

The Interplay between Gender-Based Workplace Prejudice and Girls' Occupational Choice at Bahir Dar Polytechnic College

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Abstract: This study aims to pin down whether there is linearity between gender-based occupational stereotyping and the professional choice of girls at Bahir Dar Polytechnic College. Four interrelated basic questions treated through qualitative design were emphasized to spearhead the study. Thirteen female students and one key informant took part in the study. The analysis and interpretation of data demonstrated that the gender-based workplace labeling has put over its own impact on the professional choice of girls in the college. That is, the professional gender context in the college is the reflection of the gender stratification that exists in the wider society in general and in the work place practices in particular. It also revealed that efforts made so far by the college to minimize the gender-based occupational labeling have been more of futile exercises. The problem of gender stereotyping in the college is, therefore, not that much pushed over except the placement of as many girls as possible in traditionally male-dominated occupations through a quota system.

Keywords: gender, gender-based occupational prejudice, occupational choice, occupational, stereotyping, TVET.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are a number of compelling reasons why it is important to encourage females to access technical and vocational education and training (TVET). According to African Union (2007), Anker (1997; 1998) and UNESCO (1999), for instance, at least three major reasons can be mentioned in this respect. First, the nature of the labor market is changing and females can no longer rely on the traditionally segregated and limited range of occupations. Second, since an increasing number of occupations in our steadily globalizing market environment are technical, females need to be given the opportunity and ability to access those occupations. Otherwise, they will continue to suffer from unemployment, poverty and male dominance. Third, in our contemporary socio-economic environment many of society's problems are resolved by the application of science and technology and females' increased participation in this field can bring important knowledge and transformation in their day to day engagements in particular and on the perspective of science and technology from the standpoint of females in general.

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The context of gender-based occupational stereotyping

No matter it is practiced consciously or unconsciously, different sources (e.g., African Union, 2007; Anker, 1997; 1998; Ethiopian Society of Population Studies [ESPS], 2008) argue that gender-based occupational segregation (perception as if there is women's work or men's work) is the result of gender patterns of socialization and gender roles. These sources also contend that the perception is often reinforced by everybody else. Other various sources (e.g., Fawcett & Howden, 1998; Kilbourne, England, Farkas, Beron & Weir, 1994; Sharma, n.d; Van Deursen, 2009; Webb, 2009), similarly, inform that females who have got the opportunity to join TVET institutions themselves choose special occupations leading to jobs that have typically been occupied by females. According to the latter sources, such occupations included hair dressing, secretary science, nursing, pre-primary and primary school teaching, garment manufacturing and textile, bakery and confectionery, home economics and hotel works. Due to this, Fawcett and Howden (1998), Van Deursen (2009) as well as Webb (2009) summarize that females' occupations are mostly concentrated in what they called the five Cs: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical works, all of which are accorded low status and are low-paid. Accordingly, they argue, that specialties which are geared more towards the industrial and the construction technologies are traditionally reserved for males. ESPS (2008) and Helina (2015), too, confirm that such stereotyping where only some occupations are reserved for females is a common phenomenon of occupational segregation in the context of Ethiopia, too. Laderchi, Lofgren, and Abdula (2010) on their part suggest that all the facts mentioned above are the reflections of the general problem of occupational stereotypes widespread in the occupational career and earning system of citizens in the entire country.

ESPS (2008), Sharma (n.d) and Helina (2015) on their part claim that gender inequality in TVET enrollment implies that males and females are not prepared equally for integration into the labor market. Such a tendency of males and females to work in different occupations and the resultant overlooking of the value of female occupations, inevitably, extend into far-reaching consequences of gender pay gap. Although females are employed in all economic activities that males are endowed with, according to these authorities, the force of stereotyping and gender structure of the labor market have confined and marginalized them mostly to low-skilled and low paid jobs. The sources, similarly, unveil that females in those countries often end up self-employed in the informal market.

Different sources (e.g., African Union, 2007; Anker, 1997; 1998; ESPS, 2008) contend that the origins of gender-based occupational leveling start in early life before schooling. According to those sources occupational choice takes place and persists in school lives to steer females and males into subject choices at schooling that subsequently impacts on their future career options. Primarily, the stereotyping or the status that societies attribute to females has contributed to the low enrolment of females in male-dominated occupations of TVET. The division of responsibilities between males and females is, therefore, based on such a complex system of long-standing traditions and attitudes related to gender segregation before and after schooling.

When viewed across the entire spectrum of occupations, according to Blackburn (2009), ESPS (2008), Fawcett and Howden (1998) and Webb (2009), gender-based occupational prejudice has two general forms: horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal segregation is a type of gender-based occupational segregation whereby the labor force of an occupation constitutes mostly one particular gender. Such a type of segregation can be seen while occupations that demand better physical strength and better pay like that of construction and manufacturing are dominated by males where as others that demand care and follow up such as childcare and household activities are almost exclusively female occupations. Vertical segregation, on the other hand, is a segregation where opportunities for career development within an organization are narrowed down for a particular gender. This type of segregation more commonly affects females than males. This can be verified by the worldwide fact that females are less likely to work as managers, senior officials, or in general highly posted and highly paid occupations when compared to those of males irrespective of their professional qualification and competence (Helina, 2015).

According to Anker (1997), ESPS (2008) and Hakim (1979) the root causes of gender-based occupational stereotyping and the consequent payment discrimination are many and typical to most developing countries. The core among them, according to those sources, is the gender disparity in access for education and training because access to employment is positively and directly related to the opportunity and level of education and training. For them, gender-based occupational discrimination, therefore, does not come after the point of entry into the labor market. But it is mostly premeditated with the traditional unequal division of labor within the home and the choice made in education and training systems that are usually characterized by reinforcing gender-based occupational segregation. To begin with, females have historically been victims of lower educational and training attainments than males. Secondly, even those who have got the opportunity of access for education and training usually do not proceed further. Thirdly, the great majority of females usually work in different informal sector jobs such as household occupations, agriculture and livestock rising that require no technical skills and are low valued. Such activities are mostly considered to have limited or no financial returns and hence their employment in these occupations does not contribute much to their status and empowerment. Thus, women hardly have autonomy and hence are dependent on their partners in most aspects of their life. In most cases, consequently, it is only comparatively in recent times that only a limited number of females have got recognition and reached senior positions in professions in which males have been well established for a long time.

