

## INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON CAREER CHOICES BY STUDENTS IN YOUTH POLYTECHNICS IN BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

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**ABSTRACT:** Different studies have been done in different parts of the world in regard to performance and employment of youths, yet little has been done on factors influencing career choices in tertiary institutions. As such, the study set out to investigate factors influencing career choices in tertiary institutions in Bungoma County. Based on the study, this paper examines how gender issues determine the choice of careers by students in tertiary institutions in Kenya. The study was limited to fifteen youth polytechnics in Bungoma County with an assumption that the respondents would be willing to give their views freely. The study used a survey design in which descriptive statistics was employed. The target population was 15 youth polytechnics, with 1340 students of which a sample population of 140 students was selected. The study used a questionnaire for collection of data. The study results showed that gender issues influence the choices of career among students in youth polytechnics. The study recommends some measures to be undertaken to reduce the current problems caused by poor career choices in tertiary institutions. These include advising Ministry of Education to set up bridging courses, workshops and seminars in tertiary institutions to help students project on careers which would march with the job market the time they complete their studies. The study is significant as it can benefit the youths to understand the careers to choose and help the government come up with strategies to help young people make right career choices in institutions of learning.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender, Career Choices, Students, Youth Polytechnics, Bungoma County, Kenya.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Kenyans aged 30 years and below constitute about 75% of the country's population, forming the largest source of human resource. However, they continue to remain on the periphery of the country's affairs and their status has not been accorded due recognition. They are often excluded from the design, planning and implementation of programmes and policies that affect them. Many productive and energetic youth remain unemployed, continue to suffer from poor health, and lack sufficient support from government and other relevant institutions. Some of them, especially, have special needs that require attention such as those living on the streets, those living with HIV/AIDS, the girls and those with disabilities.

The responsibility of ensuring that the aspirations and hopes of the youth are met cannot be left in the hands of a single stakeholder, i.e. schools. Everyone in the community, both young and old, must play a role. It is for this reason that the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders have embarked on the development of a comprehensive youth policy. The National Youth Policy recognizes that the youth are a key resource that can be tapped for the benefit of the whole country. It endeavours to address issues affecting young people by providing broad-based strategies to give the youth meaningful opportunities to reach their maximum potential. It provides a broad framework within which all stakeholders, including the private and public sector and civil society, can contribute to youth development. The document goes further to suggest an implementation mechanism.

The youth policy was drafted in the context of existing sectoral policies, national development plans, international policies and charters to which Kenya is a signatory. Cognizance is given to the Charter of the United Nations, the Commonwealth Youth Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations World Programme for the Youth to the year 2000 and beyond, among other important documents that have interest in the youth. The policy defines a Kenyan

Youth as one aged between 15 and 30 years. This takes into account the physical, psychological, cultural, social, biological and political aspects of the youth.

The youth in Kenya, who number about 9.1 million, account for about 32% of the population. Of these, 51.7% are female. The youth form 60% of the total labour force but many of them have not been absorbed in the job market owing to the country's high unemployment level (Sifuna, 1982). Enrolment in primary school totalled only 7.2 million in 2003 for those aged 6-13 years. Secondary school enrolment, by 2002, stood at around 847,287 while university enrolment stood at an estimated 63,941 students in the 2002/03 academic year. Enrolment in private accredited and private unaccredited universities totalled 10,310 of which 5,354(51.9%) are female (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

The problem became so serious to warrant immediate government action. The first step taken was an attempt to increase employment opportunities in the formal sector of the economy through an agreement and trade unions, known as tripartite agreement of 1964. Other government efforts were the Kericho conference of 1966 which was organized jointly with Kenya government and the then university college of Nairobi which investigated the problems associated with education, employment and rural development, including the problems of youth unemployment and the establishment of NYS. The conference was expected to come with ways provide skilled training for unemployed youths (Evaluation Mission for Kenya Government and Norwegian Agency, 1974). This is what led to the formation of youth polytechnics initially referred to as village polytechnics.

