

**Equal employment opportunities and access to university education in Hoima District.  
A cross-sectional study.**

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**Abstract**

**Background.**

Equal employment opportunities, particularly in recruitment, promotion, and deployment of qualified academic staff, are essential in promoting equitable access to higher education. This study examined the influence of equal employment opportunities on access to university education in Hoima District, Uganda.

**Methodology.**

The study used a correlational and cross-sectional research design using a mixed-methods approach. A total population of 300 respondents was considered, from which a sample of 169 respondents was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and documentary review. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

**Results.**

The study achieved a response rate of 88.8%. Findings revealed that the majority of respondents were male (56%), while 54.7% were aged between 21 and 41 years. Results indicated low levels of equal employment opportunities in public universities, with respondents disagreeing that recruitment and promotion processes were transparent and merit-based. Access to university education was also found to be limited, particularly among females, rural students, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable groups. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between equal employment opportunities and access to university education ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ). Regression analysis further showed that equal opportunities significantly influenced access to university education ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion.**

The study showed that equal employment opportunities significantly affect access to university education in Hoima District. However, weak implementation of fairness and inclusion policies continues to limit equitable access.

**Recommendation.**

There is a need for universities and education stakeholders in Hoima District to strengthen the implementation of equal opportunity policies in admissions, staffing, and student support systems.

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**Keywords:** *Equal employment opportunities, access to university education, affirmative action, marginalized groups, Hoima District.*

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**Background.**

Equal employment opportunities, particularly in the recruitment, deployment, and retention of qualified teachers, play a critical role in enhancing access to university education in rural areas. The availability of competent and adequately distributed teaching personnel is a key determinant of educational equity and quality. Empirical evidence indicates that disparities in teacher distribution between urban and rural areas significantly affect access to education, with rural schools often experiencing acute shortages of qualified staff (Li et al., 2024). This imbalance is largely attributed to unfavorable working conditions, low

remuneration, and limited career advancement opportunities in rural settings, which discourage teachers from accepting or remaining in such postings (Zhang et al., 2024). As a result, equal employment opportunities policies aimed at incentivizing teacher deployment to rural areas are essential for improving access to university education. Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between teacher employment policies and educational access in rural contexts. A study by Liu et al. (2022) found that supportive employment policies, including incentives and favorable working conditions, significantly increased teachers' willingness to work in rural schools, thereby improving

staffing levels and educational access. These findings highlight the importance of targeted employment strategies in addressing teacher shortages and enhancing access to education in underserved areas.

Research on rural–urban educational inequality shows that limited access to qualified teachers in rural areas exacerbates educational disadvantages, reducing students’ chances of academic success and progression (Wang, 2024). In many developing regions, the concentration of skilled teachers in urban schools results in a systemic imbalance that limits rural students’ access to quality education (Chen et al., 2024). This reinforces the need for equitable employment policies that ensure fair distribution of human resources across regions.

Moreover, equal employment opportunities extend beyond teacher distribution to include broader labor market conditions that influence educational participation. Liao (2019) found that improved access to education enhances intergenerational income mobility, particularly in rural areas, suggesting that equitable employment opportunities in education contribute to long-term socio-economic development. This implies that investing in fair employment practices within the education sector not only improves access but also addresses underlying socio-economic inequalities that affect school participation. Empirical evidence consistently shows that equitable teacher recruitment, deployment, and retention are critical for improving enrollment, attendance, and completion rates. However, persistent challenges such as teacher shortages, poor working conditions, and unequal resource distribution continue to limit access to education in rural communities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy interventions that promote fairness in employment practices and ensure the equitable distribution of educational resources. This study examined the influence of equal employment opportunities on access to university education in Hoima District, Uganda.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between affirmative action implementation and education service delivery in a public university in Hoima District. A correlational design was considered suitable for examining the strength and direction of associations between variables without inferring causation, which aligned with the study’s objective. A cross-sectional design was used to allow data collection at a single point in time from a sample of the population, thereby

providing a snapshot of the situation regarding affirmative action and service delivery. This approach was efficient in describing the prevalence of phenomena and the relationships between variables within the specified context. The study applied a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Quantitative methods were used to measure the extent of affirmative action implementation and various indicators of access to university education, enabling statistical analysis of relationships among variables. Qualitative methods were used to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders regarding the impact of affirmative action, thereby offering rich contextual insights, as noted by Cho and Gay (2022).

### **Population of Study.**

The study population comprised 300 respondents drawn from key stakeholder groups involved in access to university education in Hoima District. The population largely revolved around the only public university operating in the district, Gulu University, particularly its Hoima branch and outreach programmes, as well as district and community-level actors in the education sector. The study included 230 university students, who constituted the largest proportion of the population. These included both regular and outreach learners, reflecting the central role of Gulu University in providing public higher education within the district. Additionally, 30 university administrators and academic staff were included to provide institutional insights into affirmative action implementation and education service delivery. The population further comprised 10 district education officials, including the District Education Officer (DEO), inspectors, and education officers, who are directly involved in policy supervision and implementation. Local government leaders, totaling 20 (including LCIII officials, councilors, and other community leaders), were also included due to their role in governance and community mobilization. Furthermore, 10 representatives from NGOs and civil society organizations were incorporated because of their involvement in education advocacy and support initiatives.

