

Influence of Gender on Course Choice in Vocational Training Centres in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

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Abstract

Choice of course is a leading challenge in most Vocational and Technical Training Institutions globally. Studies have noted gender challenges as a determinant factor towards effective course choice, an aspect that the present study sought to address. The study determined gender factors that hinder effective course choice amongst students in Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Taita Taveta County. In Kenya, trainees joining TVET institutions are chosen based on their academic qualifications. Traditionally, there are some courses associated with boys while others are perceived to be feminine. This study employed a descriptive survey design of a sample size of 714 trainees and 7 principals. Questionnaires and structured interviews were used for data collection. A pilot study was undertaken in Kilifi County. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used for data analysis. Male trainees were the majority 447 (63.1%). 28.2% of the male trainees pursued Artisan in Motor Vehicle Mechanics while 34.9% of female trainees Fashion Design. The findings established that gender significantly predicted vocational choice ($F_{0.05}(1,706) = 5.060, p < 0.05$) fueled by the fact that industry prefers certain gender in employment. In conclusion, the vocational choice in the VTCs was influenced by the gender of the trainees. The research recommends that VTCs encourage female trainees to take engineering courses as well.

Keywords: Gender, Vocational choice, Vocational Training Centers

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Introduction

Vocational choice is selecting one vocation over another (Chakravarty & Gupta, 2021). In many industries, course selection is a major aspect of focus (Saravanan & Kavitha, 2020). Courses are the most significant components particularly when choosing the path in any profession. Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) offer a directive of creativeness, distinctiveness, status and way into the social system. The choice of a course to pursue is not an easy endeavor (Anovunga, N-yelbi, & Akpadago, 2021). This is because the selected career will determine how one will survive in the labor market as well as determine what employment opportunities one should seek. When a trainee selects a correct subject that will guide them towards the correct vocation, it leads to gratification and helps in their professional growth. On the other hand, choosing an unattainable course can result in frustration. The ability of each trainee is determined by several issues which include the environment they live in, their ability, and academic achievement. Traditionally, boys are driven to professions dominated by men, which are better rewarding (Eibl, Lang, & Niessen, 2020). In addition, Vuletich, Kurtz-Costes, Cooley, and Payne (2020) posited that boys pursue more realistic subjects but girls have more interest in taking care of children, beauty therapy, humanities and language fields. Further, Vuletich et al. (2020) opined that professional parents determine their children's choice of subjects. Course management needs to be carried out in our learning institutions as part of course planning and management of the respective careers in the future to promote the sustainability of the course and its corresponding career (Haridas, Ture, & Nayanpally, 2021). This is significant for human resource management. It has become imperative for the youth to start preparing themselves for their courses while still at school. Organizations need to hire well-seasoned, and passionate youths who have the right attitude and aptitude for the required job.

In Kenya, this phenomenon is more popular with Cooperative Bank, Price Waterhouse and Ernst and Young. They search for young, gifted and self-driven trainees while they are still in school. The organizations, then, drill the youths towards performing the various career tasks with more precision and required effectiveness. Career counselling services are crucial to trainees joining Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions (Anudo & Orwa, 2020). Hence, offices in charge of career counselling should be made active in learning institutions to help solve some of the challenges facing trainees such as unemployment, lack of skills among the youth and

friction among parents and trainees. Globally, proper selection of course is one of the biggest challenges. TVET is one of the best strategies adopted by developing economies to train a workforce and increase the productivity of the informal sector. Proper selection of courses in TVET institutions produces human labour that satisfies the industry's needs (Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020). In Kenya, trainees joining TVET institutions are chosen by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) based on their academic qualifications. The trainees select the courses when they are in high school and during this period, they have not been exposed to the industries, so they base their choices on weak reasons. Taita Taveta County has 29 Vocational Training Centres which offer various courses leading to various opportunities in diverse fields. It is for this reason the researcher sought to study the influence of Gender on the selection of courses in Vocational Training Centres in Taita Taveta County.