According to Anker (1997), Fawcett and Howden (1998) as well as Sharma (n. d), in general, entry into the labor market and possibilities of promotion and career development are often hindered by either lack of acquiring technical skills and knowledge or because the type of training and the skills and qualifications acquired by females are not valued enough. For Fawcett and Howden (1998), particularly, often it is found very difficult for females to enter to TVET schools for various reasons. First and for most females are highly occupied with huge household activities and hence are either denied access for training or are not expected

to enter certain male-dominated occupations. Secondly, due to the saturation of the traditionally female-oriented occupations, if there are some to join the male-dominated occupations, they may not be competent enough with their male counterparts and hence may not escape failure in employment opportunities. Thirdly, even in cases where none of the above problems are faced, there are cases where stereotypes that disregard the acquisition of females in TVET qualifications are predominant.

In addition to education and training, according to Anker (1997; 1998), ESPS (2008) and Hakim (1979), there are other socio-economic, cultural and historical factors that determine the extent and pattern of gender-based occupational labeling and the consequent low pay. To highlight them social norms and stereotypical perceptions regarding gender social security issues, the structure of the labor market and discriminations at entry and in work are the major ones. All the factors, for those authorities, including education and training, are interlinked to each other and hence the social norms and stereotypical perceptions regarding males and females are male biased. Accordingly, they assert, females (whether educated or not) are traditionally considered as good wives and mothers who are expected to be engaged in family life or family responsibility and activities related to these still precluded, particularly, many married females from taking part in schooling as well as in the labor market. In other words, these authorities contend, since most parental attitudes regarding gender socialization are stereotypically perceived in such a way that males should go out to work and females should take care of the home and the family, females have not only hardly been enjoying the opportunities for education and training but also been subjected to stereotypical choices of fields of education and training.

According to Anker (1998), the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2010) and ESPS (2008), the last factor is discrimination at entry to work and in work. This is to mean that, directly or indirectly, females face occupational segregation either by being prohibited to join the labor market initially or by being discriminated in their occupations while they are in the labor market. The direct forms of discrimination can be favoring males in recruitment, selection, training delivery, promotion, pay rate, and so forth. According to those sources, even there are cases that females often prefer not to apply for a particular post because they anticipate segregation or are socialized into and believe that traditional divisions of labor are correct and acceptable, an excuse that should not be used as a ground for continued occupational segregation. What should be underlined here is, be it imposed by the tradition and males or recognized by females themselves, they insist, discriminations at entry to work and at work have their own negative impacts not only on females but also on the entire society at large. That is because females are at least half of the entire society whose contributions can in no way be underestimated.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Needless to say, as part of the human resource, females, cannot be left at the margin of the socio-economic development endeavors in any society. Otherwise, as is often said, it is a mere loss of half of the productive force and the consequent benefits to be gained from their

participation. Massive female involvement in TVET, particularly in male-dominated occupations, may be one of the crucial strategies in creating equality and equity² between males and females. Concurrently, gender-sensitive practices in the sector more likely contribute to build-up females' human and social capital that has remained to be low and vulnerable for various socio-economic and political pressures. To this effect, according to ESPS (2008) and Ministry of Education (MoE) (2008), enhancing their involvement in male-dominated occupations of TVET is an indispensable measure required in the empowerment of females.

That is more likely why the government of Ethiopia (MoE, 2008; 2015; Transitional Government of Ethiopia [TGE], 1994) has emphasized that equity, particularly in the encouragement of girls to join traditionally non-female oriented occupations in TVET, is given steadily growing attention to provide an increasingly high number of female students in TVET. Consistently, MoE (2008) has developed a TVET strategy that principally addresses the problems related to females in the TVET system. The strategy stipulates that utmost efforts will be applied to create appropriate and adequate understanding on TVET among the society and thereby avoid gender-based occupational discrimination and ensure equal access for both sexes in all occupations.

Nevertheless, various sources of literature indicate that Ethiopia is still challenged with a serious problem of gender inequality in various aspects. Laderchi, Lofgren, and Abdula (2010, p.195), for instance, stated that "...Ethiopia lags behind other countries in achieving gender equality." These authorities have also noted that the problem in Ethiopia is higher than even from that of the Sub-Saharan African cases and other low income countries around the world, although the commitment and legislative measures to address gender disparities have strengthened through time. In line with this, Helina (2015) reports that in Ethiopia the economic participation of women (78.2%) is lower than men's (89.3%) despite the fact that the country is characterized by one of the highest participation rates of women in the economy. Helina, additionally, describes that in Ethiopia most females are employed in the informal and low valued sector (unpaid family labor) whereas males have dominated the high-valued formal sector. Moreover, she strongly argues that it is only in the informal and unpaid sector that female workers are usually overrepresented. Furthermore, she conveys that in both urban and rural areas managerial, professional and technical occupations are dominated by males whereas elementary jobs such as clerical and physical works as well as services' and sales works are predominantly occupied and reserved for females. The pattern of gender pay gap is also emphasized by Helina where she has stated that in Ethiopia males are paid more than females in all employment sectors. According to her, it all implies that there is an overall trend of women's employment disadvantage across the economy in the country.