### **Sample Size.**

From this population, a sample size of 169 respondents was selected, based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, which provides a statistically reliable sample for a given population size. The sample was proportionally distributed across the different respondent categories to ensure adequate representation of each group.

**Table 1: Category, Target Population, Sample, and Sampling Techniques**

Category of Respondents	Study Population (N)	Sample Size (n)	Sampling Technique
University students (including outreach learners of Gulu University)	230	129	Stratified random sampling
University administrators & academic staff	30	17	Purposive sampling
District education officials (DEO, inspectors, officers)	10	6	Purposive sampling
Local government leaders (LCIII, community leaders)	20	11	Simple random sampling
NGO/Civil society representatives	10	6	Convenience sampling
Total	300	169	—

*Source: Hoima District Education Department Report (2026), Gulu University- Hoima Branch Academic Registrar Office (2025)*

### Sampling Techniques.

The study employed a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques to ensure both representativeness and the inclusion of knowledgeable respondents with relevant experience in affirmative action and access to university education in Hoima District. The use of multiple techniques was appropriate given the diverse nature of the study population.

### Stratified Random Sampling.

Stratified random sampling was used to select university students, including those enrolled in outreach programmes of Gulu University. This technique was considered appropriate because the student population was heterogeneous in nature. The students were first divided into strata based on gender to ensure balanced representation of both male and female respondents. After stratification, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select respondents proportionately. This method minimized bias and ensured that key subgroups within the student population were adequately represented in the study.

### Simple Random Sampling.

Simple random sampling was used to select local government leaders. Under this technique, each member of the target population had an equal and independent chance of being selected. A sampling frame of all eligible local leaders was established, and respondents were selected using random methods such as drawing names or random number generation. This approach reduced selection bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample.

### Purposive Sampling.

Purposive sampling was employed to select university administrators, academic staff, and district education officials, such as the District Education Officer (DEO) and inspectors. This technique involved the deliberate selection of respondents based on their positions, roles, and expertise. These individuals were chosen because they possessed specialized knowledge and firsthand experience regarding

affirmative action policies and education service delivery. The use of purposive sampling ensured that the study obtained in-depth and relevant information from key informants.

### Convenience Sampling.

Convenience sampling was used to select representatives from NGOs and civil society organizations. This technique involved selecting respondents who were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study at the time of data collection. It was particularly useful in situations where a comprehensive sampling frame was not easily available. Although it may have limitations in terms of generalizability, it enabled the researcher to gather important insights from stakeholders actively involved in education-related initiatives within the district.

Overall, the combination of these sampling techniques enhanced the reliability and validity of the study by ensuring both broad representation and the inclusion of key informants with relevant expertise.

### Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data to obtain comprehensive information on the relationship between affirmative action and access to university education in Hoima District.

Primary data were collected directly from selected respondents in the field. These included university students enrolled in outreach programmes of Gulu University, university administrators and academic staff, district education officials, local government leaders, parents/guardians, and representatives from NGOs or civil society organizations. Primary data were gathered using instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides to capture firsthand information on respondents' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to access to university education.

Secondary data were obtained from existing documented sources. These included government reports, district education records, policy documents, and publications from institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Sports,

Uganda Bureau of Statistics, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Additional secondary sources included academic journals, books, previous research studies, and official reports from Hoima District Local Government, as well as university records. These sources provided background information, statistical data, and contextual insights that supported and validated the primary data collected in the study.

### **Data Collection Methods.**

The study employed a combination of data collection methods to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information from the selected respondents. These methods were chosen to ensure comprehensive coverage of issues related to affirmative action and access to university education in Hoima District.

### **Questionnaire Survey**

The study used structured questionnaires to collect quantitative data from university students and parents/guardians. The questionnaires consisted of both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions to capture respondents' views on access, enrollment, retention, and the influence of affirmative action. This method was preferred because it allowed for the collection of data from a relatively large number of respondents within a short period and ensured ease of analysis.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

The study was conducted using key informant interviews with university administrators (Academic registrar, Deans of Faculties, and Dean of Students) and academic staff from Gulu University (Hoima), district education officials, local government leaders, and NGO representatives. Semi-structured interview guides were used to obtain in-depth information on policy implementation, institutional challenges, and strategies aimed at improving access to university education. This method allowed flexibility and deeper exploration of issues that may not be captured through questionnaires.

### **Documentary Review**

The study also used a documentary review to collect secondary data from relevant documents such as district education reports, policy documents, institutional records, and publications from government and international organizations. This method helped to validate and supplement primary data while providing contextual and statistical information on trends in access to university education.

### **Research Instruments**

The study employed a set of research instruments designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from the

selected respondents. These instruments were aligned with the study objectives and the chosen data collection methods.

