Impacts of Gender on Career Aspirations of Senior Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the impacts of gender stereotyping on career aspirations of senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The findings of the study confirmed gender stereotyping for both female and male students in their career aspirations and in tune with traditional gender socialization processes learnt at home and transferred into school environment. The study adopted the qualitative design technique involving focus group interviews where the instrument used was a questionnaire titled, "Gender Stereotyping and Career Aspirations Questionnaire", (GSCAG). Recommendations on means of checking gender bias among students on career aspirations such as: parents should encourage their children to select careers without enforcement; counsellors and teachers should help students discover their potentials that fit their career aspirations were proffered.
Keywords: Aspirations; career; gender; impacts.

INTRODUCTION
The categorical assumption which underline the concept of gender stereotyping is that the difference between the sexes are permanent and the similarities within them are obvious (UNDP, 2016, while the universally acclaimed cultural definition of gender influences institution and career behaviours of male and female individuals. Thus, children from very early age learn to conform to societal expectations (Colley & Comber, 2015).

In the traditional African context, girls learn to help their mothers to cook, clean and sweep the compound as well as attend to the little ones around them (Berrington, 2016). This training is to equip them with the attributes of domestic duties in readiness for marriage and motherhood. On the other hand, boys help mostly in outdoor activities such as framing fishing and hunting in order to prepare them for the responsibilities of catering for the family in future. These traditional acquaintances initiate the men for the roles of providing security and livelihood for the family and the women for complementing through giving birth to their children, nursing them and seeing to the daily running of their homes (Schoon, 2010).

There is a reversal of these traditional settings of gender stereotyping, whereby new economic arrangements posit that women contribute to the economic survival of their families through the provision of supplementing earnings (Cea, Ginther, Kanne Williams, 2014). This is a welcome development that has triggered women to opt for hitherto male-dominated careers (Parker, 2011). Gender stereotyping is therefore transferred from home to school setting as manifested in the selection of subjects by senior secondary school students (Colley & Comber, 2015), where girls tend to prefer traditionally feminine Arts subjects, and boys show preference for Science subjects.

At the tertiary level of education, gender stereotyping occurs in the selection of courses by undergraduates. Female students are clustered in the Arts, Education and Social Sciences, while male students are predominant in the Natural Sciences and Medical Sciences (Benbow, 2013; Abiola, 2014). The selection of subjects in the senior secondary schools and later courses in tertiary institutions has therefore, gender stereotyping undertones.

In Nigeria, the practice or situation where careers are chosen is an extension of the traditional gender stereotyping, where women chose careers such as teaching, nursing and social welfare, while careers in Architecture, Medicine and Engineering are deemed the preserves for men (Ofoha, 2013).

Aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to establish the impacts of gender stereotyping on career aspirations of senior secondary school students. The study sought to answer the following questions:

i.   What are the factors that affect students' career aspirations?
ii.   How can schools help to check gender stereotyping affecting students' career aspirations?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative design technique involving focus group interviews as the instrument for data collection. A focus group is a semi-structured group discussion moderated by a discussion leader with the aim of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a designated topic. The technique is capable of unveiling crucial issues regarding people's culture or system of beliefs in their structural human social relations (Greertz, 2012).

Participants in the focus group interviews were four hundred (400) senior secondary school (SSS) students drawn from their final year (SSS III). This is the level at which students write their terminal examination at the senior secondary school level. They were divided into ten focus groups with each group interviewed for 35 to 40 minutes.

The sampling technique used was a purposive sample size of 400 participants chosen as a cross-section of the larger target population of SSS III students in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. They were first identified and classified in terms of their environmental (rural and urban settings) using stratified random sampling technique. The schools were grouped into rural and urban in order to ensure that the sample was representative of the socioeconomic backgrounds of the population. The variables captured included location, parental socioeconomic levels and their residential areas.

