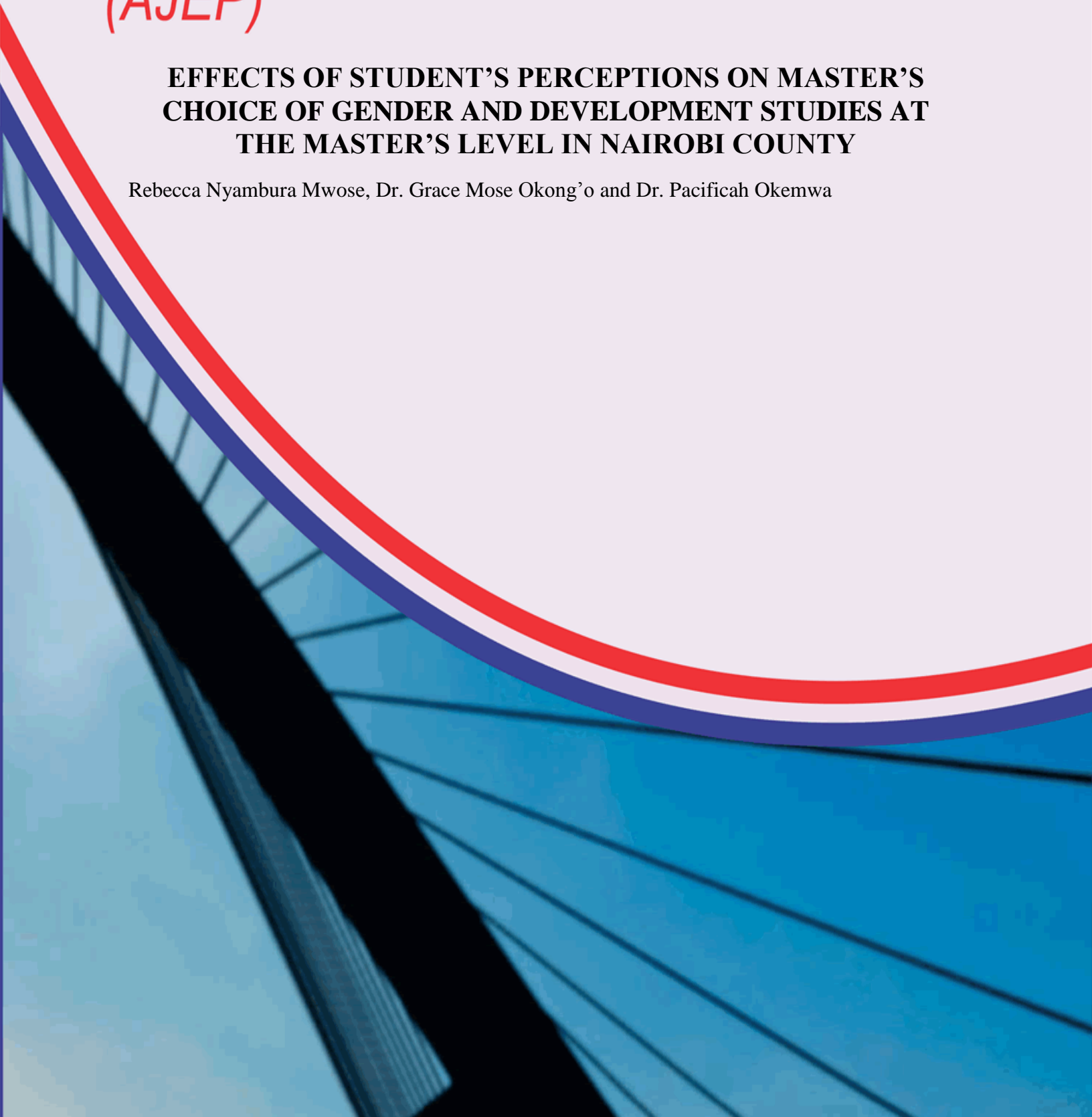


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EFFECTS OF STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS ON MASTER'S CHOICE OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT THE MASTER'S LEVEL IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed at investigating the effects of student's perceptions on master's choice of gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County.

Materials and methods: The study employed a case study design. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents for the study. Interview guides and open ended questionnaires were the main data collection instruments for the research. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques guided by the research objectives and research questions were used to analyze data. Qualitative data was analyzed by use of themes and the coding technique while frequencies and percentages were used in the analysis of quantitative data that was collected.

Results: The study found that women perceived gender and development studies as prestigious, participatory, empowering and economically sound. The effects of women's perceptions they felt that they had made the right career choice and were confident despite of cultural constraints. Men perceived gender and development studies as a financially rewarding course but were more influenced by the patriarchal cultural ideals of the society. Perceived economic benefits therefore played a major role in the choice of gender and development studies.

Recommendations: The study recommends that universities should start career education sections to help resolve gender unresponsiveness through the creation of awareness about it by helping students to make subject choices where they can actualize their potential.

Key words: *Perceptions, gender and development studies*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Career choices in education are made every day; the way these choices are made and implemented depends on the attitudes and perceptions of the society and their decision makers. An individual's education helps to form these attitudes and priorities during the career choice process. An educational career choice is important because of its potential to promote social

change and of its role as defender of prevailing norms and values (De Groot & Maynard, 1993). Career choice is not only a question, of which institutions one chooses to attend but is also inclusive of a broad range of forces influencing the development of individuals, their educational experience and their later working life (Young, 1992).