As enshrined in Kenya's constitution (2010) in article 27 (8), the country is charged with the mandate of taking legislative as well as other approaches to ensure that at least a third of each gender is represented in the various state corporations. In addition, Kenya's Vision 2030 insists that the country should seek to eliminate any cultural and historical imbalances in gender to avoid segregation and gender disparities across all professions and fields of production. If this is the case, why is it that there are still professions and careers that are dominated by one gender? Several studies have been done to investigate gender disparities in various careers. However, the influence of gender in the selection of courses in vocational training centres has not been exhaustively researched. It is of essence, therefore, to investigate the influence of gender in the selection of courses in VTCs. This study was based on Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice (Woods, Edmonds, Hampson, & Lievens, 2020). The theory states that the choice of a vocation is a broad process that relies on such factors as occupational environment, an individual's distinct characteristics, the development of the person as well as their interaction with the environment, and the nature of their vocational environment. This study found this theory useful because the study delved into investigating the choice of vocational courses where the distinct characteristics of an individual which include gender were used to investigate vocational choice.

Conceptual Frameworks lay out the key factors, constructs, and variables involved in a given phenomenon, as well as the relationships between those factors (Orkin et al., 2021). In this study, gender was the independent variable while course choice (or

vocational choice) was the dependent variable. In addition, the study had the intervening variables which included availability of finance, academic performance and KUCCPS requirements. This is because the three aspects in the Kenyan context have a significant influence on the interaction between gender and the choice of the course that a trainee can pursue.

Women are still underrepresented in physics in the United States (Moshfeghyeganeh & Hazari, 2021). However, women make up a significant portion of both undergraduate and graduate physics departments in many Muslim nations. Few efforts have been made to understand this pattern. The number of women studying physics in the United States (U.S.) needs to increase. To comprehend how cultural experiences affect the pursuit of physics, Moshfeghyeganeh and Hazari (2021) investigated the experiences of female faculty members of physics in the United States who were from a variety of Muslim nations (Cardador, Damian, & Wiegand, 2021). The study found that individuals' gender and physics identities were influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Additionally, contrary to what has been observed in the West, gender identities and physics frequently interact in Muslim nations. The intersection was productive for promoting participation in physics. The gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) course choice represents a problem for researchers (Soylu & Özeren, 2021). The “surplus model” of vocational interests suggests that females with strong STEM-related interests are likely to pursue STEM courses. Also, they have strong interests in other areas, due to wider course options (Cardador et al., 2021). Cardador et al. (2021) examined predictors of the course choice of students in Human Kinetics Education, at the University of Ilorin in Kwara state, Nigeria. The predictors investigated were; Family, Personality and Gender.

According to Abdulraheem and Ibraheem (2019), gender does not significantly influence the course preferences of students studying human kinetics education at the University of Ilorin. The trainees are urged to learn more about who they are, what matters to them, and what interests them. Course counsellors should be employed by TVET colleges so that students may learn about their strengths. According to Soylu and Özeren (2021), there is a correlation between gender perception and course optimism. As a result, students who scored highly on the egalitarian gender perception scale showed greater personal growth motivation, which led to improved course adaptation and optimism (Fabrizio, Gomes, & Tavares, 2021). Inequitably, women's employment is

declining (Bluedorn, Caselli, Hansen, Shibata, & Tavares, 2021). This is a result of the high degree of country heterogeneity, with more than half to two-thirds showing greater drops in employment rates for women than for males. These gender-specific effects of COVID-19 are often transient. The gender distribution of employment has been severely altered by the COVID-19 epidemic. It is important to monitor gender disparities in employment across industries, particularly in those where women make up a larger portion of the workforce. Instead of unemployment, the fall in employment is due to women's propensity to leave the workforce earlier than males. The drop in women's labour force participation reflects the greater impact of the crisis on mothers, mainly those who are lower-income and lower-skilled, as childcare burdens increased with the crisis (Fabrizio et al., 2021).

