

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON STUDENTS'
PERFORMANCE IN UNIVERSITIES (UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY-MUKONO)**

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S23B15/021

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

April, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

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Declaration

I, Kirabo Julian S23B15/021, declare that this research proposal titled “Lived Experiences of Gender Inequality on Student’s Academic Performance”; A case study of Uganda Christian University, Mukono is my original work. It has been prepared for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of my Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration at Uganda Christian University.

This proposal has not been submitted for any other degree or diploma at any other university or institution. All sources of information used in this work have been duly acknowledged through citations and references.

Signed: 

Date: 17th April, 2026

Approval

The study has been under my supervision and I can testify that it is original work. It is therefore ready to be submitted to the School of Social Sciences, Uganda Christian University.

Supervisor: Rosemary .N. Bwire

Signature:



Date: 27/04/2026

Dedication

I dedicate this study first and foremost to my parents, whose steadfast support, quiet sacrifices and unwavering faith have been my greatest source of strength and perseverance throughout this research.

I further dedicate this study to my supervisor, for the scholarly guidance, rigorous feedback, and patient mentorship that have shaped both this research and my development as a researcher.

Abstract

The study explored how gender inequality affected student academic performance at Uganda Christian University, Mukono through their actual experiences. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the various forms of gender inequality experienced by university students, to identify the challenges faced by students due to gender inequality, and to explore strategies to address gender inequality for better academic performance. The research utilized three theoretical frameworks which included Feminist Social Work Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Intersectionality Theory as its foundation. The researchers conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with undergraduate students who were selected from different faculties. The researchers used thematic analysis to examine the collected data. The findings the study discovered that gender inequality exists through different methods which include classroom interaction patterns, authority power systems established between genders, and the execution of policies which face implementation challenges. Students reported challenges affecting academic engagement, psychological well-being, and career aspirations. The study concluded that gender inequality significantly influences students' academic experiences and performance at UCU. The study recommended three actions which included bettering policy enforcement and developing pedagogy that considers gender and creating better support systems for students who experience these issues.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Uganda experiences gender inequality which creates different treatment standards that affect all people based on their gender, thus leading to educational and employment disadvantages and political exclusion and resource access problems which mainly affect women and girls (Aitchison & Henderson, 2020). The system operates through cultural norms that establish traditional gender roles and create economic disparities and develop legal restrictions which result in discriminatory practices that prevent women from achieving social and economic empowerment. The discussion about gender gaps or gender inequality which exists here emerges through two dimensions which show different patterns of gender distribution.

Gender gaps, or gender inequality, include the different treatment of men and women in laws and differences in political representation. Despite significant progress in recent decades, gender gaps in important areas such as rights, well-being, opportunities, and economic and political power still exist in many developing countries, as well as in some developed countries. According to a detailed survey by the World Bank, progress has been uneven, both in terms of specific aspects of gender inequality and in the regions of the developing countries (Plesons et al., 2021). The one area where progress has been the fastest and most widespread is education, where gender gaps have closed quickly and visible improvements can be seen everywhere.

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, the issue of gender inequality in the realm of education has been an important focus of international development agendas, especially in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4 and 5). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization noted in their publication by Jiang et al. (2025) that although considerable strides were made in reducing enrollment inequality between girls and boys in primary and secondary schools, inequality in terms of learning outcomes and educational experiences remained (Jiang et al., 2025). According to the Global Education Monitoring Report published by UNESCO in 2024, approximately 122

million girls were not in school globally. Even if they were in school, the educational experiences of girls and boys were not the same. The term "lived experiences" was informed by the phenomenological approach in the study of human societies. The term was used to describe the experiences of individuals in their encounters with the world. The term was informed by the work of Smith and Osborn in their recent work in interpretive phenomenological analysis in 2021. The work showed the application of the term in the study of the subjective nature of social inequality. The term was used in the study of the lived experiences of individuals in the face of inequality. The application of the term in the study of inequality in the realm of education was such that the inequality was not just about the inequality in the knowledge shared in the classroom. The inequality was more about the experiences of students in the classroom. The inequality was more about the experiences of students in the classroom. The inequality was more about the Studies from various global contexts showed consistency in such patterns. In the USA, recent studies by (Chiplunkar & Kleineberg, 2025) revealed how, even recently, classroom environments and teacher interactions with students showed gender biases, with girls getting less elaborate feedback in STEM subjects. Another recent study by (Luoto, 2023) revealed how patterns of differential teacher interactions persisted, with male students getting more interactions in class despite decades of raising such concerns. In European countries, recent studies by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023) revealed how patterns of gender segregation persisted, with girls underrepresented in STEM subjects and boys in care-related subjects. Such patterns had an impact on performance perceptions and opportunities, as revealed in recent studies by (Tardos et al., 2025). What is more, recent global studies revealed how, compared to earlier decades, there was a shift from simply revealing gender gaps to revealing how gender inequality functioned in students' lives. Recent studies by (Scott et al., 2024) in the UK revealed how gender stereotypes functioned through teacher expectations, which impacted students' performance through self-fulfilling prophecy. Recent longitudinal studies in Australia by Keddie and Mills (2023) revealed how masculinity impacted boys' performance, with boys feeling pressured to stop performing academically to remain masculine. The recent pandemic has also revealed how gender gaps exist in various countries' educational systems.

UNESCO (2022) revealed how, during the pandemic, girls were more impacted by school closures, with increased domestic work, reduced access to technologies, and increased risk of gender-based violence, all of which impacted academic performance. In her study on the recovery of education in the post-pandemic period, highlighted the importance of addressing the issue of gender in the process of building back more equitable education systems. The above global trends provided an important background in understanding the issue of gender inequality as it was lived by students in different parts of the globe. The issue of gender inequality in education in Africa was characterized by diversity and complexity (Ainscow, 2020). The colonial past, cultural diversity, economic conditions, and current responses were some of the factors that impacted the issue in the region. The African Union Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) recognized the importance of gender equality as one of the key principles in the development of education in the region (African Union, 2021). However, the lived experiences of students in the region showed the complexities that went beyond the statistics of access. Sub-Saharan Africa still faced significant disparities in education between the genders. According to UNICEF (2024), the enrollment gap between the two genders at the primary level had narrowed; however, the completion rates showed the persistence of the issue in the region. The situation was more serious in conflict-affected countries where the education of the female population was more adversely impacted. According to the African Development Bank (2023), the issue of gender inequality in education in the region still showed significant gaps in the learning achievements of the two genders. The issue of specialization was also more pronounced in the case of the female population. However, the statistics did not show the lived realities of the female students in the region as portrayed by the recent study of the region done by (Chalasani, 2025). The recent study done in East Africa by Odhiambo (2023) showed the impact of patriarchal cultural values in the education of the female students in the region. According to the study, the female students were seen as wives and mothers in the future, while the male students were seen as the providers who needed education. The recent study done in the whole of Africa by Chege and colleagues (2022) showed the impact of cultural values in the way the two genders were perceived in the context of education. The

study showed the impact of cultural values in the way the two genders were perceived in the context of encouragement and support in education. The study by Mkhize and Ndlovu (2024) illustrated the ways in which education itself was also gendered in African societies, in terms of the types of education and careers deemed suitable for men and women, thus influencing student identities from early childhood into young adulthood. In terms of the ways in which teachers interact with students, research in Africa has consistently found gendered teacher-student relationships. For instance, in South Africa, (Llorens et al., 2021) Morrell and Bhana (2023) found that teachers still have lower expectations of girls in math and science and channel them into humanities and social sciences instead. In Nigeria, the study by Okeke et al. (2024) found that discourse in the classroom reinforced gender stereotypes, with boys encouraged to ask questions and assert themselves, while girls were encouraged for being compliant and for being neat in class. These differing expectations have implications for student self-concepts and academic achievement, as illustrated in the recent longitudinal study by Akyeampong (2022). In terms of material conditions, recent African scholarship has also highlighted the ways in which education in Africa has been gendered in material ways. For instance, in rural Kenya, (Mwansa, 2020) found that girls' household responsibilities, including fetching water, taking care of siblings, and doing household chores, still have significant implications for girls' study habits and thus for girls' academic achievement. In terms of broader material conditions, the MasterCard Foundation (2024) study on girls' education and economic empowerment found significant ways in which poverty intersected with gender in various African societies, including in terms of education priorities for families in poverty, where boys were prioritized in terms of education in order for families to have a better chance of escaping poverty, thus illustrating the significant ways in which education in Africa has been gendered in material ways. In terms of the ways in which gender has intersected with other identities in shaping education in Africa, recent African scholarship has highlighted significant ways in which gender intersected with ethnicity and rurality in shaping education in Africa. For instance, the study by Tamale (2021) in Uganda found significant ways in which girls in rural areas from marginalized ethnic groups were at a disadvantage and that gender was not sufficient in itself to explain these disadvantages. Similarly, studies on urban

informal settlements conducted by Abuya and colleagues (2023) in Kenya found how the issue of poverty, gender, and location intersected in such a way that created specific barriers in the educational engagement and achievement of the girl child. The application of these intersectional theories, as conceptualized by Nnaemeka (2022), in the theorization of African feminisms, was instrumental in understanding the intricacies of life experiences.

Although the government and civil society organizations' interventions showed some positive trends in the increased enrollment of the female child in education and the enhancement of the law in the fight against gender-based inequality in society, the societal norms were still an impediment in the achievement of full equality between the genders. The resolution of these problems required the implementation of comprehensive strategies in the education sector, the economic empowerment of the female child, and the need to address the cultural barriers in the perception of the roles of the two genders in society.

The Ugandan government's commitment to the achievement of full equality between the two genders in the education sector was clearly stated in the National Gender Policy (updated in 2023), the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2021-2026), the Gender in Education Policy (revised in 2022), among other policy documents. The policy issues in these documents ranged from the education of the girl child to the implementation of gender-sensitive education in the country. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2024), the enrollment of the girl child in primary education was at par with the enrollment of the male child at 50.1%, while in secondary education it was slightly lower at 48.5%.

In the tertiary education sector, the National Council for Higher Education (2024) reported that the enrollment of the female child in Ugandan institutions of higher learning was slightly higher at 46%. However, the issue of the differential experiences of the two genders in the education sector was recognized in the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB, 2024), which reported that there were significant disparities in the performance of the two genders in mathematics and sciences at all

levels in Ugandan institutions of learning. The Uganda National Examinations Board (2023), in its analysis of the examination performance of the two genders in Ugandan institutions of learning over the past ten years, found that the gap between the two genders was quite stable in the past ten years.

Qualitative studies carried out in recent years in Uganda have provided valuable insights into the ways in which gender inequality has played out in the experiences of learners. For instance, Aceng et al. (2023) carried out a study in Ugandan secondary schools and found ways in which teachers called boys more frequently for challenging questions in class and girls for reproductive roles. Sexual harassment by teachers and boys in Ugandan schools has also played a significant role in the experiences of girls in Ugandan schools, as they found it hard to concentrate in class because of the hostile environment created by teachers and boys. In another study carried out in Ugandan universities in Kampala, Nakanyike and Musisi (2022) found ways in which girls in Ugandan universities experienced daily micro-aggressions in the form of being ignored in class, having their contributions dismissed by teachers, and being assumed to be intellectually inferior in predominantly male fields.

The study carried out by Asiimwe and Kwesiga (2024) in Ugandan communities found ways in which culture played out in the experiences of learners in Ugandan schools. For instance, girls in Ugandan schools have always known that they might not have the full chance to complete their education because they might get married early, and in some cases, success in education might jeopardize marriage in the future. In addition, girls have always known that they are valued for reproductive purposes in Ugandan culture. Boys, on the contrary, have always known that they have to perform well academically in order to provide for their families in the future but have also known that culture values boys for being tough rather than for being academically inclined, leading to masculine academic disengagement, as noted in the study carried out by Ssali (2023).

In the field of the tertiary sector, recent research has built on the understanding of gender in the university experience. Kwesiga and Ahikire (2022) investigated the experience of young women in Ugandan universities, where they had to contend with

the male-dominated environment in the academe, experience sexual harassment, gender stereotypes on intellectual competence, and the dual burden of school and domestic work, such as the case for married and parental students. The report on gender in higher education by the Uganda Vice Chancellors Forum (2024) reiterated the persistent concerns on sexual harassment, the low representation of women in leadership and in particular fields, and the call for more responsive policies.

The common concern in the more recent research on education in Uganda was the disconnect between policy and practice. As noted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWE, 2024), the policy on gender-sensitive teaching, sexual harassment, and the girl-friendly school program was in place but remained on paper because the implementation was hampered by the lack of resources and the resistance to change in the cultural context. Mirembe (2023) noted that the disconnect between policy and practice has become part of the experience of the students.

