Access To and Participation of Women in Science-Oriented Vocation Education and Training Programmes in Kenya

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Since the women’s decade conference in Nairobi, various efforts have been made by governments and international donors to increase women’s participation in formal schooling and the labour market. However, evidence still persists that women in most parts of the world face numerous challenges. The objective of this study was to explore persisting challenges that exclude women students from pursuing science and mathematics programmes in Kenya’s vocational training institutes. The study sought to investigate factors influencing women’s access to and participation in science oriented Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes in selected Technical Institutes in Nairobi. To realise the purpose of the study, a survey design was adopted. Primary data was collected by use of questionnaire and interview schedule. The questionnaire contained both open ended and structured questions. Informal discussions were held to seek clarification and additional information from the respondents. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 was used for data processing and analysis. The study revealed that the general enrolment of females in VET institutions in Nairobi is lower than males and in particular they are under-represented in science oriented courses. However, the study showed that majority of female students who enter the VET institutions aspire to pursue science based occupations such as Engineering and Laboratory Technology. The study further showed that the main factors that contribute to low female enrolment in science oriented courses are: the negative attitude females have towards sciences, the belief that science is a man’s world, females find sciences to be difficult, peer influence, poor performance by girls in the foundation subjects, gender stereo-type by the society and prospective employers, lack of female role models, lack of proper information on science oriented careers, and high school dropout rate due to early pregnancy. The study also revealed that there were various interventions that can be made in order to increase female enrolment in science oriented courses. These were: girls at primary and secondary schools be guided and counselled on the benefits of pursuing science oriented careers as well as advised to
change their attitudes towards science subjects, teachers at secondary schools should focus on building a strong foundation for girls in mathematics and science subjects, provision of equal job opportunities, girls should have more opportunities to observe female role models in science based careers, the government should establish special science and technology institutes to cater for the needs of female students, the school curriculum be made relevant to respond to the needs of girls, and lowering entry points for females in science oriented courses. In conclusion, it is evident that female enrolment in science oriented courses in VET institutions in Nairobi is very low. The study recommends that all stakeholders should support and initiate programmes and activities aimed at increasing female enrolment in science oriented courses.