

Influence of Gender on Career Choice in Home Science Education Programmes in Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

Career aspirations of students may be largely shaped by gender and would make choices on careers to pursue based on the established social orientations. Besides gender, other factors like availability of employment opportunities, guidance and counselling and personal interest in a given field could be important factors driving students to a given university programme. The objective of this study sought to establish the influence of gender on choice of careers in Home Science Education programmes in Kenyan Universities. The study was guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory that explores how career choices are made. This study used the Convergent Parallel mixed method design. The study was conducted in Uasin-Gishu and Kiambu counties in Kenya that have universities with programmes that train Home Science educators. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two universities offering the Home Science Education programmes. The 2 Heads of Department were purposively selected while the 254 students were conveniently selected. Data was obtained using questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion guide. Quantitative data was analysed and presented using graphs. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically then used to compare with that of quantitative data. The findings of this study reveal that gender played a minimal role among the respondents. The study recommended that policy makers and all stakeholders should offer civic education and sensitization that Home Science Education programme is not a feminine programme. There is need to deliberately showcase men who have ventured and thrived in Home Science and Home Science related careers..

Key words: *Gender, career choice, home science education*

Introduction

Choosing a career path for young persons is usually a difficult process. Musset and Kurekova (2018) believe that the young people of today have more decisions to make than before. They argue that the process of choosing an institution together with the programme to study is one big decision that has to be made by an individual. Beremenyi (2020) established that a section of disadvantaged youth is often driven by logics that take them to less competitive courses and to future lowpaid jobs with bad working conditions, thus limiting their social mobility aspirations.

Career ambitions of young people are shaped by gender as depicted by Musset and Kurekova (2018) and that girls have advanced career hopes in comparison to boys nevertheless are limited in terms of being focused. Mishkin, Wangroicz, Dori, and Dori (2016) believe that gender and career choice have a very close relationship and that there is need to encourage women to choose careers perceived to be male-oriented. The loss of focus may emanate from the stereotypes that the society has placed into the limelight. McSweeney (2014) notes that bias that exists within the education system can transpire in the curriculum by the manner in which subjects are packaged and offered to students. It is therefore most likely that the offering of subjects may adversely affect the choice of given subjects.

Wesarat, Sharif, and Majid (2016) argue that people make a choice on careers to pursue based on established traditions. They indicate that people choose careers that are gender matched and dodge those that are gender mismatched. They further believe that the influence of gender on career choice may have a negative impact whereby shortage of workforce may be felt in some professions. They established that gender difference is an important factor for career choice.

Gender influence has a strong statistical implication with choice of subjects. Dom and Yi (2018) established that gender plays a role in choice of courses to pursue which in the long run has a negative role in the lives of its women. They attest this to the fact that it eventually finds its way in the society, job market, economic system which overlooks the ability of women. Further, Mesquita and Lopes (2018) indicated that there exist women dominated professions which may make them choose them over other professions because they wish to have a relation with the home activities. In this regard, those activities that women do or have been gendered to allude that they are meant for women may make them choose a programme that brings about this continuity. They further established that men will pursue careers that are technical in nature consummate with tools and thrill-seeking activities.

Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider (2010) there exist attitudes regarding cultural opinions of gender, gender stereotypes and gender roles. These may have an effect in the minds of people and may create biasness in the world of work. Thus make a vague assumption that women should only pursue programmes that are believed to be feminine. As Makarova and Herzog (2015) indicate that gender stereotypes are more pronounced in the STEM disciplines which in the long run have a direct relation with the kind of job opportunities available.

Further, Wesarat, Sharif & Majid (2016) uphold the need for students and job seekers to familiarize themselves with other available careers and link them to occupations. They believe in the need to establish their actual abilities with an aim of reducing gender biasness that will help them be aligned with the most appropriate

careers. Many at times, there exists unequal job opportunities. In this regard, Castellano and Rocca (2014) recommend the need to provide equal opportunities for women in education for the sake of safeguarding their employability. They believe that there exist unfit conditions (labour inequalities) in the labour market discriminating against a particular gender. In addition, they describe gender inequalities found within the labour market to be the different treatments received by men and women in terms of involvement, employment, professional conditions and payment.