This student body comprised a wide range of students from urban and rural backgrounds, different ethnic communities, various socioeconomic backgrounds, and increasingly international students from Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, and beyond. This provided a wide range of interplays between genders. For example, a female student from a rural Karamoja background on scholarship may have a completely different interplay between gender and inequality compared to a male student from urban Kampala on private fees. The Anglican heritage and location in central Uganda meant that students came from different religious and regional backgrounds and may have encountered unfamiliar gender interplays. Recently, research on student diversity conducted by the UCU Office of the Dean of Students (2024) recognized the need for a more nuanced understanding of these interplays on student life.

Significantly for our purposes, UCU provided a situation where policy may have been progressive but lived experiences were less researched. The university's Gender and Equity Policy (2022) provided clear and comprehensive policy commitments. However, how these lived experiences relate to lecturers, university administration, and peers may or may not have matched these commitments. Indeed, a preliminary research

study conducted by the UCU Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) found that while 85% of students were aware of the university's gender policy, only 32% felt it was effective in their daily academic lives. Understanding these interplays between lived experiences and policy commitments became vital for effective intervention.

1.2 Problem Statement

Gender inequality in education was a persistent challenge in the world, and it had a significant impact on the academic experience and performance of students. While many researchers had investigated the relationship between gender and the academic performance of students, a more in-depth and in-depth analysis of the existing literature revealed gaps in the research, which the study attempted to bridge. Extensive research had been conducted globally on the relationship between gender inequality and the academic performance of students. Research by Francis et al. (2022) in the United Kingdom, Cheryan et al. (2020) in the United States, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023) had established the relationship between gender inequality and the academic performance of students. However, the research was conducted in the Western world and was therefore limited in its application to the African context. While many researchers had investigated the relationship between gender and the academic performance of students in the African context, the research was conducted in the Southern and Western regions of the continent and had left a gap in the understanding of the same in the East African context and in the context of the universities in Uganda.

In terms of gender and education in Uganda, though there were studies on gender and education, there were particular limitations. Aceng et al. (2023) and Asiimwe & Kwesiga (2024) studies were mainly focused on primary and secondary education. Nakanyike & Musisi (2022) focused on female students' experiences on microaggressions. On the other hand, Kwesiga & Ahikire (2022) provided a general overview on a macro-level perspective but didn't delve into detail on how gender inequality affected students' lived experiences. Most studies on gender and education in Uganda were based on public universities such as Makerere University. However, studies on private universities, particularly faith-based institutions such as Uganda Christian University,

were extremely limited. The preliminary study conducted by UCU Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) found that while 85% of students were aware of the university's gender policy, only 32% felt it was effective. This study therefore aimed to fill this gap on how gender inequality is experienced by students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono, how these lived experiences are related to academic performance in different disciplines, and what qualitative aspects are at play in terms of daily encounters, meanings, and coping mechanisms on how these experiences affect their academic performance as both male and female students.

1.3 General Objective

The purpose of the study was to assess the degree to which gender inequality affected the performance of students in their respective universities. It was expected that the study would identify some of the key factors contributing to the inequality between the genders, as well as provide possible solutions towards ensuring an inclusive environment for both genders.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- To examine the various forms of gender inequality experienced by university students.

- To identify the challenges faced by students due to gender inequality.

- To explore strategies to address gender inequality for better academic performance.

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the common forms of gender inequality in university education?

- What challenges do university students face as a result of gender inequality?

- What strategies can be put in place to address gender inequality to enhance student's academic performance at the university?

1.5 Justification

The need for the study was based on the need to understand the impact of gender inequality on the performance of students, which continued to grow globally, in Africa,

in Uganda, and at Uganda Christian University, Mukono. This was justified through the use of the triangulation approach, which started at the global level, moving towards the institutional level, justifying the need for the study. Globally, the impact of gender inequality on the performance of students was on the increase. Recent reports by UNESCO indicated that although gaps in the number of boys and girls enrolling in schools were reducing, the quality of the learning experiences remained highly gendered, with differences in class participation, course selection, and performance between the genders persisting and even growing in some instances. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of both genders was also on the increase, as UNESCO (2022) noted that school closures had negatively affected girls, who bore the brunt of increased domestic work, decreased digital learning opportunities, and increased risks of GBV, factors that continued to affect their performance in the post-COVID period. Furthermore, the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023) noted that the phenomenon of segregation by gender in choosing subjects was remarkably resistant to change, with females being underrepresented in high-status STEM subjects that led to lucrative careers, thereby sustaining economic gender gaps. These trends globally confirmed that the phenomenon of gender inequality in education was not an issue in decline but was an issue requiring continued research in specific contexts. In Africa, the impact of gender inequality on the performance of students was being recognized as an important barrier to educational and economic transformation. The African Union (2023) acknowledged that despite commitments towards addressing the issue, disparities in the performance of female and male students persisted, and in some countries, the disparities were growing. Recent research by Odhiambo (2023) highlighted the impact of patriarchal cultural values on shaping expectations about education in ways that undermined the performance of students. Parkes et al. (2022), in their research on three countries in Africa like; Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique found that school-related gender-based violence was rampant in the countries studied, and the impact on performance was severe and long-lasting. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (2024) noted that addressing the issue of gender inequality in education was an important continental priority because failure to address the issue undermined the achievement of all other educational priorities. In the case

of Uganda, the impact of gender inequality on the performance of students was evident and continued to manifest itself despite the progressive policy frameworks in the country. For instance, the Uganda National Examinations Board (2024) noted the persistent gender disparities in the performance of students in the country. According to the report, the gender gap in the performance of students was evident in all levels of education in the country. While the girls were performing poorly in mathematics and science subjects, they excelled in languages and arts. These trends had remained consistent over the last decade. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2024), the gender gap in the performance of students in the country was evident in the completion rates and learning outcomes. For instance, a study by Aceng et al. (2023) on the impact of gender inequality on the classroom interactions in the schools in the central region of Uganda noted the persistent gender inequality in the classroom. According to the study, the classroom interactions in the schools in the region were reinforcing the gender hierarchies, where the teachers unconsciously gave more attention and encouragement to the male students. Asiimwe and Kwesiga (2024) noted the persistent cultural factors in the country, where the value placed on the education of the girls was evident in the study. For instance, the study noted the cultural factors in the country, where the value placed on the education of the girls was less than the value placed on the education of the boys. In the case of the universities in the country, the National Council for Higher Education (2024) noted the persistent gender inequality in the country. For instance, the study noted the persistent gender inequality in the country, where the women were less represented in leadership and faculty roles. These trends justified the need for the study to investigate the impact of gender inequality in the Ugandan context. In Uganda Christian University, Mukono, there were compelling reasons why the study was conducted. First, the universities own Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) undertook a preliminary study which found that "while 85% of the students were aware of the university's gender policy, only 32% felt it was effectively implemented in their daily academic experiences." The gap between policy awareness and implementation was significant enough to warrant systematic study in order to understand the nature of the gap and its implications for student performance. The university found worrying trends in the student body. The UCU Student Guild (2023)

recorded formal student complaints of sexual harassment at 14 in one year. The Guild found that male students dominated in university leadership positions at 78%, even though the student enrollment was almost equal between the two genders. The Counselling Department (2024) found that female students were more likely to seek counseling services over academic confidence issues compared to their male counterparts. The study found that gender inequality was an active factor in the university student body. No qualitative study had been conducted at Uganda Christian University examining the lived experiences of the students in relation to gender inequality and their academic performance. While the preliminary study by the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) was useful in providing quantitative study findings, it was not able to offer the rich understanding of the subjective reality of the students' lived experiences with gender inequality. By examining the lived experiences of gender inequality in Uganda Christian University in relation to academic performance, the study provided context-specific knowledge that was useful in understanding the issue in the Ugandan context. The study was useful in the Ugandan context because it provided knowledge that was specific to the Ugandan situation. The study was useful in the Ugandan context because it provided knowledge that was specific to the Ugandan situation. The study was useful in the Ugandan context because it provided knowledge that was specific to the Ugandan situation.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research on the lived experiences of gender inequality and their association with student academic performance at Uganda Christian University in Mukono is important as it provided significant value to various stakeholders.

University Administrators and Management. The findings of this research were important to university administrators and management at Uganda Christian University and other similar institutions. University management is responsible for providing a learning environment for all students to thrive academically. This research provided university management with valuable knowledge on the lived experiences of gender inequality among university students. This knowledge will be important for effective

implementation of the university's Gender and Equity Policy (2022). University management will have a clear understanding of the lived experiences of gender inequality faced by university students. This will be important in providing solutions to challenges faced by university students as a result of gender inequality. This knowledge will be important for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming activities at Uganda Christian University. University management will have a clear understanding of the lived experiences of gender inequality faced by university students. This will be important in providing solutions to challenges faced by university students as a result of gender inequality. This knowledge will be important for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming activities at Uganda Christian University. University management will have a clear understanding of the lived experiences of gender inequality faced by university students. This will be important in providing solutions to challenges faced by university students as a result of gender inequality. This knowledge will be important for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming activities at Uganda Christian University.

Educators and Teaching Staff. Lecturers and teaching staff at Uganda Christian University found this research important to their daily activities. Educators are on the front line and are responsible for interactions with university students. Much of gender inequality occurs in learning institutions. However, many educators may have been unaware of how their own practices, such as the questions they asked, the students they called upon, or the feedback and examples used may have contributed to gender inequalities and impacted student performance. This study shed light on how students experienced these classroom dynamics and provided educators with valuable feedback on their own practices. This way, educators may have become aware of how gender inequalities were subtly practiced within teaching and learning spaces and have adjusted their own practices to promote a more gender-sensitive approach. Students. The current and future students of Uganda Christian University were likely to greatly benefit from this research. This research provided a voice for the experiences of students and validated their realities, which many may have faced but may have felt powerless to express within a public forum. For those students who have faced gender

inequalities within their learning spaces, validating these experiences within a research may have provided a sense of self-worth and may have reduced feelings of isolation or self-doubt. The research may have also provided awareness for all students on the different forms gender inequalities may take within learning spaces, which may have become so ingrained within society as to go unnoticed. This awareness may have been the first step towards collective action and peer support. Moreover, as the research provided information on effective approaches for addressing gender inequalities as experienced by students, it may have empowered these students to become advocates for change within their learning spaces.

Gender Equality Advocates and Activists. This research provided valuable information for gender equality advocates and activists within and beyond Uganda Christian University. Those in the business of pushing for the advancement of gender equality in higher education institutions have often faced opposition from individuals who believed that gender disparity did not exist or that the policies in place were adequate. The study provided concrete evidence of the reality of the lived experiences of gender inequality in Uganda. It showed that despite the policies in place, students still faced certain barriers in their academic performance based on their gender. The information obtained in the study can be used by advocates of gender equality in higher education institutions to strengthen their case.

Counselors and Student Support Services. The counselors and student support services staff at Uganda Christian University and other higher education institutions in Uganda can benefit from the information obtained in the study. The study provided information about the psychological and emotional aspects of the experiences of the students in the study. The Counselling Department at UCU (2024), in their study of the counseling needs of female students at Uganda Christian University, found that female students were more likely to present with academic confidence issues compared to their male counterparts. It is likely that the effects of gender inequality over the years might have had an impact on the female students. The study provided more information about the effects of the experiences of the students with gender inequality on their mental well-being.

Policymakers at National Level. The policymakers at the national level in Uganda involved in the education sector found the study relevant to their work in the development of policies that guided the operations of higher education institutions in Uganda. The Ministry of Education and Sports, the National Council for Higher Education, and organizations such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWE), among others, were in the process of addressing the issue of gender inequality in education. Although these organizations had access to national-level statistical information regarding student enrollment and student performance, they sometimes did not have the rich, in-depth understanding of the ways in which gender inequality functioned within a particular institutional setting. This study helped to fill this void by offering an in-depth study of one Ugandan university.

Researchers and Academics. The academic community, including both researchers and scholars in the fields of gender studies, higher education, and African studies, found this study a valuable contribution to existing knowledge. As previously mentioned in the problem statement, there was a need for more research regarding the issue of gender inequality and student performance in private universities in Uganda, specifically those faith-based institutions. This study helped to fill this void by offering empirical research in an area previously under-researched.

Social Workers and Community Practitioners. Social workers and community-based practitioners who worked with university students or those in transition to and from higher education found the information in this study helpful. Social workers in university settings, in community organizations, or in government agencies often found themselves working with young people struggling academically for a variety of reasons not always immediately obvious. Understanding the ways in which gender inequality might influence student performance helped social workers better understand the student's situation and thus better serve them.

Parents and Families. Parents and families of university students, both currently enrolled and those considering enrollment in the near future, benefited indirectly from this study in terms of potential improvements in the university setting. Parents and

families have made significant investments in terms of monetary, emotional, and social capital in the education of their children at the university level, with the expectation that this investment would lead to success in terms of academic performance. When gender inequality affected students' potential but also the family's investment.

