

INFLUENCE OF GENDER ROLES ON STUDENTS PURSUING MODULE II PROGRAMS IN KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES.

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Abstract

Module II programs in Kenyan Public Universities have grown over the last ten years giving expanded access to many Kenyans hitherto unable to access higher education. Since the programs are being offered in an educational setting with already well documented gender disparities, this paper argues that research focus in higher education needs to be directed to the gender trends in Module II programs, to ensure that the gender is not relegated to the periphery of the discourse surrounding Module II programs. Neglecting the gender angle may lead to an undesirable situation where Module II programs will perpetuate the gender disparities that currently characterize the educational sector, or worse still, create new ones that will diminish or undermine any gains that could have been made towards gender parity in tertiary and other levels of education. The paper thus reports groundbreaking research that seeks to call attention to the implications of gender in Module II programs. The paper explores how the traditional gender roles influence students enrolled in the programs. Two public Universities were sampled through stratified random sampling and data collected from students undertaking courses under the Module II program. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing data. The paper demonstrates that gender roles influence both men and women in different ways, making it necessary for Universities to consider gender barriers while advertising and mounting Module II programs.

Introduction

The onset of the new millennium has seen an unprecedented growth of Module II programs in Kenyan public Universities. The nascent nature of these programs is borne out by the fact that the earliest started in 1998 and the rest have grown over the subsequent years. Different terminologies are being used to describe these programs viz; parallel programs, evening programs, part time programs, self sponsored programs, school based programs, direct entry programs, full fee paying academic programs and Module II programs. Within the context of this paper, I have used the term Module II programs to refer to all the full fee paying/private sponsored/adult/continuing/lifelong education programs in public universities in Kenya, which are being offered to students who are not selected through the Joint Admissions Board (J.A.B) *.

The Gender Equality and Education Task Force of the United Nations Millennium Project[†], working on the project's gender equality goal, envisioned elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education preferably by 2015 (UNDP 2003, Gender Equity Report)[‡]. These goals had previously been emphasized in the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. This focus on gender equality in education is informed by the fact that gender disparities that disadvantage women and men are present at all levels of education and are much more pronounced in third world countries. UNESCO (2003), identified gender inequality as one of the challenges besetting higher education in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gender and Module II Programs: A Confluence

Module II programs are being offered in an environment of economic and structural problems which have preoccupied the concerns of educationalists and critics of higher education as issues that engender "commercialization" of education. The public discourse surrounding Module II programs raises serious concerns about the Universities' objectives in mounting the programs.

* This is an Inter-University body that selects students who will join Public Universities under Government subsidy.

† The Millennium Project was established by the United Nations to identify the best strategies for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to help countries achieve the goals agreed upon by 189 governments at the Millennium Summit held in 2000. The MDGs aim at reducing poverty and its correlates by 2015.

‡ This is a preliminary output report of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. The task revisited the contents of this document in their report entitled: Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women. The report is discussed at length in the literature review.

Critics view Universities as sidelining important issues to “cash in” on a population with an ever-increasing appetite for continuing education. In an article entitled “Uneasy balance between academic merit and cash” appearing on the Sunday Standard of 14th June 2004, attention is drawn to the fact that Universities are eager to cash in using the Module II programs. A statement attributed to the then Nairobi University Vice-Chancellor states:

We have vigorously continued the *consolidation and diversification of income generation* especially in those areas that are related to our *core business* and where we have a *market comparative advantage*. For example, the *full fee paying academic Programs*, popularly known as Module II, have continued expanding and now account for about 50 per cent of the current population of over 30,000 students, [Emphasis mine] (Sunday Nation 14th June 2004, pg19 Col, 7)

One immediately notices the economic language and tone of this statement which may seem to reinforce the position of critics that Module II programs are about income generating as much as or, more than, they are about meeting emerging learner needs. It portrays Universities as “merchandising” knowledge. Granted the need to generate extra income, Universities must nonetheless be made to sufficiently address issues of gender among others, to ensure that such issues are not sacrificed at the alter of “diversification and consolidation of income generation”. One of the main challenges in this area is to ensure that Module II programs do not perpetuate already existing gender disparities in education or inadvertently and inconspicuously create new ones.