Gender difference in perception may impact career choices among students. As stipulated by Gokuladas (2010) both male and females have different perceptions to careers they can choose and may choose depending on their preference. Beck, Fuller, and Unwin (2006) depict a scenario of gendered choices in terms of apprenticeship contributing to gender dissection within the work force. They indicate that females are found in fields known to have a lesser completion rates, low pay and weaker openings for advance.

Canaga and Sempele (2019) established that majority of their respondents (63.3%) were female. They concluded that the study of Hospitality Education was popular among the female students. Therefore, this study intended to establish how gender of an individual can influence the decision of students in choosing Home Science Education programme in the University.

Research Objective

The objective of this study sought to establish the influence of gender on choice of careers in Home Science Education programmes in Kenyan Universities.

Methodology

This study adopted the convergent parallel mixed method where both the quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently followed by analyzing them separately (Creswell, 2014). The main assumption of using this type of mixed method is that both the quantitative data and qualitative data provide different types of information and gives a detailed view of respondents qualitatively which has the ability to make scores on instruments quantitatively. The obtained results are then compared to see whether the findings confirm or disconfirm each other.

This study was conducted in Uasin Gishu and Kiambu counties with focus on the two universities that train Home Science educators. The university is the most suitable target because it is the institution of higher learning mandated to train Home Science educators to handle the secondary level of education where Home Science is currently one of the subjects offered.

Data was analyzed descriptively and thematically. Quantitative and qualitative data that was obtained from the questionnaires were first coded and then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The analyzed quantitative data was then presented by use of graphs. Qualitative data from the focus group discussions and the interviews were transcribed, coded, and created/grouped into themes. The analyzed qualitative data was used in explaining the quantitative results by giving more insights

Findings

The results of this study established that 12 (4.7%) students were male while 242 (95.3%) were female (Figure 1). The finding indicates that, female respondents were the majority in relation to career choice in Home Science. Similar findings were established by Canaga and Sempele (2019) that majority of their respondents in their study were females.

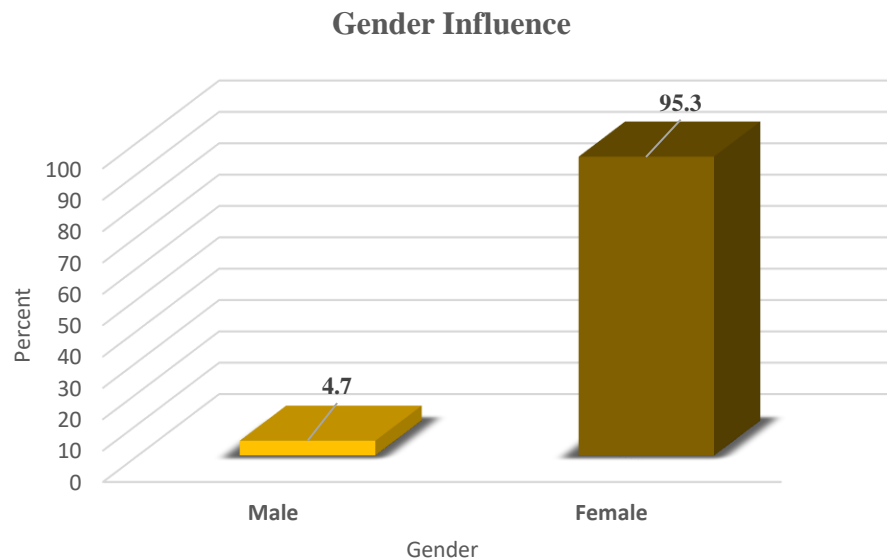


Figure 1: Demographics Distribution of Respondents by Gender

On the students’ questionnaires, seven items on gender were given where students gave their responses accordingly. The first item in Figure 2 showed that 77.6% of the respondents disagreed that gender influenced their choice of Home Science education programme, while 18.1% agreed. Therefore, a higher percentage of the respondents were of the opinion that they did not choose a programme of study because of their gender. This implies that both male and female can do any programme including Home Science Education. Thus, the notion that Home Science Education programmes are meant for females may not be correct. Mwaura (2020) established contrary findings where their study concluded that gender affected students’ career aspirations.

