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Gender differences in mathematics performance attributions among first year students at National University of Lesotho: implications for access to and performance in mathematics.
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Summary: Personal factors tend to inhibit learners' opportunity to benefit from the provision of mathematics education and to achieve satisfactory performance in mathematics. Equity in the provision of such education is seen to be lacking if such factors relate significantly to one or the other of the demographic characteristics of a group of learners or of their schools. One of such factors relates to the reaction of the learner to his/her experience with this subject. According to Heider (1944), when we have a failing or successful experience, we may locate its origin in another person or thing, in fate or ourselves, and this might influence the way we relate to or perform in the subject in the future. Performance attribution in mathematics has been found in many populations to be gender related. To assess this for a population of 2000/2001 National University of Lesotho (NUL) first year students, attribution and performance data in mathematics were gathered from 563 students and then analysed using chi-square, independent t-test, and 2-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical techniques. The results showed that attribution of mathematics performance among these students is significantly gender-dependent, and that males tended to attribute their performance to effort significantly more their female counterparts. Additionally, both gender and attribution were found to relate significantly to performance in the subject. These results are discussed, and recommendations made with regard to diluting such gender influence, and hence enhancing achievement and equity in the provision of mathematics education.

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