According to Millet (1970) gender and development studies as a career choice ensures that education has a positive impact on improving the status and roles women and integrates men into the gender discourse. In furtherance the author argues that a gender and development study has the potential to challenge stereotypes about male and female roles, offer alternative ideas and to equip women and men to pursue a range of possibilities. Thus as a career choice this area of study is associated with power and control as gender has been and is a system of oppression.

This system of oppression has been demonstrated in the career choices that women have made since the 1970s. It's been noted that women's employment has been in the services. Women's career choices are geared to this sector which confines them to lower levels of pay and responsibility: in health, education and social services; banking and insurance; hotel and catering; the retail trade; and personal services such as hairdressing and domestic work. Women typically make up the majority of sales staff, cleaners, and kitchen assistants, nursing auxiliaries, secretaries and primary-school teachers. Overall, more service jobs are part time, casual, temporary or 'informal' than are jobs in other sectors, posing a great disadvantage to women in these jobs (ILO, 2016).

The fact that women predominate in certain career choices that are characterized by lower levels of skill, responsibility and pay leads to job segregation. This implies that the career choices that women and men make differ leading to segregation and concentration in the fact that women are overrepresented in a limited number of careers (ILO, 2014). What is important in the gender system is the impact of women's career choices, their lack of opportunities in both formal and informal careers that increases competition between them and keeps wages low.

There are two types of segregation that women face when they make their career choices; the first is horizontal segregation where they find themselves in careers clusters that are dominated by women such as the services sector, especially in the personal and caring services. The second is vertical segregation where by a career choice is mixed with women and men; however women are usually in the less responsible, less secure and less well paid careers. Even when the career is predominantly female, men are still found in the management positions (ILO, 2016).

Gender and development studies as a career choice is of importance as it seeks to examine the issues of structural disparities of the gender system that influence women and men when making their career choices. Of importance to note is that woman do not enter the labour market be it formal or informal on the same basis as men, nor do they operate within it on equal terms. The social and economic roles allotted to women and men limit women's access to the means of production from credit to training opportunities- and result in crowding of women into a limited number of careers and markets (ILO, 2014).

Gender and development studies has revealed that the lower wages and prices that women command and the pressure on their time from their unpaid domestic activities, means that women everywhere are working longer hours than men for considerable less income, and with less control over the decision- making processes that affect their lives and careers (Fragniere,

1990). Gender and development studies is thus of importance as it reveals career choice dynamics and their implications that affect both women and men.

Gender studies emerged as an academic discipline of the social sciences as a result of the UN Women's Conferences (Mexico-1975, Copenhagen-1980, Nairobi-1985, Beijing-1995) that sought for an approach that integrated men and women, their needs and concerns in the development process. Former development approaches such as the Women in Development approach (WID) prevalent in the 1970's exclusively focused on women without account of how their lives were shaped by their relations with men (Young, 1993). Globally gender studies seeks to address the structural relations of power and inequality in a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural spheres in which equality needs to be realized (De Groot & Maynard, 1993).

Gender studies in higher education seeks to draw out interconnections of relationships associated with power and meaning in different sites both between men and women, boys and girls. According to Unterhalter (2012), gender studies explore how universities and processes of learning operate to reproduce and transform inequalities. This is important because among others it highlights the process of choice whereby there are subjects defined as either those which women or men are "good" at or those which they are not. Gender studies in higher education is therefore, an academic discipline aimed at naming and changing the relationships of inequality that sets the conditions and processes that allow people to critically view their well being. The term gender studies flourished in the mid-1980s in research and publications which substituted the word 'gender' rather than 'women' as their area of focus (De Groot & Maynard, 1993).

The use of the term gender in the West led to the increased interest in the study of masculinity and the development of men's studies alongside women's studies. This was due to the perception that there was little direct focus on the social construction of 'men'. Gender studies in higher education examine ideas like 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and the processes involved in the reproduction of gender relations (Thomas, 1990). Thomas (1990) additionally notes that process plays a crucial role in the creation and reproduction of gender difference and that to understand this process; we have to look at the experiences of students themselves and the meanings they give to the choice on whether to study gender studies. The goals of gender studies include the balancing of the curriculum by providing a place for both a male and female perspectives and second educating for social change (Coyner, 1983).

Women who have reached higher education are not deemed to be successful by virtue of having done so, on the contrary the choices they make on what to study is deemed to exclude and marginalize them, pushing them further into 'female' jobs or marriage and family, however the university is a system that prepares men to take up roles of power in the man-centered society (White, Cox & Cooper, 1992). Radical feminists argue that higher education curricula are biased towards male experience as secondary education curricula. Alison Jagger and Paula Rothenberg argue that sexist prejudices contribute to women's suffering qualitatively as well as quantitatively, leading to an oppressive environment for women (Tong, 1992).

In Africa owing to the implementation by national governments of gender policies both long and short term programmes in gender studies are offered in many universities (National Policy on Gender and Development, 2000). The gender policies main objectives are to build capacity by creating a pool of qualified personnel to serve as researchers in gender-focused studies or as

trainers and practitioners to work with various sectors and NGOs. These trained women and men are supposed to be change agents either through generating gender-disaggregated information if they are researchers or through training others and showing good examples through gender sensitive practice (Kasente, 1996). In East Africa, Makerere University offers gender studies at the degree level its mission being to bring change in the socialization of men and women in Uganda through understanding their lives, and encouraging development of policies and programmes that are sensitive to the fact that women's and men's lives are structured differently (Ibid. 1996).