The second item showed that 99.2 % agreed that men and women were legible to pursue Home Science education programmes. As discussed earlier, there are no gender preconditions in joining the Home Science education programmes. This implies that Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) admits students from any gender profile and thus anyone is legible to enroll. Excerpts from the focus group discussions affirm that both male and female should enroll in Home Science education programme as indicated below;

Gender is all about attitude, if you have a positive attitude, you will not be concerned that Home Science is only meant for women, so if you've got a negative attitude obviously, you will feel humiliated doing Home Science which is a subject mostly meant for females (FGD 3, 18/12/2020).

Gakuladas (2010) indicated that both male and females may have different perceptions pertaining to careers they choose and they do so depend on their most preferred choices. Further, Beck, Fuller and Unwin, (2006) intimated that there are gendered choices in terms of apprenticeship contributing to gender dissection within the work force. This they believe that females were found to be in fields known to have a lesser completion rate, low pay and weaker opening for advancement. As much as there is that notion from the society that there are definite roles for males and females, there seems to be a paradigm shift. Further, an excerpt from a focus group discussion alluded that the society is the one to blame for instance;

The society perceives Home Science as a lady's course so when you do Home Science as a man, you tend to be laughed at because they say 'that's a lady's job. They think engineering belong to men, Home Science of cooking is usually for women (FGD 4, 18/12/2020)

Castellano and Rocca (2014) recommend the need to provide equal opportunities for women in education to safeguard their employability. Further, they believed that there existed unfit conditions referred as labour inequalities discriminating against a particular gender which are the different treatments received in terms of involvement, employment, professional conditions and payment. Similarly, Ikonen, Leinonen, Asikainen, and Hirvonen (2018) affirm that guidance counsellors perceive the parents to be the main source for occupational gender stereotypes that are currently experienced in the society.

The fifth item showed that 78.7% of the respondents disagreed that gender influences the choice of a career because there are careers more suitable for women and others more suitable for men, while 13.8% agreed. It can therefore be argued that gender influence does not play a role in the choice of programme of study leading to particular career. And from the interviews and focus group discussions, it was indeed established that the society plays a big role when it comes to this item. For example;

The society opines some activities are feminine and some masculine. Men are expected to handle harder activities like engineering while Home Science are meant for women because women because it's cheap. Home Science is concentrated in mixed schools or girl schools but not in boy's schools. They believe that hard subjects should be offered in boy's schools but not Home Science (FGD 2, 3/12/2020)

People are still holding to the old culture, of dividing roles, instead of school bringing about civilization, it continues to enhance that culture. Most boys' schools offer aviation, mechanics, electricity but not Home Science. (FGD 4, 18/12/2020)