According to Owano (1986, 1988), the youth polytechnics offer non-formal education programmes that have received considerable attention in Kenya. The idea of village polytechnic was spurred by National Christian council of Kenya (NCCK) report on the fate of the youth after school of 1966. The report sought identified the rapid development of serious unemployment amongst the primary school dropouts. It spelled out the problems of unemployment, unproductive and landless youth in rural areas citing that these problems have led to high rural urban migration. There was, therefore, need to create institutions that did not require high academic entry grades and upon qualifying from these institutions the graduates would access job market through self-employment within the places where they were living.

According to Court (1972), the provision of education and training for all Kenyans is fundamental to government's overall development strategy. Kenya's human resource is central to the country's attaining its goal of industrial development and technical advancement. The introduction of free primary education is one of the key reforms which have led to an addition of 1.5 million children in primary schools between January 2003 and June 2004. This has in turn caused high level of school leavers. The government therefore recognizes the need to create opportunities for post-primary and secondary youth who for one reason or another do not transit to higher levels of learning, and who, since they are below 18 years, do not qualify for public employment. They can therefore only qualify to join youth polytechnics and technical institutes so that they can offer market-driven courses (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2005).

At the initiation of the youth polytechnics (YPs), the most common courses offered were carpentry, tailoring, dress making and masonry (Fortham, 1993). Presently, the courses that have been adopted widely over a period of time include fashion design, garment making, motor vehicle technology and carpentry. Surprisingly statistics reveal great disparities in enrolment in different courses. For example, in some YPs like Naitiri, a number of female students enrolled in masonry in 2009 are 19 and none of the male students was enrolled. A few female students were enrolled in plumbing and carpentry while some courses that were expected to have high employment, like hair dressing, recorded no employment. It is also surprising that some courses like leather work and agriculture-related courses like fish farming and zero grazing were not offered nor had no students choosing them. These courses were missing in many polytechnics which are the major concern of research of these papers. The previous studies of youth polytechnics tended to be rather critical on the relevance of most YP programmes in relation to local needs (Anderson, 1970).

#### **GENDER EFFECT AND CAREER CHOICES**

The term gender refers to the social or cultural characteristics assigned to women and men as they grow as members of a given community. Society has over time expected women and men to perform certain duties and behave in certain ways due to their biological differences and other social factors. Gender-based division of labour is prevalent under which duties are allocated on basis of one's sex (Berkeley, 1981).

Universally, young generations learn, acquire and initialize perceptions, attitude, values and beliefs from older generations through the process of socialization. In addition to age, gender is one of the universal dimensions on which status differences are based. Unlike sex, which is a biological concept, gender is a social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed role that men and women are to follow. According to Lerda (1998), in the creation of patriarchy, gender

is the costume, a mask, a straight jacket on which men and women dance their unequal dance. Gender roles are influenced by cultural practices which has made the socialization process become perpetuated gender inequalities.

The girl child is constantly socialized to like the mother, undertake domestic and household duties of private domain, while the boy child is socialized in public duties that result to gender inequalities, notably in division of labour. Wolfe (2004) says that of all the ways that one group has systematically mistreated another, none is deep rooted than the way men have subordinated women.

According to a Maseno article *Equipping Youths with Practical Skills* (RoK, 2010), the Maseno polytechnic acknowledges the social economic differences between men and women which lead to bias in choice of courses they pursue and therefore advocate affirmative programmes that encourage girls and women to excel in various fields alongside their male counterparts. In contemporary society, teachers and schools are becoming key agents of socialization. Unfortunately, school systems still seem to emphasize non-empowering domestic skills such as sewing, cooking and embroidery. This has had a serious impact on the choice of courses among the girls and boys in youth polytechnics.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A career is a chosen a profession or occupation; career decisions cannot be left to chance since more than ever one's success depends on making informed career plans (Watley, 2006). Studies on career choices by first year students in youth polytechnics in Kenya indicate that there is no clear trend towards particular careers. It appears as though the choices of various trades vary from year to year. For instance, in 2008, in Kimilili, Chebukwabi polytechnic, the highest enrolment was 5 students in masonry, while the following year, the highest enrolment was 21 in garment making. These fluctuations are likely to cause mismatch of skills and job opportunities and can also make some facilities to lie idle in some trades where there is no enrolment of students in a particular year. Little has been said about the causes of these fluctuations. The study, therefore, sought to find out the factors that influenced the career choices in youth polytechnics in Kenya.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to four factors influencing career choices by students in youth polytechnics in Bungoma County, namely gender, availability of physical facilities, job opportunities and students' background. From past studies only a few factors influencing students' career choices in youth polytechnics in this area have been identified. This paper focuses specifically on gender-related issues on career choices.