### **Questionnaire**

A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from university students, including those enrolled in outreach programmes of Gulu University, as well as parents/guardians. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed-ended questions and a few open-ended items to allow respondents to express their views. It was divided into sections covering demographic information, access to university education, and aspects of affirmative action such as equal opportunities, inclusivity, and targeted programmes. The questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions.

### **Interview Guide**

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from key informants, including university administrators, academic staff, district education officials, local government leaders, and NGO representatives. The guide contained open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide detailed explanations on issues related to policy implementation, institutional challenges, and strategies for improving access to university education.

### **Document Review Checklist**

A document review checklist was used to systematically collect secondary data from relevant documents such as government reports, district education records, policy documents, and institutional publications. The checklist guided the researcher in identifying key information related to enrollment trends, attendance, completion rates, and affirmative action initiatives.

The use of these instruments enabled the researcher to gather comprehensive and reliable data, while also allowing for triangulation of findings from different sources.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process followed a systematic procedure to ensure accuracy, reliability, and ethical compliance throughout the study.

First, obtained an introductory letter from the relevant academic institution to seek permission to conduct the study in Hoima District. This was followed by securing authorization from district authorities, including the District Education Office and local government officials. Permission was also sought from institutions associated with higher education access, including Gulu University, particularly for accessing students and academic staff involved in outreach programmes.

After obtaining the necessary approvals, the researcher conducted a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The pilot test was carried out on a

small sample of respondents outside the main study area, and necessary adjustments were made to improve clarity and consistency of the instruments.

Data collection then proceeded in the field. Questionnaires were administered to selected university students and parents/guardians using appropriate sampling techniques. At the same time, key informant interviews were conducted with university administrators, district education officials, local government leaders, and NGO representatives using a semi-structured interview guide. Relevant documents were also reviewed using a document checklist to obtain secondary data.

During data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, confidentiality was maintained, and participation remained voluntary. Respondents were assured that the information provided was used strictly for academic purposes.

Finally, all completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency before data entry and analysis. Interview responses were recorded (with permission), transcribed, and organized for analysis.

This procedure ensured that the data collected was credible, ethically obtained, and suitable for addressing the study objectives.

### Validity of Instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure, accurately reflecting the underlying concept or construct (Cho & Gay, 2022). In other words, validity determines whether the research truly measures what it intends to measure. It assesses the extent to which the instrument achieves its intended purpose (Smith, 2003).

In this study, the validity of the research instruments was assessed using the Content Validity Index (CVI) through expert judgment. The CVI was computed by dividing the number of items rated as relevant by experts by the total number of items in the instrument.

The instrument achieved a CVI of 0.9, which indicated a very high level of content validity. This meant that 90% of the items in the questionnaire and interview guide were rated as appropriate, clear, and relevant to the study objectives. Since the obtained CVI of 0.9 was above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Amin, 2005), the instruments were considered highly valid for use in the study without the need for major revisions.

The high CVI also implied that the items adequately covered the key constructs of affirmative action implementation and access to university education, ensuring that the data collected was reliable and aligned with the research objectives.

### Reliability of Instruments

Reliability estimates the consistency of a measurement instrument, or more simply, the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same respondents (Masejane, 2012). When the results of a measuring instrument are reproducible, the instrument is considered reliable.

In this study, the reliability of the quantitative data was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The Cronbach's alpha value obtained was 0.85.

This value indicated a high level of internal consistency among the items in the research instrument, meaning that the questions were measuring the same underlying constructs related to affirmative action implementation and access to university education. Since the coefficient of 0.85 was above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, as recommended in research standards, the instrument was considered reliable for use in the study.

The high reliability coefficient further implied that the data collected from the respondents were consistent, dependable, and suitable for producing valid statistical analysis and findings.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the findings in relation to the study objectives.

#### Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were coded, entered, and analyzed using statistical software such as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data and describe the characteristics of respondents as well as trends in access to university education.

Inferential statistics were also applied to examine the relationship between variables. Specifically, correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between affirmative action components (equal employment opportunities, inclusivity, and targeted programmes) and access to university education. The results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs for clarity and ease of interpretation.

#### Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected through interviews and document review were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview responses were transcribed, organized, and coded into themes and sub-themes based on the study objectives.

Patterns and key insights were then identified through a systematic review of the coded data, allowing the researcher to interpret recurring ideas and meanings related to

affirmative action and access to university education. The findings were presented in a narrative form, supported by direct quotations from respondents where appropriate to enhance credibility and depth of interpretation.

**Data Integration**

Page | 6 Findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the results. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between affirmative action and access to university education in Hoima District.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2014) highlights the importance of ethical considerations in research, including respect for participants’ rights, dignity, and privacy. This study prioritized ethical standards by obtaining the necessary approvals, seeking informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality throughout the research process.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation was ensured without any form of coercion. The researcher took measures to minimize potential harm, protect participants’ well-being, and secure all collected data through proper storage and restricted access.

Compliance with relevant laws and institutional regulations was ensured, and approval from the institutional review board or ethics committee was obtained before data collection to safeguard participants’ rights and welfare.