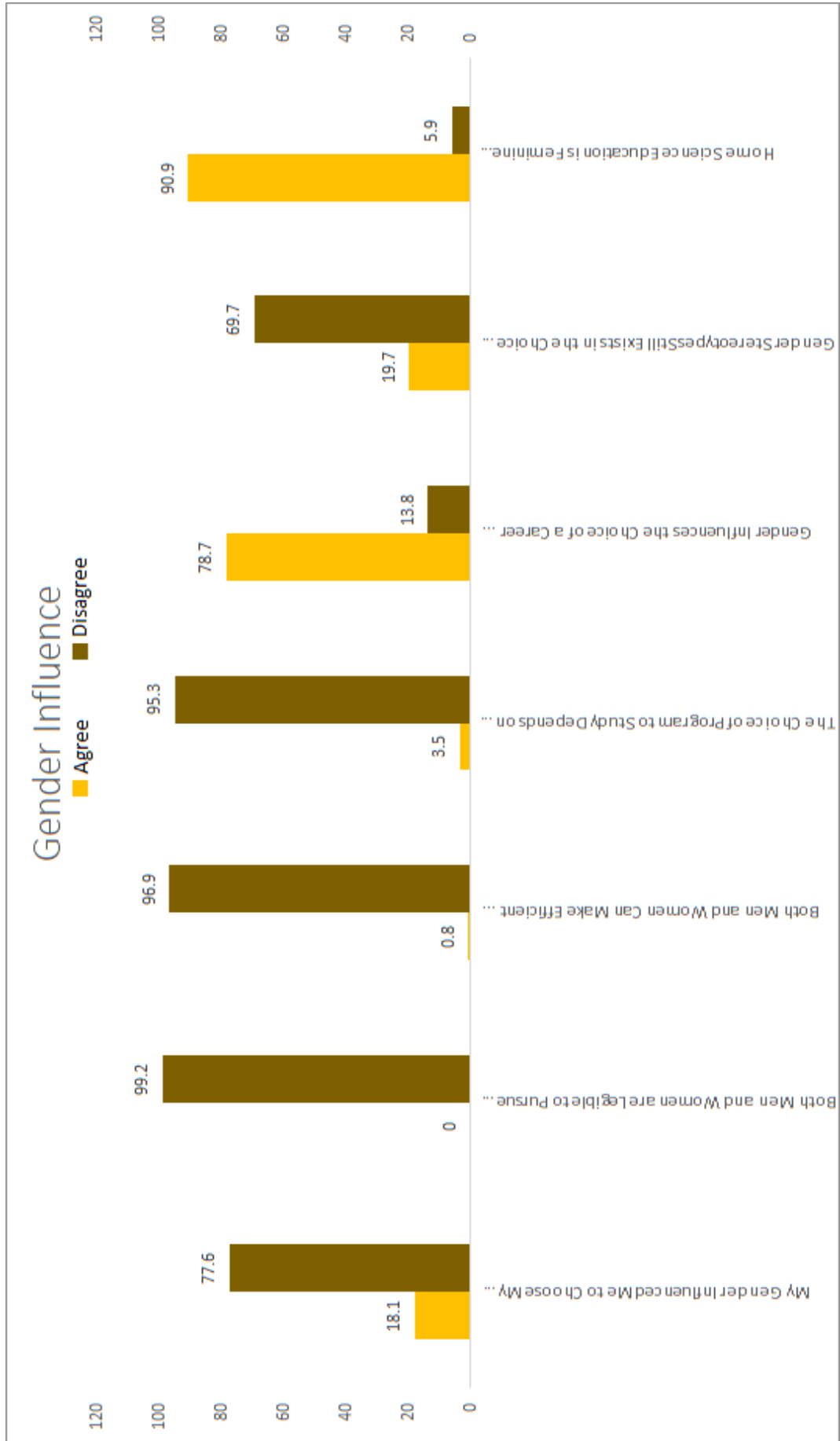


Figure 2: Gender Influence on Choice of Careers in Home Science Education Programme

The Interview session had this response

Home Science is seen to be a subject for female students... their teachers are females, female students and so a male student in a Home Science class that has a lot of interest among female students will be very uncomfortable. Many have tried to change from Home Science to something else but because of the marketability of the subject, the few that get in don't change. I've never seen boys' schools getting interested on how best they can include the subject in their curriculum. Female teachers are the majority both at high school and the university implying that Home Science intentionally or unintentionally is for females, they have not popularized it among the males (Interview 1, 12/1/2021)

The above interview excerpt resonates with that from a focus group discussion that intimated that what may influence selection of a subject to study or programme may emanate from the sex of the teachers/course instructors.