Future Employers and the Broader Society. Finally, future employers and the broader Ugandan society benefited from this research in terms of its potential contribution to the development of a more equitably educated student body. When students faced gender inequality issues that impacted their academic performance, they did not reach their full potential because they entered the workforce with less than the full potential they might have achieved. Therefore, by helping to create a more equitable education environment for women and men, this study helped create a society in which the graduates of Ugandan universities had the full potential they might have achieved despite being female.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The boundaries of this study were three-fold: content scope, geographical scope, and time scope. These boundaries ensured that the research was focused and achievable while still addressing the objectives.

1.7.1 Content Scope

The content scope of this study defined the substantive parameters of the study, including what the study covered and, more important, what it did not cover. This study was guided by three major objectives: first, to investigate the various types of gender inequality faced by university students; second, to identify the challenges faced by the students because of gender inequality; and third, to identify the strategies that could be implemented to address the issue of gender inequality for better academic performance. Regarding the types of gender inequality, this study covered the experiences of the students in various dimensions of university life (Wang et al., 2023). This included experiences in the classroom with lecturers and fellow students, experiences within departments and faculties, experiences in co-curricular activities, experiences with university administration, and experiences in the broader social

environment of the university. This study covered both the obvious types of gender inequality, like discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, and the less obvious types of gender inequality, like micro-aggressions, stereotyping, and unconscious bias(Aitchison & Henderson, 2013). This study covered the experiences of the students in terms of gender inequality in the processes of teaching and learning.

In terms of challenges faced by the students, the research focused on challenges that were related to or affected academic performance. This included challenges that were directly related to academic performance, such as those that affected learning, participation in class, ability to concentrate, or participation in activities or subjects. It also included challenges that were indirectly related to academic performance, such as those related to psychological effects, relationships with lecturers or peers, or those that affected time and energy management(Buchmann et al., 2008). In terms of strategies for addressing gender inequality, the research focused on those strategies that were potentially effective according to the perceptions of the students as well as those that were actually used. This included individual-level strategies, peer-level strategies, and institutional-level strategies. The research explored the perceptions of the students on those strategies that were actually effective in creating a learning environment for all students where academic performance was enhanced.

The study was delimited in the following ways. Firstly, the research focused on gender inequality and did not include other inequalities such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, disability, or religion, except where these inequalities intersected with gender. Secondly, the research focused on academic performance as the outcome of interest and did not include other potential outcomes such as career performance or psychological effects (except as these affected academic performance)(Klasen, 2018). Thirdly, the research focused on the experiences and perceptions of the students and did not include those of lecturers or other stakeholders.

1.7.2 Geographical Scope

The geographical scope was the geographical boundaries within which the research was conducted. This study was conducted within the geographical boundaries of Uganda

Christian University, Main Campus, Mukono, located in Mukono Municipality, Mukono District, Central Region, and Uganda.

Mukono District is one of the districts in the Central Region of Uganda. Its central business district is located in Mukono Municipality, along the Kampala-Jinja Highway. The geographical coordinates of Mukono District are approximately 00°28'50.0" North latitude and 32°46'14.0" East longitude (0.480567°N, 32.770567°E). The average elevation is approximately 1,200 meters above sea level. This district covers an approximate area of 2,986.47 square kilometers, with 1,804.68 square kilometers being land and 1,181.73 square kilometers being water bodies, including a large part of Lake Victoria. Uganda Christian University Main Campus is specifically located on Mukono Hill, Mukono Municipality, Central Division, and Kampala-Jinja Highway. This campus is approximately 21 kilometers from Kampala City. This made the Main Campus easily accessible while still being unique and distinct from the capital.

1.7.3 Time Scope

The specific time scope of the study provided the temporal boundaries of the research. The research sought to investigate the phenomenon of gender inequality in the higher education sector in Uganda from about 2015 to 2026. Data collection was done in 2026. The specific period was critical in the sense that various indicators suggested the existence of gender inequality in the country(Kane & Kyyrö, 2001). At the national level, Uganda's performance in terms of the global gender equality indices was in decline. The country's position in the world ranking in terms of the gender gap index was 0.717 in 2020 but reduced to 0.706 in 2024. The implications were that the disparities in terms of gender in areas such as education were not reducing but were actually increasing. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were dramatic in terms of the exacerbation of the disparities in the Ugandan education system(Jiang et al., 2025). The students who were in school in 2020-2022 were the ones who were most affected in the sense that they were in the critical secondary school age when the disruptions were taking place. The students who were entering the universities in 2022-2026 were the ones who were in school when the disruptions were taking place.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

This research was informed by an adequate theoretical background. The background was provided by the existing social work theories on the concepts of gender, power, and human development. The conceptual framework was informed by one existing social work theory. The theory provided an integrated framework for the investigation of the phenomenon of gender inequality in the Uganda Christian University in Mukono. The theory was, Ecological Systems Theory, the theory provided an additional dimension in the analysis of the phenomenon under investigation.

Ecological Systems Theory. Ecological systems theory, as originally formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner and extensively applied in the field of social work, was a theory that helped in the understanding of the role of the various environmental systems in the shaping of the individual. The theory was significant in the practice of social work because it helped in the understanding of the various environments in which individuals lived, learned, and developed. Ecological systems theory was significant in the practice of social work because it helped in the understanding of the various environments in which individuals lived, learned, and developed. The theory was significant in the practice of social work because it helped in the understanding of the various environments in which individuals lived, learned, and developed and changes over an individual's life course.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed existing literature related to the lived experiences of gender inequality and their relationship to students' academic performance in universities. The review included theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence on forms of gender inequality, challenges faced by students, strategies to address gender inequality, and identified research gaps that this study sought to fill.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by one complementary theory: Ecological Systems Theory.

2.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and heavily adapted by social work practice, was a guiding theory that provided an understanding of how individuals were shaped by and related to their various environmental systems. Ecological systems theory identified various interconnected systems that impacted human development and experiences. These include the microsystem, which was the immediate environment with which the student directly interacted. This was composed of the lecture halls, classrooms, and peers. The mesosystem was composed of the connections between various microsystems. The exo system was composed of the indirect factors that impacted the experiences of the students. This included the university policies and other university decisions. Finally, the macro system was composed of the cultural values, beliefs, and ideologies that permeated all other systems. Ecological systems theory was an all-encompassing theory that provided an understanding of how the gender inequality experienced by the students at Uganda Christian University was multi-level and impacted various aspects of their environment (Tudge, 2019).

2.3 Forms of Gender Inequality Experienced by University Students

The first purpose of this study was to identify the various dimensions of gender inequality faced by university students. A significant amount of recent literature has explored the various dimensions of gender inequality faced by university students.

2.3.1 Gender Stereotypes and Their Manifestations

Gender stereotypes were prevalent in the university environment across the world. These stereotypes have impacted the way university students have been viewed and assessed in the university environment. Dilshan & Shantha (2026) undertook a study on the psychological impacts of gender stereotypes on university students in Sri Lanka. This study found that the influence of gender stereotypes in university environments led to the way men and women were viewed in terms of what was appropriate for each gender. This led to different growth patterns for men and women in terms of societal expectations. This study found from its review of the literature that gender stereotypes have impacted the way university students view themselves in terms of their abilities, interests, and expectations in terms of their careers. This has led to psychological barriers for university students in terms of pursuing their expectations. In terms of gender stereotypes in the Latin American region, a study of 672 university students in Chile found that there were three dimensions of gender stereotypes in the university environment. These dimensions included traditional masculinity, feminine caregiving, and moralizing in terms of female behavior in the university environment (Chilean University Study, 2026).

2.3.2 Gendered Authority and Classroom Dynamics

One of the well-documented types of gender inequality in the university setting was with regard to the way authority was represented in the classroom. Kong (2026), in their study of the way in which teaching evaluations were used to reinforce the idea that individuals were heavily socialized in their expectations and stereotypes, found that women were praised for being caring and supportive, while males were praised for being brilliant and dynamic. The type of gender inequality that was found in the university setting was problematic in the way in which it was used in the objective

process of evaluation. The way in which male students were able to participate in the classroom was well-represented in the research that was done in the way in which classroom participation was used (Luoto, 2023).

2.3.3 Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Harassment

One of the more egregious types of gender inequality that was faced by university students was with regard to the way in which gender-based violence was perpetrated in the university setting. A systematic review was conducted at the Society for Social Work and Research 30th Annual Conference (2026), in which the way in which college student bystander behavior was used to reduce the occurrence of sexual assault was examined. The study found that the way in which bystander intervention education was required by law did not reduce the occurrence of violence perpetrated by the students. The way in which the situation was in the African context was well-represented in the reflective case study that was done by Ashraf, Ali, and Ali (2025).

2.3.4 Differential Treatment in Academic Advising and Mentorship

Current research on women in STEM postgraduate education in sub-Saharan Africa has shown some complexities in mentorship and advising. In a recent study involving 163 female PhD alumni from 40 African universities in 17 different countries, it was found that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of focus group participants preferred male supervisors because of competitiveness and lack of support from some women at higher positions (Sub-Saharan Africa STEM Study, 2026).

2.3.5 Gendered Patterns in Technology Use

A recent area of research has looked into the differences in the way men and women engage with artificial intelligence technology in learning. In a systematic review carried out in 2026 on 30 studies from 2020 to 2025, it was found that there were significant differences in the way men and women used artificial intelligence technology in different aspects of university life. In general, men reported higher frequency, self-confidence, and behavioral intention for the use of AI technology in different situations, while women used it more cautiously and emphasized the need for ethical considerations, guidance, and feedback.

2.3.6 Forms of Gender Inequality in the Ugandan Context

In the Ugandan context, research on the forms of gender inequality in higher education institutions revealed similar trends to those found in other parts of the globe. The study by Kwesiga & Ahikire (2022), which provided an extensive overview of the experiences of women in Ugandan higher education over the past two decades, revealed the different forms of gender inequality in the Ugandan context. The study by Nakanyike & Musisi (2022), which focused on the issue of micro aggressions and the experiences of female students in Ugandan higher education institutions, revealed the different forms of subtle gender inequality that female students experienced in Ugandan higher education institutions. The preliminary study carried out by the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) at Uganda Christian University revealed that although eighty-five percent of the students were aware of the university's policy on gender, only thirty-two percent believed that the policy was being implemented in their daily academic experiences.

2.4 Challenges Faced by Students Due to Gender Inequality

The second objective of the study was to identify the challenges faced by the students as a result of gender inequality. Recent literature highlighted the different challenges faced by the students in their academic performance, psychological well-being, and academic achievement.

2.4.1 Academic Performance and Achievement Gaps

Research carried out on the performance gaps between the two genders in higher education institutions showed mixed findings that were not entirely in favor of either the male or female gender. A study carried out in 2026 in one of the public universities in Indonesia focused on determining the existence of performance gaps between the two genders in entrance examinations. The study found that there were no statistically significant differences between the two genders in the entrance examinations; however, it was established that the maximum scores were far below the full mark. A study carried out in the United States by Skoy, Antman, and Flores (2026) focused on the effects of grades and information on the gender gap in college major and college dropout rates. The study found that women were more likely to be affected by their

grades in introductory economics when determining whether or not to major in the same course; however, the male counterparts were more likely to be affected by their grades in introductory economics when determining whether or not to drop out of college.

2.4.2 Psychological and Emotional Challenges

The psychological effects of gender inequality among university students were widely researched in recent times. A study carried out by Dilshan and Shantha (2026) found that the existence of gender stereotypes acted as psychological barriers that limited the students' ambitions and their self-image. The concept of the "impostor syndrome" was well established in the research carried out on the female gender in higher education institutions. A study carried out among the female counterparts in the master's programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in sub-Saharan Africa found that despite the fact that more than sixty percent of the female counterparts were financially stressed and more than half were not prepared at the time of entry into the program, ninety-five percent were confident in their ability to succeed in their respective programs.

2.4.3 Career and Professional Development Challenges

The issue of gender inequality in universities posed significant challenges in the career development of university students. The systematic review of the research productivity of women in the academy, which was published in the journal Higher Education in 2026, revealed that patriarchal academic cultures were significant barriers in the career development of women in the academy. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy was characterized by systemic bias and lack of institutional accountability. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy posed significant barriers in the career development of women in the academy. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy was characterized by patriarchal academic cultures. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy was characterized by systemic bias. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy was characterized by lack of institutional accountability. The issue of gender inequality in the academy posed significant barriers

in the career development of university students who were pursuing academic careers. The study on the experiences of women in the academy revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy posed significant barriers in the career development of university students in the African context. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the academy was characterized by cultural barriers where women were expected to prioritize their families over their academic careers.