Gender and development studies in Kenya were started as an effort to situate gender equality issues at the center of policy decisions and they entail bringing out the perceptions, experience, and knowledge of women as well as men to bear on the development agenda (National Policy on Gender and Development, 2000). Gender and development studies examine the status and conditions of women and men in developing economies.

Kenya has made efforts to promote gender equality in higher education in various policy documents such as the Constitution; article 27 states that "women and men have the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres". International agreements also underscore the importance of achieving gender equality in education such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the Dakar Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to Onsongo (2006), universities are expected to play a role in leadership and transformation of the society with regard to gender relations and women's participation in particular. These goals adhere to one of the Gender and Development approach (GAD) key propositions, that a focus on women alone was inadequate to understand the opportunities for women for agency or change (Young, 1993). Gender and development studies goals and objectives in Kenya are directed by the National Policy on Gender and Development (2000) and Sessional Paper no.2 of 2006 on Gender Equality and Development which among others seek to address two key priority areas relevant to this study.

The first is the removal of impediments to equal access to economic employment opportunities for men and women and second, the elimination of gender disparities in education and training to enhance and sustain gender parity in access, retention, transition and performance in education for boys and girls, women and men.

The contemporary gender approach in development requires in its process that gender is mainstreamed, this involves ensuring that attention to gender equality pervades all interventions such as gender and development studies programmes at the university (UNDP, 2000). Gender imbalances or unresponsiveness in career choice have been deemed to be an impediment to inclusivity and representation of students, as both women and men are not participating and benefiting equally from the developmental policies put in place to ensure their equal access to gender and development studies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Nairobi County, almost all public and some private universities in response to international and local gender policies that aim to establish gender equity and equality have sought to offer gender related courses. Gender and development studies is of importance as it accommodates

both women and men's perspectives in its classes, benefiting the society by examining the structures that keep women and men in separate spheres. These structures occur on the social, political and economic levels and shape values and attitudes throughout the society.

While making subject choices it has been noted that even if men and women have the same opportunities available to them, several factors condition their choices in different ways. This leads to gender imbalances in terms of gender representation despite interventions by universities which are aimed at ensuring gender inclusivity. Subsequently, misperceptions about certain subject choices continue to flourish, affecting enrolments in certain departments. Even though subject choices made by both men and women are personal, patterns emerge as some courses are dominated by a specific gender leading to a gender unresponsive *status quo* in universities. However there exist few studies that address subject choice of gender and development studies from a gender and socio-cultural perspective.

Additionally imbalances in enrolment patterns in career choice go against Kenyan Constitutional efforts to promote gender equality and equity as enshrined in Article 27 of the Kenyan Constitution which states that: women and men have the right to equal treatment including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.

Therefore the purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of student's perceptions on master's choice of gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County;

1.3 Objective of the Study

To investigate the effects of student's perceptions on master's choice of gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Effects of Student's Perceptions on choice of Gender and Development Studies at the Master's Level

Student's perceptions on gender and development studies are influenced by four primary factors: first are environmental stimuli such as advertising and books, second is education, third are reference groups and fourth are personal characteristics (Fox & Renas, 1977). These intermix and create a person's self perception that in turn influences subject choice. From childhood, students amass conceptual structures (schemata) which serve later as tools to shape their perceptions and influence their attitudes. The schema structures perceptions and attitudes, by filtering out irrelevancies and allowing sense to be made of partial information. As new experiences are gained, schemata are modified and perceptions of the students reflect what is recognized in the surrounding world (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Perceptions about particular career choices are shaped early in life, and it has been noted that children appear to be more stereotyped in their beliefs than older persons (Gottfredson, 1996). Program presentation, materials and career guidance may also shape the perceptions about gender and development studies by reinforcing sex role stereotypical behaviour by for example over representing female interests and concerns in textbooks (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

Gottfredson (1981) offers a theory of subject choice that examines both the individual perception and social environmental influences on subject choice. Gottfredson emphasizes the importance

of gender roles and prestige in the subject choice process. Gottfredson and Lapan (1997) further emphasize that the subject choices people tend to make reflect their desires to implement their preferred self concepts and to have their choices remain congruent with their sense of self. In addition a person's satisfaction with their career choice depends on a sense of congruence between a sense of self and the career itself, thus men who choose gender and development studies may sacrifice high prestige within a career or within their career to implement their self concept.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1996) which posits that individual choice is the foundation of action and inaction, the theory explores how individuals react to and seek to structure the varying constraints on action that occur, whether they are sets of institutions, patterns of group interaction or constellations of socio-economic structures. In particular the rational choice theory seeks to focus on individual choice making as influenced by social factors making it relevant to explain how master's students in Nairobi County made their subject choices.

Rational choice according to Goldthorpe, (1996) deploys some distinct tenets about human nature that are important for this study; the first is that human beings have preferences that are for the purposes of analysis, that is individuals are purposive entities rather than just vehicles for wider social and economic forces. They are as such, are capable of choosing their own projects and preferences. Second rational choice theory assumes individuals act in their self-interest rather than for the interest of others.

People are instrumental rather than expressive and they seek to maximize their personal utility rather than to give life to their personal and collective identities. Personal utility is maximized through an optimization process whereby individuals maximize their income or balance out a number of preferences such as between current and future benefits.

Third, people express their preferences as clear goals. Fourth, rational choice theorists often assume individuals have information about the preferences available to them. Fifth, when individuals examine the information available to them they select the course of action that satisfies their preferences and are able to modify their courses of action when the benefits and costs of choices change (Goldthorpe, 1996).