Gender disparity has been a result of the COVID-19 epidemic in various nations. The availability of inexpensive childcare options, the gender mix of the workforce, and employment laws with distinct effects on various genders are some underlying issues at work that are reflected in this. Policymakers might strive to make sure that there are choices for inexpensive day care, that men and women can take family leave equally, and that work hours are flexible as permitted by employment needs (Bluedorn et al., 2021; Fabrizio et al., 2021). According to Quinby, Rutledge, and Wettstein (2021) among workers aged 55 and older, the probability of quitting their jobs after a year increased by 7.6%, a 50% rise over the pre-pandemic rate. Asian Americans, women without college degrees, and people in professions less conducive to remote work saw disproportionate effects. In contrast, the probability of retiring rose by 1%, with retirements being more common among people over the age of 70. Workers did not have a higher likelihood of claiming old-age and survivors insurance benefits as a result (Bluedorn et al., 2021; Fabrizio et al., 2021). Whether people who quit their employment during the epidemic return to work will have an impact on policy. Policymakers may take into account measures to increase retirement resources if older people are unable to find new employment, such as adjusting the actuarial penalty for early Social Security claims (Cardador et al., 2021). Future studies should examine if the new positions provide compensation and benefits that are similar to those of the workers' pre-pandemic employment if they are able to re-enter the workforce.

Course selection was similarly impacted by gender (Cardador et al., 2021). Cardador et al. (2021) found out that in the past, women were discouraged from pursuing

higher education and from careers dominated by men, including engineering and medicine. Women still tend to stay away from professions with a male preponderance, but there has been a little increase in the proportion of women working in these fields. The ladies were discouraged from continuing their education and from careers dominated by men, including engineering and medicine (Qureshi, Malik, & Hassan, 2021). Although studies have indicated that more and more women are pursuing university education and entering traditionally male-dominated professions, it was recently discovered that women frequently avoid picking male-dominated courses (Iyer & Siddhartha, 2021).

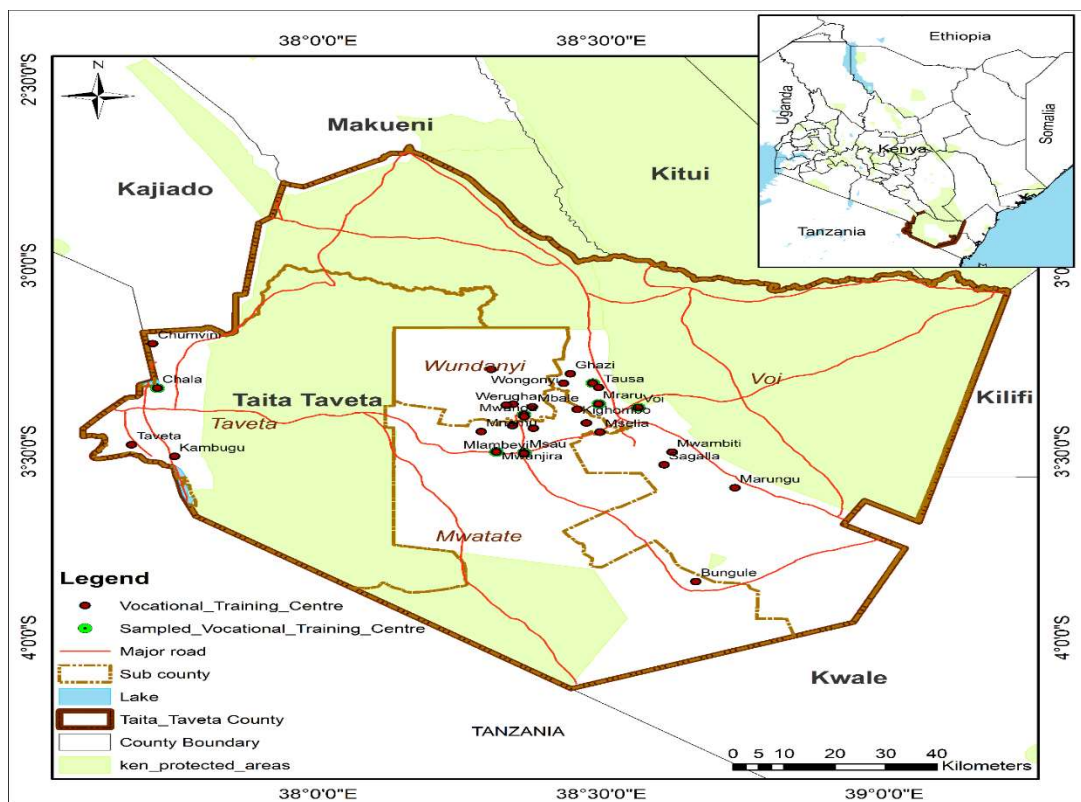
From the global arena, it can be seen from the various studies that the issue of gender imbalance has been alluded to by various frontier studies whose aims were varied and the findings for each did not converge for all cases. There is little to explain the place of gender, particularly in the selection of vocational courses in TVET institutions around the globe. This study focused on filling this gap.

