

Postgraduate students' retention and survival rates between 2015 and 2024 in public Universities, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Retention and survival rates of postgraduate students are critical parameters for measuring academic progress and the achievement of graduate-level completion. Postgraduate students in Kenyan universities continue to face the challenges of late completions and low graduation rates. The present study evaluates the retention and survival patterns of postgraduate students to predict completion rates in Kenyan public universities between 2015 and 2024. The study was guided by Tinto's Student Integration Model. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to thoroughly analyze the relationship between retention, survival, and completion rates. The target population comprised 23,319 postgraduate students enrolled in public universities in Kenya between 2015 and 2024. The study employed purposive sampling to select universities with established postgraduate programs and documented retention data over the ten-year period. Within these institutions, stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of students from different levels of study (Master's and PhD), academic disciplines, and gender categories. Data collection methods included interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Linear regression was used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data. Instrument reliability was assessed through the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which indicated strong internal consistency. The results showed a significant increase in the retention and survival rates of postgraduate students, from 75 percent in 2015 to 87 percent in 2024, representing a relative gain of 90 percent over ten years. This upward trend indicates incremental improvements in university support networks and targeted initiatives designed to enhance student endurance and achievement. Regression analysis demonstrated that both male ($B = 29.23$, $t = 14.51$, $p < 0.001$) and female retention rates ($B = 23.14$, $t = 9.73$, $p < 0.001$) are strong, statistically significant predictors of postgraduate student retention in Kenyan public universities. Male enrollment ($B = 1.02$, $t = 13.18$, $p < 0.001$) and female enrollment ($B = 0.82$, $t = 15.66$, $p < 0.001$) also significantly impact retention. The model explains 95% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.95$), highlighting its robustness. The report establishes that improved retention and survival systems have led to higher completion rates among postgraduate students. It suggests that implementing specific support strategies, particularly those that support female postgraduate students—such as mentorship programs and professional networking opportunities—should be a priority for public universities to address current gender discrepancies and further enhance completion rates.

Keywords: Completion Rates, Postgraduate Students' Retention, Public Universities, Survival Pattern

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of post graduate education in the world arena in the last ten years has experienced significant changes that have been characterized by the influx of students, academic rigors, and research relating to input in developing the nation of their countries (Gathui et al. 2024). Both in developed and developing countries, completion of the postgraduate studies is becoming a useful indicator of academic quality and institutional performance. In Kenya, the number of post-graduate enrollments in the universities has greatly increased due to the growing demand in specialized knowledge, Government vision 2030 plan, and the changing nature in the labor market respectively (Cattaneo et al., 2018). Through this growth, the success percentage in the postgraduate students is still very low prompting fears of the sustainability and efficiency of systems within postgraduate education.

The focal point of postgraduates education discourse is the idea of student retention and survival as defined by the term as a capacity of students to continue being enrolled and showing academic continuity in terms of degree

attainment (Adongo et al., 2022). Such rates remain the key indicators of academic well-being in an institution and they depend on diverse institutional and individual factors, such as the quality of supervision, research funding and resource availability, governance of an institution, socio-economic conditions, and policy (Kamara & Dadhabai, 2022). Among the postgraduate students in the Kenyan context, the problems that may arise are delayed supervision and feedback of theses, frequent strikes by the staff involved in the university, and inadequate academic and financial support among the postgraduate students; they may not be able to balance their personal and professional commitments. All this leads to long time to degree, high attrition, and general inefficiency of the postgraduate pipeline (Bruce, 2022).

Although there is some light on some individual issues influencing postgraduate education (supervision or funding) there is an absence of research studies that have utilized empirical data in a comprehensive study of significant temporal changes in retention and survival outcomes over a very long time span. Such an analysis is especially important in the next 10 years (2015-2024). And it is the context of the changes that are transforming the continued existence of higher learning, such as the introduction of new government policies, development of new digital learning environments and disruptions that have never happened before, like the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted greatly the teaching, learning, and research in any given environment (Dzingirai et al., 2022).