**Informed Consent.**

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Results.**

**Table 2: Response Rate by Category of Respondents**

Category of Respondents	Questionnaires issued and interviews scheduled	Questionnaires collected and interviews conducted	Response Rate (%)
University students (including outreach learners of Gulu University)	129	122	94.6
University administrators & academic staff	17	12	70.6
District education officials (DEO, inspectors, officers)	6	4	66.7
Local government leaders (LCIII, community leaders)	11	8	72.7
NGO/Civil society representatives	6	4	66.7
Total	169	150	88.8

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

The study achieved an overall response rate of 88.8%, which was considered very good for data analysis and interpretation. Out of the 169 targeted respondents, 150 research instruments were administered, and 133 were fully completed and returned.

Among university students, 122 instruments were issued, and 118 were successfully returned, representing the highest response rate of 94.6%, which indicated strong participation among this group. For university administrators and academic staff, the response rate was 70.6%, with 12 out of 17 instruments completed.

District education officials recorded a response rate of 66.7%, where 4 out of 6 targeted respondents participated. Local government leaders had a response rate of 72.7%, with 8 out of 11 responding, while NGO and civil society representatives also recorded 66.7%, with 4 out of 6 participating.

The high overall response rate enhanced the reliability of the findings on affirmative action implementation and access to university education in Hoima District, as it minimized non-response bias and ensured adequate representation across all respondent categories.

**Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

**Table 3: Sex of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	84	56.0
Female	66	44.0
Total	150	100

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

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The results indicate that the majority of respondents were male (56%), while females constituted 44%. This shows a relatively balanced gender representation in the study, which enhances the reliability of the findings on affirmative action and access to university education.

**Table 4: Age of Respondents**

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10–20 years	28	18.7
21–41 years	82	54.7
42–52 years	30	20.0
Above 53 years	10	6.6
Total	150	100

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

The findings show that the majority of respondents (54.7%) were aged between 21 and 41 years. This age group largely represents active students and working professionals within the university system.

**Table 5: Marital Status of Respondents**

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	92	61.3
Married	40	26.7
Divorced/Separated	10	6.7
Widowed	6	4.0
Others	2	1.3
Total	150	100

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

The results indicate that most respondents were single (61.3%), which is consistent with the student-dominated population of the study.

**Table 6: Education Level of Respondents**

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Certificate	20	13.3
Diploma	38	25.3
Bachelor's Degree	62	41.3
University (Other levels)	28	18.7
Others	2	1.4
Total	150	100

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

The majority of respondents (41.3%) held bachelor's degrees, indicating that most participants had a relatively high level of education, enabling them to understand issues related to affirmative action and access to university education.

### **Equal Employment Opportunities in Hoima District. Descriptive Findings on Equal Employment Opportunities in Hoima District**

**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics on Equal Employment Practices**

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Recruitment is based on merit rather than favoritism.	2.41	1.12	Disagree
Both men and women have equal opportunities to be employed.	2.58	1.08	Disagree
Vacant teaching positions are advertised publicly.	2.33	1.05	Disagree
Teachers from marginalized communities have equal chances of employment.	2.20	1.10	Disagree
The selection process for teachers is transparent.	2.15	1.14	Disagree
Opportunities for promotion are equally available to all teachers.	2.28	1.09	Disagree
Appointments consider qualifications fairly.	2.62	1.00	Disagree
Appointments consider experience fairly.	2.70	0.98	Slight Disagreement
Teachers are informed about avenues for addressing unfair practices.	2.10	1.13	Disagree
The local education office monitors equal employment policies effectively.	2.05	1.11	Disagree

*Source: Primary Data (2026)*

The overall mean scores for most statements ranged between 2.05 and 2.70, indicating general disagreement among respondents regarding the existence of equal employment practices in public universities in Hoima District. This suggests that respondents perceived inequalities in recruitment, promotion, and transparency of employment processes.

The lowest-rated statement was that the local education office effectively monitors equal employment policies (mean = 2.05), implying weak enforcement of affirmative action and employment equity guidelines. Similarly, transparency in selection processes (mean = 2.15) and access for marginalized groups (mean = 2.20) were rated poorly, indicating concerns about fairness and inclusivity. Although qualifications and experience were moderately acknowledged in appointment decisions, the overall pattern of responses suggests that favoritism, lack of transparency, and limited accountability mechanisms may still influence employment practices in public universities.

### Interview Responses on Equal Employment in Public Universities in Hoima District

This section presents synthesized qualitative responses from key informants, including the District Education Officer (DEO), District Inspector of Schools (DIS), Academic Registrar (AR), and Deans from the public university system in Hoima District. The responses focus on perceptions of equal employment, recruitment fairness, transparency, and implementation of affirmative action principles.

#### 1. District Education Officer (DEO)

The DEO noted that while government policies emphasize equal employment opportunities, implementation at the institutional level remains inconsistent. He observed that: *"In principle, recruitment in public universities is supposed to be merit-based, but in practice, there are concerns raised*

*about influence and networks in hiring processes. Monitoring is also limited due to resource constraints."*

The DEO further emphasized that enforcement mechanisms for employment equity are weak, making it difficult to ensure full compliance with affirmative action guidelines.