Research Approach

This study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey research design considers existing circumstances or relationships, held beliefs, active procedures, clearly visible results, or emerging trends (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). This is because the study was aimed at critically looking into the existing reality in terms of the place of gender in making vocational choices among trainees by the use of active procedures such as administering interviews and questionnaires. The descriptive survey design enabled the collection of data without manipulating the research variables (Novikov & Novikov, 2019). The strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were optimized in the descriptive survey design. At a cheaper cost, descriptive survey research methodology enables the collection of information from a sizable sample group and produces conclusions that are utilized to represent the entire community. Moreover, the study was guided by the ontology research paradigm that concentrated on the reality of the VTCs in Taita Taveta County and allowed the use of simple yes or no or agree or disagree responses to obtain the research data. The study was conducted among trainees and VTC managers in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. The county covers an area of 17,083.9 km², of which 62% or 11,100 km², is within Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks.

The county covers an area of 17,083.9 km², of which 62% or 11,100 km², is within Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. The remaining 5,876 km² consists of small-scale farms, ranches, sisal estates, water bodies (such as Lakes Chala and Jipe in Taveta and Mzima springs), and the hilltop forests. Taita Taveta county has four sub-counties namely Mwatate, Wundanyi, Voi and Taveta. The map of the county is shown below.

The target population for this research were 2,386 trainees and 29 principals in Taita Taveta County VTCs in the year 2022. Sampling was done to permit the detailed study, rather than the whole target population. A good sample is 30% of the accessible population and is pursued to be a good representative of a population (Kothari, 2017). 714 trainees and 7 principals who form 30% of the 2,386 trainees enrolled in VTCs and 29 principals respectively participated in the study.



Sampling involved both stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The study had a stratum of principals and that of trainees from which 30% of the population was randomly selected to take part in the study. This was done carefully to involve 30% of trainees from each of the four sub-counties to form the cumulative population that was a good representative of the entire population. Table 1 is a summary of the sample size used for this study.

The study used questionnaires and an interview guide for the data collection. The questionnaire comprised both open and close-ended questions to probe well-varied and adequate data from the trainees. The interview guide was structured to ensure the precision of the responses from the principals. Through the use of the two instruments, the trainees and principals in Taita Taveta County VTCs provided information on gender as a determinant of vocational choice. The instruments were piloted in Kilifi County to ensure their validity. This is because the county neighbors Taita Taveta County and therefore the characteristics of the respondents were almost indifferent.