The next stage was to produce a students' database for the selected schools. This consideration had helped to establish their parental socioeconomic levels, which is a variable in this study. Similarly, the students were further divided by course offered to ensure that the final stratified random sample was representative of their parent's diverse socioeconomic levels, which also ensured the control of the major variables of the study.

The researcher designed a questionnaire titled, "Gender Stereotyping and Career Aspirations Questionnaire (GSCAQ)" which was used as instrument for the study. The questionnaire designed for the respondents was categorized into 6 sections (A – F) with questions focusing on research questions for the study so as to keep the interview sessions on focus. Questions in the first section of the focus group interview guide were designed to elicit data on the role of the school in guiding students to choose subjects and career aspirations. This was to establish the link between subjects studied by the students and the career aspirations they eventually followed on graduating from school.

RESULTS

Table 1: Students' Career Aspiration According to Frequency and Gender

Career	Percentages (%) Male students	Percentage (%) Female students
Architecture	15.0	0.2
Electronic Engineering	9.0	0.1
Military	2.0	-
Town Planning	1.0	0.3
Medicine	8.4	20.0
Agriculture	1.0	3.0
Nursing	-	2.5
Pharmacy	0.2	1.2
Veterinary	0.3	-
Nuclear Physicist	0.2	-
Teaching	6.0	10.7
Tailoring	0.2	2.0
Law	7.0	7.0
Politics	0.1	-
Estate Valuing	0.3	-
Economics	0.3	-
Total	**50%**	**50%**

Table 1 indicated the percentages of students who aspired for each of the careers listed. The male students aspired higher in Medicine– 8.4%, Law – 7.0%, Architect – 15.0%, Teaching – 6.0% and Electrical Engineering– 9.0%. However, they did not choose Nursing. The female students aspired higher in Teaching – 10.7%, Medicine– 20% and Law– 7%. No female student opted for Military, Veterinary, Nuclear Physics, Politics and Estate Valuing.

Table 2: Students' Career Aspirations in Order of Preference

Chosen Career	Both	Position
Teachng	14.6	1st
Medicine	13.4	2nd
Law	12.7	3rd
Architecture	7.1	4th
Electrical Engineering	6.6	5th
Accounting	6.4	6th
Journalist	5.7	7th
Social Work	5.4	8th
Pharmacist	5.2	9th
Theatre/Film/Producing	4.2	10th
Politics	4.7	11th
Counselling	3.5	12th
Piloting	2.1	13th
Military	1.7	14th
Veterinary	1.4	15th
Computer Engineering	0.4	16th

From Table 2, Teaching had the highest frequency, chosen by 14.6% of the respondents, followed by Medicine – 13.4%, Law– 12.7%, Architecture– 7.1% and Electrical Engineering -- 6.6%. Careers of least selection included Military – 1.7%, Veterinary – 1.4% and Computer Engineering --Engineering

Table 3: Career Aspirations for Male, Female and Both Students

Career	M %	F %	B %
Electrical Engineering	94.0	4.7	7.2
Architecture	93.3	16.1	93.3
Building Engineering	92.7	2.3	3.9
Surveying	87.9	5.9	4.8
Military	90.2	0.1	9.1
Journalist	92.0	3.7	92.0
Academic	81.4	6.9	81.4
Teachering	79.0	7.8	79.0
Pharmacy	74.2	4.9	74.2
Mechanic	6.9	0.7	1.7
Food Vendor	0.2	59.2	1.5
Tailoring	0.3	60.2	1.5
Typing	1.2	64.0	1.2
Home Making	0.9	84.0	1.1
Broadcasting	1.7	1.2	0.9
Teaching	1.0	1.0	0.9
Nursing	0.7	82.0	0.3

Note: M% = Male %, F% = Female %, B% = Both (Male and Female %)

Table 3 shows the frequency of mention of male students' career aspirations, female career aspirations and both. The first 5 careers considered most suitable for male students only were Electrical Engineering – 94%, Architecture– 93.3%, Building Engineering 92.7%, Survey– 87.9% and Military– 90.2%. Careers unsuitable for male students were Teaching – 1%, Nursing – 0.7%, Broadcasting– 1.7%, Home Making– 0.9% and Tailoring-0.3%. The careers most suitable for female were Home Maker – 84%, Nursing – 82%, Tying- 64%, Tailoring – 60.1% and Food Vendor – 59.2%. The careers which were unsuitable for female students were Broadcasting-0.9%; Teaching- 0.9%; Nursing- 0.3% and Home making-1.1%.

DISCUSSION
The results of the study indicated the existence of gender stereotyping which has been imbibed in them from childhood (Sikora & Pokropek, 201). It was also found that there was gender stereotyping in the career aspiration of female students who mentioned feminine careers like teaching. Other careers which were popular for the female students were Medicine, Broadcasting, Law and Journalist. All these careers were feminine biased because they would not interfere too much with their role stereotyping as housewives and mothers. They require tenderness and socialization, which were more suitable for female students (Zosuls, Miller, Martin & Fabes, 2011).
The study also sought to find the factors that influenced students' career aspirations. Factors such as socioeconomic background, peer group influence, parental influence were found to be prominent. The study observed that male and female student were aware of the fact that career aspiration is made to suit individual's special ability, irrespective of gender (Mtemem, 2017).

The study also revealed that teacher expectations were significant factors in students' career aspirations. Such results corroborate findings by Otto (2000); Siebel (2015); Adeboye, Mustapha and Adeboye (2017) who observed that teachers and parents often put pressure on children's aspirations. Gender role socialization which begins at home and is consolidated by schools, thus plays an influential role in promoting a gendered career perspective. This is in conformity with the findings of Obura and Ajawo (2012) that if parents value education very highly and have high expectations on their children, their children would aspire for high status, like their parents.

Teachers constitute an important factor in students' career aspirations. This supports the findings of Gantam (2016) who claimed that as teachers interact with students, they influence them towards certain careers in the manner that parents do. They may talk to students and advise them on future careers. In a way, this influences the students' view of different careers and the resultant aspirations they make. Teachers can therefore, serve as role models for their students' career aspirations (Siebel, 2015).

It was realized from the study that peers also play a role in students' career aspirations. This finding confirms the perception that friends and their supportive roles play significant aspects in the planning and decision of students' career development (Mtemeri, 2017; Alan, Ertac & Muncu, 2017). Similarly, the type of subject combination that students chose is a pointer for their career aspirations in future. This finding also supported that of (Evbuoma, 2018) who discovered that there is strong relationship between students' subject combinations and their final career options.

CONCLUSION
This study set out to examine the impacts of gender stereotyping on career aspirations of senior secondary schools in the F.C.T., Abuja, Nigeria. It confirmed that female students indicated their preference for feminine careers, while male students preferred masculine careers. The students also showed similarities in their selection of certain careers. These career aspirations signify evidence of gender-role stereotyping. It was therefore, discovered from the study that despite the emphasis on equal educational opportunities for all Nigerians, women fall far behind men in career opportunities (Okere, 2018; Anyelebechi, 2016) though, few female students defy societal gender-role expectations by venturing into male-dominated careers, thus constituting gender reversal in their career aspirations.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The study confirmed the impacts of gender stereotyping in the career aspirations of students in senior secondary schools of the F.C.T. Abuja, Nigeria where male students aspired for masculine careers and female students aspired for feminine careers. The following recommendations are suggested based on the findings of the study:
i.   Female students should be encouraged by parents and government to venture into selecting subjects at senior secondary school level that would put them at par with their male counterparts on careers placement;
ii.   Curriculum planners should address gender-stereotyping in subjects and careers so that equal placements can be achieved;
iii.   Parents should allow their children to select careers that fit their intellectual and moral aptitudes;
iv.   Counselors and teachers should help students handle their career aspirations in line and recognition of their individual potentials.

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