

What explains gender gaps in math achievement in primary schools in Kenya?

Moses W. Ngware, James Ciera, Benta Abuya, Moses Oketch and Maurice Mutisya

Abstract

In Kenya, girls are persistently outperformed by boys in math national examinations. This paper aims to improve our understanding of classroom-based gender differences that may lead to differential in opportunity to learn provided to girls and boys in low and high performing primary schools in Kenya, and ask whether this explains the persistent differentials in performance. The paper uses opportunity to learn (OTL) framework. It tests the hypothesis that teaching practices and classroom interactions explain gender gaps in math achievement in Kenya. The data used is obtained from video recordings of 70 lessons in Mathematics and interviews with subject teachers in Kenyan primary schools. Results show that gender gaps in math achievement are more evidenced in the curriculum outcome area of measurement. Contrary to reviewed literature, the gaps are more pronounced among low achievers in favour of boys. The findings also show that 58.4% of boys compared to 54.6% girls received encouraging follow-up moves from their math teachers. The most revealing finding is that entry achievement level is the main source of gender gaps in math learning outcomes, implying that girls start at lower levels than boys and this gap is not closed by school. The policy implication to education of these findings is that while Kenya has achieved gender parity in enrolment, the fact that boys continuously outperform girls implies that boys have better chances of transition to secondary school and tertiary levels than girls, and consequently, broader gender disparities than can be closed by pro-gender education policies may continue to persist.

Keywords

Gender, instruction, opportunity to learn, math, teacher, gain score

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