Table 1

Target Population and Sample Size

Code	Trainees per Sub-County	Population		Sample	
		Trainees	Principal Managers	Trainees	Principal Managers
A	Mwatate	807	9	242	2
B	Wundanyi	607	7	182	2
C	Voi	643	9	192	2
D	Taveta	329	4	98	1
Total		2,386	29	714	7

In addition to piloting, the researcher expert judgement from experienced researchers to enhance the validity of the research instruments after data collection, Quantitative data was coded in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The Data was analysed with the use of descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was derived from narratives and was presented in continuous prose.

Results and Discussion

The administered questionnaires showed that 99.2% of the response was achieved from the trainees in Taita Taveta VTCs. Interview guides showed that a 100% response rate was realized for the principals. In addition, most VTCs were located in rural areas (71.4%) compared to urban areas (28.6%). The high number of VTCs in the rural areas could be attributed to the high population of schooling youths in the villages and the government policy to decongest the urban areas. These findings were similar to those

found in Kakamega County, where most VTCs (88.9 %) were located in rural areas, while 11.1% were in urban areas (Maingi, 2019).

Nature and Characteristics of the Trainees in the Taita Taveta VTCs

Regarding the proportion of male and female trainees, the total percentage of male trainees, 63.1% (447), was higher than the total percentage of female participants, 36.9% (261). This indicated that the enrolment of females in Taita Taveta VTCs was low compared to their male counterparts. This finding agreed with Najoli (2019) who found that despite efforts by the government to ensure equal empowerment of males and females, there was still low female enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes, resulting in low female completion rates from the TVET institutions. Although many barriers discourage female students from pursuing male-dominated TVET courses and trades, there is low public attention and policy to remedy this situation (Struthers & Strachan, 2019).

Most trainees (44.2%) were aged between 15-19 years, while 39.7%, 5.8%, and 10.3% were between 20-24 years, 25-29 years, and 30-34 years, respectively. The mean age of the trainees was 21 years. These findings indicate that most of the trainees were in their youthful stage (Makato, Mugambi, & Kalai, 2022). Most of the trainees (52%) had enrolled in 2022, the same year the research was conducted. 29.4% had registered the previous year, 2021, 17.1% in 2020, 1.1% in 2019, and 0.4% in 2018 and below. These findings show that the trainees join the VTCs immediately after completing high school or primary school (Tsui, Lee, Hui, Chun, & Chan, 2019). Also, these findings showed that the successful completion of the artisan courses was quite high since only 0.4% had enrolled in 2018 and below. Bursaries and scholarships inspire higher success rates by assisting the trainees to pay their school fees on time, motivating them to join the VTCs and complete their studies on time (Syme et al., 2022).

Table 2*Trainees in the Taita Taveta VTCs (n=708)*

		Frequency	Percentage	Chi-square (χ^2)
Gender	Male	447	63.1	$\chi^2= 6.76,$ d.f.=1, p = 0.0093
	Female	261	36.9	
Age	15-19 years	313	44.2	$\chi^2= 46.88,$ d.f.=3, p<0.0001
	20-24 years	281	39.7	
	25-29 years	41	5.8	
	30-34 years	73	10.3	
Year of enrolment	2018 & below	3	0.4	$\chi^2= 93.75,$ d.f.=4, p<0.0001
	2019	8	1.1	
	2020	121	17.1	
	2021	208	29.4	
	2022	368	52.0	

Courses Undertaken by Gender

The majority of the male trainees, 28.2% pursued Artisan in Motor Vehicle Mechanics while 1.8% pursued Artisan in Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy and 0.4% pursued Artisan in Food and Beverage. The majority of the female trainees 34.9%, pursued Artisan in Fashion Design while only 0.8% pursued Artisan in Welding (Table 3).