2.4.4 Social and Relational Challenges

The issue of gender inequality in universities posed significant social and relational challenges in the university environment. The study on the impact of gender stereotypes in the university environment in the context of the Chilean university revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the university environment was characterized by beliefs that acted as normative frameworks in the university environment. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the university environment was characterized by systemic bias in the university environment. The study revealed that the issue of gender inequality in the university environment was characterized by lack of institutional accountability in the university environment. The study revealed that the issue

2.4.5 Institutional and Structural Challenges

The systematic review on women's research productivity identified a gap between policy formulation and implementation on gender equity issues. This gap can be seen as a challenge for students as it resulted in a situation where institutions were committed to gender equality but still exhibited elements of gender inequality. In Uganda, challenges identified were those related to resources for implementing gender policies, cultural influences on institutions, and lack of mechanisms for holding institutions accountable for gender-based discrimination.

2.4 Strategies to Address Gender Inequality for Better Academic Performance

The third objective of the study focused on exploring the strategies that can be used to address gender inequality for better academic performance among students. Literature on gender inequality in education indicated that there were many strategies

and approaches to address gender inequality and promote academic performance among students.

2.5.1 Institutional Policy Reforms

Institutional Policy Reforms The systematic review on women's research productivity identified several issues that can be used to address gender inequality. These issues were identified as necessary for addressing gender inequality and enhancing women's research productivity. Kong (2026) identified institutional reforms as necessary for promoting gender equality in institutions. These reforms included hiring and promoting committees that were diverse, promoting criteria that recognized non-linear career paths for academics, transparent workload models, and rotational service requirements. In Africa, the systematic review on women in STEM postgraduate education identified several issues as necessary for promoting gender equality in institutions. These issues included family-friendly policies, mentoring programs, and institutional reforms.

2.5.2 Educational and Pedagogical Strategies

This study by Dilshan and Shantha (2026) concluded that addressing gender stereotypes through specific educational interventions, mentor programs, and awareness programs might motivate students to pursue their chosen careers in areas that reflected their real interests. The study on gender stereotypes in Chile highlighted the need for educational interventions that critically examined gender stereotypes and higher education with equity and non-sexist training. The study on AI tools in higher education institutions recommended the development of gender-responsive AI tools with equity and inclusivity considerations.

2.5.3 Mentorship and Role Model Strategies

Mentorship was highlighted in the literature as an essential strategy in addressing gender inequality in higher education institutions. The study on women in STEM in sub-Saharan Africa found that mentoring was essential in the support of women in their postgraduate education programs. The finding that the majority of the participants in the focus group study wanted male supervisors implied that the quality of mentorship

was essential in addressing the issue of gender inequality in higher education institutions.

2.5.4 Student Support Services and Counseling

The psychological effects highlighted in the literature pointed to the need for student support services in addressing the issue of gender inequality in higher education institutions. Counseling services might assist students in dealing with their experiences of gender-based discrimination or harassment. At Uganda Christian University, the study by the Counselling Department (2024) found that female students required counseling services more than male students in the issue of academic confidence.

2.5.5 Peer-Led and Student-Driven Strategies

Studies on bystander intervention have emphasized the power of peer approaches in dealing with issues of gender inequality. Student-centered approaches, like gender equality clubs, awareness programs, and peer education, could potentially contribute towards cultural change by communicating the message that inequality was not acceptable on campus and that those affected were not alone.

2.5.6 Addressing the Policy-Implementation Gap

The systematic review identified the policy-implementation gap. UCU Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) noted that only thirty-two percent of the students felt that the gender policy was implemented effectively. This emphasized the need to bridge the policy-implementation gap through various mechanisms and strategies. This is where the importance of addressing the policy-implementation gap comes in.

2.5.7 Context-Specific and Culturally Grounded Strategies

A major theme noted in the recent literature was the importance of implementing context-specific and culturally grounded strategies. This was especially important given the unique challenges that existed, especially in the Global South. The systematic review was critical of the fact that lessons were being drawn from the Global North to address the socio-economic challenges in the Global South. Africa was noted to be a source of innovation and resilience. This emphasized the importance of addressing the issue of gender inequality with the knowledge and resources available.

2.6 Research Gaps

This literature review helped in the realization that although research had been undertaken on the issue of gender inequality in higher institutions of learning worldwide, gaps still existed. Firstly, little research had been done on the relationship between gender inequality and the performance of students in Ugandan private institutions of higher learning, specifically faith-based institutions like Uganda Christian University. Secondly, most research was based on primary and secondary schools. Thirdly, most research on gender inequality in Uganda was based on public institutions of higher learning. Fourthly, little research was based on the qualitative approach, which involved the exploration of the lived experiences of the participants. Lastly, most research was based on the performance of female students, while little research was based on the performance of both female and male students. This research aimed at filling the gaps by exploring the lived experiences of gender inequality and their relationship to the performance of students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology employed by the researcher in exploring the lived experiences of gender inequality and their relationship to the performance of students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono

3.2 Research Design

This research was based on the qualitative research design. This was because qualitative research was important in helping the researcher understand social phenomena from the participants' own perspective by exploring the meanings, experiences, and interpretations individuals gave to social issues. The design was appropriate for the study because gender-based discrimination was a multifaceted social phenomenon that demanded in-depth understanding of the students' experiences in the higher learning institutions. Through the research design, the researcher was able to investigate the academic, social, psychological, and institutional challenges the students encountered because of gender inequality.

3.3 Area of Study

The study was conducted in Uganda Christian University, Main Campus, and Mukono. The researcher chose the university because it was a microcosm of the larger population in the sense that the students in the university were diverse in gender, academic program, and socio-cultural background. The researcher chose a university that offered undergraduate programs in different fields. This gave the researcher the opportunity to explore the students' experiences in different fields. Additionally, the university was located in Mukono Municipality, 21 kilometers away from Kampala City. Mukono has a rich cultural and historical background and has a distinct campus.

3.4 Sources of Information

The main sources of information for the study were the undergraduate students studying in Uganda Christian University, Mukono. Both male and female students were targeted to enable the researcher to compare the information and views the students

had concerning gender-based discrimination. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather information. Through the research design, the researcher was able to investigate the students' freely expressed views concerning gender bias and discrimination, and the shared experiences and collective views concerning gender equality in the university. Besides the above sources, the researcher also used other sources such as the university's policies and guidelines on gender equality to give the researcher a background on gender equality in the university.

3.5 Target Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population in this study consisted of undergraduate students from various faculties in Uganda Christian University, Mukono. The study included both male and female students in order to have a balanced view. A purposive sampling method was used in the study, which included participants who have undergone some form of discrimination based on gender within the university setting. This method was appropriate for the study since it enabled the researcher to sample participants who would have relevant information for the study. The number of participants in the study was relatively small since the study was qualitative in nature. It is estimated that the researcher interviewed about 10 to 20 participants, depending on the time it took for saturation to set in.

3.6 Variables and Indicators

This study examined various variables regarding gender inequality and the academic performance of university students. In this study, the independent variable was gender inequality in higher education, which was examined in various dimensions. These dimensions included academic discrimination, which refers to discrimination in terms of grades, class participation, guidance, and opportunities for higher education. It also included institutional bias, which refers to discrimination in terms of university policies and culture against a certain gender. It also included social and cultural stereotypes, which refer to discrimination in terms of expectations and beliefs about a certain gender. In addition, it included harassment and safety issues, which refer to discrimination in terms of experiences of harassment and intimidation among university students. The dependent variable was students' academic performance and

involvement, which was assessed through experiential variables like academic confidence, self-esteem, involvement in class discussions, motivation towards studies, availability of academic opportunities, and perceived academic achievements.

3.7 Measurement Levels

This study followed a qualitative approach towards measurement, focusing on the in-depth understanding of students' experiences, their perceptions, and their meanings. While focusing on the measurement of gender inequality, the measurement approach followed was based on two different levels. Firstly, the measurement approach followed was based on the nominal level of measurement, where the types of inequality faced by the students were assessed. Secondly, while moving beyond the simple categorization of inequality, the measurement approach followed was based on the ordinal level of measurement, where the perceived frequency of inequality was assessed. While measuring the dependent variable like academic performance, the approach followed was based on the perspectives of the students, focusing on their experiences of dealing with gender inequality while pursuing their studies.

3.8 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher obtained clearance from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee by presenting the research proposal, the data collection tools, and the consent forms. After approval was obtained, the researcher pilot-tested all the data collection tools with three to five students not included in the study sample in order to address any ambiguities with the tools. The researcher used purposive sampling of the student population of Uganda Christian University, Mukono Main Campus. The researcher disseminated the information about the study using posters and flyers placed in strategic positions around the university with the approval of the university authorities. The Gender Mainstreaming Directorate, the Dean of Students Office, and the student leadership were instrumental in facilitating the study by providing information about the study and encouraging student participation in the study. The inclusion criteria were being a current student at UCU Main Campus Mukono, in any year of study and in any faculty, willing to share their experiences and perspectives about the issue of gender inequality in Uganda. The researcher targeted twenty to

twenty-five participants for individual interviews and three to four focus group discussions with three to five participants in each group in order to achieve diversity in terms of gender, faculty, and year of study, socioeconomic background, and ethnicity.

3.9 Data Collection Methods

The researcher used three data collection methods in the study: individual interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Semi-Structured Interviews. The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. This method provided the participants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. The interview was structured in such a way that it covered the main areas of interest. The interview guide was created in advance and consisted of the three objectives of the research. The interview was conducted in quiet and private areas on campus. These areas were quiet rooms in the school library and quiet classrooms. The participants were informed about their rights and were asked to fill out the consent form. The interview was then recorded with the participant's consent using a digital recording device. The interview was conducted over a period of forty-five to ninety minutes. The participants were asked questions and the responses were noted. The researcher observed the participants' body language and noted the responses.

3.10 Quality Control

Several steps were taken to ensure the quality and validity of the data collected. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by the prolonged engagement in the data collection process on campus. The triangulation of the data was done by using more than one method. The participants were asked about the findings of the research. The researcher's journal was used to keep track of the participants' responses. The data was then transcribed into text. The text was then reviewed for accuracy. The data was then pseudonymized.

3.11 Data Processing and Analysis Strategy

The data collected through interviews and focus group discussions was then processed and analyzed through thematic analysis, which is most suited to identify patterns and meanings from the lived experiences of the participants. The interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed in textual form. The researcher listened to all the

recordings and transcribed them accurately. The researcher paid close attention to every detail, including pauses, emotions, and non-verbal responses, as required. The transcripts were compared with the recordings to ensure accuracy. To maintain participant anonymity, all personal details were deleted and replaced with pseudonyms. The transcripts were stored on a computer with password access limited to the researcher and supervisor.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations were upheld during the study. This was achieved by seeking approval from the Institutional Review Board at Uganda Christian University. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. This study was conducted in an ethical manner, and participants were aware of the purpose of the study. They also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, since the study involved issues of gender discrimination, a conducive environment was created during the interviews.

3.13 Anticipated Challenges and Mitigation

The researcher anticipated some challenges during the study. For instance, some of the students might fear to open up regarding issues of gender discrimination. In addition, the researcher might not access the students on time due to the nature of the study. Some challenges might arise from the institution itself regarding access to some documents regarding the issue at hand. The researcher will ensure confidentiality and will seek approval from the relevant authorities at the institution.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected from five university students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono. The data was collected through audio interviews conducted in English, with each interview lasting between 5 to 15 minutes. The participants were from various faculties such as Nursing, Social Work and Social Administration, Information Technology, Engineering, and Theology. The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the results are based on the three objectives of the study, which are to investigate various forms of gender inequality experienced by university students, to identify various challenges experienced by students as a result of gender inequality, and to explore strategies to be employed to eradicate gender inequality for better academic performance. Quotations from the participants are included to support the results, with participant codes such as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5, which ensures anonymity and helps readers to identify the participant categories. The chapter begins with an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by the results based on each of the objectives. The results are presented based on various themes, and then a general overview of the results is provided. This chapter is based on the results obtained from the verbatim transcripts of the five audio interviews conducted with the university students, which are safely stored for verification.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The total number of participants for this study was five, all of whom were currently enrolled students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono Main Campus. They were purposively chosen from different faculties to ensure a diverse representation of different views on the effect of gender inequality on academic performance. They included two male participants and three female participants. The first participant was a male student, 22 years of age from Jinja District, pursuing a Bachelor of Nursing in his third year of study at Uganda Christian University. He was labeled P1 in order to maintain his privacy while still being able to trace his information throughout the study.