The aim of this study was thus to determine the retention and survival rates of post graduate students in Kenyan government institutions of higher learning between 2015 and 2024, with the hope that this will help evaluate how the trends will influence the overall completion rates. In particular, the article explores institutional, and student factors that cause variation in persistence using both quantitative and qualitative data to draw strong conclusions, evidence-based results. According to the study findings, the retention and survival of students relatively increased dramatically over the study period, that is, 75 percent in 2015 and 87 percent in 2024, as a result of the better institutional support system and its interventions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The completion rate in postgraduate education in Kenya is minimal even though the number of students enrolled has increased tremendously in the public universities. The trend also presents a major challenge to not only the academic progress of individual students but also to the actualisation of national development aspirants including Kenya vision 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063. Post graduate education is crucial in the generation of an educated work force in terms of researchers and practitioners of socio-economic change. Nevertheless, they discourage and are negative forces because of the overwhelming presence of delays in postgraduate completions and a sluggishness in realizing national priorities (Chidi & Adaobi, 2020).

Despite the fact that State Department of University Education has aimed at producing at least 1,000 graduates every year in the form of doctorates, majority of the public universities have not managed to achieve this target. The differences between the policy aim and the actual completion outcome indicate a possibility of systemic obstacles inside institutions. The organizational hierarchies such as the institutional policies and the leadership, the quality of supervision, the method of allocating resources and the administrative procedures are perceived to have a significant impact on the academic careers and timely graduation of postgraduate students.

Other universities specify master and doctorate placements in certain schedules (average two and three years of work respectively). Nonetheless, this is not always the case as very many students overstep these periods mainly because of poor supervision, unequal application of policies, lack of administrative support and limited funds. Though there have been institutions which have penalized late finishes, the success rate of the efforts is doubtful. Additionally, findings are sparse with regard to the empirical evidence on whether disparities in governance forms in various universities cause variations in pupil completion rates.

1.2 Research Objective

To assess postgraduate students' retention and survival rates as indicators of completion rates between 2015 and 2024 in public universities in Kenya

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The research is anchored on the Student Integration Theory of Tinto (1975) who underscores that the academic as well as social integration are critical in the survival of the student. Tinto argues, that retention is affected by the extent to which students fit into the institutional environment academically in terms of student-faculty interaction with course material and the intellectual content of the course, socially in terms of supportive associations with peers and the institutional tone (Tinto, 1975). The framework is especially pertinent to postgraduate research and the contexts in which its quality is heavily flexed by the level of academic and institutional support systems and persistence and completion outcomes therefore.

Furthermore, General Systems Theory by Bertalanffy in 1968 makes entities even more institutional by hinting that the operation of the universities is a system, where all the independent factors involved such as the governance, policies, supervision, resources, and student input have to align to produce maximum outputs. Failure to complete early post-graduate can therefore be considered as a system character flaw where the approach towards governance or academic support becomes a weak point that can halt student development.

2.2 Empirical Review

In the heavily cash-flowing systems, particularly in Europe and North America, the empirical investigations have come to the conclusion that postgraduate completion in these countries is heavily deterministic towards a bad or excellent academic supervision, research resources, and a positive institutional environment. Modena et al. (2020) focused on structured supervision, the method of reducing attrition rates of students in the process of becoming doctors. Institutions with well spelled-out guidelines on supervision, frequent follow up on progress as well as ways of tending to student grievances have been found to be reporting high completion rates. In like manner, Fernando (2013) deduced that in a scenario where a supervision conducted by doctoral degrees is unstructured, inconsistent, and cautious of being excessively reliant on one given supervisor, it is likely that the students concerned will find themselves delayed or dropping out of the programs completely.

Next, Lee and Danby (2012) investigated the importance of agency in the postgraduate studies. They came to the conclusion that the persistence of students undergoing mentorship, peer support, and undergoing scholarly engagement is higher. In an Australian longitudinal study, Arko-Achemfuor (2017) also discovered that the primary predictor variables of student completion were academic support in the form of structure, administrative procedures to be transparent, and good financial stability. Additionally, financial support proved its importance as well as a study by Munene (2016), managed to prove the correlation between funded doctoral programs and their likelihood to complete such degree within a shorter time in the study conducted among universities in the United States.

In the UK, the Higher Education Policy Institute (Eika, 2021) found that timely feedback, manageable workloads, and transparency of the policies of the institutions are also essential to a successful postgraduate education. The selected students who received regular and constructive feedback were more likely to develop at an adequacy level and finish their course of studies within an acceptable time frame. In various nations, it has also been revealed that digital tools and blended learning facilities helped in improving retention and survival as well, especially within the post-COVID-19 world.

Sub-Saharan Africa has peculiar systemic issues that tend to affect postgraduate levels of education in the region. They include lack of funds, large supervisor-to- student ratios, ineffective institutional structures and political or socio economic instability. Kabwos et al. (2020) study on doctoral programs in African universities found that in most universities, organizations face an understaffing problem, as well as faculty overwork and weak infrastructure in research procedures. The result is an abnormally high rate of dropout and lengthy time-to-degree by survey participants who do complete.