² *Equity and equality are conceptually different. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful whereas equality is treating everyone the same.*

In light of the above background, this study examines the influence of the traditional gender-based workplace segregation on the occupational choice of girls and its consequences at Bahir Dar Polytechnic College (BDPC). Although it is hardly possible to pinpoint the research gap to be filled due to the difficulty to get an empirical research result undertaken on such a specific gender related problem in the context of Ethiopian TVET so far, it is not that difficult to understand that the study can explore and pin down the challenges of gender inequality in the TVET system as a consequence of the traditional gender based occupational stereotyping³. To that effect, the research activity is intended to answer three guiding questions: (1) what does the proportion of females in the different occupations on which training is provided in the study college look like? (2) How do females determine their occupational choice in the college? (3) What are the underlying influences that different reference groups (parents, peers, seniors, etc.) impose on girls' occupational choices?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Both the education and training policy (TGE, 1994) and the TVET strategy (MoE, 2008) stipulate that gender mainstreaming⁴ in the provision of TVET is the major reform measure to be taken in the education and training system of Ethiopia. The intention of this measure is to rule out gender inequalities in the system. The measure, apparently, enables to involve more human resource (females) than ever before in the labor market and thereby fosters the development endeavors of the country. In line with this policy and strategy intentions in TVET, this study sought to pin point problems that are related to gender-based occupational segregation in the TVET system and their far reaching socio-economic implications. Accordingly, the study is intended to provide the following major benefits: (1) It helps policy makers and practitioners effectively understand the what, how and why of the challenges that females are faced with in the TVET system; (2) It informs the college under study, and other similar colleges, with the defects in and ways out to improve girls' participation in male-dominated occupations; (3) It is of great help for females in informing them about the consequences of clinging to their traditional occupational choices; and (4) It can attract researchers to pay attention for the problem of gender stereotyping in the TVET system.

METHODOLOGY

Two major population categories were targeted by the study. Female students of the college were the first in this regard. These were the first year Focus Group Interview I (FGI-I) and levels III and IV (senior year) female students (FGI-II) because it enables to compare and contrast the perceptions between those whose occupational choices are not yet influenced by TVET experiences (such as impression with the college, teacher, or friends at the college)

³ *Stereotyping is to reduce somebody to an oversimplified category or to categorize individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardized image, idea or perception (Jagtenberg & D'Alton, 1995).*

⁴ *Gender mainstreaming is the integration of gender issues into every aspect of development program, which is usually practiced across the world to empower females.*

and those whose longer college life may have changed their perception and thinking. Among them six participants of each category, twelve in total, were involved in the study. Participants from senior students were recruited from both male dominated and female dominated occupations to compare and contrast the underlying perceptions between the two. In addition, a key informant, appropriate and relevant college official, took part for the purpose of implementing the combined levels of triangulation in the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005).

The sampling technique that I implemented for drawing student participants was basically a stratified type – senior and junior batch students –accompanied by a purposive sampling method. That is, six more outgoing, articulate, and assertive young female students (all represented with pseudonyms) were recruited from each batch through consultation with the college officials and instructors and on a voluntary basis (Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Besides, a key informant with a pseudonym of Kasahun was purposefully selected and involved due to his rich experience and ample information.

The study has employed a qualitative research method of phenomenological type. It was phenomenological in its approach, primarily, because it has focused on the direct experiences of participants from whom face value information was gathered through FGI and one-to-one interview. Secondly, this method was found appropriate because the researcher has planned to explore a phenomenon on which little study has been carried out so far. Thirdly, phenomenology aims at securing an in-depth information and understanding of any subject under investigation. In addition, documentary examination was carried out focusing on the census of female enrolment with respect to occupational type to enhance the validity of the qualitative data gathered (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Sherman & Web, 2005).

The study has utilized three different methods to collect data: FGI, an interview, and documentary examination. Data collected from relevant documents has answered the first basic question. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, was implemented to gather data on the remaining two questions. The general interview guide approach was implemented in the study. This was, primarily, because this approach is recommended for studies of such types that have a sense of social class, race, gender and the like. Secondly, this approach enabled me to gather a comprehensive data by saving from missing issues untouched or unexplored during the interview process. That is it helped me to save time by avoiding time wastage as a result of jumping back and forth from topic to topic time and again (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2012; Seidman, 2006).

The FGI method is the type of interview implemented in the study. That is because, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005), this method is recommended for such studies which involve participants that are engaged in a similar occupation whereby everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are saying. The implementation of this method also assisted me to gather a wide range of painstaking data from the participants in a quicker and shorter time than could have been through individual interviewing method.

FGI was conducted in two different groups (i.e. in an independent session with participants from two different batches). During the interview session participants were encouraged to take part as actively, openly and honestly as possible in the discussion. When the need arises, I also involved myself into the dialogue and made unbiased probing on participants for further debate for or against the underlying idea throughout the discussion. That is why FGI has been preferred to FGD. In this regard, I made as much care as possible to maintain validity by avoiding imposition (e.g., posing leading questions) on the participants that might result from my preconceived notions. For securing more participation, better communication (easy understanding by participants of what is being asked and avoiding my misperceptions of what the participants are saying) and thereby to minimize problems of validity the interview was conducted in Amharic. Before stepping into the FGI, I included the judgmental validation of few teachers in the college who have adequate information on the study topic in connection with the peculiarities of the study area. This measure also assisted in ensuring the content validity and reliability of the interview questions. Through such an effort it became possible not only to gather a more clear, relevant, and adequate feedback but also to shade a light of relevant triangulation in the interview discussion that otherwise could not have been achieved (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

The data collected through FGI, interviews and document analysis were organized, described and analyzed in integration. This activity, apparently, begun during data collection. In accordance with the arguments of Bogdan and Biklen (1998) as well as Patton (2002) the organization and description of data included a careful integration, triangulation and verification activities across data sources. Data were further collected time and again at times when information gaps were faced. The data analysis strategy pursued was a mixture of both case analysis and cross-case analysis strategies. Primarily, all the data gathered were classified case by case for each participant. Then, the data analyzed case by case per participant were interwoven and grouped in line with the thematic topics. At the same time, individual differences were focused with respect to each question through a cross-case analysis strategy. Finally, the newly emerging analytic insight and interpretation, the case of poverty cycle of TVET in the college, was also taken in to consideration.

RESULTS

Data collected through different methods were categorized into three thematic topics: background information; trends of female enrolments in BDPC; and occupational choices of females in BDPC. This was done for the sake of convenience in the description and presentation of the data. The background information provides a snapshot of information regarding the college. Student enrolment and placement has focused on the grounds that the college used to enroll and place new entrants as well as the trends of enrolment and placement of girls. In fact, although the presentation of the result is categorized into the three subtopics, these major thematic topics are not mutually exclusive or are interrelated.