Table 3*Courses Enrolment by gender*

Gender	Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%
Course taken				
Electrical installation	100	22.4	17	6.5
Fashion design and garment-making	12	2.7	91	34.9
Food and beverage	2	0.4	11	4.2
Vehicle mechanics	126	28.2	8	3.1
Information Communication & Technology	11	2.5	26	10
Masonry	114	25.5	2	0.8
Carpentry and joinery	19	4.3	7	2.7
Agribusiness	1	0.2	0	0
Knitting	1	0.2	3	1.1
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	8	1.8	90	34.5
Welding	20	4.5	2	0.8
Plumbing	33	7.4	4	1.5
Total	447	100	261	100

Nature and Characteristics of the Principals

The findings on the demographic information of the principals are shown in Table 4. Generally, most of the principals (71.4%) were aged between 41-45 years while 28.6% were aged between 36-40 years. The mean age of the principals was 43 years (Table 4). The majority of principals between 41-45 years formed the greatest population and consisted of mature, experienced men and women at the height of their careers who tend to make informed decisions regarding VTCs affairs.

The gender imbalance was observed, portraying 85.7% male Principals and 14.3% female Principals in charge of the VTCs in Taita Taveta County. It is important to incorporate the views of females for a study that is enhanced with the participation of more females (Gunn, 2020).

Table 4*Demographic Information of the Principals (n=7)*

	Attribute	Frequenc y	Percentag e	Chi- square (χ^2)
Age	36-40 years	2	28.6%	$\chi^2=17.64$, d.f.=1, p<0.000 1
	41-45 years	5	71.4%	
Gender	Male	6	85.7%	$\chi^2=51.84$, d.f.=1, p<0.000 1
	Female	1	14.3%	
Highest Level of Formal Education	Diploma	6	85.7%	$\chi^2=51.84$, d.f.=1, p<0.000 1
	Higher Diploma	1	14.3%	
Experienc e	6-10 years	6	85.7%	$\chi^2=51.84$, d.f.=1, p<0.000 1
	11-15 years	1	14.3%	
Location of VTCs	Urban	2	28.6%	$\chi^2=17.64$, d.f.=1, p< 0.0001
	Rural	5	71.4%	

Since the ratio between males and females was extensively spread out, it is apparent that much work is supposed to be done to achieve gender equality in managing the VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. Gender equality can positively contribute to proper training in technical institutions (Andreoli et al., 2019)

Most of the Principals 85.7%, were diploma holders while 14.3% had higher diplomas. Principals with high education levels enhance good management in schools and lead to the success of institutions. Principals with high levels of education are important

because they can promote stability in education, and promote research and policy in their respective schools (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). The academic qualifications of the principals reveal a body of averagely qualified staff in the VTCs in Taita Taveta County. In Kenya, just like Singapore, polytechnic diploma holders are competing with degree holders in the globalized marketplace of jobs (Mathews, Lim, & Selvarajan, 2019). The majority of the principals 85.7% had 6-10 years of experience while the minority 14.3% had 11-15 years of experience. The mean experience for the principals was 9 years.

Gender Influences of Vocational Choice in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

To gather the information to account for this, data was obtained from questionnaires and interviews administered. Table 5 below reveals the extent to which gender aspects influenced the choice of courses that trainees pursued in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. The variations in which scores of the respondents' opinions are shown in Table 5.

More than half of the respondents (57%) agreed that the industry prefers a certain gender in employment, 33.9% disagreed and 8.6% were neutral. This means that although both male and female genders are working, they still focus on the lower levels of the professional hierarchy and in female-dominated occupations. Globally, the differential involvement of gender in employment and training has become difficult to ignore. The trainees prefer subjects that can predetermine their careers. If females develop weaker preferences for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), it results in gender inequalities in salary and social status. In addition, when the trainees were asked whether the industry experts prefer a certain gender in employment, the majority of respondents 30.5% strongly agreed while 10.9% strongly disagreed. As a result, there is gender inequality at the places of work.