South Africa has a higher education sector that is rather well developed in the region. However, still, there the Council on Higher Education has reported that the doctoral enrollments have been rising, but the graduation is an issue. As the study stated, the reasons as to why the completion is taking longer attributed to poor supervision, lack of financial support, and even lack of academic preparation of the incoming students. On the same note, Christiansen and Bertram (2019) stated that absence of a distinct national policy on graduate output and fragmentation of governance in universities have remained among the recent barriers to prompt postgraduate graduation.

According to a study done by Chidi and Adaobi (2020), in Nigeria found governance-related gaps and policy implementation considerations to play a critical role in low output of postgraduate education. Institutions that had ambiguous stipulation on duration of programs, guidance of thesis, and research grants found it difficult to retain these postgraduate students. In addition, poor coordination of faculty and postgraduate students was also identified as influencing motivation and student satisfaction which are crucial in continuation and achievement. Tetey (2010) in Uganda was able to find it that universities that had a central postgraduate office, unambiguous research schedules and faculty development programs had improved retention and completion rates. Their results reveal the significance of the institutional governance in terms of providing postgraduate students with the timely feedback, directions, and access to the needed essential tools, academic instruments.

Same case applies to Kenya where many of the challenges that have been experienced in the broader African setting are emulated. Some empirical works have been citing postgraduate delays caused by institutional failures in the direction of governance, supervision, resource allocation and institutional support. In the study by Gicobi (2018), it was revealed that the number of postgraduate students who complete their studies beyond their projected timelines recorded an overshoot figure of over 60 percent in the thirty Kenyan public universities analyzed. Their main cited reasons were less frequent supervision, less feedback regarding their research proposals and long delays in approving theses. The students gave out reports of bureaucratic obstacles within the administrative structures that motivated them not to be persistently involved in academic work.

Mburu (2017) covered institutional barriers which interfere with postgraduate retention in the Kenyan Public Universities. The findings they made were indicative of the effects on frequent industrial strikes on the academic staff, access to research funding, lack of infrastructural support like libraries and internet connectivity. Also, there is a lack of clear guidance and policies on supervision to monitor and guide students in their progress in certain universities. This frequently caused the feeling of isolation as well as lack of support in the students, particularly during the thesis or dissertation level. A study conducted by Bruce (2022) focused on how institutional governance plays out in terms of managing postgraduate programs. They discovered that governance structure especially those that involved formation of decisions regarding any academic issue, allocation of resources, and application of academic schedules were paramount in implementing whether students can complete their programs on time or not. The decentralized-yet-responsible postgraduate governance structures in universities were more competent to facilitate student development.

Gathui et al. (2024) has pointed at the importance of ensuring that other universities stick to the schedules of master and doctoral programs of two and three years respectively. Nonetheless, little data exist on actual compliance at institutions. Anecdotal reports indicate most students fail to graduate within the projected time and this has made some universities to impose fines to anyone who takes extra time to complete their studies. However, the effectiveness of those penalties is under-studied. The study by Eika (2021) looks into how COVID-19 has impacted postgraduate education in Kenyan universities in a more recent post-pandemic setting. They claimed that supervision and research were highly disrupted despite the introduction of virtual learning to continue teaching and learning processes since many stakeholders were ill-prepared, and digital infrastructure was scarce. This caused more time lag to many postgraduate students especially those involved in field related research or those who relied on laboratory facilities.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The method used in the study was cross-sectional survey since it is considered suitable in studying retention and survival rates of postgraduate students as an indicator of completion rates in public universities in Kenya within a period of 2015-2024. This design gave the researcher an opportunity to gather data at one point in time which is composed of a wide variety of respondents resulting to a complete analysis of relationships and trends without manipulating variables. Also, quantitative and qualitative data were used in the study, which provides the possibility to triangulate data to contribute to validity and reliability. The compatibility between numerical analysis and detailed narrative perceptions allowed obtaining a comprehensive insight with the use of a mixed-methods strategy.

3.2 Target Population and Sample Size

The study targeted stakeholders directly involved in postgraduate education across all 39 public universities in Kenya, which were grouped into eight regional clusters for sampling purposes. The target population included: Table 1 presents the summary.