The issue of gender in education has many manifestations. Literature reveals undesirable barriers to gender equality in education through direct costs (Oxfam 2001), opportunity cost (Watkins 2000:191), quality (Watkins 2000:106), socio-cultural factors (Dighe 1998:419), distance (Watkins 2000: 193) and health (Watkins 2000:40). Conversely, studies have shown that factoring gender issues in educational planning and practice has positive results through empowerment of women (Malhotra, Pande, and Grown 2003), formal employment (Birdsall and Behrman 1991; Cameron, Dowling, and Worsick 2001), formal labor force participation (Deolalikar 1994; Aromolaran 2002), female fertility and mortality (Subbarao and Rainey 1995), promoting health (Malhotra, Pande, and Grown 2003) and (Elo 1992; Bhatia and Cleland 1995; Govindasamy 2000). Further, there is a positive relationship on educational attainment across generations with increased access to education for women, (Lavy 1996; Ridker 1997; King and Bellew 1991; Lillard and Willis 1994; Alderman and King 1998; Kambhupati and Pal 2001; Parker and Pederzini 2000; Bhalla, Saigal, and Basu 2003).

We need to address these gendered concerns in Module II programs from the recognition that , unless very deliberate efforts are made to foreground this gendered context and mainstream gender at this nascent stage of the programs, gender and all its manifestations will be sidelined and suffocated by the overwhelming issues of economic survival that are seen as having given impetus to development of the programs in the first place. Failure to address these concerns may result in the undesirable situation where Module II programs will perpetuate the gender disparities that currently characterize the educational sector, or worse still, create new ones that will diminish or undermine any gains that could have been made towards gender parity in this and other levels of education. Eventually the benefits of Module II programs may not benefit men and women equally.

Gender Roles and Education: An Overview

A gender role is a set of perceived behavioral norms associated particularly with males or females, in a given social group or system, (Medical Dictionary, 2002). It can be a form of division of labour by gender. All societies, to a certain effect, have a gender/sex system, although the components and workings of this system vary markedly from society to society. Creativity may cause the rules and values to change over time. Cultures and societies are dynamic and ever changing, and thus changes are expected over time although there has been extensive debate as to how, and how fast, they may change. Talcott Parsons, in a model of gender roles in the nuclear family he developed in 1955 believed that the feminine role was an *expressive* one, whereas the masculine role was *instrumental*. He believed that expressive activities of the woman fulfill 'internal' functions, for example to strengthen the ties between members of the family. The man, on the other hand, performed the 'external' functions of a family, such as providing monetary support. Gender roles were seen to pervade all areas of social engagement namely, education, profession, housework, decision making, childcare and education. In their very traditional and compartmentalized sense, gender roles: ascribe high professional qualification as important only for the man; the workplace is not the primary area of women; career and professional advancement is deemed unimportant for women and domestic work; housekeeping and child care are the primary functions of the woman while the participation of the man in these functions is only partially wanted.

In decision making the man has the last say, for example, in choosing the place to live, choice of school for children, and resource allocation and buying decisions. The woman takes care of the largest part of the function of child care and education.

According to the *International Handbook of Gender Roles*, the traditional role for women is to take care of the household and the children, probably because a dichotomy exists between the genders on a biological basis. However, very rarely are the negative aspects of motherhood including "fatigue, curtailment of freedom, a damper on intellectual stimulation, and frustrated career opportunities ever mentioned" (Denmark, Schwartz & Smith, 1991). Even in modern or modernizing countries, the domestic duties are still regularly delegated to women, even in two-career families. Besides holding a part-time or full-time job, the woman is responsible for child care and household chores. Only in a few modern countries like the United States of America and Canada can one find young fathers "helping out" with child-rearing practices and some domestic chores, though not all to the same degree of involvement that is expected of women. At adulthood and old age, the roles are quite differentiated and stabilized so that the man is expected to be the breadwinner and custodian of family discipline, property, and moral values and the woman the primary care giver.