#### 2. District Inspector of Schools (DIS)

The DIS highlighted challenges in monitoring fairness in employment practices within higher education institutions. He stated that:

*"We mainly focus on primary and secondary education, so our direct oversight of university employment is limited. However, reports we receive indicate that transparency in recruitment is not always fully observed."*

He added that while job advertisements are sometimes publicly issued, the selection process may not always reflect full transparency and fairness.

#### 3. Academic Registrar (AR)

The Academic Registrar provided an institutional perspective, acknowledging both progress and challenges in recruitment systems. He explained that:

*"We follow established procedures for recruitment, including advertising vacancies and setting qualification standards. However, perceptions of bias still arise among some staff and applicants, especially regarding promotions."*

He further noted that efforts are being made to digitize recruitment processes to enhance transparency and reduce human interference.

#### 4. Deans of Faculties

The Deans expressed mixed views regarding equal employment practices. One Dean stated:

*"We try to ensure that recruitment and promotion are based on qualifications and experience, but sometimes external pressures and internal politics affect decisions."*

Another Dean added:

*"There is still a perception among staff that opportunities are not always evenly distributed, especially for early-career academics and those from marginalized backgrounds."*

### **Thematic Analysis of Findings on Equal Employment in Public Universities in Hoima District**

The qualitative data obtained from key informants, including the District Education Officer (DEO), District Inspector of Schools (DIS), Academic Registrar (AR), and Deans, were analyzed thematically. Several key themes emerged in relation to equal employment practices in public universities in Hoima District.

#### **Theme 1: Existence of Formal Merit-Based Recruitment Policies**

Most respondents acknowledged that formal recruitment policies exist and emphasize merit-based hiring. The Academic Registrar and Deans indicated that procedures such as public advertisement of vacancies, qualification screening, and structured interviews are followed.

However, while policies are clearly defined, implementation was reported to be inconsistent. The DEO noted that:

*"In principle, recruitment is supposed to be merit-based, but in practice, there are concerns about influence and networks."*

This theme suggests that although formal systems exist, their enforcement is not always fully effective.

#### **Theme 2: Perceived Lack of Transparency in Recruitment and Promotion**

A major theme that emerged was the perceived lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion processes. The District Inspector of Schools highlighted limited oversight in university-level employment, noting that complaints of non-transparent selection procedures are common.

Similarly, Deans reported that:

*"Sometimes external pressures and internal politics affect decisions."*

This indicates that despite established procedures, decision-making processes are sometimes influenced by non-merit factors, leading to perceptions of unfairness.

#### **Theme 3: Weak Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanisms**

Respondents consistently pointed to weak monitoring systems as a key challenge. The DEO emphasized that district-level monitoring of university employment practices

is limited due to institutional mandates and resource constraints.

The DIS also confirmed that their oversight is mainly focused on lower education levels, leaving university employment largely self-regulated. This weak enforcement structure was associated with gaps in ensuring compliance with equal employment principles.

#### **Theme 4: Perceived Inequality in Employment and Promotion Opportunities**

Another key theme was the perception of unequal access to employment and career advancement opportunities. Some Deans observed that early-career staff and individuals from marginalized backgrounds often feel disadvantaged in recruitment and promotion processes.

This perception was supported by concerns raised by multiple informants regarding favoritism and uneven distribution of opportunities within academic departments.

#### **Theme 5: Efforts Toward Improving Recruitment Systems**

Despite the challenges, some positive efforts were noted. The Academic Registrar reported initiatives such as the digitization of recruitment processes and the standardization of procedures to improve transparency and reduce bias.

These reforms were viewed as steps toward strengthening fairness and accountability in employment practices, although their impact was still considered limited at the time of the study.

The thematic analysis reveals a consistent pattern: while formal merit-based recruitment policies exist in public universities in Hoima District, their implementation is hindered by weak monitoring systems, perceived favoritism, and limited transparency. Consequently, equal employment practices are not fully realized in practice, despite ongoing institutional efforts to improve the system.

### **Documentary Review Findings on Equal Employment Practices in Public Universities in Hoima District**

A documentary review was conducted on relevant records obtained from Hoima District education offices and institutional documents from Gulu University (Hoima Campus). The reviewed documents included district education reports, staffing records, recruitment guidelines, appointment letters, and policy documents on human resource management in public education institutions. The findings were organized according to emerging themes.

#### **Theme 1: Formal Existence of Recruitment and Employment Policies**

The reviewed policy documents from Gulu University (Hoima Campus) indicated that recruitment is guided by

established human resource manuals consistent with public service regulations in Uganda. The documents emphasized merit-based recruitment, equal opportunity employment, and open advertisement of vacancies.

Similarly, Hoima District education reports highlighted that public institutions are required to adhere to national employment guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Public Service Commission. These documents confirmed that affirmative action principles are formally embedded within recruitment frameworks.

However, despite the existence of clear policy guidelines, the documents did not provide sufficient evidence on the extent of enforcement at the departmental level, suggesting a gap between policy and practice.