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bungoma County lies on the Northern part of Western Province and borders Trans-Nzoia County to the North, Lugari District to the East all the way to Kakamega County to the South and Busia County to the West. It covers an area of 2,069 km (798.8 sq miles) with a population of 1.4 million. The County has five constituencies with 15 youth polytechnics. The economy of the County is mainly based on agriculture farming on the sugar cane and maize industries. The area experiences high rainfall throughout the year with some large rivers used for small-scale irrigation farming.

This study used survey design. The most attractive attribute of the descriptive research design for which the research prefers to the other methods is that, apart from enabling direct generation of information, it creates the opportunity for in-depth responses through sharing on the past, present and future possibilities that provide a good understanding of the phenomena under study.

The target population consisted of 15 youth polytechnics as follows: Bungoma East 2, Bungoma Central 2, Bungoma North 2, Kimilili 3, Bungoma South 4, Bungoma West 2 with 1340 respondents found in Bungoma County. These polytechnics are distributed in the five districts, namely Bungoma North, Bungoma South, Bungoma Central and Bungoma West and Bungoma East. The sampling was done in all the 15 youth polytechnics based on the formula by Tronchien (2007) which states that when the population is small, the sample will be all the participants. Proportional sampling was then used to determine the number of students to be interviewed in each of the 15 polytechnics in Bungoma County.

This study used questionnaire to collect data which enabled for the collection of more information over a short time. The choice of instruments was informed by the nature of the data to be collected the time available as well as the objectives of the study. The study was mainly concerned with gathering views, opinions, perceptions, feelings and attitude of the respondents, such information could be captured by use of the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained both open- and close-ended items.

The findings of the study were analyzed using the SPSS system and content analysis method (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) which involves a systematic qualitative description of the objectives or units of study (categorical variables) and determines the intensity with which certain themes or phrases have been used. It involves a detailed description of the items that comprise the sample.

In interpreting the results, the frequency of the items appears was interpreted as a measure of importance, attention or emphasis. The specific classification system used to record the information for the research was designation content analysis which was to determine the frequency and trends with which concepts of the objectives then was interpreted as a measure of direction or bias. Tabulation was also used to give a visual display of the findings trends and for ease of reference.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **GENDER OF THE STUDENTS**

The research was interested to ascertain the enrolment of students based on their gender from the questionnaire. The table below presents the enrolment of both male and female students in youth polytechnics in Bungoma County.

*Table 1: Gender of the Students*

<b>Respondents' Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	75	57.7
Female	55	42.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The table above shows that out of the 130 students who filled the questionnaires, 75(57.7%) were male while 55(42.3%) were female. This indicates that there are more male students in youth polytechnics than there are female students. As such, one type of gender dominates in tertiary institutions in Bungoma County.

#### **GENDER AND CAREER CHOICES**

The research further sought to establish how gender influenced career choices in the sampled polytechnics. The study used indicators such as male roles and female roles in the society which were raised as items in the questionnaire to gather respondents' views on what society expects males or females. The first step was to know the representation of both male and female students in each trade. The results of the findings were as presented in Table 2 below. Out of the 55 students who chose garment making, only 5 were male and out of 14 students who chose masonry, none of them was female. Only one student chose metalwork and this was a male student.

