

Abstract

This study investigated the factors that shaped students' choices of training programs in two technical colleges in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to determine the nature of the students reasoning with regards to their decisions about enrolling in particular training programs. It also highlights how the students deal with the pressures from their parents, peers, and the community at large, to conform to their 'gender expected' program choices. The expectations of Kenyan society have been that female students would choose programs within the female dominated fields of secretarial, food and beverage, and clothing technology. The expected programs for male students have been in the male dominated fields of engineering and building trades. The study showed that program choices for girls differed from those of boys irrespective of the type of school the students attended. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Ethnographic techniques were used to analyze the participants experiences obtained through conversation like interviews. Chi square tests and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the enrollment records obtained from the participating colleges. The participants included 39 students and 4 Heads of Departments from the two participating colleges, College A and College B. There were 14 female and 7 male students enrolled in traditionally female programs, and 9 male and 9 female students enrolled in traditionally male programs. For each college, one head of a department with predominantly female programs and one from a department with predominantly male programs participated in the study. All the participants were interviewed within their college. The interviews focused on the participants' individual experiences related to their choices of training programs. The interviews with the Heads of Departments also looked at the relationship between the government guidelines on student enrollment and the actual criteria used by the colleges to select the students for different programs within each college. All the interviews were audio taped. The students indicated that their choices were moderated by factors within the homes they came from, the schools they attended, the society at large, and the world of work. Factors within the homes included gender related socialization, and parental pressure for the students to choose the programs that the parents wanted them to choose. The major factors within the schools the students attended included lack of career guidance, the school facilities, and lack of role models for the students to emulate. The main factors that were related to the society at large were the general expectations that the students would choose "gender appropriate programs. It was interesting to note that the students placed an emphasis on their perception of the expectations of their potential future spouses. The main factors related to the world of work were the availability of employment in particular careers, and the students' perception of the gender biases that the employers might have when recruiting workers for different types of jobs.