### **Theme 2: Evidence of Public Advertisement and Competitive Recruitment**

Staffing records from Gulu University (Hoima Campus) showed that vacant academic and administrative positions were publicly advertised through national newspapers, institutional websites, and notice boards. This indicated compliance with formal recruitment procedures aimed at ensuring openness.

District education reports also confirmed that recruitment processes in public institutions within Hoima District generally follow competitive procedures, including interviews and verification of qualifications.

However, the documents lacked detailed records on recruitment outcomes disaggregated by gender, disability status, or marginalized groups, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of affirmative action implementation.

### **Theme 3: Representation of Marginalized Groups in Employment**

A review of staffing summaries indicated limited documentation on the representation of marginalized groups within the workforce. While policies encouraged inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups, the records from both the district and university did not consistently show structured tracking of equity indicators.

This absence of detailed disaggregated data suggested weak monitoring of affirmative action implementation in employment processes.

### **Theme 4: Promotion and Career Progression Practices**

University human resource records revealed that promotion is generally based on academic qualifications, experience, and performance appraisal reports. However, there was limited documentation on standardized timelines or transparent criteria for promotion across departments.

District reports similarly indicated that while promotion guidelines exist, their implementation varies across institutions, with some inconsistencies in adherence to structured appraisal systems.

This suggests potential gaps in fairness and transparency in career progression systems.

### **Theme 5: Monitoring and Compliance Mechanisms**

Documents from Hoima District education offices indicated that monitoring of employment practices is largely conducted through periodic inspections and administrative reporting. However, these mechanisms were mainly focused on lower education levels, with limited direct oversight of university employment systems.

At Gulu University (Hoima Campus), internal audit and human resource committees were identified as responsible for monitoring recruitment compliance. Nevertheless, the documents did not provide strong evidence of external accountability mechanisms, indicating reliance on internal regulation.

The documentary review findings reveal that both Hoima District education offices and Gulu University have established formal policies supporting equal employment and merit-based recruitment. Evidence confirms the existence of transparent procedures such as public advertisement of vacancies and structured recruitment guidelines.

However, the documents also reveal key gaps, particularly in monitoring, enforcement, and tracking of equity outcomes. Limited data on marginalized groups and inconsistencies in promotion records suggest that while policies exist, implementation of equal employment principles remains partially weak.

## **Access to University Education in Hoima District**

### **Descriptive Findings on Access to University Education in Hoima District**

**Table 8: Access to University Education in Hoima District**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Enrollment is increasing steadily	2.60	1.05	Disagree
Most students in the community attend regularly	2.45	1.02	Disagree
Completion rates of university education are satisfactory	2.30	1.08	Disagree
Dropout rates are low	2.40	1.01	Disagree

The university is located within a reasonable distance	2.35	1.10	Disagree
Lecturers meet the learning needs of students	2.50	1.06	Disagree
There is no gender inequality in access to university education	1.87	1.13	Strongly Disagree
Persons with disabilities have adequate access to university facilities	1.93	1.10	Strongly Disagree
Students from vulnerable groups receive necessary support	2.10	1.09	Disagree
Learning materials and classrooms are sufficient for all students	2.20	1.07	Disagree

Source: Primary data (2026)

The findings in Table 8 indicate that access to university education in Hoima District is generally limited and below satisfactory levels, as reflected by the low mean scores across almost all indicators, which fall within the Disagree to Strongly Disagree range.

Overall, respondents disagreed that key indicators of access are being adequately achieved. For instance, the statement on enrollment increasing steadily recorded a low mean of 2.60, suggesting that enrollment growth is not strongly perceived by respondents. Similarly, the views on regular attendance of students (Mean = 2.45) and satisfactory completion rates (Mean = 2.30) indicate that student progression and participation in university education are considered weak.

The perception of dropout rates being low (Mean = 2.40) also received disagreement, implying that dropout remains a challenge in the district. In addition, respondents disagreed that the university is located within a reasonable distance (Mean = 2.35), suggesting that geographical accessibility remains a barrier for many students.

Academic support services were also rated poorly. The statement that lecturers meet the learning needs of students (Mean = 2.50) was disagreed upon, indicating that instructional support may not fully meet students' expectations or needs. Furthermore, respondents disagreed that learning materials and classrooms are sufficient (Mean = 2.20), pointing to inadequate learning resources and infrastructural constraints.

More critically, issues of equity and inclusion recorded the lowest ratings. The statement that there is no gender inequality in access to university education (Mean = 1.87) was strongly disagreed with, showing that gender disparities in access are perceived to be significant. Similarly, access for persons with disabilities (Mean = 1.93) was strongly disagreed upon, indicating major barriers in infrastructure and institutional support for PWDs.

Additionally, respondents disagreed that students from vulnerable groups receive necessary support (Mean = 2.10), suggesting that targeted assistance programs are insufficient or ineffective.

## Interview responses on Access to University Education in Hoima District

### 1. District Education Officer (DEO)

He said, "Access to university education in Hoima District is gradually improving, but it is still limited by financial constraints among students from poor households."

He added, "Scholarship opportunities are very few and cannot meet the high demand from needy students."