The second participant was a male student, 23 years of age from Mbarara District, pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration in his third year of study at Uganda Christian University. He was labeled P2. The third participant was a female student, 20 years of age from Kampala District, pursuing a Bachelor of Information Technology in her second year, second semester at Uganda Christian University. She was labeled P3. The fourth participant was a female student, 22 years of age from Gulu District, pursuing a Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering in her third year of study at Uganda Christian University. She was labeled P4. The fifth participant was a female student, 29 years of age from Kabale District, pursuing a Bachelor of Theology in her third year of study at Uganda Christian University. She was labeled P5. The participants were chosen to reflect a range of districts of origin across Uganda. These districts were Jinja in the Eastern Region, Mbarara in the Western Region, Kampala in the Central Region, Gulu in the Northern Region, and Kabale in the South-Western Region. This ensured that the study was able to reflect different cultural backgrounds, which was a significant factor because gender roles and expectations vary across the cultural regions in Uganda. The participants also came from different academic fields. These fields ranged from male-dominated fields such as Engineering, Information Technology, and Theology to female-dominated fields such as Nursing and Social Work. In terms of the level of study, participants were in their second year to third year, which meant that they had gained sufficient university experience to draw on their lived experiences of gender inequalities. Participants were all in their first year or more at UCU, with the third-year participants having spent between two to three years on campus.

4.3 Presentation and Analysis of Findings on Forms of Gender Inequality

This section seeks to address the first research objective: to explore the different forms of gender inequalities experienced by university students. From the analysis, there are various themes concerning gender inequalities and how these inequalities are experienced in the academic life of university students.

Gender Stereotyping and Role Expectations

One of the dominant themes emanating from all the interview data is the presence of stereotypes concerning gender inequalities and how these affect perceptions and

treatment based on gender. The male students in female-dominated fields reported stereotypes concerning their course of choice, while female students in male-dominated fields reported stereotypes concerning their capability. P1 is a male nursing student from Jinja District. He reported on stereotypes concerning his course of choice: *"When I was choosing courses at A-level, my teachers at secondary school in Jinja asked me why I wanted to do nursing. They said it is a 'girls' course.' At UCU, sometimes male students in other faculties ask me why I am doing nursing, like it is a joke. One engineering student told me, 'Nursing is for women who want to marry doctors.'"* This quote shows that gender stereotypes are not only found within university campuses but are part of the education journey before one joins university. The student shows how his profession is stereotyped as either feminine or masculine and how those in non-stereotypical professions are treated. P5 is a female theology student from Kabale District. She reported on stereotypes concerning her course of choice: *"When I told people I wanted to study theology, many asked me why." My own relatives said, 'But you are a woman. You should do education or nursing.' At church, people said, 'Theology is for men who want to become pastors and reverends. What will you do with it?' Even at UCU, I have had male students ask me, 'Why are you doing theology? Are you going to be a pastor?' with a tone that suggests that is not possible."* The text shows how, like nursing, there is stereotyping of women in the field of theology, and how their presence is questioned as illegitimate or unnecessary. The female students in male-dominated fields were stereotyped as to how they perceived themselves intellectually. P3, who is a female student pursuing IT in Kampala District, said, *"One male student once said to me, 'You are too pretty to be coding.' I did not know how to take that. It was like a compliment and an insult at the same time."* The text shows how there is stereotyping of women, complimenting them on how beautiful they look but at the same time insinuating that they cannot be intellectually present in an IT field. The stereotype is that coding is not for women who are pretty. P4, who is a female engineering student from Gulu District, said, *"In first year, a male lecturer told the class that 'engineering is not for women who want to get married and have children.'"* *I sat there feeling like he had just told me I do not belong."* This shows the stereotype not only coming from peers but from authority figures who help create the

learning environment. The lecturer's comment indicates that women must choose between family and engineering, which men do not face.

Differential Treatment in Classroom Interactions

Another notable theme was the differential treatment in the classroom setting, where male and female students said they were treated differently by lecturers based on gender. P3, the female IT student, gave an account on how lecturers treated male and female students differently. She said, *"When a male student gives an answer, the lecturer will often nod and say 'good' or 'correct.' When I give an answer, sometimes the lecturer will ask, 'Are you sure?' or 'Where did you get that from?' It is like they trust the male students more. There is a lecturer who frequently calls on male students first, even when I have my hand up. I have to keep my hand up for longer to be noticed."* This account shows the differential treatment where the lecturers' responses to the female students indicate to them that their contribution or answer in class is less valued or trusted than the contribution or answer by the male students. The experience shared by P4 on how she was treated by the lecturers in her engineering class was humiliating. She said, *"When a male student makes a mistake in a calculation, the lecturer will explain and move on. When I make a mistake, sometimes the lecturer says things like, 'Are you sure you are in the right course?' or 'Maybe you should consider something easier.' One lecturer said to me in front of the whole class, 'This is not tailoring, you need to focus.' I was so embarrassed. I almost dropped out after that."* This account shows the differential treatment where the lecturers' responses to the female students indicate to them that they do not belong in the class or in the course. Tailoring was a typical feminine course, and the lecturer's comment was intended to dismiss her in the engineering class. P2, a male social work student from Mbarara District, provided an account of differential treatment that was somewhat different from the experiences related by other participants: *"In social work, we discuss gender issues a lot. Sometimes I feel like I am expected to represent the 'male perspective' when we talk about issues like gender-based violence or women empowerment. Lecturers will look at me when discussing issues like 'what men should do to stop violence.' I feel put on the spot."* This account shows that male students in predominantly female fields feel burdened by the

expectation that they will have to speak for their entire gender. P5 related an account about how her contributions as a theology student were diminished: *"When a male student gives an interpretation of a scripture, it is taken seriously. When I give an interpretation, sometimes it is dismissed as 'emotional' or 'women's perspective.' I have had my contributions minimized."* This account shows how women's intellectual contributions are diminished through gendered language that portrays women as emotional beings, not rational beings, and how this is problematic since emotion is generally given negative connotations in academia where rationality is valued.

Gendered Division of Academic Labor

They also noted that in their studies, tasks and opportunities were sometimes segregated by gender, with females being allocated documentation and presentation tasks while males were allocated technical and leadership tasks. P3 explained this phenomenon in her IT program as follows: *"In group projects, I have been assigned the documentation and presentation parts while the men take the coding. I had to insist on doing coding so that I can learn."* This demonstrates the way in which group projects, intended as a vehicle for collaborative student learning, can instead serve as a vehicle for the perpetuation of inequality between the genders. P4 also explained a similar phenomenon in her engineering program as follows: *"In site visits, the contractors and site managers often ignore me and talk to the male students. They think the male students are the engineers and I am just accompanying them. I have to talk up and say, 'I am also an engineering student, I am here to learn.'"* This demonstrates the way in which gender inequality can play out outside the classroom. P1 explained the way in which even in nursing, a predominantly female discipline, gender inequality can play out in terms of task allocation as follows: *"During clinical placements, some patients will refuse to be attended to by a male nurse. One elderly woman at Mukono Health Centre said, 'Omusajja ono agenda kunkwatako?' meaning 'This man is going to touch me?' The lecturers try to be fair but sometimes during group discussions in class, they assume the girls are more caring and the boys are better at the technical procedures."* This demonstrates the way in which even in fields dominated by one gender, gender stereotypes still play a significant part in student perception.

Gendered Authority and Leadership

The other major theme discussed was the aspect of gender in terms of access and control of leadership positions in the university. This was highlighted by the participants as they noted that there were more men in leadership positions in the university. P2 highlighted this aspect as they noted: *"I have noticed that male students are encouraged to take leadership positions more than female students. In our department, most of the student leaders are male, even though there are more female students in social work."* This is in line with the earlier highlighted UCU Student Guild study that noted that 78% of the leadership positions in the guild were occupied by men despite the almost equal number of men and women in the student population. P5 highlighted this aspect as they noted: *"I have noticed that male students are encouraged to preach in chapel and lead prayers. Female students are rarely given those opportunities."* This note highlighted the aspect of exclusion of women from some of the major roles in the theology discipline, which requires the involvement of both men and women in public preaching.

Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence

One of the major themes highlighted in the discussion was the aspect of sexual harassment and violence in the university, although some of the participants were reluctant to discuss some of these issues. P3 described the environment in the IT lab as uncomfortable: *"In lab sessions, when I ask questions, some male students roll their eyes like I am wasting time. When I answer correctly, sometimes people act surprised, like they did not expect a girl to know the answer."* Although this is not directly related to harassment, it is an example of a hostile environment where the presence of female students is challenged and their ability to perform is questioned. P4 describes the environment and how it affects the student: *"I can feel the male students looking at me, waiting for me to make a mistake."* This is an example of the pressure and stress that comes with being constantly watched and judged, something that female students have to endure but male students do not. P2 mentioned that some female students in his program have been harassed: *"Some of my female classmates have told me about male lecturers who make them uncomfortable. They do not report because they fear*

it will affect their grades." This is an example that sexual harassment exists within the university and that reporting mechanisms are not effective since the victims fear reprisals.

4.4 Presentation and Analysis of Findings on Challenges

This section will address the second research aim, which was to explore the challenges students face because of gender inequality and how such challenges affect their academic performance. From the analysis, the challenges relate to the psychological and emotional challenges, as depicted in the following subtopic

Psychological and Emotional Challenges

All the participants experienced considerable psychological and emotional challenges as a result of the gender inequality they had encountered. For instance, P1 shared his experience on how his confidence was affected in the early days of his course: "My confidence was low in the first year. I felt like I did not belong. But as I progressed, I realized I am actually performing well. I am currently in the top 10 of my class. But sometimes when I make a mistake during practical, the feeling that I am proving the stereotype right comes back. I tell myself I have to be perfect to be accepted." P2 shared his experience on how a lecturer had affected him in class: *"I once shared a perspective about why men might be reluctant to seek help when they are struggling with family issues, and a lecturer said, 'That sounds like you are making excuses for men.' I was not. I was trying to explain how socialization affects men too."* However, *after that incident, I stopped contributing for a while.*" The above account shows the impact of dismissive behavior by authority figures on students. The student P3 explained the pressure of representing her gender: *"There is a pressure to represent all women. If I fail, it is not just me failing; it is seen as a woman failing. Male students can fail and it is just them. That pressure sometimes makes me want to give up."* The above account shows the additional pressure faced by female students in male-dominated fields. The student's individual performance is seen as reflecting on the capabilities of their entire gender. The student P4 explained the emotional impact of the discrimination: *"My confidence has been shaken many times. There have been moments when I believed what the lecturers and male students implied, that I do not*

belong in engineering. But then I look at my grades. I am consistently in the top 10 of my class. I am better than many of the male students who are treated like they belong. That helps me remember that I am capable. But the confidence takes time to rebuild after each incident." The above account shows the cyclical nature of confidence challenges faced by the student. The student P5 explained the emotional impact of the discrimination: *"It is exhausting to have to prove yourself every time you speak. I have learned to argue from a strong theological foundation so that my points cannot be ignored." But it is exhausting to have to prepare that thoroughly just to be heard."* This passage shows the unfair burden placed on female students to have to prepare more than their male counterparts in order to have their voices heard.

Effects on Academic Engagement and Participation

Participants reported that their experiences of gender inequality had a significant impact on their participation in class. Some reported stopping or reducing their participation in class. P1 explained how his participation stopped at first: *"At first, I used to hesitate to answer questions because I felt like I was invading a female space. In first year, I would keep quiet because the girls were always the ones speaking about patient care."* This shows how a male student may feel out of place in a female-dominated field. P2 explained how his participation stopped after the lecturer's comment: *"After that incident, I stopped contributing for a while. I just listened. My grades in that course dropped because class participation is part of assessment."* This shows a clear link between gender inequality and poor academic performance. P3 explained how she stopped raising her hand to contribute to class discussion: *"In first year, I stopped raising my hand. I felt like my contributions were not valued, and I was tired of being the one who had to prove myself every time. My class participation grade suffered. My GPA in first year was 3.5. I knew I could do better."* This shows how a female student may feel forced to prove herself all the time in a class where she is outnumbered by females. P4 described her experience on how she stopped attending after the lecturer's comment on the process of tailoring. *"After that lecturer made that comment about tailoring, I stopped for a whole semester. I would sit in the back, keep quiet, and just take notes. My participation grade was zero in that course. I had to*

work extra hard on the exams to pass." This shows the effect of a single discriminatory comment on a person's participation in class for a long time.