*Table 2: Number of Male Verses Female Students in the Trade*

<b>Career</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Garment making	55	5	50
Fashion design	3	0	3
Masonry	14	14	0
Carpentry	9	9	0
Metal work	1	1	0
Plumbing	5	3	2
Motor vehicle engineering	38	35	3
Electrical engineering	5	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>59</b>

As indicated in Tables 2, gender is one of the factors that influence career choices among students in youth polytechnics in Kenya. Among all the careers given metalwork registered the lowest enrolment while masonry and carpentry did not attract any female students. Garment making which attracted many students had the highest number of female students. It was also observed that most of the female students tend to enrol in one career. On the other hand, masonry, carpentry, electrical engineering and metalwork courses were largely left for male students.

The author also used cross tabulation to show the correlation of career choices and gender. The findings were as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Symmetric Measures on Gender and Career Choices**

		<b>Value</b>	<b>Asymp. Std. Error (a)</b>	<b>Approx. T(b)</b>	<b>Approx. Sig.</b>
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.663	.058	-10.009	.000(c)
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman correlation	-.733	.059	-12.179	.000(c)
N of Valid Cases		130			

*a = Not assuming the null hypothesis.*

*b = Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.*

*c = Based on normal approximation.*

From the results given in Tables 3 above, male students' enrolment in different careers was negatively correlated to the female students. This shows that there is inverse proportion between male students and female students in different careers in youth polytechnics. It was observed that student enrolment based on each gender was not uniform, which will in turn result in gender imbalance in the job market.

On further research, it was found that out of 130 respondents, 53(40.8%) either strongly agreed or agreed that some trades are believed to be for women while 61(46.9 %) disagreed with the statement, as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Trade Gender Biasness**

<b>Likert scale</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Strongly Agree	34	26.2
Agree	19	14.6
Not Sure	16	12.3
Disagree	23	17.7
Strongly Disagree	38	29.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The results in Table 4 above show that many students choose careers based on their gender.

On the labour intensive careers, the research was interested to find out how both genders selected their careers. The results were as presented in Table 5 which reveals that 99(76.2%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that men are suited to do more labour intensive tasks than women.

**Table 5: Labour Intensiveness**

<b>Likert scale</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	66	50.8
Agree	33	25.4
Not Sure	13	10.0
Disagree	12	9.2
Strongly Disagree	6	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above findings show that male students choose careers that are more physically demanding than their female counterparts.

Finally, the research sought to determine how the culture has affected the choice of careers. The findings were as presented in the Table 6 below.

*Table 6: Culture influence on career choices.*

<b>Likert scale</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	42	32.3
Agree	35	26.9
Not Sure	15	11.5
Disagree	16	12.3
Strongly Disagree	22	16.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Out of the 130 respondents, 77(59.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that traditions or culture does not allow women to undertake some careers such as masonry and carpentry. The results show that more than half of the students were influenced by cultural believes in the choice of their careers.

In many African societies, women are expected to perform some roles like sewing and tailoring. These roles are believed to be for women yet men are believed to be muscular and should perform hard tasks that require a lot of energy or are labour intensive. In summary, 71(54.6%) out of the 130 respondents believed that some roles are meant for women culturally while 99(76.2%) out of 130 believed men are meant to do labour intensive tasks. This is in agreement with what Lerda (1998) states that in the creation of patriarchy, gender is the costume, a mask, a straight jacket on which men and women dance their unequal dance. Gender roles are influenced by cultural practices which have made the socialization process perpetuate gender inequalities.

**4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As far as gender is concerned, the study revealed that cultural believes interfere in the choices of careers made by students in youth polytechnics. It was also observed in that stereotype believes have hindered female students from undertaking some trades like carpentry, metal work and masonry. The female students seem to be only interested in careers like garment making and fashion while careers like electrical engineering, plumbing and metalwork are left for male students. This division of labour is a big setback to acquisition of employment, especially for female students who are left with small sample of careers to undertake. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Planning, Development and National Heritage together with the Ministry of Education should set up seminars and workshops to sensitize people, society and country on the expectations of the society in future.

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