He further said, "Gender disparities still exist, with fewer female students accessing university education compared to males due to socio-economic and cultural factors."

### 2. District Inspector of Schools (DIS)

He said, "Although many students perform well at the secondary level, transition to university is still low in this district."

He explained, "This is largely due to inadequate career guidance and a lack of proper information about university entry requirements."

He also stated, "Students from rural areas face serious challenges in accessing university education because of distance and transport costs."

He added, "Learners with disabilities are disadvantaged since most institutions lack inclusive facilities and support services."

### 3. Academic Registrar (AR)

He said, "We receive applications from many students, but completion rates are affected by financial difficulties and academic challenges."

He further noted, "Some students fail to complete their studies due to the inability to pay tuition fees on time."

He added, "Inadequate learning facilities such as classrooms and ICT resources negatively affect the quality of access to education."

### 4. Deans of Faculties

He said, "Enrollment is increasing, but equity in access is still a major concern."

He explained, "Students from vulnerable backgrounds struggle academically because they lack financial support and remedial assistance."

He further said, "There is still a gender imbalance in some faculties, especially in science-related programs where female students are fewer than males."

He added, "Lecturers are often overwhelmed by large numbers of students, making individualized support difficult."

### 5. Chairman Local Council V (LCV)

He said, "Access to university education in Hoima District is still limited, especially for students from rural and poor households."

He stated, "Poverty is a major barrier that prevents many families from supporting their children through university education."

He further said, "Students with disabilities are not adequately supported due to poor infrastructure and limited specialized services."

He added, "Although government efforts exist to expand higher education, implementation at the local level is still weak."

### Thematic Analysis of Interview Findings: Access to University Education in Hoima District

The qualitative findings from key informants were organized into themes to reflect patterns emerging from the interviews. The major themes identified include: financial constraints, limited institutional support, inequitable access, infrastructural challenges, and transition barriers to university education.

#### 1. Financial Constraints and Affordability Barriers

Respondents consistently highlighted financial limitations as a major barrier to university access. The DEO said, "Access to university education in Hoima District is gradually improving, but it is still limited by financial constraints among students from poor households." Similarly, the LCV Chairman stated, "Poverty is a major barrier that prevents many families from supporting their children through university education." The Academic Registrar also said, "Some students fail to complete their studies due to the inability to pay tuition fees on time." These views indicate that affordability remains a key determinant of access to university education.

#### 2. Inequitable Access (Gender, Disability, and Vulnerable Groups)

Another dominant theme was inequality in access among different population groups. The DEO said, "Gender disparities still exist, with fewer female students accessing university education compared to males." The DIS also reported, "Learners with disabilities are disadvantaged since most institutions lack inclusive facilities and support services." Additionally, Deans of Faculties said, "Students from vulnerable backgrounds struggle academically because they lack financial support and remedial assistance." These responses suggest that access to university education is not evenly distributed among all social groups.

#### 3. Inadequate Institutional Support Systems

Respondents also pointed to weak institutional support mechanisms. The AR said, "We receive applications from many students, but completion rates are affected by financial difficulties and academic challenges." Deans of Faculties added, "Lecturers are often overwhelmed by large numbers of students, making individualized support difficult." The DEO further said, "Scholarship opportunities are very few and cannot meet the high demand from needy students." This indicates that existing support systems are insufficient to ensure full participation and completion.

#### 4. Infrastructure and Resource Limitations

Limited learning infrastructure and resources were also highlighted. The AR stated, "Inadequate learning facilities such as classrooms and ICT resources negatively affect the quality of access to education." The DIS further said, "Most institutions lack inclusive facilities and support services for learners with disabilities." These statements reflect that infrastructural inadequacies constrain both access and learning quality in universities.

#### 5. Transition and Accessibility Challenges

Respondents also identified challenges related to transitioning from secondary to university education and physical accessibility. The DIS said, "Transition to university is still low in this district due to inadequate career guidance." He further added, "Students from rural areas face serious challenges in accessing university education because of distance and transport costs." This suggests that the lack of information and geographical barriers continue to hinder progression to higher education.

Overall, the qualitative findings indicate that access to university education in Hoima District is constrained by financial hardship, inequality, inadequate institutional support, poor infrastructure, and transition challenges. These themes align with the quantitative findings, which showed generally low mean scores and widespread disagreement on equitable access to university education.

### Documentary Review Findings on Access to University Education in Hoima District

A review of relevant documents from the District Education Office and Gulu University (Hoima Campus) was conducted to triangulate findings on access to university education in Hoima District. The documents included enrollment records, admission reports, institutional strategic plans, scholarship records, and student welfare reports.

#### 1. Enrollment and Admission Records

District records and university admission reports indicate that student enrollment in university education has gradually increased over the years, although the growth rate remains modest. The documents show that most admitted students

come from urban and semi-urban areas, while rural representation remains relatively low. It was further observed that female student enrollment is lower than that of male students, particularly in science-based programs.

### 2. Completion and Retention Reports

University academic records reviewed show that student completion rates are moderate but not optimal. Several cohorts indicate cases of delayed graduation and withdrawal due to financial constraints and academic difficulties. The records also show that dropout cases are more common among students from low-income backgrounds, confirming inequalities in retention.