Most Home Science teachers are female and tell a male to take Home Science subject and then asks, 'how many male teachers are there in this country?' they don't have mentors. When I don't have a male teacher and am a male, it becomes difficult to relate with the subject. (FGD, 3 18/12/2020)

Home Science education programme may be boosted when more males are taking the course and also more male instructors/teachers are involved. For instance, the esteem of one of the male students was boosted when he encountered a male lecturer who happened to be the head of the department. The excerpt is as below;

My esteem was highly boosted when I joined the university and I found that we have a male lecturer who has been taking us through very well compared to some female lecturers. I prefer male lecturers in this course. I'm from a high school background where I was encouraged that I can make it (FGD3,3/12/2020)

Item six showed that 69.7% of the respondents agreed that gender stereotypes still exist in choice of careers, while 19.7% disagreed. Culturally, this is true because some courses as literature suggests are seen to be gender biased. One such programme is the Home Science education which is naturally associated with the female gender as discussed earlier. Further, excerpt from focus group discussions in support;

Like you are there doing stitches and others would say, 'look at that guy, what are you doing? You look like a girl'. They would say, 'You are still making our skirts?' But we enjoyed when it came to the food practicals (FGD 3, 18/12/2020)

The final item in Figure 2 showed that 90.9% of the respondents disagreed that Home Science Education is a feminine programme of study, while 5.9% agreed. Findings in this study therefore indicate that respondents were of the opinion that Home Science Education programme is not a feminine programme of study and all genders are legible to pursue but it is the society's assumptions that the programme is solely meant for the females and not males.

An item was included in the interviews to establish measures that would help reduce gender imbalance of students who choose Home Science Education programmes. Some of the responses were;

Male counterparts in the profession should deliberately portray success and comfort in the Home Science careers male Home Science teachers should take up leadership positions. At the university male counterparts should be given space to occupy leadership positions in the fields (Home Science) that are majorly dominated by the females. To remove stigma of Home Science male teachers, deliberate awareness on gender should be created (Interview 2, 13/10/2021)

From the above discussions, it can be concluded that the gender perspective in relation to individuals who are enrolled in the programme and those who are already in the profession have divergent views with those of the society. It is therefore clear that the society in general portrays a scenario that this programme is meant to be for the female gender. As alluded in one of the interviews;

The society understands the course as being that of cooking. That how can one go and study a ‘cooking course’ at the university yet they have been cooking all through. (Interview 2, 13/10/2021)

Teaching is just one of the many options. There’s need to sensitize. The society needs to understand that this is a subject like any other. It is not a cooking and sewing subject. (Interview 1, 12/1/2021)

Similar findings can be compared to the works of Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneideret (2010) who indicated that there exist attitudes regarding cultural opinions of gender, gender stereotypes and gender roles. They believed that these cultural opinions may have an effect in the minds of people as they create biasness when it comes to the world of work and thus make assumptions that women should only pursue programmes believed to be feminine. In addition, Makarova and Herzog (2015) showed that the aspects of gender stereotypes are more pronounced in the STEM disciplines that have a direct relation with the kind of job opportunities. Tabassum and Nayak (2021) believe that, individual, family, socio-cultural and organizational factors shape stereotyped thinking in human beings thus perpetuates gender discrimination and obstructs the career progressions. Similarly, Taher (2022) reiterates that gender stereotyping habits are old and tend to restrict society. Their respondents chose their academic specialization not only according to their capabilities and qualifications but according to; what suits their gender and their society’s expectations for men and women. They affirmed the need to get rid of the stereotypes and believed that education was sufficient to reduce gender stereotyping in all communities.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that majority of the respondent in this study were female, gender in this study did not play a major role in the choice of Home Science Education programme. This was portrayed by the participants’ responses where majority were of the opinion that aspects of gender on the offering and uptake of the programme were the perception of the society. Their responses indicated that majority of them had chosen the programme as a result of personal choice and not due to their gender. They believed that any person regardless of their gender was eligible to enrol into the programme. Respondents opinioned that the society was to blame for the stereotypes that exists with the uptake of the programme. Therefore, it may be prudent to note that gender may have been predetermined for respondents in this

study back in secondary schools where majority of the schools offering the subject were girl schools.

Recommendations

The policy makers and all stakeholders should offer civic education and sensitization that Home Science Education programme is not a feminine programme. There is need to deliberately showcase men who have ventured and thrived in Home Science and Home Science related careers.

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