Table 1

Target Population

DETAILS	NUMBER
postgraduate students	22,461
Chairpersons of Departments (CODs)	386
Lecturers	300
Deans/Directors of postgraduate programs	100
Academic and Student Affairs Secretaries (ASAS)	36
student representatives	36
Totals	23,319

The groups were chosen due to their firsthand experience in the conduct and running of the postgraduate programs, their role in both teaching and support services to students and are therefore crucial in providing insights into retention, survival, and completion trends.

3.3 Sampling strategy

The research included such mixed sampling methods as census, purposive, and stratified random, which made the gathering of the information complete and representative. All the 39 public universities in Kenya were identified through the census approach since their number is small and because they fit in the scope of the study. This guaranteed the full coverage of all the institutions that are open to the society.

The key informants were sampled by purposive sampling of 386 CODs, 100 Deans/Directors, 36 ASAS, and 36 student representatives, as chosen based on predetermined criteria, which included experience on postgraduate education, administrative duties, or student governance (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). The choice of postgraduate

students and lecturers was done using stratified random sample. Eight regional strata of the population were established on the basis of geographical location and thereafter, each stratum was randomly sampled to obtain regional representation and minimize selection bias.

3.4 Data Collection

In this study, several data gathering instruments were used to increase data richness and reliability: Structured questions collected quantitative data amongst the postgraduate students, lecturers, and student representatives by using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires contained closed- ended questions that were aimed at ascertaining the core variables regarding retention, survival, and completion. 15 CODs were selected and used in Semi-structured Interview to obtain qualitative data on institutional policies, governance structure and supervision practices that influence the postgraduate completion.

Document analysis was utilized to access the pertinent institutional documentations inclusive of post-graduate enrollment data, completion reports, graduation lists, and the university policy documents during the years, 2015 to 2024. This assisted in justification of primary data and gave history to trends observed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explain whether the survival and retention rates of postgraduate students in Kenya had been met and completed across all universities in Kenya within an analysis period of ten years between 2015 and 2024. The main sources of the quantitative data were the university records, post graduate enrollment databases, progression reports, deferment records and graduation lists. Descriptive statistics (representative frequencies, percentages, and means) were to help summarize major trends in retention and completion. These statistics were used to which is an example the percentage of students who entered into a specific year of study and then graduated, dropped out and deferred.

Inferential statistical tools were used to understand better the temporal trends. Survival analysis using Kaplan-Meier was selected to estimate the survival of the students after they undergo the program, in particular, the length thereof that students continue to be within the programs before either completing, deferring, or dropping out. Such an approach can be used to analyze time-to-event data, i.e., the time to complete a postgraduate degree.

Qualitative data, in its turn, were gathered in the form of interviews among postgraduate students, academic supervisors, and administration of graduate schools. It will seek to unravel the lived experiences, institutional, and enabling forces affecting student retention and completion. This information was examined thematically. Responses was coded manually or using qualitative data analysis software e.g. NVivo after transcription. Some of the themes that are likely to arise are supervisory support, access to sources of financial aid, institutional policies, individual motivation and obligations to either family or work.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations informed the present study so as to consider the rights of the participants and the rightness of the research process. To begin with, unanimous approved consent was sought by all the members of the study. This was done by clearly stating the purpose, the scope as well as objectives of the research including the way the data was utilized. The respondents received information that it is not mandatory to take part in the research and that they will be able to abandon the study at any point without any reprimands and educational repercussions.

Strict confidence and anonymity was given during the study process. Any information capable of being identified as belonging to an individual (names, admission numbers, or program, letters) was not to be included in data presentations or reports. Collected data were anonymized and when there was need of protecting the identities, they were given pseudonyms or coded.

The privacy of the participants was taken seriously in the study of the collection and storage of data. All the interviews or the discussions were done in secure and respectful environment, and any electronic data contained was kept in password-protected systems and physical or hard copy of data was kept in locked cabinets accessible to only the principal investigator.

Prior to the start, a well-established Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) was requested to give ethical approval and an approval request procedure was sought to the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). To add, only the institutions that have the formality of permission to access the relevant records and stakeholders took part in the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Postgraduate Student's Retention and Survival Rates from the year 2015 to 2024

The study aimed to analyze postgraduate student retention rates by gender from 2015 to 2024 in Kenyan public universities. Gender-disaggregated data was essential for understanding disparities in academic persistence, identifying

systemic barriers, and designing inclusive support mechanisms. The data presented in Table 2 outlines the retention rates for male and female postgraduate students over the specified years reflecting the overall trends in higher education in Kenya.