Effects on Concentration and Study Habits

Gender inequality affected the participants' concentration on their studies. Participants claimed to have altered their study habits because of the experience in gender inequality. P1 described the effect of the comment by someone outside the class on her concentration. *"The comments from outside the classroom affect my concentration sometimes. When my friends mock me for doing nursing, I start questioning myself. There was a time in second year when I was studying for a difficult exam and a relative called asking when I will switch to something 'better.' I could not concentrate for two days after that."* This shows the effect of gender inequality on a person's concentration in class. P3 described her experience on how she altered her study habits. *"When I am in the lab and the male students are talking over me or making comments, I cannot concentrate. I have started going to the lab at odd hours when fewer people are there. The constant pressure of being the minority is distracting."*

Effects on Academic Performance and Grades

They said that their academic performance has been negatively impacted by what they experienced in terms of gender inequality, specifically with regards to GPA and academic opportunities. In terms of performance gap, P1 said, *"I think they affected my first year grades negatively because I was not participating fully and I was not confident in practical. My GPA in first year was 3.6 but now I am at 4.1. So the gap between how I was performing and how I could perform was there. Also, the extra pressure to prove myself means I study longer hours than maybe necessary. I have to over-prepare so that no one can say I am in the wrong place."* The account here shows that there is indeed a big gap between how one is performing and how he/she can perform, and that over-preparing for classes consumes his time, which can be allocated to other activities. In terms of performance gap, P2 said, *"There was a semester in second year where my GPA dropped from 4.2 to 3.8. It was the same semester I had that experience with the lecturer. I was not participating, I was not fully engaged, and I was questioning whether I belonged. I think the lack of belonging affected my*

performance." The account here shows a clear link between his experience with discrimination and his poor performance. P3 identified the disadvantage she experienced by being allocated documentation roles: *"Group projects where I was assigned the easier tasks meant I did not get as much practice with coding as my male counterparts. That puts me at a disadvantage. I have had to do extra work outside class to catch up. That extra work takes time away from other courses. It is a cycle of disadvantage."* This statement shows how the disadvantage experienced by females through the allocation of labor in group projects leads to cumulative disadvantage through lack of practice and then having to spend extra time to catch up. P4 identified how disadvantage impacted her grades in one course: *"My grades in first year were good, 4.0, but they would have been better if I had not had to overcome so much just to be heard. In second year, when I stopped participating after the tailoring comment, my grades in that particular course dropped. I had to teach myself most of the content because I was not engaging in class. That took time away from my other courses."* This statement shows how disadvantage leads to cascading disadvantage, where one course impacts other courses due to the diversion of time meant to be devoted to all courses to compensate for the lack of learning.

4.4.1 Coping Strategies

They cited different coping mechanisms they have developed over time in dealing with inequality based on gender, like getting support from peers, being highly prepared, and having faith. P1 shared his experiences on how he managed to get support from other male nursing students: *"I have been a member of the Nursing Students Association, where I have met other male nursing students. We support each other and remind each other that we belong here."* This shows the need for support from peers in dealing with inequality based on gender. P2 shared his experiences on how he managed to get support from other male social work students: *"I have been seeking mentorship from a male lecturer in the department. He shares his own experiences and reminds me that male perspectives in social work are needed. I have also been part of the group of male social work students we have informally formed. We meet once a month to discuss our experiences."* This shows the need for mentorship support. P3 described connecting

with other female IT students as follows: *"I formed a study group with other female IT students. We meet on weekends and study together. It is a safe space where we can ask questions without judgment. That has helped my concentration and my learning."*

This account shows how female students create support networks to make up for what is lacking in support. P4 described how she relied on her faith as follows: *"I pray. My faith in God gives me strength when I feel weak. I also keep a file of all my good grades, all the projects I have completed successfully, and all the positive feedback I have received. When I doubt myself, I open that file and read it. It reminds me that I am capable regardless of what anyone says."* This account shows how female students rely on their faith and achievements to boost their confidence. P5 described how she prepares for class as follows: *"I have learned to argue from a strong theological foundation so that my points cannot be ignored."* This account shows how female students prepare rigorously as a coping mechanism to make sure their contributions are taken seriously.

4.5 Presentation and Analysis on Strategies to Address Gender Inequality

This section discusses the third research objective: to explore the strategies which can be implemented to address the issue of gender inequality in order to enhance academic performance. The analysis shows the following themes: institutional policies, lecturer practices, students' initiatives, and support services.

Strategies for University Administrators

The participants were asked to provide specific suggestions on the steps which the university administrators, such as the Dean of Students, the University Wardens, and the Directorate of Gender Mainstreaming, could take to address the issue of gender inequality. P1 said: *"First, they should sensitize students across all faculties that no course is for one gender. Many students come from homes where certain subjects are considered for boys or girls. The university should have orientation sessions which specifically address this. Second, there should be mentorship programs for male students in female-dominated courses and female students in male-dominated courses. Third, the administration should ensure that hostel facilities and policies do not reinforce gender stereotypes."* The above quotation shows the need for both

educational interventions to address stereotypes and mentorship for students in courses which are not typical for their gender. P2 said: *"The administration should recognize that gender inequality affects both men and women, just in different ways. There should be support systems for male students in female-dominated fields, not just female students in male-dominated fields. Also, the university should ensure that gender sensitivity training for staff includes understanding how assumptions about masculinity can affect male students. For example, the assumption that men do not need emotional support is harmful." The counseling services should be advertised as for everyone, not just women.*" The account has shown the need for gender-sensitive approaches to take into account the challenges faced by male students as well as female students. P3 has recommended active recruitment of female students in STEM fields. The recommendation is as follows: *"The University should actively recruit more female students in STEM fields through targeted scholarships and outreach programs. They should also create a mentorship program where senior female students in IT mentor junior ones. The lab spaces should be monitored to ensure they are safe for everyone. If there is harassment, it should be dealt with immediately and seriously. Also, the university should bring in female tech professionals to speak to students. Seeing successful women in IT makes a huge difference for our motivation."* The account has shown the need for active recruitment, mentorship, and safe spaces for female students in male-dominated fields. P4 has recommended the need for accountability for discriminatory behaviors. The recommendation is as follows: *"The University needs to take gender-based discrimination seriously. When a lecturer makes a comment like 'engineering is not for women,' there should be consequences. Students need to see that the university protects them.* There should also be a female warden or counselor who specifically supports female students in male-dominated faculties. The university should also provide scholarships for female students in STEM. Money is a barrier for many girls from Northern Uganda. Financial support would help keep us in school." The account has shown the need for accountability, support, and financial support for female students in STEM fields. P5 proposed the following: *"The University should ensure that women are given equal opportunities to lead in chapel and spiritual activities. The assumption that only men should preach sends a message to the female*

students in theology that they are not qualified to be in spiritual leadership." This shows the need to address the issue of gender inequality in co-curricular activities.

Strategies for Lecturers

Participants were asked to give specific suggestions on what lecturers can do to address the issue of gender inequality. P1 proposed the following: *"Lecturers should be aware of their own bias. They should call both male and female students equally. They should not make comments about gender when discussing career paths. They should use successful male nurses and female engineers in their materials. People who look like you matter. They should not make jokes about gender. Sometimes they may say, 'You men would not understand this patient care topic.' They may think it is funny, but it is not. They should not use such jokes. They create distance."* This shows the need for lecturers to be self-aware and not to make jokes about gender. P2 proposed the following: *"Lecturers should be trained to facilitate discussions on gender in such a way that they do not shut out anyone." They should also be careful not to make generalizations about genders and not make the students feel like they represent the whole gender. When a male student makes a comment, it does not represent the whole male gender. When a female student makes a comment, it does not represent the whole female gender. They should also include diverse gender experiences in the readings they provide for the students.* This text shows the need for lecturers to have some training in facilitating sensitive group work and in including diverse experiences in the readings they provide for the students. P3 recommended intervention in group work dynamics. *"Lecturers should ensure that in group projects, female students are not automatically assigned documentation roles. If they see this happening, they should intervene. Also, lecturers should call out sexist comments when they happen. When a male student says something like 'girls cannot code,' the lecturer should address it immediately. Silence gives permission."* This text shows the need for lecturers to actively intervene in group projects and in addressing sexist comments in the classroom. P004 recommended encouragement for female students. *"Lecturers should intentionally encourage female students. A word of encouragement from a*

lecturer can change everything for a student who is struggling to believe she belongs." This text shows the impact of encouragement from authority figures on the student.

Strategies for Students

The participants also gave suggestions on what the students themselves could do to address gender inequality and support one another.

P001 gave the following suggestion: *"Students need to stop mocking each other for their choices. We should support our colleagues regardless of what course they are doing. There should be peer mentorship where senior students guide junior students on how to deal with gender stereotypes. Students should also speak out when they hear gender-based jokes and stereotypes. Silence also encourages such stereotypes."* This account shows the importance of peer support and mentorship in addressing gender inequality and stereotypes.

P2 gave the following suggestion: *"Students should also create safe spaces to discuss the issues. For instance, we have a Gender Equality Club in UCU but the club seems to be dominated by women. Students should also challenge gender stereotypes when they encounter them. For instance, when they encounter gender stereotypes in class or outside class, they should challenge them. It requires a lot of courage but silence encourages inequality. Students should also support one another. For instance, a male nursing student and a male social work student share a similar experience because both study in female-dominated fields. They should support one another."* This account shows the importance of creating safe spaces and supporting one another in addressing gender inequality.

P3 recommended male students being allies: *"Male students need to be allies. They should speak up when they see female students being treated unfairly. They should not assume female students are less capable. They should include us in coding projects, not just documentation. And they should stop making comments about our appearance or our abilities. We are here to learn, just like you. Female students need to support each other. We should sit together, study together, and lift each other up. We should also speak up for ourselves and not let the environment silence us."* The above text

shows the need for male allies, collaboration between the sexes, and female peer support.

P4 recommended mentorship of junior students: *"Female students need to support each other. We are stronger together. We should sit together, study together, and encourage each other. We should also mentor junior female students who are just joining so they do not feel alone."* The above text shows the need for mentoring students who are new in the course and who may be entering the course in a gender-atypical field.

Strategies for Support Services

The participants were asked for their suggestions regarding support services that could be helpful for the students who face inequality based on gender. P1 suggested confidential reporting mechanisms. He stated, *"The University should have a clear, confidential reporting system for gender-based discrimination that students trust. Right now, many students don't report because they think nothing will be done. There should be a counselor specifically trained in gender issues. The Counseling Department is good but maybe they need someone dedicated to this."* This account shows the need for support services like confidential reporting mechanisms and counseling support. P2 suggested support networks consisting of peers, orientation programs for students in gender-atypical courses, and anti-discrimination policies. He stated, *"First, a confidential peer support network where students can talk to people who have had similar experiences. Second, orientation programs specifically for students entering gender-atypical courses, so they can meet other senior students who have had the same experience. Third, the university should have a clear anti-discrimination policy that includes gender-based discrimination in academic settings and have a reporting mechanism that students trust."* This account shows the need for support services like support networks, orientation programs, and anti-discrimination policies. P3 recommended specialized counseling and support groups: *"We need a support group specifically for female students in male-dominated courses. Somewhere we can share experiences and strategies. We need a counselor who understands the specific challenges of being a woman in STEM. The Counseling Department is helpful but they*

need specialized training on these issues. We also need a clear, confidential way to report discrimination. Right now, if a female student experiences harassment, she might not know who to tell or fear that nothing will be done." The above account shows the need for specialized support groups and counseling for female students in STEM. P4 recommended mentorship programs: *"We need a mentorship program where senior female engineering students mentor junior ones. We need a safe space where we can talk about our experiences without judgment. The university could create a Women in STEM club that meets regularly. We need a clear reporting mechanism for discrimination that protects the reporter. Right now, many students do not report because they fear the lecturer will find out and punish them through grades. Finally, the university should bring in female engineers from Uganda and beyond to speak to us. Seeing successful women who have navigated the same path is incredibly encouraging."* The above account shows the need for mentorship programs, safe spaces, and role models.

4.6 The Burden of Proof

A common theme throughout the accounts of all the participants was the burden of having to prove themselves more than their peers in the gender majority group in their chosen field. Male nursing students had to prove they were able to be caring, female engineering students had to prove they were able to be technical, female theology students had to prove they were able to interpret scripture, and male social work students had to prove they were able to understand gender issues.

The Cumulative Nature of Discrimination

Participants described the gender inequality they had experienced as a cumulative process. This means the experience was not just a one-off but built up over time. For instance, every comment, every dismissive look, every time they had to do documentation work built up to a weight.

The Gap between Policy and Practice

Participants also pointed out the gap between policy and practice. While the UCU had gender equality policies in place, the policies were not being implemented. This was also supported by the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate's preliminary findings, which

showed that only 32% of the students felt the gender policy was effectively implemented.

The Importance of Peer Support

Throughout the accounts of all the participants, peer support was a crucial factor. Whether through formal organizations such as the Nursing Students Association or informal organizations such as the male social work student organization, participants found strength in connecting with one another.