In this study, the rational choice theory was applied to explain master's student's process of choice making as influenced by socio-cultural factors. Goldthorpe's argument that individuals are purposive entities seeks the individual student's preferences of choice before those of the society. This was significant to this study as when the society's socio-cultural beliefs played a role in influencing the student's choice of master's program before their own preferences could lead to conflict.

In addition, the posit that individuals act out in their self interest rather than the interest of others was applied in the study. According to the rational choice theory the interest of the individual comes first before that of society thus making the student's attitudes and beliefs free from socio-cultural encumbrances. Goldthorpe argues that even though the society may have certain expectations for a student's choice the prime motivator for the student to act should be their own individual preferences.

Therefore Goldthorpe approaches choice making as an individual process which emerges as rational when the chosen alternative is primarily based on the student's individual preferences. Applied to this study the theory provided the opportunity to achieve gender responsiveness in subject choice by focusing on the student's individual preferences.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a case study design, in collecting information from the sample population in order to assess gender and development as a subject choice for master's students in Nairobi County. This research was carried out in selected universities in Nairobi County that offer gender and development studies at the master's level. Public and private universities were targeted because the study sought diverse views from students from different parts of the country who were mostly found in public universities and students from Nairobi County who were mostly found in private universities. The universities in Nairobi County had an approximated total postgraduate student population of 240,000 registered for various courses (KNBS, 2015). The target population for this study comprised of master's students in both public and private universities taking gender and development studies and development studies. The County has a total of seven public universities and fifteen private universities out of which only eight (four public and four private) offer gender and development studies or courses with a gender and development component such as development studies. The eight universities had approximately a total 250 master's students registered in the gender and developments studies departments for years 2013/ 2014 to 2014/2015. The researcher purposively selected four universities that offered gender and development studies or courses with a gender component. The four universities were inclusive of public and private universities. A sample of 54% from the total population of the students taking gender and development studies in the four universities (which was 122 students) in the years 2013/2014 to 2014/ 2015 was chosen which translated to a total sample of sixty six students. Lecturers, chairpersons and gender and development master's students were purposively selected to act as key informants. The study used both primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected from the study respondents in the form of open-ended questionnaires and interview schedules. While secondary data was collected from libraries in the form of information from textbooks, journals and research theses and publications.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

4.1.1 Gender distribution of the respondents

In this sub-section the study sought to establish the gender distribution of the respondents to enable a clear gender analysis of the findings. The total number of students of gender and development and development studies departments for the years 2013/2014-2014-2015 is shown in table 1 below. The total number of students who participated in the study were 51(77%) women and 15(23%) men making a total of 66 respondents as shown in table 2. Of the 20 key informants, 10 were women and 10 were men. This study purposively sought the views of both men and women taking gender and development studies to ensure inclusivity and representation

of both. It was also crucial to get the views of both to make the study more meaningful from a gender and development perspective.

Table 1: Total registered students per department for years 2013/2014- 2014/2015

Institution	Men	Women	Total per University for years 2013/2014-2014/2015
Kenyatta University (gender and development studies)	10	45	55
University of Nairobi (gender and development studies)	7	43	60
Mount Kenya University (development studies)	15	20	35
St.Paul's University (development studies)	12	14	26
Total	44	122	

Table 2: Total number of respondents per university

Institution	Men	%	Women	%	Total per University
Kenyatta University	7	46	15	29	22
University of Nairobi	4	27	20	39	24
Mount Kenya University	3	20	10	20	13
St.Paul's University	1	7	6	12	7
Total	15	100	51	100	

From table 1 and 2 above it is noted that the student distribution is asymmetrical with there being more women than men both in terms of those registered for gender and development studies and

those who participated in the study. Flabbi (2011) attributes this to a variety of reasons such as women acquire a little more tertiary education than men, are the majority of graduates in humanities and perform better than men in the humanities. In the World Development Report (2012), it is noted that there are gender differences in tertiary education across the world where women are overrepresented in arts and humanities, health and education and underrepresented in engineering, manufacturing, construction and science.

Additionally the report notes that in tertiary education women are more likely to participate than men a difference that increases with overall participation rates. The report further notes that between 1970 and 2008 in Sub Saharan Africa, the number of female tertiary students increased more than sevenfold (from 10.8 million to 80.9 million) compared with a fourfold increase among males. The researcher notes that this trend of more women participating and enrolling could be a factor contributing to the above asymmetry in the enrolment for gender and development studies in Nairobi County.

4.1.2 Marital status of the respondents

The study sought to establish the marital status of the respondents at the master's level pursuing gender and development studies to get a clear understanding of the findings. As shown in Table 3 of the 16 men students, 4 (25%) of the men interviewed were married, 10 (62%) single and 2 (13%) in a come we- stay- relationship. Out of the 50 women students interviewed, 11 (22%) were married, 35 (70%) single, 2 (4%) divorced and 2 (4%) in a come we- stay- relationship.

Table 3: Marital status of male and female students

Marital Status	Number	Men (%)	Number	Women (%)	Total
Married	3	20	11	22	14
Single	10	67	36	70	46
Divorced	0	0	2	4	2
Separated	0	0	0	0	0
Come we- stay- relationship	2	13	2	4	4
Total	15	100	51	100	

In identifying this variable, the study took note of the fact that gender and development studies as a career choice for women and men students is based on the notions of gender equality and how these are defined and perceived in or outside the marital context (Klasen & Francesca, 2009). The findings showed the highest number of women and men students that made the choice to pursue gender and development studies were single as compared to those who were married or in a come we –stay- relationship. This suggests that gender and development studies was more appealing to single students as they did not as yet have fixed notions of gender issues such as equality whereas those in marriage and come we-stay relationships were influenced by

how the society perceived gender issues as having a detrimental role in families (Amin and Islam, 2015).

4.1.3 Age of the respondents

Age of the students was thought to be a crucial component, as it reveals the age categories of those pursuing gender and development studies at the master's level. Scholars have noted that, the age may influence individual values which in turn influences the student's choice (White, Cox and Cooper, 1992). The findings are presented in table 4.

Table 4 Age of the male and female students

Age	Number	Men (%)	Number	Women (%)	Total Number
20-29	8	54	28	55	36
30-39	5	33	17	33	22
40-49	2	13	3	6	5
50-59	0	0	3	6	3
60-69	0	0	0	0	
Total	15	100	51	100	

From Table 4 the group aged 20-29 years had the highest number of men 8 (54%) and women 28 (55%) students followed by the group aged 30-39 years with 5 (33%) men and 17 (33%) women. The possible explanation for more younger and literal no older students pursuing the master's degree could be the fact that in Africa consumption of education is higher among the younger age groups and consumption of healthcare higher among the older groups (Canning, Raja & Yazbeck, 2015)

There were fewer older people choosing gender and development studies with 2 (13%) for men and 3(6%) for women for the age bracket of 40-49 and 3(6%) women for the age group 50-59. This decline in choice by the older people could be attributed to the maintenance and decline stages in the career development, which did not allow them to make new choices (White, Cox and Cooper, 1992).

4.2 Effect of student's perceptions of master's choice of gender and development studies

The study sought to establish student's perceptions of their choice of gender and development studies at the master's level. This objective examined perceptions which are important to the student during the choice-making process. This is because perceptions are the student's assessment of what comprises choice, how accessible the choice is, as well as what choice is compatible with their values. The study posed closed and open-ended questions to the respondents, whose options were sought as to what and how perceptions played a role during their choice-making process. Table 5 below presents the findings.

Table 5: Effect of perceptions on student's master's choice of gender and development studies

	Women		Men	
	No.	%	No.	%
Perceptions of Acceptability	4	7	4	30
Perceptions of Prestige	6	12	0	0
Perceptions of Career Prospects	17	33	6	33
Perceptions of Career Relevance	8	16	3	20
Trusted Information and Guidance	7	14	2	17
Family and Career Balance	9	18	0	0

The study found that perceptions of career prospects at (33%), perceptions of acceptability at (30%) and perceptions of career relevance at (20%) were the major perceptions influencing the choice of master's program among the male respondents. Female respondent's choice of master's program was mainly influenced by perceptions of career prospects at (33%), family and career balance (18%) and perceptions of career relevance at (16%). These results are discussed as below:

4.2.1 Perceptions of acceptability

The results show that 30% of men perceived gender based acceptability as a factor while making their career choice and 7% of women did the same. Acceptability in career choice in the study pertained to the appropriateness of the choice in light of individual, societal and family factors. These factors were in turn influenced by African gender roles which dictated which career roles were deemed acceptable. Perceptions of acceptability could have featured as a stronger determinant for men than women owing to their closer link to societal gender role expectations.

Gender role expectations can be seen as a socializing influence, and views about the acceptable social roles of men and women can be seen as attitudinal sets that influence non traditional career choice (Lease, 2003). Men who perceived gender and development studies to be acceptable are likely to have more liberal gender attitudes that challenge traditional stereotyped perspectives of appropriate gender roles (Hayes, 1989). With regards to acceptability of career choice, one male respondent noted:

What is deemed as an acceptable career choice is dictated by the conservative nature of our society that demands adherence to the traditional roles of men and women and does not entertain deviance from these roles. Traditionally men were the breadwinners and in some communities women did not perform certain roles like constructing houses. However at present, especially in the urban areas perceptions have changed owing to lifestyle changes whereby

women are no longer restricted to their traditional roles and men have embraced those once associated with women(O.I. Paul, 7/08/2015).

The men in this study could have found perceived acceptability to be of more importance than women because they are traditionally supposed to be the moral custodians or gatekeepers of what is deemed as acceptable in the society, owing to their dominance in leadership positions. In this regard a male lecturer opined:

Men are used to being at the top of the house and to have the decision-making power. A woman who has power over him or is viewed as competing for power in the household and productive realms is not well tolerated by him, his family and friends(O.I, Casper 6/08/2015).

Other men respondents in the study made an association between dominant male leadership and a conservative society as being the source of what was deemed as an acceptable career choice. The researcher noted that even though most of the respondent's in the study were living in urban areas, the conservative outlook on gender roles that originated from the rural areas still had a hold on them.

In this regard a male lecturer opined:

The rural areas in Kenya are the source deeply rooted cultural perceptions. Male dominance is celebrated and entrenched with traditional symbols such as fly whisks, batons, elaborate head dresses and costumes. Male personalities are personified with attributes of courageous or strong animals such as the lion, the cockerel, the crocodile, and the bull among others. Such traditional symbols and personifications contribute to strengthening of the notion that men are the natural leaders and that what they dictate is what should be taken as acceptable in the society (O.I, Caleb 8/08/2015).

According to Gottfredson (1981), individual and social-environmental influences such as cultural gender role expectations, impact on gender roles as well as one's gender self image in career choice. The author further indicates that one's gender self image interacts with one's understanding of which career choices are acceptable. The researcher notes that cultural career expectations and notions such as: there are some careers that are the preserve of men and other for women may act as career barriers. This is because during the career decision making process students may be inclined to make decisions based on cultural acceptability instead of their individual preferences and aptitude for the course. This may be a reason for gender unresponsive enrolments in courses such as gender and development studies in Nairobi County.

The researcher notes that fewer women may have found perceived acceptability as a challenge as they may have found it compatible with their preferences and did not feel like they were going against their cultural career expectations. It may also indicate that the women respondents had more proximal factors acting in their favor such as such career contacts or academic advisors.

4.2.2 Perceptions of prestige

Perceived prestige was a factor only considered by women at 12%. Prestige in the study was the association of gender and development studies with high status in society, professionalism, employability and both local and international repute. Career prestige is associated with widely held cultural beliefs that attach greater social value and competence with one category of the attribute than another (Correll, 2001). The cultural status of a career choice provides the setting

for whether greater or lesser worthiness and competence are associated with the choice (Correll, 2004).

Fiske et al., (2002) notes that those possessing higher status in careers are expected to offer more valued contributions than those with lower status. The author further notes that higher status individuals are given more opportunities to participate and when they do participate in the group, their contributions are evaluated more positively. In this regard one female lecturer noted:

In Kenya since the Fourth Beijing Women Conference, opportunities for women in the gender and development area were amplified. Women's issues were in the limelight and careers emerged to address women's needs and concerns. A local woman's situation could now take international center stage and this encouraged many Kenyan women especially scholars and activists into the field, making gender and development studies prestigious (O.I, Geraldine, 16/08/2015).

Women respondents in the study noted that gender and development studies addressed issues that concerned them and that they felt included in terms of content and participation in the classes. Most of the women respondents, who participated in the study, were in gender and development careers or were anticipating entering into the field.

While in class the women respondents said that they felt at ease in participation and also felt that their contributions mattered. This led to feelings of worthiness and competence among the women respondents. One female respondent opined that:

I view my choice as strategic and enabling because I am exposed to better career opportunities and that my choice will make me a gender focal point. I feel like I will be part of a society that contributes to issues that have long been neglected. I also feel I have a role to play in the sensitization of gender issues. I am aware of my privileged position as not many women have such an opportunity (O.I, Getrude, 5/08/2015).

Despite most women in the study viewing the career choice as prestigious they were aware that not everyone especially men found the course to be prestigious. This may be due to what Ridgeway (1997) terms as status beliefs and stereotypes that operate as schemas for interpreting and making sense of the social world. The researcher notes that status beliefs and stereotypes when viewed as cultural schemas are likely to lead to gender unresponsiveness at enrolments of master's students.

This is because even students who do not personally endorse beliefs that men choose more prestigious courses than women, are likely not to endorse gender and development studies as a prestigious course. The researcher notes that this can be attributed to the students' awareness of these beliefs existing in their culture and expect that others will expect them to choose the more prestigious male oriented courses. This expectation or what we think most other people believe has been shown to modify behaviour and bias judgment (Correll, 2004).

4.2.3 Perceptions of career prospects

The perceptions of career prospects of gender and development studies highly influenced choice at 33% for men and 33% for women. This was the most highly ranked perception among both men and women and had to do mainly with employability. Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) define employability as the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through

the optimal use of competences. The men and women respondents chose gender and development as they perceived that their choice would lead to new employment opportunities or enable upward mobility in existing careers.

Hayes (1989) among other reasons noted that when it came to career employability men were likely to choose a career associated with women owing to opportunities for advancement to authority positions that may not be available in male dominated occupations. This was the case in the study as one male respondent noted:

I think being a man played a role in my choice as I felt I had a higher advantage in the job market over women, even if gender and development studies was considered as a woman's turf. This is because there were fewer men entering in female concentrated careers thus granting them with more employment slots and greater receptivity as they could be seen as proof that gender equality works. Additionally I had done prior research and found out that when a man ventures into a female concentrated profession such as catering, they enjoy higher status and wages than women in the same field(O.I Anthony, 18/08/2015).

The views of the respondent concurred with research that has noted that men who enter female-concentrated occupations, benefit from their minority status (Gutek and Groff Cohen, 1992). These benefits include remuneration where by men are paid more than women in female-concentrated occupations (Williams, 1995; England and Herbert, 1993). Such benefits have been linked to the glass escalator effect whereby men progress more quickly than women to senior positions (Williams, 1995). The effects of this process are apparent in vertical segregation that sees a higher proportion of men in upper echelons of female concentrated occupations (Lupton, 2006).

Concerning this a key informant in the gender and development sector noted that:

Men find the career prospects of gender and development studies so appealing because of greater rewards and prestige. Men who have the gender and development studies qualification are more likely than women to have an advantage in hiring and promotions (O.I Angela, 21/08/2015).

The above advantages and benefits that men acquired in female concentrated careers may be attributed to what Williams (1995) described as men taking their gender privilege and sexual power with them into women's work and thus representing an advantaged rather than oppressed minority.

Despite what Williams (1995) noted about privilege and sexual power, the researcher noted that the men respondents in the study were not as assertive and confident as the women respondents when it came to expressing themselves and the way they felt about the course and its content. Even though men respondents were aware of the benefits and high employability that pursuing gender and development studies promised they did not want to entertain doubts about their masculinity or have their sexuality challenged.

This thin line between advantage in female concentrated occupations and the questioning of masculinity by the men respondents was noted by a lecturer as follows:

In a typical gender and development class male students are very conscious of the reactions of other students towards their choice as they do not want to be considered effeminate. However

when they realize that their classmates have accepted them they become fine with their choice. I have noted that men are more concerned with what their peers will think of them when they chose a course associated with women and women's activities(O.I, Sheila, 12/08/2015).

The researcher also notes that these advantages that gender and development studies offers to male respondents could lead the men to be as purposive entities that seek rewards and prestige rather than just heeding to gender stereotypes. This supports the rational choice theory employed in this study, as the theory posits that purposive entities put their interests and preferences before those of the society.

The women also interviewed in the study had similar reasons such as those of the men respondents. Most of the women were either seeking job promotions, entry into new careers or to enhance their consultancy work profile. Marshall (1984) however noted that women unlike men mostly consider prospective benefits while men weigh whether the prospective benefits exceed latent conflicts.

The researcher notes that women weighing prospective benefits could be the result of their complex reality whereby women have fewer choices available to them as compared to men. When a women is considering her career prospects and she understands that she is limited in terms of time, resources and career options, it make sense for her to focus primarily on the prospective benefits.

The researcher also noted that the career prospects for women not only comprised of the employability benefits, but was also inclusive of the benefits that they would gain to their overall wellbeing.

In this regard one female respondent noted:

I chose gender and development studies because as a woman I felt subdued by cultural constraints and saw that men especially those in leadership positions had not embraced inclusivity. As a result of my career choice, I now can articulate my standpoint on the need to include women in the development process and do not look down upon myself. I also now have healthy self esteem and increased confidence (O.I, Maria, 14/08/2015).

Other women respondents in the study also reported choosing gender and development studies because of benefits related to the above view, such as its association with women's empowerment and women's rights. The researcher notes that these additional benefits that women anticipate in gaining from their choice that did not feature with the male respondents could to be tied to women's complex reality of home-making and childcare.

The researcher notes further that the benefits of healthy self esteem, higher confidence greater empowerment and awareness of rights stem from feminist identification. This identification is beneficial to women as its curriculum underscores the importance of ability and a sense of personal agency as was rightly perceived by the women respondents while making their choice.

4.2.4 Trusted information and guidance

In terms of trusted information and guidance concerning gender and development studies men felt this was adequate at 17% higher than women who felt it was adequate at 14% respectively. Trusted information and guidance was mostly accrued by the respondents from background

influences such as past career choices, lecturers, mentors, friends and family members. Lecturers especially featured in this study as sources of trusted information and some of them were friends or in contact with the respondents. In this regard one female respondent noted:

A lecturer in the gender and development studies department whom I knew gave me the information that I needed while I was in the process of making a choice for my master's degree. I knew that I could rely on this information as the lecturer had previously taught me in the undergraduate level (O.I, Faith, 21/08/2015).

Among influences for guidance are family especially parents who were supportive of the student's past achievements and encouraged autonomy of decision-making. Parents featured for guidance in this study and in this regard one male respondent noted:

When I first made my choice to pursue gender and development studies, I discussed my prospective choice with my parents. My parents encouraged my choice because they liked the development field. They thereafter discussed my choice with their peers and then came to a unanimous conclusion that it was a good choice as its prospects were very promising (O.I, Samuel, 4/08/2015).

Lent et al. (2000) notes that background contextual factors guide and help shape the individual's career choice based on the prior learning experiences that they have experienced. In this case such background contextual factors that were present in this study were the respondent's undergraduate career choices. Some of the respondents had previously pursued gender and development studies or courses with a gender component such as anthropology or sociology. In this regard one male respondent noted:

My undergraduate background is in sociology and geography where I did units in gender and development. Since then gender and development studies has always been an interest of mine because I wanted to learn more about gender issues and my rights in the society(O.I. Meshack, 9/08/2015).

The effect that trusted information and guidance from the student's lecturers, parents, friends or background influences was one of reassurance to the students that they had chosen the right choice. Such reassurance has been construed to be a career support which has been associated with enhancing the students' belief in their scholastic aptitude and career decision self efficacy (Fass and Tubman, 2002).

When relating the above findings to the rational choice theory employed in this study, the researcher noted that just as the theory posits that the necessary information should be available, the respondents had information about their choice available to them. After the respondents examined the information they made their choice according to their preferences. However, the researcher noted that the theory did not factor in the support input from the respondents environment from their families, friends and lecturers which played a role in this study.

4.2.5 Perceptions of career relevance

Perceptions on whether gender and development studies was relevant, in this context relevance means that their choice was anchored in the day to day reality as based on their preconceptions before career choice. The men in this study scored higher than women at 20% while women at 16% felt that their choice was relevant to their reality. The student's career reality was based on

what Hemsley-Brown (1999) refers to as preconceptions; these were social, economic and cultural frames of reference, self image and group identity.

The researcher noted that students entered the preliminary search stage of their choice-making process with a set of preconceptions which affected their willingness to pursue gender and development studies. These preconceptions also acted as a filter mechanism when assimilating career information later in the process.

In this regard one female respondent in the study said:

My choice was influenced by a local university that was launching a gender training program for staff members whereby they needed consultants. It then occurred to me that even though my undergraduate degree was in development studies, I was qualified enough to train on gender and development because I had done gender and development units in my undergraduate studies (O.I. Lena, 19/08/2015).

From the above verbatim it may be noted that the preconceptions of the respondent's career were shaped by social and group interests. Blustein *et al.*, (2004) has noted that these interests are shaped by the relational perspective where people tend to seek connectedness through role models and mentors. Other respondents in the study reported as having their preconceptions being shaped by other factors such as economic factors. In this regard one male respondent noted:

My choice was influenced by economic realities, I am the first born in a family of six children and my parents are paying for my master's degree in gender and development studies. I made the choice to pursue gender and development studies as I perceived it to be a marketable course whereby I could easily get employed and in turn educate my siblings(O.I. Thomas , 14/08/2015).

Trevor- Roberts (2006) notes that career choices are often made under conditions of continual change, uncertainty, and contingent employment. When structural barriers to opportunity and financial realities constrain desired career decisions, individuals attempt to make good decisions within their life contexts (Phillips & Jome, 2005). The researcher noted that in this study that the respondent's preconceptions of career relevance were mainly shaped whether directly or indirectly by economic factors. The dominance of economic factors may be attributed to factors like the ratio of working-age population to dependents rising and the absolute number of young workers entering the labour force rising creating large youth cohorts (Canning, Raja & Yazbeck, 2015).

Korenman and Neumark (2000) further note that being born into a large cohort, known as generational crowding, may reduce wages and lead to large scale unemployment among the youth. The researcher notes that with unemployment rife this may lead the respondent's carefully evaluating how they are investing their resources in education. This is because the respondent's will want to chose a career that will give them greater chances of employment and maximize on their earning capacity.

4.2.6 Family and career balance

Lastly no men perceived that their choice brought about family and career balance, while 18% of women perceived that their choice was connected to family and career balance. For the women respondents this was particularly an important variable as it was the second highest scoring

variable. Family and career balance was taken in this study to mean how women balanced their family and career related responsibilities. Some of the women respondent's in the study were married and this meant that when they were making their career choice they had to factor in their marital responsibilities. In this regard one female respondent noted:

Choosing to pursue my postgraduate degree was challenging as during the day I was working and in the evening I had household duties. I therefore had to choose my career over my household duties upsetting my family in the process as I had chosen my career over them. An additional challenge I faced was that pursuing gender and development studies was viewed negatively by our family friends as encouraging the absconding of my marital duties. I am lucky that my husband understands how competitive the employment standards are, and that you need to continually upgrade your qualifications. However some other married women are not as lucky as I to have such a supportive husband and as a result their evening education has stalled (O.I. Elizabeth, 17/08/2015).

Other married women respondents in the study reported similar sentiments that it was difficult to balance their family and career duties. While those women respondent's who were not married but were working during the day said that the evening classes took a toll on their vitality levels leaving them feeling drained. A key informant in the gender and development sector noted that:

Unlike in the past, the family career balance and free versus working time balance in higher educational attainment has now featured as a crucial element in working women's progression. Women have been known to have triple roles and the juggling of these roles has proved to be problematic for women. This is because they must now learn fast how to achieve this balance in their roles in light of shrinking employment slots in the labour market(O.I. Grace, 17/08/2015).

In the ILO (2016) report on women and work the above sentiments are echoed in a 2015 poll where more than 9,500 women in the G20 countries found that work family balance was the top-work related issue for women flagged as such by 44% of the respondents. Additionally the ILO (2015) in a survey of 1,300 private sector companies in 39 developing countries found the greater burden of family responsibilities was borne by women than men and was ranked as the number one barrier to women's leadership.

The researcher notes that since unpaid household and care work disproportionately falls on women family responsibilities need to be equally distributed between women and men. This is because the unequal share of unpaid household and care work may result in direct or indirect discrimination and tensions between work, family responsibilities and private life, which are detrimental to individual and collective well being.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The objective of the study was to investigate the effects of perceptions on the student's choice of gender and development studies. The study found that women perceived gender and development studies as prestigious, participatory, empowering and economically sound. The effects of women's perceptions they felt that they had made the right career choice and were confident despite of cultural constraints. Men perceived gender and development studies as a

financially rewarding course but were more influenced by the patriarchal cultural ideals of the society. Perceived economic benefits therefore played a major role in the choice of gender and development studies.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concluded that since women and men while making their choices are conditioned by different factors, there needed to be the implementation of career education that incorporated these factors such as exploration with career counsellors and provision of career resources by mentors and role models. This career education needs to factor in the context specific student's perceptions elements in the Kenyan society, such as perceptions of acceptability, prestige, career prospects, trusted information and guidance, perceptions of career relevance and the aspect of family and career balance.

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for achieving gender responsiveness in enrolment interventions in gender and development studies in Nairobi County:

1. Universities in the county should implement career education in the form of career counselling and mentorship programs for the students. This can be a good avenue for self exploration with students during choice-making where they can be administered tests to ensure that they make their choice free of gender bias and stereotypes.
2. To make known about the underrepresentation of men in gender and development studies, universities in the county should hold talks in the media and disseminate information about gender responsiveness in the university campuses through posters, pamphlets and in career choice materials.
3. There should be awareness, sensitization and outreach programs by the university that discuss gender unresponsiveness during the choice-making process. Pre-career talks by role models who are in gender and development studies can help to create clarity as to what the students will experience once they choose gender and development studies.
4. To narrow the chances of gender unresponsiveness there should be equal participation of women and men in gender roles implemented in educational curricula at all levels. This will prepare women and men for a career in which they do not experience underrepresentation thus being productive to their employers and enjoying their career choice.

5.4 Areas for further research

This study focused on investigating the effects of student's perceptions on master's choice of gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County. A study should also be undertaken in other urban counties to establish other determinants of career choice in gender and development studies.

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