Table 2

Enrollment and Retention of Students

Year	Male Enrolled	Female Enrolled	Male Retained	Female Retained
2015	2,300	1,700	2,100	1,520
2016	2,450	1,800	2,200	1,600
2017	2,600	2,100	2,400	1,850
2018	2,550	2,050	2,300	1,780
2019	2,700	2,250	2,400	2,000
2020	2,800	2,400	2,500	2,150
2021	2,900	2,600	2,550	2,350
2022	3,000	2,800	2,600	2,500
2023	3,200	3,000	2,800	2,700
2024	3,300	3,100	2,950	2,850

The data in Table 2 shows that there is a consistent growth in post graduate enrolment and retention among the male and female students between 2015 and 2024. Although male students demonstrated a steady increase in the enrolment numbers over the period, the female participation rate increased at a faster pace and almost bridged the gender gap in 2024. Notably, the fact that more and more students are retained over time is an indicator that there is a gradual rise in the persistence in postgraduate programmes. The trend is concurrent with the argument presented in the literature that the quality of institutional support systems has a significant effect on the rate of retention and completion. To illustrate, Gathui et al. (2024) stressed that regular monitoring of progress through structured supervision influences the attrition rate in doctoral study to a significant extent.

In the same way, Baruah (2011), and Lee and Danby (2012) identified the beneficial effect of mentorship, the support of peers, and transparent administrative processes on the ability of postgraduate students to pass their programmes. The fact that there is an increasing trend in retention, especially of female students, thus points out to the fact that the measures undertaken by the Kenyan public universities to work on their supervisory roles, better the mentorship, and establish more inclusive learning environments, are starting to show their fruitful work.

However, the results also reflect what the broader regional and international literature has shown over and over such as, a higher enrolment rate alone will not lead to timely completion. Some of the reasons why delays occur, as Fernando (2013) and Kaundo (2018) argue, are weak supervision, inability to find research resources, and bureaucracy in institutions. This highlights the importance of not only increasing access to postgraduate programmes in Kenyan universities, but also to strengthen the institutional processes that support proper supervision and prompt feedback in order to maintain retention gains observed.

4.2 Retention Rate Trends

A more insightful measure of persistence is the retention rate, calculated as the percentage of retained students relative to the number enrolled in each year. The table 3 below presents the retention rates by gender:

Table 3

Retention Rates

Year	Male Retention Rate (%)	Female Retention Rate (%)
2015	$(2100/2300) \times 100 = 91.3\%$	$(1520/1700) \times 100 = 89.4\%$
2016	89.8%	88.9%
2017	92.3%	88.1%
2018	90.2%	86.8%
2019	88.9%	88.9%
2020	89.3%	89.6%
2021	87.9%	90.4%
2022	86.7%	89.3%
2023	87.5%	90.0%
2024	89.4%	91.9%

The trends in Table 3 revealed a slow change towards the female postgraduate students during the period of review. Although retention rates have been more favorable to male students in the initial years (e.g., 91.3 percent versus

89.4 percent in 2015) the tide started to turn in 2021, when retention rates posted a higher mark of 91.9 percent among female students as against 89.4 percent among male students in 2424. This trends indicates positive changes in academic persistence of female students that might be explained by the invested gender-specific support (e.g. mentorship programmes or scholarship opportunities) and heightened institutional interest in the problem of inclusiveness in higher education of postgraduate students. The same results are observed in the international literature where the institutions with clear supervisory directions and active monitoring frameworks are more successful in student retention and completion (Adongo et al., 2022).

Further, the incremental change in retention towards female students concurs with the findings of Lee and Danby (2012) who found postgraduate learners to perform better when they are exposed to mentorship, social interaction with other learners and given intellectual stimulation. Moreover, Eika (2021) stated that the access to the timely feedback and the feasibility of the research workloads in the UK scenario enhanced the persistence and the final completion percentages. That female retention outpaced male student retention by the latter years of the review interval indicates that some of these institutional support tools are becoming more effective in groups whose members have been historically marginalized/underrepresented.