### 3. Scholarship and Financial Aid Records

District and university scholarship records indicate that financial support is limited and insufficient to cover all eligible students. Only a small proportion of needy students benefit from government or institutional bursaries. The documents further reveal that most scholarship programs are competitive and favor academically strong students, leaving out many vulnerable learners.

### 4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources Reports

Institutional reports from Gulu University (Hoima Campus) highlight inadequate lecture space, limited ICT facilities, and insufficient learning materials in some faculties. The

documents also note challenges in providing accessible infrastructure for students with disabilities, including a lack of ramps and assistive learning technologies.

### 5. Equity and Inclusion Reports

Policy and welfare documents indicate that while the university has gender and inclusion policies in place, implementation remains weak. Reports show limited targeted interventions for students with disabilities and vulnerable groups. There is also minimal documentation of structured support programs, such as remedial teaching or comprehensive student mentorship systems.

### 6. Accessibility and Geographic Coverage

District planning documents show that students from remote sub-counties face greater challenges in accessing university education, mainly due to transport costs and distance to institutions. This has resulted in uneven participation, with higher enrollment rates observed among students closer to urban centers.

The documentary evidence confirms that although university education in Hoima District is expanding, access remains limited and unequal. Key challenges identified include: Slow but uneven enrollment growth, Gender imbalance in admissions, financial constraints affecting completion, Limited scholarship coverage, inadequate infrastructure and learning resources, and Weak implementation of inclusion policies.

## Correlation Analysis

**Table 9: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N = 150)**

Variables	Equal Opportunities
Access to University Education	0.78**

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Note:  $p < 0.01$

This is followed by equal opportunities ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that fairness in admission, recruitment, and participation processes significantly enhances access to

university education. The findings suggest that when equal opportunity principles are upheld, more students are able to access higher education services.

## Regression Analysis on Access to University Education in Hoima District

**Table 10: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.86	0.74	0.73	0.42

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The results show a strong positive relationship between the independent variables and access to university education ( $R = 0.86$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.74$ ) indicates that 74% of the variation in access to university education in Hoima District is explained by equal

opportunities, inclusivity, and targeted programs, while the remaining 26% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.73 confirms that the model is a good fit for the data.

**Table 11: ANOVA Results.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	52.36	3	17.45	98.21	0.000
Residual	18.42	146	0.13		
Total	70.78	149			

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 98.21, p < 0.001$ ). This implies that equal opportunities have a significant effect on access to university education in Hoima District.

**Table 12: Regression Coefficients**

Variable	Unstandardized Beta (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.52	0.21	—	2.48	0.014
Equal Opportunities for Employment	0.31	0.07	0.29	4.43	0.000

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The results show that all independent variables have a positive and statistically significant effect on access to university education in Hoima District.

Equal opportunities ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$ ) also have a strong positive effect, indicating that fair recruitment, admission, and participation processes significantly improve access to university education.

### Discussion of Findings.

#### Equal Opportunities and Access to University Education

The study findings revealed that equal opportunities in access to university education are generally limited in Hoima District, as indicated by low mean scores and respondent perceptions showing inequality in recruitment, admission, and participation processes. The correlation results further showed a strong positive relationship between equal opportunities and access to university education ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ), implying that improvements in fairness and equality in opportunities are associated with improved access to university education.

These findings are consistent with Wang (2024) and Chen et al. (2024), who argue that unequal distribution of educational opportunities in rural areas leads to persistent disparities in access and participation. Similarly, Li et al. (2024) emphasize that rural–urban inequalities in resource allocation and staffing contribute significantly to unequal access to education.

The findings also align with Liu et al. (2022), who found that fair employment and institutional policies improve educational service delivery and access outcomes. In the context of Hoima District, the strong correlation suggests that addressing inequality in opportunities would significantly enhance access to university education, particularly for rural and disadvantaged students.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that equal opportunities significantly influence access to university education in Hoima District. However, the level of equality in opportunities is still limited, particularly in relation to gender representation, access for rural students, and participation of marginalized groups. Despite the strong positive relationship between equal opportunities and access ( $r = 0.78$ ), implementation gaps in fairness and resource distribution continue to constrain equitable access to university education. Therefore, unequal opportunity structures remain a key barrier to achieving inclusive higher education in the district.

### Recommendation.

There is a need for universities and education stakeholders in Hoima District to strengthen the implementation of equal opportunity policies in admissions, staffing, and student support systems.

Recruitment and admission processes should be made more transparent, merit-based, and inclusive of disadvantaged groups, especially rural students, females, and marginalized communities.

The government and university management should also enhance monitoring mechanisms to ensure fairness in access and participation.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Abbreviation	Full Meaning
AR	Academic Registrar
CVI	Content Validity Index
DEO	District Education Officer
DIS	District Inspector of Schools
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LCIII	Local Council Three
LCV	Local Council Five
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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There is no conflict of interest.

### **Availability of data.**

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

### **The author's contribution.**

SK designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript.

DA supervised all stages of the study from the conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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