For our present analysis, we are looking at gender roles in their traditional sense, where the woman is the primary care giver in the family and the man is the provider. Our concern is to show how these gender roles impact on students taking Module II programs, influencing decisions, activities and coping mechanisms of both men and women. Further, we seek to make general recommendations on policy and research that would help spur action in ensuring that gender issues are addressed at both policy and research level in order to make Module II programs gender sensitive, and ensure that the opportunities offered by the programs benefit men and women equally.

Methodology

Stratified random sampling was used to select two public Universities for the study. Public Universities around Nairobi were put in the urban category and those away from Nairobi were put under the non-urban category. One University was randomly selected from the two categories. Nairobi University and Moi University were thus selected as the study sites. Participants in the Module II programs in the selected public Universities were the primary respondents to the study. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the primary respondents. Questionnaires were administered to 970 Module II Students from the selected Universities. Module II programs were divided into science based, arts based and business based courses. One course of each orientation was randomly selected. All participants in the selected courses were included in the sampling frame since the ratios of men and women are important to the study.

Interviews were used to obtain in-depth data from the administrators and managers of the Module II programs, since this method allows for probing, spontaneity, clarification, flexibility, high response and personal interaction. The respondents' responses were recorded through note taking. Interview schedules were semi-structured and contained both open and closed ended questions. Documentary analysis was used to gather data on the Universities' advertised objectives and statutory requirements governing Module II programs. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 12.0) was used for data analysis using simple descriptive statistics. Statistical results are presented in both graphs and tables. Five aspects of Module two programs and participant are examined and inferences made on how gender roles influence the perceptions and choices that both men and women have in Module II programs. Five variables examined in this paper include: mode of study, marital status and marital relations, perceived challenges of engaging in the programs, sources of financial support and motivational factors in engaging in Module II programs.

Relationship between Gender and Mode of Study

The pattern of preference for the more flexible modes of study such as Open Learning, School Based and Evening Programs seemed to be more popular with the women. For instance, the Evening Program attracted 45.3 % of the females whereas for the males, it was 39.6%. The preference for Fulltime Programs however was more popular with men at 50.1% against 36.3% for the women. There is a notable preference for flexible modes of learning among women and the non-flexible full time mode among the men.

Challenges faced by Students by Gender

Respondents were asked to identify and rate the challenges that they encounter in pursuing Module II programs. Several challenges viz; financial constraints, pressure from family, timing, difficulty of course content and age were cited as follows. Financial constraint was a major problem faced by 87.9 % of all the respondents.

Of this, men accounted for the greater percentage (91.4%) as opposed to 84.0% of women. Financial constraints affect both gender but affect men more than it affects women. More men (53.8%) than women (48.5%) faced financial constraints. Pressure from the family was cited as a challenge by 26% of the respondents. However of this, the greater proportion (32.1%) was females with males being 20.9%. The timings for the studies are also an important challenge to the students since it was mentioned by 37.2 % of all the respondents. The issue of timing was experienced more by women (40.2%) than men (34.4%). Difficulty in course content was mentioned by 12.6% of all respondents. Men (14.3%) were more likely to report difficult course content than women (10.7%). Age was not a serious problem affecting the students enrolled in the Module II programs since it was cited by only 7.7% of the respondents. However, men (9.0%) were more likely than women (6.3%) to mention age as a problem.