A Glimpse of BDPC

BDPC is located in the outskirts of the city of Bahir Dar (the seat of the Amhara State government), after crossing the Blue Nile, nearly some three kilometers north-east of the center of the city. It is just on the edge of the main road to the historic city of Gondar. Documentary evidences found in the college reveal that it has been established in 1997. As one of the seven Skill Development Centers (SDCs) in the State of Amhara, it was established to materialize the new education and training policy, a policy that gave due attention for gender equality. Initially, it used to provide training on seven different occupations: building construction, auto-mechanics, metalwork, electricity, woodwork, surveying, and drafting. Until September 2000 the training it delivered on those occupations was completed in ten months for which a certificate was awarded for graduates.

As of September 2001 it has changed its name from Bahir Dar SDC to Bahir Dar TVET Institute in line with which it has also changed its training programs from issuing a ten months' certificate to certificates at 10 + 1 and 10 +2 levels. In addition, it has widened the types of occupations that it used to deliver training into eighteen that were departmentalized into four core sectors: industrial technology; construction technology; home science; and business. Then by September 2005 it has further upgraded itself to a college level, one of the three TVET colleges established in the State of Amhara, to deliver training at a diploma (10+3) level. By this time its name was also changed to Bahir Dar Construction Technology College and the occupations of training delivery were raised to twenty-two. However, as its name indicates, at this juncture it was limited to focus its delivery only on the occupations of construction sector. By September 2007, however, it was renamed Bahir Dar TVET College, a name intentionally given to reverse the resolution passed by the regional government to limit its training delivery only on the construction sector. Following that, it has been delivering training in various occupations ranging from level I to level IV. Then in 2010 it has upgraded itself into a polytechnic college whereby it has started to deliver training at level V, too. Hence its name has become BDPC. Currently BDPC has started to deliver training at an undergraduate (first degree) level in different construction fields to provide the entire TVET system of the country with better opportunities of qualified teacher supply.

Trends of trainee placement

Data sources inform that student placement trend in all TVET colleges in the State in general did not enable everybody to meet his/her primary choice of fields. That is because securing the primary occupational choice at all owes (or is directly related) to a student's Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE) or the 10th grade results. Those that have better EGSECE results are given their primary choices whereas those with lower grades are more likely placed on occupations that may not be their choice at all. Accordingly, those who cannot get their first choice can be given their second choice so far as their EGSECE achievement enables them to secure it. Still those who cannot secure their second choice can be placed on their third choice under similar conditions. Ultimately, others who cannot secure their third choice are placed randomly based only on the availability of vacancies for placement. According to FGI-II participants, therefore, with the exception of a

handful of girls (boys too) who have secured their first choice due to their EGSECE results, most of the girls that are placed on hard occupations have been placed randomly by disregarding their interests.

After agreeing with the above explanation, the key informant (Kasahun) regrettably complains the dependence of most candidates' decisions more on the hearsays of peers, seniors and/or parents than on guidance and counseling service delivered by the college. According to him, this has been the major misleading factor on both the enrolment and occupational choice of the young girls who complete secondary schooling. He has reported that he understood this fact from the discussion forums he undertook with the female students of the college at different times as well as from the feedbacks and reports he used to gather about the practices of guidance and counseling services.

With distress and regret, Kassahun further added that neither the students nor the college have been benefiting from the reliance on hearsays. This is because measures taken by the girls based on hearsays primarily forced them to demand unemployable white-collar occupations that are mostly left for private colleges. Secondly, dislike of hard occupations on which the college is ready to deliver TVET has been creating much inefficiency in resource utilization that otherwise could have been allocated for other activities. Consequently, he stressed, many girls are still losing useful opportunities that they can gain from BDPC due to reliance on hearsays. The problem also resulted in not only the retention of gender-based occupational segregation in the college but also left girls vulnerable for gender related problems in their future employment careers.

Nevertheless, despite Kasahun's absolute refutation, most FGI-II participants disagreed on the relevance and timeliness of the guidance and counseling services delivered by the college to attract girls to TVET in general and to male dominated occupations in particular. Rather, most of them considered it a service merely practiced only for show that basically targets to fulfill report requirements than delivering real and heartfelt support for girls. The following extracts reveal the shared conception of participants in this regard:

Q: How is the guidance and counseling service delivered by the college?

Azeb: I do not... know what ... [guidance and counseling service] is meant [a little embarrassed].

Mastewal: What [she] said is true. I mean...I did not come across a support [guidance and counseling] given to us to know which occupation is more useful for our career... To your surprise ... there are [teacher] evaluation formats that usually request us to confirm that we are benefitting from the counseling service. But most of us did not tick [confirm].

Yeshihasab: [hopelessly] ... yes, that is what everybody does today ...reporting what is not practically done. Even training materials are scarce. We simply lose ...walking here and there in the campus.

Q: Do you mean that a relevant and appropriate guidance and counseling service is not delivered in the college?

Tigist: Yes, it did not [carelessly]. ...It seems me that they do not think that girls are appropriate for TVET.

Q: How do you know, Tigist?

Tigist: This is what our teachers usually say in a workshop ...in the classroom. They usually tend to discourage girls ...because of their perception that girls are inferior to boys in [hard] occupations. Instead of motivating they prefer to tell us that we have wrongly joined the occupation. On the one hand, they place us without our interest, on the other ...they tell us that the occupation we joined is not suitable for us, what does this do for us...which is useless and untimely information.

Q: What do you mean by that, Tigist?

Tigist: For me telling an occupation that I have already joined is non-suitable... such practice after they have placed me once is joking on others' lives Rather, it is [just similar to the metaphor that says] 'inserting a stick on other's wound'. I say this because it is the college itself that placed me on the occupation that ... they are telling me it is unsuitable for me ...after I missed my preference that could probably be suitable to me. [Accordingly,] ...for me the practice of the college is a ...mere mockery on the benefits of females as well as gender and justice in general.

Genzebie: [hot tempered]...I think everybody says this [shares this idea]. I also have never come across a teacher giving special attention for girls.... Instead, I see our teachers providing their ironic support, which is highly immoral and discouraging for us [girls]. Otherwise, I understand it is [a service delivered] only to maintain disciplinary problems [in the college]. This is because no one has ever talked to [counseled] me ...and my colleagues, too, about my training in my long stay in this college.

