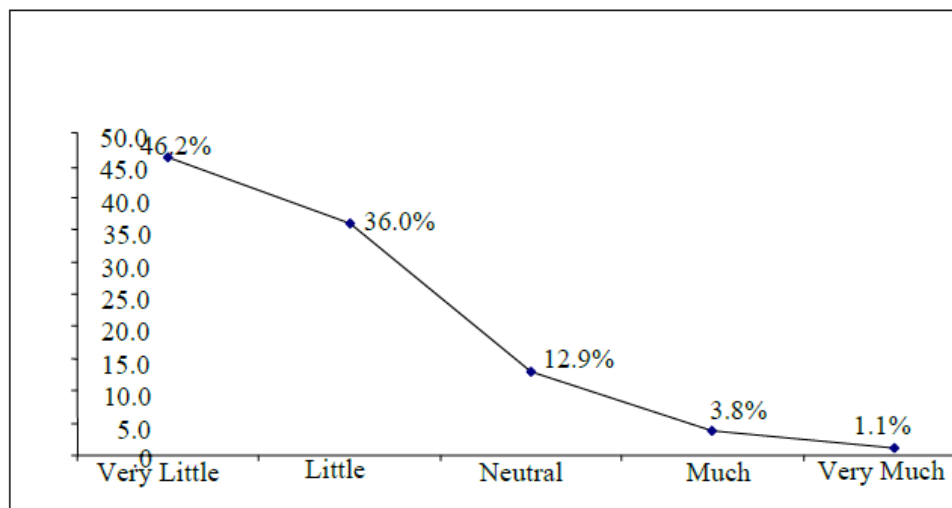

Figure 12. Ministry of education sensitization to parents and communities

5. Conclusion

BOG and PTA who are supposed to be implementers of the policy are not well prepared and trained. Also, Gender awareness and sensitization has not been done effectively to the parents and communities. Finally, the study concluded that gender mainstreaming in the education sector is constrained by several factors such as lack of commitment from top down to the schools, inadequate training and awareness, inadequate resources and social-cultural factors.

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