It is evident from the responses on challenges experienced by both men and women that while men view financial constraints as a more significant challenge, women view family pressure as the more significant one. Notably, timing is not a big challenge for the men while it is for the women. This is consistent with the earlier finding that women’s preferred timings for participating in the program differ with that of men with women preferring part time courses as opposed to men who prefer full time courses. Given that family pressure is a challenge to women, it is understandable that they prefer part time programs that will enable them to continue working in their traditional gender roles as care givers. Men on the other hand have to continue in their traditional gender roles as providers and thus their biggest challenge is finance. Asked if they would have pursued this course earlier, 60.7% answered in the affirmative. In terms of absolute numbers, there were more women saying they would have desired to pursue the course earlier than there were men. Among the reasons for not pursuing the course earlier, financial constraints was the most prominent accounting for 62.1% of all respondents and it affected men (64.6%) than it affected women (59.9). Marital and family commitments on the other hand affected about 9.9 percent of the respondents but affected females (14.3%) more than their male (4.8%) counterparts. This seems to tally with results on the problems/challenges faced by both men and women in pursuit of Module II programs, in relation to their gender roles. Financial constraints were mentioned and affected more men than it did women. Similarly, women experienced more pressure from the family than did men. Thus, the proportion of women that were kept away due to family and marital commitments was 14.30% compared to 4.80% for the men.

Marital Status, Gender and Module II Students

Relationship between Marital Status and Gender

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of Marital Status by gender among the respondents.

Figure 1: Relationship between Marital Status and Gender

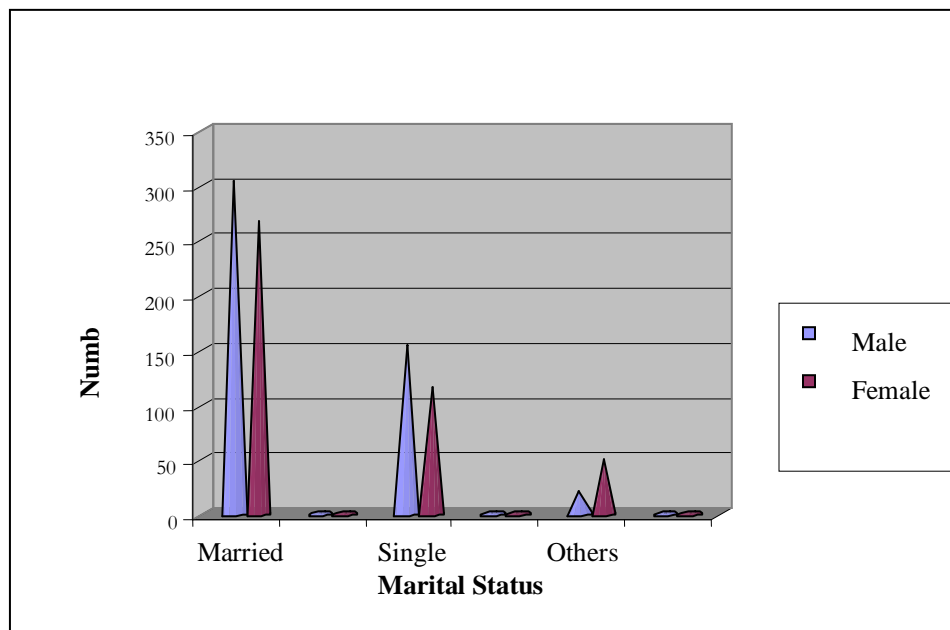


Figure 1 above indicates that whereas there are more men in the married and single category, there are more women in the other category which includes those who were widowed, divorced, and separated.

Even though men who are married and single are only slightly more than women, the women in the “other” category are significantly more than men. This finding tallies with the earlier one on the issue of family commitments. It seems that of all the categories, women with altered family ties that lead to the absence of a spouse are at a slight advantage of accessing Module II programs than those with family ties, especially spouses.

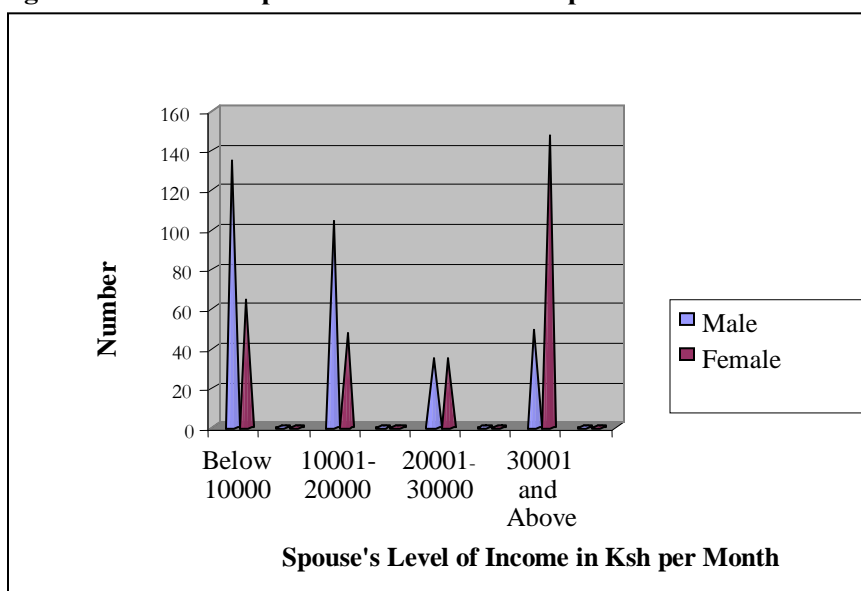
Gender and Spouses Level of Education

It seems evident that women pursuing Module II Programs have relatively more highly educated husbands. For instance, most of those reporting that their spouses had Masters (33.5%) or PhD (7.6%) were women. These figures were higher than those for the men in the same category. On the other hand, most of those reporting that their spouses had undergraduate degrees (28.4 against 24.5%) were men. It would seem then that men with higher educational levels seem to play a mentorship role for their spouses more than men with lower educational levels.

Gender and Spouse’s income

Figure 2 below shows the relationship between gender and spouses income for students pursuing module II programs

Figure 2: Relationship between Gender and Spouse’s Income



According to the results above, spouses of female students generally tended to earn more income than the spouses of male students. Inversely, the spouses of male students earned less than spouses of female students. For instance, 11.6% of women as opposed to 10.6% of men reported that their husbands earned in the 20001-30000 category. In the 30001 and above, the differences are even more marked. The figure for women is 50.3% as opposed to 15.3% of men. It would therefore seem that men with higher incomes extend their provision role to the facilitation of enrollment to Module II programs for their spouses.

Gender and Financial Support

Figure 3 below shows the relationship between gender and sources of financial support.

Figure 3: Relationship between Gender and Sources of Financial Support

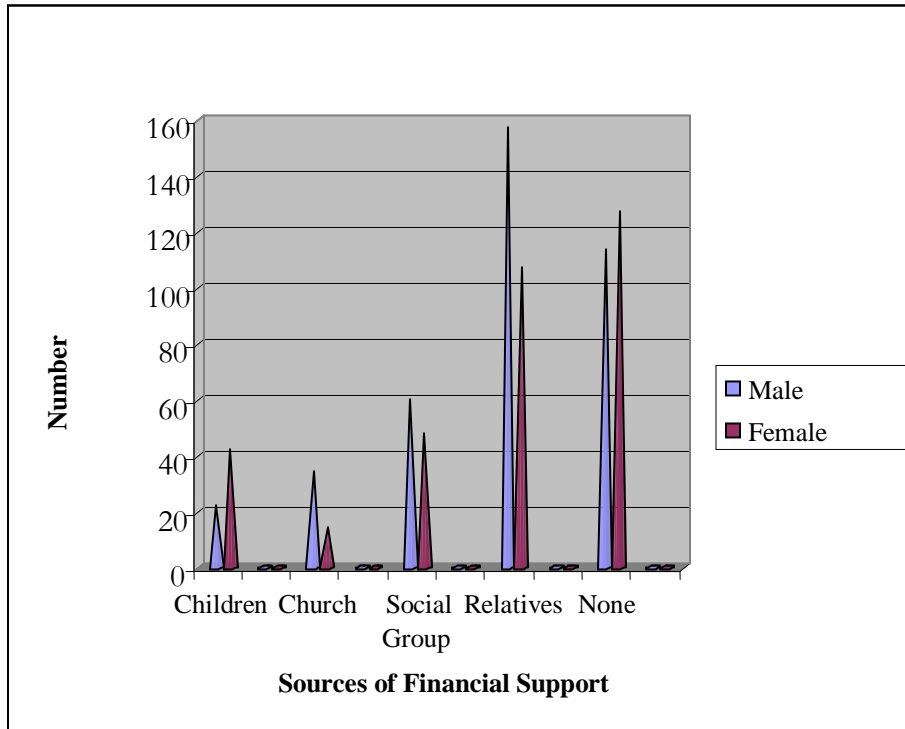


Figure 3 above indicates that a significant portion of both male and female respondents (33.2%) had no other sources of financial support apart from themselves. With regard to other sources of financial support, a majority (36.4%) reported getting it from their relatives. Of these, a majority were men (40.6) as opposed to 31.7 % for women. Even among those who had no other source of support, women (37.6%) outnumbered men (29.5%). Women on the other hand were more likely to get financial support from their children (12.4%) than men (5.7%). The exogamic status of women especially those married becomes evident here. Their best bet for support especially financial support is their children as opposed to relatives. This is because they are viewed as “outsiders” in the homes where they are married and thus investing in them is seen as risky or at least less defensible than investing in males who are seen to be in the kinship lineage. By the same token, women are viewed as having left their homes of birth and thus their kin do not consider it priority to support them now that they are no longer viewed as bonafide members of their blood relations.

Gender and Motivational Factors in Module II Programs

Several reasons were given why the respondents had chosen to enroll in Module II programs. The most important reason why the students enrolled for the program is to develop their respective careers which were mentioned by 80.7% of all cases. The other important reasons given for the enrollment were are: Change from current career (14.2% of responses); Increase earnings (14.2% of responses); and increase chances of promotion which accounted for (12.0%) of all responses. The least important reason for enrollment was to match spouse’s income which accounted for (1.5%) of all responses.

Results showed that more men (46.1%) than women (41.8%) enrolled so as to develop their career. Men also outnumber women in reasons such as to facilitate change from current career, boredom with current career, increase or earnings and matching spouse’s income. Women on the other hand, outnumbered men on measures such as the need to enhance job security and increase chances of promotion. Significant numbers of each gender identified with most of the reasons for enrollment. Only 24.1% of all respondents said that career change was an important motivation for pursuing module II programs. However, of the 24.1%, a greater portion was accounted for by men (27.4% against 20.4% for women). About 21.0 % of all respondents mentioned promotion as one of the motivations for enrollment. In this category, the greater proportion of those mentioning promotion were women (23.1% as opposed to 19.2% men). Of the 15.7% of the respondents who mentioned job security as a motivation for enrolment, the proportion represented by women was 20.4% as opposed to 11.5% for men. This means women viewed the Module II course as providing for them avenues for enhancing job security.

Summary

Women prefer part time courses as opposed to men who prefer full time courses. In fact, women are significantly more in the sandwich/parttime/school-based and open-learning programs. These are seen to be more flexible than full time courses where we have more men. Thus flexible programs structures should be seen as an opportunity for women. Women have traditionally not been able to access education due to family commitments. It is instructive to note that while more men cited age, difficult course content and finances as constraints in Module II programs, more women cited pressure from family and timing as their major constraints in pursuing module II programs. Further, more women cited marital and family commitments as a reason for not pursuing the course earlier. Since they are expected to continue with these commitments even after they resume schooling, they no doubt find part-time, flexible programs more appealing.

It is sometimes argued that women fail to enroll in higher education because of the rigidity of traditional higher education Programs, which leave women no room to combine their multiple gender roles with studies and that they would be better served by flexible Programs (Bunyi 2004). There is a clear reflection of gendered roles in the preferences of males and females in Module II programs. The above observation that women prefer part-time as opposed to full time courses is in line with the care-giving roles of women within families. Further, the observation that time constraints and family pressure are the most important inhibitors among women, and that family pressure deterred the women from seeking the courses earlier is in line with their traditional care-giving roles. Another indicator of the effect of family commitments on women is the fact that they account for a larger percentage of unmarried, widowed, divorced or separated categories. This observation should however be interpreted cautiously because there is no clear evidence that family commitments are less for these women. However, we can, to a limited extent, infer that marital commitments as part of family commitments are less for these categories of women. Similarly traditional male gender roles seem to be important factors in constraining men in Module II programs. Financial constraints are the most important inhibitors among men, in line with their roles as providers among families. Thus traditional gender roles constrain both men and women pursuing module II courses.

For women, motivational factors for seeking module II programs are stability and security while for men its change and development. This accounts for the fact that more men than women are willing to change their area of study and prepare to switch careers. Although more women than men reported that their spouses were supportive, it should be remembered that spouses of women are more educated and earn more. It seems that men are more supportive of women when they themselves are more educated and economically empowered. It therefore seems that on the whole the education and economic empowerment of men has a positive effect on the education and economic empowerment of women.

Implications for the Provision of Module II Programs

Since there are identifiable gender based programmatic, socio-economic, demographic and attitudinal trends that affect Module II programs, there is urgent need on the part of Universities to make explicit the importance of gender as a consideration in the delivery of Module II programs. There is a significant gender angle to the ability of men and women to access and benefit from Module II programs. The current approach of the Universities where they claim an “open door” policy for anyone who is “willing” and “able to pay” ignores this gender angle and is only likely to replicate and exacerbate the already existing gender disparities in education and specifically higher education. Universities need to put up urgent gender monitoring systems to ensure gender equity and promotion of women in planning and implementation of Module II programs.

Universities should promote their part-time programs specifically targeting women so that many can see the opportunities available to them while still playing the important care-giving roles in their families. Universities need to be involved in gender training programs in partnership with other institutions working in the area of gender and development. In this gender training, Universities should promote the developmental and change oriented motivations and goals for enrolling in Module II programs to help women not only make the decision to join Module II programs but also see the potential of these programs to facilitate career change and development as opposed to stability and security in their present careers. Women and men need to be assisted through innovative financing programs through scholarships. However, all women are not equally disadvantaged. Women from low socio-economic status with lowly educated spouses should be given priority.

Conclusion

While Module II programs are an avenue for increased access and participation for women, it would be unfortunate to assume that this will happen automatically. The extent to which Module II programs will provide equal opportunities for women and not perpetuate the disparities discussed above will be the result of conscious gender planning. There is therefore need for educational practitioners and policy makers to constantly and consciously initiate debate and pursue gender concerns in Module II programs. This paper establishes that gender roles do influence the choices men and women make in pursuing Module II programs. Policy makers in higher education, in government and in Universities should therefore factor in gendered needs while formulating, advertising and mounting Module II programs. This is to ensure that these issues do not get submerged and drowned in larger problematics like universal primary education, structural reforms in higher education and survival of universities in the face of advancing globalization.

Further, research in gender studies is one of the most important prerequisites for ensuring gender parity, because it is the main tool to detect current issues and problems in a given policy field (GREG 1998). In addition, fundamental research in gender studies, will lead to identification of new fields for public universities and help develop more profound knowledge on the mechanisms which (re)produce gender relations with particular regard to module II programs. The rationale for this is that gender equality must be constantly fought for, protected and promoted – like human rights of which it is an integral part. Achieving gender equality in all sectors of society is a continuous process that has to be constantly put into question, thought about and redefined. Education is a key target for gender equality as it involves the way in which societies transfer norms, knowledge and skills. It is crucial that Module II programs empower both men and women and take caution in counterbalancing the existing gender hierarchies.

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