The following query was also another discussion point that not only triggered similar responses among FGI-II participants but also served as an evidence for the prevalence of gender disequilibrium in the college under a circumstance whereby adequate awareness is hardly created on TVET. Surprisingly enough, this was a question that, even, the only girl among participants that chose TVET while fulfilling the entrance criteria for preparatory schooling herself has disclosed that her reason to join BDPC was not desire for TVET. As she was an orphan who hardly had any support for the time taking higher education, it was zeal of getting a fee-free shortcut way out for employment that drove her to the college. A few but more direct segment of the discussion is presented below:

Q: Why did you join this college?

Genzebie: I joined it because I do not have any other alternative to go for further education. Just I joined it [simply] ...not to sit idle at home.

Q: What about others?

Mastewal's agreement was quick and more direct to that of Genzebie. Her words, including that of others', are quoted below:

Mastewal: Yes she is right; I don't think that there is no one [among us] who came here [to the college] with her own interest [with laughter, indeed].

Tigist: Ya ...it is true.

Yeshihasab: Everybody says the same [shares the idea].

Another more acute agreement was delivered by Kalkidan when I further probed the participants in a different direction through the following interrogation: Does that mean that nobody has joined this college with interest?

Kalkidan: As to me... I have joined this college by my interest though I had the right to join *pre* [a shortened local designation for preparatory school] because my 10th grade result allows me to do so.

Q: So, you are also the one who joined the college with interest!

Kalkidan: No, I don't mean that, teacher [probably she wanted to say sir]. I joined it due to my personal problem that forced me...[to join the college.] [She then kept quite with unhappiness].

Q: What happened, Kalkidan?

Kalkidan: Since I don't have parents [with sorrow]... to support a five years' long education [preparatory and university] I joined technical and vocational [BDPC] to get job as fast as possible. Then, God willing, I can get money and pursue for higher education by myself.

Though not quick and furious, unlike most of her colleagues participated in the discussion, Azeb delivered a consensual reply of all her friends regarding girls' interest for TVET while responding to the following question: Why do you all dislike TVET? Here are her words:

In most cases it [TVET] is not useful. It is simply a waste of time. Graduates are wandering around...unemployed. The government is not providing employment chances. If there is ...government vacancy is filled out by networks [demonstrating the underlying corruption and despotism]. Simply, training and graduating...what does it do? Private employers give the opportunity [employment] for their relatives, irrespective of training [qualification]. Many graduates did not change the knowledge

and skill they acquired into money.... Neither did it solve their problems. It does not take us to university. If that is so why do I need it?

The discussion with FGI-II participants has also generated emerging issues about public prejudice against TVET where participants argued with substantive justifications for the predicament of girls to join BDPC. The influence of public misconception on TVET that has resulted in ridiculing and criticizing girls with a veiled insult for being “tomboys,” particularly when they joined male-dominated occupations, was mentioned with high emotion from different participants. All participants agree that such a prejudice has resulted in most girls to understand TVET, particularly of hard occupations, fit only for males and inappropriate and impossible for girls. Hence they usually hesitated and refrained from enrolment in such occupations. Most girls, who have developed a prejudice towards TVET, usually lose time unnecessarily contemplating and regretting on their lack of joining preparatory schooling that they think leads to a “privileged” and high-valued white-collar jobs than for TVET that is already on their hand. Participants, consequently, did not deny that most girls are still victims of the traditional outlook of prioritizing white-collar occupations than blue-collar ones.

All the participants alike, including the two girls who were drawn from male dominated occupations, agreed that hard occupations such as the construction sector are not suitable for girls’ physical make up. For instance, they argued that mixing gravel, sand, and cement to make a mortar for a construction purpose is very difficult for boys leave alone for girls because it requires high physical fitness. They also uncovered and blamed most parents for physically as well as psychologically ill-preparing their children, fit only for white-collar jobs, which in one way or the other has affected the youngsters to dislike blue-collar occupations. This was, indeed, a reply they forwarded when I requested them to justify the presence of many girls and women in the labor market who are physically fit and are daily engaged on blue-collar and labor demanding activities such as that of mixing gravel, sand, and cement to make mortar.

According to most participants, in addition, the involvement of many girls in the informal sector occupations to generate money for the livelihood of their family is another major reason they mentioned as a ground for their dislike of TVET. Indeed, they put up the stereotype that most families consider their daughters (and their sons, too) useless unless they join preparatory schools is the root of this problem. In most cases girls who failed to join preparatory schooling are not given the attention and opportunity to join BDPC because TVET by itself is usually not taken by the society as a useful engagement for girls. Consequently, many girls of lower income family background who failed to join preparatory schools usually opt to get automatic employment on whatever occupation that requires no extra training or new technical skill. According to them such occupations included poorly paid and low valued jobs such as janitor, messenger, waitress, housemaid, housewife, and even a significant number of them bar ladies.

On the other hand, those families that can afford to send their daughters to private colleges deliver training on white-collar occupations – health, business and ICT. In relation to this

FGI-II participants were requested to tell their reasons for joining BDPC and not the private TVET colleges, with an abundant supply in the city. Their responses were uniform, short and clear, in their words “coin matters”. Therefore, it was only those girls relatively from a better income family to afford the tuition fees who have got the chance to join private TVET colleges. Kasahun, too, has further magnified this idea by adding the presence of girls, whom he suggested are more likely with poor family background, who have gone as far as being engaged in sex works to collect money to cover their tuition fees for attending white-collar private college education. This is obviously a measure taken at the expense of the fee-free education and training chance available at BDPC. For him this implied girls' dislike of joining blue-collar occupations.

A few data that I collected regarding the background of participants, demonstrated by Table 1, substantiates the fact that economic problems are the major reasons on girls to join BDPC. The data in the table indicates that almost all participants are from a lower economic background. To begin with, almost all of them are daughters of a family whose income is very low, which can be taken as adequate only for subsistence. Secondly, the majority (seven) of them has no fathers and one is an orphan, all of whom have replied that the income of their family is usually generated through day to day subsistent activities or low status jobs. Thirdly, eight of them are from illiterate parents. The remaining four are from literate families, two from parents of not more than primary level education and other two from those who have only completed secondary education and are employed in a very low paid civil service jobs. Lastly, most of them are members of a large family size (minimum four) relative to the income each family earns. Therefore, coupled with the responses disclosed by the participants above it is possible to infer that TVET is in most cases the preference of the poor who are unable to afford other alternatives.