The Role of Faith

For the participants in the study, the role of faith was significant in coping with the issue of gender inequality. P4 explicitly stated the role of prayer in providing strength in the face of gender inequality. Similarly, P5 spoke about her call to study theology. While faith can be an important source of strength in the face of gender inequality at a Christian university such as Uganda Christian University, it can also be used to justify the existence of gender inequality.

Divergent Experiences by Gender and Field

The researcher found that the experiences of the participants in the study were significantly different depending upon the participants' gender and their academic field. Specifically, male participants in female-dominated fields were perceived as being questionable in their choice of field of study. Similarly, female participants in male-dominated fields were perceived as being questionable in their capabilities in their chosen fields of study. Male participants in male-dominated fields did not participate in the study; however, their lack of participation in the study suggests that their experiences with gender inequality might be different in that it might not be as visible.

4.7 Summary of Findings

The researcher found the following key findings based upon the content of the interviews with the participants in the study.

Forms of Gender Inequality. The researcher found that the issue of gender inequality at Uganda Christian University takes different forms. This stereotyping has significant

implications for the way students are viewed and treated in the classroom. Male students in female-dominated courses face the stereotyping of course selection, whereas female students in male-dominated courses face stereotyping of their capabilities. Differential treatment in classroom interactions was noted, where participants noted that lecturers treat male and female students differently. Additionally, participants noted that mistakes were treated differently depending on the gender involved. The division of academic labor was noted in terms of group projects and the application of concepts in practice. Participants noted that female students were given the role of documentation and presentations in group projects. The role of leadership was noted in terms of the dominance of male students in leadership positions and in public presentations. The issue of sexual harassment and violence was noted in the participants' discussion with caution. The challenges and effects on academic performance, the research noted that the experience of inequality in terms of gender has significant effects on the academic performance of students. The effects noted in the research include the experience of reduced self-confidence, the experience of not belonging, emotional exhaustion, and the experience of representing one's gender. The experience of inequality in terms of gender was noted to affect the academic performance of students in terms of reduced willingness to participate in class. This affected their concentration and study habits, as they changed their study locations to escape hostile environments. Academic performance was also affected, as the participants performed poorly in their semesters when they experienced discrimination. They also experienced the disadvantage of being given less skill-building tasks in group projects. The participants developed different coping mechanisms, which included support networks, mentorship, rigorous preparation, and faith. Strategies to Address Gender Inequality Based on the participants' recommendations, different strategies can be adopted by the university administration, lecturers, and students to address the issue of gender inequality at UCU.

Challenges and Effects on Academic Performance

The research noted that the experience of inequality in terms of gender has significant effects on the academic performance of students. The effects noted in the research

include the experience of reduced self-confidence, the experience of not belonging, emotional exhaustion, and the experience of representing one's gender. The experience of inequality in terms of gender was noted to affect the academic performance of students in terms of reduced willingness to participate in class. This affected their concentration and study habits, as they changed their study locations to escape hostile environments. Academic performance was also affected, as the participants performed poorly in their semesters when they experienced discrimination. They also experienced the disadvantage of being given less skill-building tasks in group projects. The participants developed different coping mechanisms, which included support networks, mentorship, rigorous preparation, and faith. Strategies to Address Gender Inequality Based on the participants' recommendations, different strategies can be adopted by the university administration, lecturers, and students to address the issue of gender inequality at UCU.

Strategies to Address Gender Inequality

Recommendations for the university administration included sensitization on stereotypes, mentorship programs for students in gender-atypical courses, recruiting female students in STEM courses, taking responsibility for discriminatory actions, and equal opportunities for female students in leadership roles. Recommendations for the lecturers included being aware of their own biases, being neutral in class, having an inclusive curriculum, training on facilitating discussions on sensitive issues, intervening in group work, and encouraging female students. Recommendations for the students included support networks, mentorship, actively challenging stereotypes, and men being allies. Recommendations for support services included confidential reporting systems, specialized counseling, support networks, and orientation sessions for students in gender-atypical courses.

4.8 Audio Recordings Reference

All the findings presented in this chapter have been obtained from verbatim transcription of audio interviews conducted with five participants at Uganda Christian University, Mukono.

The audio interviews were recorded for 5 to 15 minutes with each participant, during which the three major research questions were explored. This was done in a flexible manner without restricting the scope of the questions.

The audio recordings were made in the language of the participants, which in this study was English. This has helped in eliminating the need for transcription, thus keeping the authenticity of the participants' statements.

The audio recordings were then transcribed into written text immediately after each interview. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the transcription was done in a manner whereby the participants were anonymized.

Each transcription was assigned a participant code according to the coding system used in Section 4.1 of this manuscript. This implies that the participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5.

The audio recordings will be kept for a period of five years after publication, after which they will be deleted. Only the researcher and the research supervisor have access to the audio recordings.

The audio recordings and transcription played a crucial role in the trustworthiness of this study, thus keeping the authenticity of the participants' statements.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations based on the findings of the study. The findings discussed in the study were presented in Chapter Four. The conclusions are based on the study's findings; therefore, the researcher addressed each of the research objectives. The recommendations are geared towards different stakeholders in the university. The study concludes with the contribution of the study to knowledge, the limitation of the study, and suggestions for future study.

5.2 Discussion of Findings on Forms of Gender Inequality

The first research objective (i) was geared towards finding out the different forms of gender inequality experienced by university students at Uganda Christian University, Mukono, which include; Gender Stereotyping and Role Expectations. The finding that university students in gender-atypical fields face scrutiny about their course choices and assumptions about their motives is supported by the literature on gender and education. According to (Setyadi, 2022)Dilshan & Shantha (2026), the university environment is characterized by gender norms that create different conceptions of what is suitable or acceptable for men or women; thus, they end up with totally different developmental paths depending on societal expectations. The male nursing student was told that nursing is for women, while the female theology student was told that theology is for men; therefore, the study supports the literature in the sense that it shows the existence of these norms in Uganda. The fact that the lecturer told the female engineering student *"engineering is not for women who want to get married and have children"* is especially problematic because it reflects not only peer attitudes but also those of institutional authority figures. This phenomenon resonates with the theory of gender regimes as described by Connell (2021), which reveals that that educational institutions are the main sites for the construction of gender. These sites are where the production and reproduction of gender asymmetry occur. Differential Treatment in Classroom Interactions. The fact that lecturers treat male and female

students differently in the classroom, with female students' answers more likely to be challenged and male students more likely to be called on first to answer, resonates with the extensive body of literature on the role of gender in classroom dynamics. The phenomenon was also observed in the current study, where Solvang and Skreland (2024) found that girls in mathematics classrooms experience the opportunity to participate differently than boys. Boys were more likely to be called on to answer and were more likely to be taken more seriously. The current study extends this phenomenon to the university level and across various disciplines such as IT, engineering, theology, nursing, and social work. The phenomenon of the male social work student being asked to present the "male perspective" in the discussion about gender issues reflects a different kind of differential treatment. This phenomenon resonates with the literature about male students in female-dominated academic disciplines who experience being tokenized and asked to present the "male point of view" (Poggio, 2020). The current phenomenon extends the literature in the sense that this phenomenon was observed in both male and female students. Gendered Division of Academic Labor. This phenomenon of female students in IT and engineering courses being assigned documentation and presentation work in group projects, whereas male students were assigned technical work in the projects, has been noted in literature on gender in STEM. Cheryan et al. (2020) have shown that the learning environment in STEM fields is characterized by gender biases. This study has shown how this bias manifests. This study has shown that group work, which is meant to be a collaborative learning activity, is where gender inequality is reproduced. This study has also shown that male nursing students were given the role of carrying out technical procedures, while their female counterparts were given patient care roles. This shows that even in female-dominated fields, gender stereotypes are reproduced. This finding is consistent with Connell (2021) that the division of labor is a dimension of gender regimes where tasks and responsibilities are characterized by gender inequality.

Gendered Authority and Leadership. This study found that male students dominate the leadership positions at UCU. This finding is consistent with the UCU Student Guild data that male students dominate the leadership positions by 78%. This finding is consistent

with Connell (2021) that the dimension of gender regimes is characterized by power relations. This study found that male theology students are given more opportunities to preach. This finding is consistent with the dimension of gender regimes where authority is exercised. This study found that female theology students are not given the opportunity to preach. This is an important finding since UCU is a Christian university. Wilson-Thomas (2026) has shown that sexism in schooling and policy reforms is an important issue that needs to be addressed. This study found that despite the Christian values of UCU, which value human dignity, gender inequality is reproduced.

5.3 Discussion of Findings on Challenges and Effects on Academic Performance

The second (ii) research objective attempted to explore the challenges experienced by the students due to gender inequality and their impact on their performance. Psychological and Emotional Challenges. The finding that the students experience reduced self-confidence, feelings of not belonging, and emotional exhaustion is consistent with research on the psychological impacts of gender inequality. Dilshan and Shantha (2026) found that due to gender stereotypes, psychological challenges are experienced by the students. These challenges restrict their ambitions and affect their self-image. This research finding reveals the specific psychological mechanisms by which these challenges operate. These include the pressure to represent their own gender and the cyclical nature of confidence challenges. The finding that female students feel pressure to represent their own gender and that their own failures reflect all women is consistent with research on tokenism. This is the pressure experienced by women to be representatives of their own gender. Male students do not experience this pressure since their failures do not affect their own gender. This is because male-dominated fields have male students failing as representatives of their own gender but not females. Effects on Academic Engagement and Participation. The finding that the students stop their participation due to their experiences with discrimination is consistent with research on patterns of participation. Solvang and Skreland (2024) found that patterns of participation are gendered. This research finding reveals the specific impact that reduced participation has on their performance. This is evident by the finding that the participants achieve lower grades during the semesters they stop their

participation. The finding that a single discriminatory comment affects their participation for an entire semester is particularly important. This is because it reveals that the impact of gender inequality is not limited to single instances. Effects on Concentration and Study Habits. The fact that students change their study habits to avoid the hostile environment, sometimes missing collaborative learning opportunities, confirms the research on the effects of a hostile classroom environment. The study confirms the painful reality that students have to choose between protecting themselves against scrutiny and gaining access to collaborative learning opportunities, which benefit all students. The fact that female students study alone in hostels to avoid scrutiny in laboratories and libraries also confirms the research on the effects of a hostile classroom environment. However, the study also reveals the painful reality that the price paid by the students for gender inequality in the classroom and in other learning environments is the missing opportunity to benefit from the informal learning opportunities in group study sessions and access to resources in libraries and laboratories. Effects on Academic Performance and Grades. The fact that the participants' grades were affected in a negative manner by gender inequality in the classroom confirms the research on the gender gap in academic performance. According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (2024), there has been a persistent gender gap in the academic performance of Ugandan students. While the study confirms the research on the gender gap in academic performance, it also reveals the mechanisms by which the gender gap in the classroom and other learning environments manifests itself in the gender gap in the students' grades. The fact that female students in IT and engineering courses are assigned less skill-building work in group projects also confirms the research on the gender gap in academic performance. By missing the opportunity to build skills in coding and other skills assessed in exams and valued in the job market, the female students in IT and engineering courses also miss the opportunity to benefit in the job market. Coping Strategies. The reality that students develop coping strategies such as peer support, mentorship, thorough preparation, and faith resonates with studies on resilience in higher education institutions. The research shows that students are not passive victims of gender inequality but active subjects who find ways to cope in a challenging situation. However, the reality that these coping mechanisms

are necessary in the first place is unfair to those students who do not have to deal with gender discrimination.

5.4. Strategies to Address Gender Inequality

The third (iii) objective of the research was geared towards finding ways that can be used to address the issue of gender inequality in the achievement of academic performance.

Strategies for University Administrators. The study finding that participants recommended university administrators consider the implementation of awareness programs, mentorship programs, the recruitment of female students in the fields of STEM, and the need for accountability in the case of discrimination is in line with the literature. The systematic review done on the research productivity of women (Golafronz Ramezani, Azizi, & Siri, 2026) revealed that addressing the issue of gender inequality requires policy reforms at different levels. The current study is significant in that it provided specific study findings that were relevant in the Ugandan context. The study finding that participants recommended university administrators should be accountable in the case of discrimination is significant. The study done by the UCU Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) revealed that only 32% of the participants felt that the university policy was implemented well. The current study is significant in that it provided specific study findings that were relevant in the Ugandan context.

Strategies for Lecturers. The study finding that participants recommended lecturers should be aware of their biases, be fair in the classroom, be fair in the content of the material covered in the classroom, and should intervene in group work is in line with the literature. The systematic study done on the issue of gender-responsive pedagogy (Kong, 2026) revealed that lecturers should be aware of their biases. The current study is significant in that it provided specific study findings that were relevant in the Ugandan context. The study finding that participants recommended lecturers should include examples of successful male nurses and female engineers in the content of the material covered in the classroom is significant. The current study is significant in that it provided specific study findings that were relevant in the Ugandan context.