Table 5*Gender Influence of Vocational Choice in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya.*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi-square (χ^2)
My course was influenced by my gender	297 41.9%	210 29.7%	55 7.8%	82 11.6%	64 9.0%	$\chi^2=45.65$, d.f.=4, p<0.0000
I feel industry experts prefer a certain gender in employment	191 27.0%	216 30.5%	61 8.6%	163 23%	77 10.9%	$\chi^2=19.05$ d.f.=4, p=0.0008
I feel both genders are given the same responsibilities in the industry	298 42.1%	264 37.3%	59 8.3%	61 8.6%	26 7%	$\chi^2=58.33$, d.f.=4, p<0.0000
I would consider a job held traditionally by the opposite gender	147 20.8%	277 39.1%	96 13.6%	140 19.8%	48 6.8%	$\chi^2=28.31$, d.f.=4, p<0.0001
Certain employment positions are kept for a specific gender to have a gender balance in employment.	490 69.2%		-	-	218 30.8%	$\chi^2=14.44$, d.f.=1, p<0.0001

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, N – Neutral, D – Disagree, SD - Strongly Disagree

When respondents were asked whether both genders are given the same responsibilities in the industry 79.4% agreed, 15.6 disagreed and 8.3% were neutral. 59.9% of the respondents agreed that they would consider a job held traditionally by the

opposite gender while 26.6% of the respondents disagreed and 13.6% of the respondents were neutral. When the respondents were asked whether certain employment positions are kept for a specific gender to have a gender balance in employment, 69.2% said yes while 30.8% said no.

When the principals were asked to give their views on early education in the vocational choice among the trainees, the majority cited that “vocational choice training sessions are very effective and important in VTCs for they enable trainees to be engaged early in their chosen courses thus having the chance to reach higher levels in education. Trainees can demonstrate good performance in their areas of specialization since they are guided to pursue courses based on their talents, capability and the job market.”

The principals were interviewed on the influence of gender on vocational choice. The majority of them cited that “some courses are dominated by the female gender while some by the male trainees. The female trainees choose courses like fashion design, beauty and therapy while their male counterparts go for engineering courses like motor vehicle mechanics. The female gender has started embracing engineering courses and competing favourably with their male colleagues, soon there will be no male and female jobs”.

Regression Analysis on the Impact of Gender on Vocational Choice in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya.

The study employed regression analysis to establish whether there was a significant impact of gender on vocational choice. The dependent variable vocational choice was regressed on predicting variable gender. Gender significantly predicted course choice, $F(1,706) = 5.060$, $p < 0.05$, which indicates that gender played a significant role in shaping vocational choice ($b = 0.599$, $p < 0.05$). These results show that there is a significant effect of gender on course choice. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.007$ depicts that the model explains 0.7% of the variance in vocational choice. According to numerous other studies, engineering courses are viewed as being male-dominated, thus most scientists are overwhelmingly male (Makarova, Aeschlimann, & Herzog, 2019). Female trainees assess engineering courses as masculine when it comes to gender disparities. Thus, gender-based assumptions about math and science may have an impact on young men's and women's aspirations to enrol in STEM programs. Consequently, a less pronouncedly male perception of science has the potential to boost interest in STEM careers.

Conclusion

The choice of course in the VTCs was influenced by the gender of the trainees. This is because 71.6% of the trainees agreed that the choice of the courses they pursued was influenced by their gender. On the positive side, the trainees were considerate about enrolling in courses traditionally meant for the opposite gender. Certain enrolment vacancies were being kept for a specific gender to have a gender balance in the courses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made;

1. It is therefore important for the VTCs to encourage the female trainees to be motivated and take up engineering courses as well.
2. The VTCs should also market the courses to ensure that they not only have youthful trainees but have an older generation eager to upgrade their skills.
3. The male trainees should also be encouraged to pursue Fashion Design and Garment Making for leads to self-employment and income generation.
4. The trainees should be advised not to be influenced by gender when making vocational choices

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