Table 1

Overview of students interviewed

Pseudo name	Age	Participants			Parents		Job	income/mo	Family size
		Occupation	Job Level	Available	Level of education				
					Father	Mother			
Genzebie	19	Machining	III	Mother	----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	5
Yeshihasab	20	Masonry	IV	Mother	----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	5
Kalkidan	21	Surveying	IV	None	-----	-----	----	Low	4
Tigist	20	Drafting	IV	Both	Primary	Basic	Public	Low	4
Azeb	22	Electricity	III	Both	Primary	Primary	Public	Low	6
Mastewal	19	Electronics	III	Mother	----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	7
Sintayehu	17	Garment	New	Both	Secondary	Secondary	Public	Low	6
Mulu	17	Garment	New	Mother	----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	5
Maritu	19	IT	New	Mother	-----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	4
Melkam	17	Textile	New	Both	Secondary	Secondary	Public	Low	6
Kasanesh	18	IT	New	Mother	-----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	7
Beletu	21	Weaving	New	Mother	-----	Illiterate	Grassroots	Low	6

According to most participants, consistently, the basic reason for prioritizing fee-demanding private colleges to fee-free BDPC is in most cases looking for traditionally female-oriented occupations. They do this because they believe that it is the appropriate track for their future employment and life career, which is indeed, a traditionally tuned up conception among most

girls. They still perceive occupations that include health care, office administration, accounting, cashiering, purchasing, IT and the like provide better and faster employment opportunities on jobs that they highly consider appropriate for females. That is, most girls still prefer white-collar to blue-collar occupations in their life-career that in turn shows most of them are still concentrated in traditionally female-dominated occupations.

Participants of FGI-I also backed the point mentioned above by their seniors. That is, all of them have reported that TVET is the last choice that they took because of their economic problem that hindered their chance from looking for other alternatives. They mentioned three major reasons for disliking TVET. First, they believe that TVET is an undermined and undervalued occupation. The tradition of emphasizing and appreciating university education on the one hand and degrading and undervaluing of TVET by most parents is an obstruction that has left behind such a negative impression on TVET. Secondly, they have replied that TVET is mostly not employable. They stressed that TVET exposes youngsters for a pervasive graduate unemployment, which left a bad impact on their interest for it. Thirdly, most of them believe that unlike the academic education, TVET is a difficult occupation for girls to compete with boys because in most cases, they argued, it requires physical strength. Two participants have, however, shown their disagreement on this idea. They presented exemplary females that have been successfully engaged in the construction and industrial sectors, which in most cases demanded much physical strength than the occupations in other sectors and are formidable for females.

Trends of girls' occupational choices in the College

Although the number of boys enrolled to TVET within the five years considered is greater than that of the girls (see Table 2), the aggregate proportion of the latter has exceeded the former gradually. According to documentary review data, girls have also gradually been conquering the territories of some of the traditionally male-dominated occupations. For example, girls are the majority in the construction as well as water and irrigation works' sectors. Besides, girls have maintained their dominance on the occupations that are usually taken as female-dominated occupations, i.e. Information Communication Technology (ICT), hotel and tourism as well as textile and garments, with the exception of the odd data scored in the year 2005 regarding hotel and tourism. In the traditionally female dominated occupations, in fact, boys' participation has been growing slowly and consistently in proportion. In ICT, for instance, the share of girls has declined by 19.7% (from 75.8% to 56.1%) between the two extreme years. Girls' share has also dwindled by 12.7% (from 95.7% to 82.9%) between the years 2006 and 2009. The trend in general indicates that while females are liberating themselves from the problems of occupational stereotyping steadily, boys are slower than girls in this respect. And hence, it seems that unlike girls boys are still not completely freed from the traditional narrow-minded and prejudiced occupational perception.

Table 2

Recent five years' regular program enrolment data (all years in E. C.)

Occupation by Sector	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		Sum by Sector		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
												#	%
Construction ⁵	110	97	355	271	393	513	113	150	445	476	1416	1507	51.6
Metal works	32	27	90	39	130	58	181	48	263	76	696	248	26.3
Water & irrigation works ⁶	23	19	110	142	90	95	109	192	123	210	455	658	59.1
Electricity & electronics	63	37	101	89	114	80	156	155	173	193	607	554	47.7
Automotive technology	163	50	422	66	345	62	334	69	312	55	1576	302	16.1
ICT ⁷	38	119	71	130	54	117	30	74	47	60	240	500	67.6
Hotel and Tourism ⁸	17	4	6	135	27	169	52	286	55	266	157	860	84.6
Textile, garment and leather	9	32	20	56	49	94	51	175	95	300	224	657	74.6
Furniture making	5	12	57	28	78	38	47	38	101	51	288	167	36.7
Sum by Year	460	397	1232	956	1280	1226	1073	1187	1614	1687	5659	5453	49.1

Source: Annual Reports of BDPC (2005 – 2009 E.C).

Be all as it may, according to the discussion with FGI-II participants, nonetheless, the secret behind the involvement of more and more girls in traditionally male-dominated occupations from year to year is found to be different. According to them, the tradition of male and female-dominated occupational choice is not yet overwhelmed. They argue that the figures regarding girls enrolled in hard occupations do not necessarily represent the real preference of girls in the college. According to them, that was because with the exception of few who have better achievements in their EGSECE, enrolment in most cases was carried out through a quota system and not based on individual choices. When we examine deep into the context of each sector explicitly there are data that complement the concern of the participants. In the construction sector, for example, although the aggregate proportion is being dominated by girls, it is limited to drafting and surveying, occupations that are characterized more as soft programs. Otherwise, the same data discloses, occupations associated with males and masculinity such as masonry, bar bending, concrete works and carpentry remained predominantly in the hands of males.

Kasahun's response on this issue, too, has strengthened FGI participants' ideas in addition to delivering further information regarding girls' dislike to their placement on hard occupations. He replied that there are many girls that totally used to leave the college when placed on hard occupations on conditions of lack of securing their choices. The following excerpt from the discussion with him reveals the situation better:

Q: How do you place your students into different occupations?

Kasahun: ...based upon their 10th grade results [EGSECE].

⁵ Include concrete works, masonry, road construction, surveying, drafting, tiling, and plastering.

⁶ Include plumbing, small-scale irrigation and drainage, rural water supply and sanitation.

⁷ Include occupations like hardware and networking, IT support and data base administration services.

⁸ Include hotel and tourism management, tour guide, front office operation, and bakery and confectionary occupation as well as hair dressing and beautification.

Q: Can you clarify it further, please?

Kasahun: Well, students will be given a format to show their three choices in priority for placement. Those who have better [EGSECE] grades are placed on their first choice. If they cannot secure their first choice, they will be placed on their second or third choices so far as their grade guarantees them to be placed in their choices. Ultimately, those who cannot secure their three priority choices are placed on any vacant place through a quota system until places are saturated.

Q: Is there any affirmative action carried out to reduce gender-based occupational segregation in the college?

Kasahun: Yes, girls are given a high privilege in our college ...although they are not ready to use it properly. That is, as of the year 2001 [E.C] we have been reserving for girls 50% of the places in all occupations. Moreover, they are allowed to compete with the boys in the remaining 50% places from which they can be given priority even at times when they score equal results with boys in the competition. But since girls usually want soft occupations ...they did not effectively utilize the opportunities given to them in hard occupations. The reserved vacancies that are not filled by the girls due to their dislike of hard occupations are filled out by boys at the end of the day. Even there are girls who left our college simply because they were placed on hard occupations. Therefore, we believe that girls are one of the major actors in the retention of gender-based occupational segregation in our college. In fact I do not mean that the cultural influence that usually criticizes girls for being engaged on “male” occupations has no its own [destructive] roles in this regard.

Documentary evidences, too, substantiate Kassahun’s reply. That is because I saw circulars released from the Technical Vocational and Enterprises’ Development Bureau as of 2001 E. C. in series of circulars regarding gender equity in the enrolment of students. One of the articles on the circular released in Amharic script on 16 September 2004 E.C. (2011), for instance, states that so far as they fulfill the minimum admission requirements, 50% of the places in all occupations and at all levels on which students are admitted should be reserved for girls in addition to the opportunity they should be given to compete equally with their male counterparts in the remaining 50% places. According to Kassahun this is a sweeping affirmative action in the entire regional state that is intended to minimize gender-based occupational segregation, although girls themselves are not ready to change the opportunity into an advantage. While this is a big chance given for them, he regretfully explains, most girls did not use the opportunity except in the traditionally female-dominated occupations. He, therefore, concludes that girls themselves are accountable for their vulnerability to gender-based occupational segregation because in most cases they usually do not utilize the outlets opened to minimize the problems entangled against them.

The most debatable issue in both FGIs was the issue regarding the sources and the way out to escape gender-based occupational segregation in TVET that cannot be alleviated even with the implementation of such a strong affirmative action. In this case, there were some students

from both FGI-I and II participants who fervently argued that females are also accountable for the occupational segregation in TVET. These blamed females for lacking confidence to think that they are as capable as males so far as they are given the chances. These participants who believe that females can perform just what males can do so far as the challenges entangled against them are alleviated, indeed, condemned male prejudice for being another major obstacle on female efficacy in TVET. Hereunder I have presented an excerpt of one of the eloquent explanations by Sintayehu:

Q: Who shall take the blame of gender-based occupational segregation? How?

Sintayehu: Both males and females. On the one hand [furiously] ...each of us [females] lack the efficacy to believe that we are strong and courageous enough just like those of males. On the other hand, I see that males are troublesome and selfish creatures who think that in any circumstance any male is better than any female. How they think that this holds true in ...a world where there is an immense number of [strong] females who are much stronger than many males ...sorrowful. In fact this may not hold true for all males ... but it is true for the majority, irrespective of his level of education. So, if these two problems are resolved I strongly believe and [want to] practically show in the future that will teach everybody that there is no reason that we [females] cannot perform just like males do [with laughter].

On the other hand, the majority from both FGIs argued that females are naturally weaker than males and need to be engaged in occupations that take their psychological as well as biological and physiological characteristics into consideration. With regard to psychological factors they have unanimously stressed that females are more susceptible to traditional psychological effects than males when they are engaged in occupations that require low status labor works. That is, girls engaged in blue-collar jobs more likely consider themselves inferior to other girls engaged in white-collar jobs. Biologically and physiologically, too, they argued that females have their own natural defects that willy-nilly require occupational specialization based on gender identity. In addition, they tried to justify that female inclination to soft occupations is not that far a grave problem. That is, they argue, the market demand for female-dominated soft occupations does not naturally stop somewhere else so long as the socio-economic development of society did not stop. They insisted that many girls can have more new chances of employment on female-dominated occupations at the footstep of any and every development. This group, unanimously, agree that since females are naturally subjected to different challenges to which males are not, they have their own characteristics that demand an occupation that take their peculiar characteristics into consideration.

DISCUSSION

With respect to girls' access to different TVET occupations data sources inform that the prejudiced public misconception and labor market features dictate the likes and dislikes of most girls for a specific occupation, despite girls are gradually outnumbering boys in the

system. In addition, although data from documentary examination indicate the involvement of many girls in traditionally male-dominated occupations, FGI data disprove that it has been achieved through a random placement method that in most cases has disregarded the real interest of girls. Parallel to various local and international sources (e. g., African Union, 2007; Anker, 1997; 1998; ESPS, 2008; Teklehaimanot, 2002) girls' occupational choice at BDPC is, therefore, determined by the underlying public perception and the stereotyped labor market factors, without overlooking the role of employability.

Both FGI participants and Kasahun (the key informant) have confirmed the above trend by approving that placement is not merit based and hence many girls (including boys) are forced to join in what is not their choice. In most cases, it is not the girls (the same holds true for boys) themselves who determine their occupational choice in the college; rather it is the college, based up on their EGSECE achievement, that determines the fate of most girls' occupational choice. Here, it is also very important to recommend a further study on the overruling authority of EGSECE achievement (in courses such as language, civics, geography, history, biology, chemistry or any other) to determine the placement of students on a completely different discipline (occupations) of TVET. In line with the concerns of various sources of literature (such as Fawcett & Howden, 1998; Kilbourne, England, Farkas, Beron & Weir, 1994; Sharma, n.d; Van Deursen, 2009; Webb, 2009) the enrolment trend in the college discloses that male and female occupational territories are still defended, although in a hidden trench.

Besides, it was understood that the affirmative measure taken by the college has hardly altered the territory of gender-based occupational segregation on enrolment at BDPC. The retention of male and female-dominated spheres of influence indicates that affirmative action may not necessarily empower females to determine their occupational fate and enjoy equity in such a tightly tied traditional situation. This, in turn, implies that drawing gender-sensitive policies, rules, and regulations alone cannot sustainably bring a breakthrough on such a formidable problem that has strongly been fortified in the minds of the society far and wide since ages immemorial. In the same way, data analysis in this study showed that most girls still depended on hearsays than the guidance and counseling services provided by the college in determining their occupational choices, given the defects in the quality and relevance of the counseling service. Seniors, peers, and parents who are all in one way or the other themselves influenced by the traditional prejudices, are found to be influential factors in this regard. And this matches with the global experiences (e. g., African Union, 2007; Anker, 1997; 1998; ESPS, 2008) whereby problem of girls' occupational choice in TVET are attributed to the destructive perpetuation of the stereotype among parents, peers, and the society at large.

Both FGI groups have reported that the guidance and counseling service delivered, too, lacked relevance and sufficiency to satisfy and alert girls. Lack of delivering adequate guidance and counseling service makes the problem remain prevalent because it, inevitably, resulted in lack of awareness and self-efficacy among girls. It is also evident that the

awareness created through the guidance and counseling service in the college is so weak that it cannot sustainably erode the stereotypes prevalent among girls themselves let alone to effectively shield them from the underlying external influences imposed by the society. This, in order, highly contributes to the preservation of the segregation. Consequently, analogous to what is stated by ESPS (2008), Helina (2015) and Teklehaimanot (2002), girls at BDPC are still vulnerable for the traditional influence that in most cases appreciates and promotes white-collar occupations on the one hand and degrades and discourages blue-collar ones on the other. If such conditions persist, consequently, the suppressed share of girls' involvement and the consequent gender-based occupational segregation will remain a worsening problem in the college. Consequently, it can be argued that the gender biased practice of TVET in BDPC is in one form or the other the result of the dictation by the college and its hidden gender-based curricular environment.

Moreover, it was found out that most girls for one reason or the other believe that they should be enrolled on occupations that take their biological and psychological factors into consideration. In congruence to different sources (e.g., Fawcett & Howden, 1998; Kilbourne, England, Farkas, Beron & Weir, 1994; Sharma, n.d; Van Deursen, 2009; Webb, 2009), this tells us that in their occupational choices girls tend to be dictated by the existing gender-discriminated labor market characteristics. That, in turn, is meant gender-based work place prejudice has enforced its own impact on the occupational choice of girls at BDPC. Therefore, it is possible to contend that the interplay between the gender-based workplace prejudice and the occupational choice of girls in TVET is plainly clear, whereby the latter is the function of the former.

The study has also found out an emergent problem in the education and training system of the college. That is, it has vividly demonstrated the presence of a ridiculous association between TVET and economic background. That is, in the study area TVET seems an occupation left for the poor because almost all the study participants were from low income family background. Most of the participants were not only daughters of poor family background but who end up unemployed as well. In addition, participants in the FGI have complained that the prevalence of graduate unemployment has usually been leaving youngsters without any alternative opportunity of generating income at least to secure their own livelihood. This, in turn, has nothing to do with resolving the socio-economic problems of girls other than wasting the limited resources of both the trainees and that of the government, not to mention the opportunity costs implied. Under such a situation where TVET is left mostly for the poor and leaves its graduates unemployed, it exposes many, particularly females, for miserable poverty cycle, which is analogous to the Amharic saying of 'mumps on goiter' because it pulls out the few money and resources prospective trainees have in addition to denying them quality education and training.

CONCLUSION

Although the government of Ethiopia should be commended for the measures it took to provide a favorable policy environment for gender equity and equality, there remain a lot to realize those constitutional, legal, and policy issues. The gender-sensitive constitution, policies, legal and affirmative frameworks introduced as well as the different international women's rights treaties ratified to prohibit gender discrimination are valuable reform measures that have not been materialized as intended. Despite promising improvements, consistently, the efforts made to change the policy documents and strategies set to promote gender equality in the TVET system are not improving fast enough. As to the findings of this study, BDPC seems to have lacked to adequately tackle the strongly fortified gender prejudice in TVET and make the intended breakthrough against it. With respect to the practice of girls' occupational choice, therefore, the college seems an institution that questions and looks solutions for the prejudices on the one hand but strengthens the gender biased system through its hidden curriculum on the other. As can be seen from the gender-based occupational prejudice that has already been embedded in the college, in general, it can be learnt that words are not so far adequately translated into deeds and measures are not stepping fast enough to enhance the overall gender-based development intentions in the TVET system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The analyses of data so far dictate that BDPC needs to endeavor much more to minimize and ultimately eliminate gender-based occupational leveling. This requires a due attention of the consequences of gender-based occupational segregation. Otherwise, wrong career choices affect not only females but males as well. Accordingly, the following recommendations may contribute highly to minimize the consequences of gender-based occupational prejudices in the system:

1. MoE shall vocationalize the education and training system as early as late primary schooling and accompany it with vigorous and relevant guidance and counseling services not only to create the awareness but also to build up the image of TVET among teenagers;
2. MoE shall better implement other preferable criterion besides EGSECE achievements as preconditions for the placement of students into different occupations because academic achievements may not necessarily imply the vocational inclination and competence of the youth.
3. BDPC must design and implement gender-based guidance and counseling trajectory to minimize the stereotypes about TVET and ultimately attract girls into occupations that they have considered as irrelevant for girls and reserved only for males;
4. BDPC must provide those girls in the pipeline, particularly in hard occupations, with attentive follow up and special support so that they can serve as success models for their juniors at the end of the day;

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