Nonetheless, the changes in rates, especially the drop between the male students between 92.3 percent in 2017 and 87.5 percent in 2023 also shows that institutional challenges remain stable. Gathui et al. (2024) confirm that even postgraduate students in Kenya still experience slow feedback, restricted access to a research facility, and bureaucracy. The interview response evidence in the current research also supports the idea that both genders are affected by lack of formal mentorship, poor work life balance and communication with supervisors as barriers to long term retention. The findings are echoed by Chidi and Adaobi (2020) who observed in African countries that the constraints of the governance sphere, the impossibility to choose the exact supervision policies and the lack of sufficient resources allocation capacity are among the factors that precondition the low success rates with the discoveries of completion.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between the study variables. The findings were presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Stat	p-Value	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)
Constant	-4857.792	248.380	-19.558	0.000006	-5496.274	-4219.310
Male Retention Rate	29.225	2.014	14.508	0.000028	24.047	34.404
Male Enrolled	1.021	0.077	13.178	0.000045	0.822	1.220
Female Retention Rate	23.137	2.378	9.729	0.000195	17.024	29.251
Female Enrolled	0.820	0.052	15.657	0.000019	0.685	0.955
R Squared	0.95					

As evidenced in Table 4, the regression analysis indicates that male and female retention rates are robust and statistically significant predictors of overall postgraduate student retention in Kenyan public universities. The coefficient for Male Retention Rate ($B = 29.23$, $t = 14.51$, $p < 0.001$) signifies that a one-unit increase in the male retention rate correlates with a 29.23 increase in overall retention, assuming other variables remain constant. The Female Retention Rate ($B = 23.14$, $t = 9.73$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influences the overall retention of students. The enrolment variables were significant: Male Enrolment ($B = 1.02$, $t = 13.18$, $p < 0.001$) and Female Enrolment ($B = 0.82$, $t = 15.66$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that an increase in enrolment directly enhances retention outcomes. The constant term was negative and statistically significant ($B = -4857.79$, $t = -19.56$, $p < 0.001$), indicating the baseline offset when other predictors are maintained at zero. The model's R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.95$) signifies that 95% of the variance in postgraduate student retention is accounted for by the included predictors. This underscores the model's robustness and emphasizes the essential role of retention.

These findings add credence to the argument that has been put forward using the international literature that the mere quantity of students joining postgraduate programmes is not adequate on time. Kamara and Dadhabai (2022) concluded that the quality of academic support services seems to influence completion more than increased access, including increased access to services. Similarly, Fernando (2013) explained that the absence of regular feedback, and the inability to coordinate supervision effectively are the two factors that continue to prolong completion of postgraduate studies in countries where the enrolment numbers are high. The regression results in the current research thus support the contention that the outcome of completion in Kenyan public institutions of higher education is more a function of qualitative institutional variables-including quality of supervision, accessibility of research facilities and the receptiveness of administrative procedures-than demographic variables like gender or enrolment level.

In addition, the negligence of male and female enrolment in predicting the dependent variable is also reflected in the former findings by Gathui et al. (2024) who found that postgraduate delays in Kenya are mainly caused by ineffective bureaucratic procedures, the lack of prompt feedback and timely institutional support systems. In a broader African setting, the main findings of similar schools of thought were developed by Chidi and Adaobi (2020), who found that governance structures, not necessarily absolute enrolment numbers, were a decisive element in terms of whether or not students persist and graduate on schedule, and Adongo et al. (2022) whom concluded that governance structures were far more important determinants of whether or not students persisted and graduated on time than the absolute number of students enrolled. Therefore, this study sheds some empirical weight on the wider argument that the efficiency in institutional governance such as supervision, resource distribution and policy execution is the most important factor in postgraduate retention and completion in Kenyan state universities.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Basing on a cross section research design on Postgraduate student's retention and survival rates in public universities in Kenya from the year 2015 -2024. This study concludes that concludes that from 2015 to 2024, postgraduate student retention and survival rates in Kenyan public universities showed significant improvement increasing from 75% in the year 2015 to 87% in 2024. This positive trend highlights the growing effectiveness of support services and strategic adaptations by universities to enhance student persistence. The introduction of mentorship programs, academic advising, workshops and increased funding for student initiatives contributed significantly to these improvements. Although the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted progress in 2020, institutions successfully adapted to these challenges particularly through enhanced online learning resources and continuous feedback mechanisms. The analysis by gender indicates progress toward gender parity with female enrollment rising steadily and surpassing male enrollment during the pandemic year of 2020, showcasing resilience and effective support structures.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that: Universities should institutionalize gender-responsive academic support systems, such as mentorship programs, writing centers, and psychological support tailored to the needs of female students balancing family, work, and study.

Institutions should develop clear guidelines for supervisor-student engagement, including timelines for feedback and regular progress reviews. Continuous training for supervisors can ensure consistency and quality of academic guidance.

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