Strategies for Students. The study's finding that participants recommended peer support, mentorship, and male ally ship is in line with the study on student-led initiatives. This study found that students have agency in effecting change and are eager to help each other. The study's finding that male students should be allies and speak out when they see female students being treated unfairly is significant. In addressing issues of gender inequality, it is not just the women's issue but involves all the students, both men and women.

Strategies for Support Services. The study's finding that participants recommended confidential reporting mechanisms, specialized counseling services, and peer support networks is in line with the recommendations in the literature. In the study by Ashraf, Ali, and Ali (2025), the silencing mechanisms for survivors of GBV were documented. This study found that the same silencing mechanisms are at play at UCU, with fear of retaliation being the reason for not reporting GBV. The study's finding that participants recommended orientation for new students in gender-atypical courses is significant. This is because it is a cost-effective strategy for improving student experiences. This strategy would involve connecting new students with senior students who have gone through similar experiences and have managed to navigate the challenges.

5.5 Integration of Findings with Theoretical Framework

The study's findings have strongly validated the basic propositions of the three theories of social work that made up the theoretical framework.

The Feminist Social Work Theory argues that gender is an essential category for social work practice. The theory also argues that power relations based on gender create and perpetuate inequality. The findings show that at UCU, patriarchal structures influence students' experiences in various ways, such as interactions in class, division of academic work, leadership, and power. The principle of the personal is political is evident in students' experiences since, as explained in the theory, students' personal experiences of discrimination connect to patterns of inequality. The theory's principle of consciousness-raising is evident in students' increased awareness of how their personal experiences connect to patterns of inequality.

Ecological Systems Theory helps to understand how gender inequality occurs at various levels of the students' environments. The micro system involves students' experiences, such as interactions with fellow students and parents' comments. The meso system involves how students' experiences in one environment influence another. The exo system involves students' observations of the gap between what is required by the university and what is experienced. The macro system involves students' observations of cultural values and gender stereotypes. The theory's principle of the chronosystem is evident in students' observations of how experiences of discrimination accumulate over time.

This is according to the theory of intersectionality. Gender intersects with other identities in a manner that influences the experience. The study targeted different districts of origin in Uganda. These participants' experiences showed the impact of culture on gender inequality. A female student from Gulu, where gender roles might be different from those in Kampala, shared her experience on the assumptions she encountered. A male student from Mbarara shared the cultural expectations on his gender role in social work. Despite the limited number of participants in the study, the intersectionality theory has significant weight.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 Conclusions on Forms of Gender Inequality

The various dimensions of gender inequality at Uganda Christian University include gender stereotyping, differential treatment in classroom interaction, and division of academic labor by gender, gender in authority and leadership, and violence. From the experiences of the five participants from diverse fields of study, it is evident that there are various dimensions of gender inequality at the University. For instance, male students in female-dominated fields have their career choices questioned and motives analyzed. Similarly, female students in male-dominated fields have their abilities questioned and are always under the magnifying glass. In classroom interaction, lecturers have different attitudes towards female and male contributions. For instance, female contributions are always questioned in class, while male contributions are always called for. In group assignments, female students are always assigned documentation and presentation tasks, while male students are assigned technical roles. This has resulted in a skill gap in terms of documentation and presentation skills. In terms of authority and leadership, male students have dominated the majority of the positions in the University. They have also been given more opportunities for public speaking and preaching. Sexual harassment and violence have also occurred in the University, although in small proportions due to fear of retaliation.

6.1.2 Conclusions on Challenges and Effects on Academic Performance

The experiences of gender inequality have resulted in psychological challenges for the participants, which have affected their academic performance in various ways. For instance, the participants have lost self-confidence and feel like they do not belong in the University. They have also felt emotionally exhausted and have the responsibility of representing their gender. These challenges have affected the participants' academic performance since they have stopped attending classes after the experiences of discrimination. Concentration and study habits were impacted, with participants changing study locations due to hostile environments. Academic performance was impacted in a direct manner, with participants citing lower grades in semesters when

they faced discrimination, as well as the compounded effect of being assigned less skill-building tasks in group projects. This gap between actual and potential performance is substantial, with participants citing the additional time and energy it takes for them to perform at the same level as those without discrimination.

6.1.3 Conclusions on Strategies to Address Gender Inequality

To address the issue of gender inequality, various levels of intervention are required, including university administrators, lecturers, and students themselves. Therefore, participants provided comprehensive recommendations regarding how to address the issue of gender inequality concerning each group. For instance, university administrators are required to ensure sensitization programs, mentorship, and recruitment of female students in STEM fields, holding those responsible for discriminatory behavior accountable, and providing equal opportunities to lead. On the other hand, lecturers are required to be aware of their own biases and ensure fair participation, provide diverse examples, and be intentional with their encouragement. Students are required to be supportive and provide mentorship to one another, challenge stereotypes where possible, and male students are required to be allies. Finally, support services are required to provide confidential reporting, specialized counseling, and orientation to new students entering gender-atypical fields. However, the gap between policy and practice is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed. This is where the university is failing to bridge the gap. Therefore, accountability mechanisms and transparency are required to bridge this gap. The UCU Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (2023) noted that only 32% of the students felt that the university implemented the gender policy effectively. This was evident from the participants' experiences where they noted that despite the existence of policies, gender inequality was still evident. Therefore, the existence of policies is not enough; what is important is whether the policies are implemented and whether the students feel the policies. Therefore, accountability mechanisms that the students trust and transparency are important. Finally, the involvement of the students themselves is important to bridge the gap. Peer support and mentorship are important.

Overall, across all participants, peer support was found to be a key coping strategy. This could be facilitated through formal organizations, such as the Nursing Students Association, but also through informal peer groups facilitated by the students themselves. Being connected with peers who have similar experiences helped combat feelings of isolation and provided a sense of belonging. This should be encouraged within the university and formal mentorship programs should be implemented so that all students in gender-atypical fields have access to this resource.

The issue of gender inequality at Uganda Christian University is not just an individual issue but also a systemic issue since it is embedded in the institutional culture.

The study findings show that there are different ways in which gender inequality operates in the Ugandan education system, including classroom interactions, division of labor, leadership structures, and institutional culture. These are linked in a way that they reinforce one another.

The study participants show remarkable resilience in coping with the challenges of gender inequality at UCU. This should not, however, be seen as the way it should be. It is not right for the burden of coping with inequality to rest with those who have to endure it.

The participants have shown remarkable coping skills in dealing with the challenges of gender inequality at UCU. This includes peer support, mentorship, being adequately prepared for challenges, and faith. It is remarkable for the participants to show such resilience in coping with challenges. It is, however, not right for them to have to endure inequality in the first place.

The participants have shown remarkable coping skills in dealing with the challenges of gender inequality at UCU. This includes peer support, mentorship, being adequately prepared for challenges, and faith. It is remarkable for the participants to show such resilience in coping with challenges. It is, however, not right for them to have to endure inequality in the first place.

6.2 Recommendations

For University Administrators

Mandatory gender sensitivity training should be conducted for the entire staff and students. The training should be about recognizing and challenging gender stereotypes.

Formal mentor programs should be established between students in gender-atypical fields. The male students in Nursing and Social Work should be linked with male professionals in their fields. The female students in IT, Engineering, and Theology should be linked with female professionals. The mentors should be both students in their final years and professionals in the community.

More female students in the STEM fields should be recruited through scholarships. The university should offer scholarships specifically for female students in the STEM fields. The university should also reach out to secondary schools in the country. The university should market the university using female students in the STEM fields. Financial barriers should be removed for female students in the STEM fields. Financial barriers should be removed for female students in the STEM fields. The university should offer scholarships specifically for female students in the STEM fields.

More should be done to hold people accountable for discriminatory behavior. There should be consequences for lecturers who engage in discriminatory behavior. Lecturers should be required to undergo training if they engage in discriminatory behavior. Lecturers should be disciplined if they engage in discriminatory behavior.

More should be done to give equal leadership opportunities to female students. The university should set targets for the representation of female students in student leadership positions. The university should give equal preaching opportunities in Theology between male and female students.

More should be done to bridge the gap between policy and implementation. The university should involve the students in the process of monitoring the implementation of the Gender and Equity Policy. The student representatives should be part of the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate's oversight committee. The university should carry out climate surveys to find out the students' experiences.

For Lecturers

Create awareness about unconscious biases in student interactions. Lecturers should ask themselves if they call on both male and female students in the classroom, if they give different reactions to contributions from both genders, and if they have unconscious biases against women in terms of capability. They should also ask themselves if they have witnessed situations where some women are not given a chance to contribute in class.

Intervene in group dynamics in order to have a fair distribution of learning experiences. Lecturers should ensure that in group projects, each student in the group has a chance to develop different skills. They should also ensure that in group projects, there is no segregation in terms of gender.

Include diverse examples and role models in the lecture materials. In nursing courses, there should be examples of men in nursing. In engineering courses, there should be examples of women in engineering. In theology courses, there should be examples of women in theology and biblical studies. It is very important for women to see themselves in the courses they are taking.

Intervene in situations involving sexist comments. Lecturers should address situations involving sexist comments immediately they arise. For instance, if a student says, "girls cannot code," the lecturer should explain why it is not acceptable for someone to say something like that.

For Students

Form peer networks for support. Students in atypical gender courses should form networks with peers in similar situations. This will give them a sense of belonging. Senior students in different fields should mentor junior students in the same fields.

For Support Services

Create specialized counseling services for students experiencing discrimination based on their gender. The counselors should be trained about the specific problems faced by students in gender-atypical fields. The counselors should be aware of the psychological

effects of gender discrimination. The counseling service should be marketed as being available to all students, not only women.

Create a trusted reporting system for cases of gender-based discrimination. The students should be assured that their reports will be taken seriously and that they will not be victimized in the process. The reporting system should be explained well to the complainants. The complainants should be kept abreast of the progress of their reports.

Create support groups for students in gender-atypical fields. The Counseling Department and the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate can provide support in the creation of these support groups. They should be student-created support groups with institutional support.

For Future Research

This study was qualitative in nature. A quantitative study should be conducted to find the extent of the problem in UCU. The quantitative study should be able to show the correlation between the extent of the problem and the effects it has on the academic performance of the students.

This study focused on the experiences of the students who did not drop out of their chosen courses. Future research can be done with the students who did drop out of their courses in the fields of IT, Engineering, Nursing, or Theology.

This study focused on the experiences of the female students. Future research can be done to show the intersectionality of the different identities of the students in their experiences in UCU. Although the participants were from different districts of origin, the small number did not allow the researcher to show the intersectionality of the different identities of the students.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions carried out on the basis of the recommendations of this study. If the university introduces mentorship programs or gender sensitivity training, further research would be required to evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions on the students' experience.

Conduct comparative research in other Ugandan universities, both public and private. This would help in understanding if the trends observed in UCU are specific to this university or if they reflect the general trend in Ugandan higher education.

This would provide the basis for interventions in UCU and further research on the issue of gender inequality in Ugandan higher education.

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APPENDICIES

AN INTERVIEW GUIDE TO FIND OUT THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, MUKONO

I Kirabo Julian S23B15/021 a third year student seeking to find out the lived experiences of gender inequality on student's performance, this is purely, you have been selected to be among the participants who will contribute ideas to this study, it's purely for academic reasons, do not write your name your ideas will be given utmost confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we begin? May I have your permission to proceed with the interview and audio-recording?

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age? _____
2. Gender? _____
3. District? _____
4. Course of study? _____
5. Year of study? _____

SECTION 2: FORMS OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

1. In your experience at UCU, have you ever felt that your gender affected how you were treated in academic settings? Please describe.
2. In the classroom, have you observed differences in how male and female students are treated by lecturers? Explain.
3. Have you experienced or witnessed situations where students were discouraged from pursuing certain courses because of their gender?
4. Have you ever experienced or witnessed any form of gender-based harassment or inappropriate comments at this university? (You may decline to answer)

SECTION 3: CHALLENGES FACED AND EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

1. How have any experiences of gender inequality affected your:
 - a) Class participation?
 - b) Concentration while studying?
 - c) Academic confidence?
 - d) Motivation to study?
2. Do you feel these experiences have affected your grades or academic progress in any way? Please explain.

3. How have you coped with any challenges related to gender inequality? What has helped you?

SECTION D: STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY

1. What do you think the university administration should do differently to address gender inequality?

2. What can lecturers do to create a more gender-equitable learning environment?

3. What support services (counselling, reporting mechanisms, etc.) would help students who experience gender inequality?

4. If you could change one thing about how gender is handled at this university, what would it be?

OTHER

1. Is there anything else about your experiences with gender inequality at UCU that you would like to share?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION