

Factors influencing male learners' choice of Home Economics in the //Kharas educational region, Namibia

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Abstract

Home Economics (HE) is one of the pre-vocational subjects for the Junior Secondary phase in Namibian schools. Statistical evidence indicates that male learners who wrote the end of Junior Secondary phase (Grade 10) Home Economics examination in 2013 were 15%, 11% in 2014 and 8% in 2015, the rest were girls (MoE, 2015). Male learners are hardly seen in Home Economics programmes at all school levels females dominating the HE classes. This study was aimed at investigating the factors influencing male learners' choice of Home Economics as a subject in the //Kharas Educational Region. The purpose of the study was to find out cultural/ traditional factors contributing to few male learners choosing Home Economics as a subject. The study further sought to find out whether parents, principals and teachers influenced male learners' choice of the subject as well as the strategies that can help increase the number of male learners choosing the subject.

The study followed a mixed methods research design, where a sample of 50 Grade 8 male learners (non-Home Economics learners), 4 Home Economics male learners and 4 school managers were drawn from five schools that offer Home Economics as a subject in the region. Purposeful random and criterion sampling were used for this study in selecting the sample. Triangulation was used in the study by incorporating quantitative and qualitative data obtained from questionnaires, focus group interviews and standardised open-ended interviews. Findings confirmed a number of factors that influence male learners' choice of Home Economics as a subject which include the availability of pre-vocational subjects to choose from, the subject being labelled as a girl's subject as well as parental influence. The study recommends enlightenment campaigns through seminars and mass media about the importance of Home Economics and career opportunities that the subject provides to learners and the society.

Keywords: *cultural/traditional factors, elective subjects, perceptions, school managers*

Background

According to the National Curriculum for Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2010b) Home Economics is one of the pre-vocational subjects for the Junior Secondary phase. The other elective pre-vocational subjects apart from Home Economics include Agriculture, Computer Studies, Accounting, Visual Arts, Design and Technology, Keyboard and Word Processing, Needlework and Clothing, and Entrepreneurship. Pre-vocational subjects are among the vital tools an individual can use to develop themselves. Azubuike

(2012) emphasized that vocational subjects are training for useful employment in trade, industries, agriculture, business and home making, thus preparing learners for self-reliance. Pre-vocational subjects are actually the most suitable form of education capable of meeting the demands of national economic growth and the globalization of Namibia as a developing country (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

Home Economics is perceived by many as a course that deals with domestic affairs, hence a course for girls. The

society, both educated and uneducated, look down on any male learner studying Home Economics (Nnubia, 2013). It is apparent that there is a gender gap in Home Economics. Male learners are significantly more likely to choose Science, Agriculture, Business, or Technical studies (World Bank, 2012). There are various theories as to why males lose interest in Home Economics. Azubuiké (2012) emphasized that males perceive Home Economics as a subject that has to do with the home, since it deals with different food preparations and serving of meals, decoration of the home and its surroundings, making of clothes and child care. Not all schools in Namibia offer Home Economics as a subject due to the fact that schools would rather select some of the other pre-vocational subjects on offer (Ministry of Education, 2010a). This is also because only certain schools in the country were built and equipped with venues like kitchens which can accommodate the pre-vocational subjects such as Home Economics. Learners are allowed to select two of the elective subjects offered at their school as they enter the Junior Secondary phase (Grade 8). However, some schools make certain subjects compulsory, depending on the availability of resources as well as the number of teachers qualified to teach these subjects. The few learners that choose to study Home Economics as a subject appears to be girls in most cases (Azubuiké, 2012).

Azubuiké, (2012) also lamented that many male learners feel that the subject is meant for girls only and so they prefer other subjects to Home Economics. Statistical evidence shows that out of 167 Grade 8 learners that have taken Home Economics in the //Kharas Educational Region in 2015, only 25 were male learners. This shows that only 15% of the total learners enrolled for Home Economics were male learners. Okoh (2006) lamented that the short sightedness

of male learners about Home Economics is compounded by the decision of their parents about their career. Teachers and learners seem not to understand what Home Economics is about and consequently develop some contempt for and aversion to the subject. According to Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005), parents are more likely to influence learners' decisions than guidance counsellors or teachers. This study therefore investigated the factors influencing the male learners in selecting Home Economics as a subject in the //Kharas Educational Region.

Statement of the problem

Sinvula (2014) stated that unemployment has now become a threat to Namibia's peace and stability with the number of school dropouts increasing every year. He emphasized that persistent unemployment among the youth and women has also led to social evils such as the high rate of crimes and HIV and AIDS infections. Moreover, numerous reasons have been advanced explaining the high incidences of passion killings in Namibia. Such reasons include unequal power dynamics in relationships between men and women (Kaumba, 2013). Men are cultural providers for women and this creates dependency where women expect support financially from the household provider. Statistical evidence indicates that male learners who wrote Grade 10 Home Economics end of year examination were 15% in 2013, 11% in 2014 and 8% in 2015 while the rest were girls (Ministry of Education, 2015). Namibia needs a functional education system that can provide its citizens with a source of livelihood. Home Economics could be one of the subjects that can improve the livelihood of the people because it emphasises personal development, decision making and intrapersonal skills (Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Home Economics is a skills oriented field of study that is capable of equipping learners with abilities that can create room for self-reliance which has the ability to reduce unemployment and improve manpower development (Azubuike, 2012). Male learners are hardly seen in Home Economics programmes at all levels of education with female learners making up the majority. Many young male learners leave school without employable skills and therefore become unemployed (Ekpenyong, 2008). Based on the above problems, the researcher wanted to find out the factors preventing male learners from choosing Home Economics as a school subject in the //Kharas Educational Region.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What socio-cultural/traditional norms hinder male learners' choice to study Home Economics as a school subject in the //Kharas Educational Region?
2. How do parents, principals and teachers influence male learners' decisions to take Home Economics as an area of study in the Junior Secondary phase?
3. What could be done to change the perceptions and increase the enrolment of male learners in Home Economics?

Significance of the study

This study is significant in that it might identify the socio-cultural/traditional barriers that make it difficult for male learners to choose Home Economics as a subject in the //Kharas Educational Region. It might also contribute to the improvement of education policies that might address the problems learners have in selecting fields of studies. The findings may be beneficial to parents as it could make them change their approach towards the study of Home Economics by their male children. In

Namibia where youth unemployment is at its peak, the findings of this study might encourage male learners to study Home Economics in the Junior Secondary phase and in tertiary institutions for self-employment which could reduce the crime rate. Males will be able to create employment of for themselves if they studied Home Economics. Finally, the findings of this study might go a long way to correct the misconception regarding Home Economics as the girls' subject.

Limitations

Namibia has 75 schools in total that offer Home Economics as a subject in the Junior Secondary phase (Ministry of Education, 2015). Due to the vast geographical distances separating these schools, time was a constraint. Therefore, the research was only carried out in five Secondary Schools in the //Kharas Educational Region. Further, among the school managers who initially accepted to be part of the sample, one was no longer willing to be interviewed. Another limitation was that not all dispatched questionnaires to the five schools, were returned.

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the progressivism theory. The progressivism theory's proponent is John Dewey. With progressivism, gender equality and minorities are recognized, as well as the framework of learning by doing and experiencing (Field, 2001). According to Dewey, learning should directly relate to the interests of the learner and the teacher's role is not to direct but to advice. Instead of having an all-knowing teacher standing up front and talking, learners themselves should have active participation in their education (Dewey, 2010). Dewey viewed the school as a miniature democratic society, where learners could learn and practice the skills necessary to live in democracy (Ellis, 1991). The foregoing

makes sense for this study since Home Economics as a subject allows learners to promote democratic principles and practices at school level and in civic life. Learners develop social responsibility towards other individuals, family life, the community and the nation as a whole over the study of Home Economics as the subject includes the learning of family studies, and food preparation which in future allow learners to become self-employed citizens.

The purpose of Progressive education is to give an individual the necessary skills and tools with which to interact with his/her environment, which changes constantly (Ornstein, Levine, Gutek, & Vocke, 2016). Home Economics enables learners to obtain the knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, attitudes and values needed for their personal development, related to the changes in the Namibian society (Ministry of Education, 2010b). In Dewey's educational theory, the learner has an honest position of capability and involvement in activities that interest him or her (Dewey, 2010).

Literature review

Male learners' perceptions toward Home Economics as a subject

The gender of learners can often affect their enrolment in a class. Davies, Telhaj, Hutton, Adnett, and Coe (2006) indicated that boys and girls have different values and there are certain standards or expectations that vary between genders. The subject choices open to a learner depend on the average popularity of subjects in the school and this varies with the social mix of learners (Davies et al., 2006). This means that some schools offer a number of elective subjects and the common norm is that learners tend to choose the subjects mostly enrolled in the school. Generally, a negative attitude towards a given subject leads to a lack of

learners' interest in that subject and when subjects are to be selected, as in Junior Secondary, learners commonly avoid the subject (Egun, 2008). A subject can be interesting to a learner but the class needs to be well executed for the content to be understood and beneficial. However, every learner has his/her own perceptions of the values attached to specific subjects that they would wish to undertake (Eze, 2001). A series of factors play important roles in the value associated with the subject lessons which can include the suitability in the job market and career choice.

Male learners shy away from studying Home Economics fearing that there may be challenges when it comes to finding careers (Azubuike, 2012). Dike (2006) observed that the wrong perception of Home Economics can be dated back to the colonial era and this makes it difficult for the perception to change. Bound and Hapson (1989) stated that male learners are more concerned with careers that will make quick money while girls tend to pay more attention to future family improvement. Male learners are significantly more likely to choose science, agriculture, business, or technical studies (World Bank, 2012) than Home Economics. There are various theories as to why males lose interest in Home Economics. Azubuike (2012) emphasizes that males perceive Home Economics as a subject that has to do with the home, since it deals with different food preparations and serving of meals, decoration of home and its surroundings, making of clothes and child care. As such, male learners do not see Home Economics as a course for them because it deals with domestic affairs. Against the latter, therefore, male learners perceive Home Economics as a course that makes a person a servant and not a master (Azubuike, 2012).

Furthermore, mention should be made that the name given to the course also tends to discourage females and

males, but mostly males, from studying the course (Azubuike, 2012). Both males and females are likely to prefer studying this subject if the name given to the subject could be changed since it is likely to motivate them to study it. The name Home Economics makes the subject sound as if it is exclusively for women or for those whose intention is to work in the homes (Egun, 2008).

Cultural and traditional norms and beliefs preventing male learners from selecting Home Economics as a subject

Eze (2001) found the factors that influence male learners in the field of Home Economics to be differential socialisation patterns of boys and girls at early stages of life. Male learners who choose to socialise with female learners at an early age are considered to be homosexuals. Sex-stereotyped occupation of girls over boys is a tradition which has socialized males into believing that it is a ridicule of manliness to venture into an occupation that is female reserved (Egun, 2008). Male learners who choose Home Economics are viewed as different from the culturally directed belief of maleness. In the past, girls were expected to make marriage and motherhood their main concern while boys were expected to go on to work and support the family (Dike, 2006). Therefore, the school life reflected these expectations as girls and boys would be directed to take different subjects.

However, girls now have greater confidence in their abilities (World Bank, 2012). Feminism has influenced cultural attitude change but also changes in education. Policies that promote equal opportunities in education and in careers have reduced bias in gender expectations (Erinosho, 1998). Boys and girls may choose different subjects because of early socialisation. It is a common belief that Home Economics is an easy subject, and this results in school administrators placing

low-performing learners into Home Economics classes (Azubuike, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that male learners are not interested in Home Economics subject. Osuala (1998) emphasized that, at the heart of our society and economics problem is a national attitude that implies that vocational subjects (including Home Economics) are designed for somebody else's children and is meant primarily for the children of the poor, for the dropouts, and the less intelligent.

Strategies to change the perceptions and increase the enrolment of male learners in Home Economics

Tenenbaum (2009) lamented that the school has a great role to play in influencing learners' choice of subjects and so it should support subjects and career decision making. This will go a long way in encouraging learners' choices of subjects. In addition, learners need information about the structure and content of the subjects they want to study. If male learners are to be more involved in Home Economics, parents should be involved. There are many practical and easy ways that parents can use to encourage male learners to study Home Economics (Azubuike, 2012). Parents can begin at home to encourage male learners by exposing them to Home Economics at an early age. Male learners should learn cooking and homemaking; therefore, they should be made to see the subject as one of the many tools an individual should have to make life easier. The one-on-one interaction between mother and son can be greatly beneficial to both the mother and the child. Discussing homemaking with their male children is another way parents could encourage them to study Home Economics (Azubuike, 2012). Parents should ask their children about their likes and dislikes of Home Economics and

explain to them the importance of the subject (Dike, 2006).

Research methodology

Research design

Due to the nature of the problem under study, a mixed methods research design that employed both quantitative and qualitative research was used. Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). Under the mixed methods design, a convergent parallel design was used. Results from both questionnaires and interviews were collected at the same time or in a single phase and were analysed independently according to the research questions. The researcher used this design in order to triangulate the collected data by directly comparing and contrasting them during interpretation.

Population

Kasanda (2015) refers to the population, as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The study targeted Grade 8 male learners from the five secondary schools as there are only five schools in the //Kharas Educational Region that offer Home Economics as a subject. The researcher wanted to carry out a research study at a school offering Home Economics as these learners might be more familiar with the subject. In addition, Grade 8 male learners were still at the beginning of choosing fields of studies and they were able to explain why they opted for other subjects and not for Home Economics. One school manager from each school that offer Home Economics as a subject was randomly selected to take part in the study. The selection was promptly done on the availability and willingness to

be part of the study. Grade 8 Home Economics male learners formed part of the population.

Sample and sampling procedures

Johnson and Christensen (2012) define sampling as the process in which researchers draw a sample from a targeted population of the study. Therefore, from the population of 1006 Grade 8 learners in all the five schools of which 526 were male learners, a sample of 50 male learners was selected. To ensure representation of the population in the sample, a stratified random sampling procedure was used. A stratified random sampling involves the division of a population into smaller groups known as strata of members who share the same attributes or characteristics (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The stratified random sample was incorporated by using class lists of male learners enrolled for Accounting, Keyboard and Word Processing and Design and Technology. This was because, male learners not enrolled for Home Economics selected the above mentioned pre-vocational subjects and this was done to have an equal representation of male learners enrolled in other pre-vocational subjects. School managers assisted the researcher by randomly selecting 10 male learners not enrolled for Home Economics from each school.

Male learners who did not choose Home Economics as a subject were believed to be knowledgeable regarding reasons why they could not take Home Economics as a subject. Four male learners who had taken Home Economics as a subject in Grade 8 and four school managers (3 HoDs and 1 principal) also formed part of the sample. Male learners who had taken Home Economics before as a subject were believed to be knowledgeable as to why they chose to study Home Economics as a subject. In addition, school managers play a major

role at the beginning of the year when Grade 8 learners select fields of study. Two schools did not have any male learners enrolled for Home Economics as a subject. However, all the male learners enrolled for Home Economics participated in the study. Both schools had more male learners not enrolled for Home Economics as a subject which resulted in the exact presentation of the sample (50 male learners). Moreover, three Heads of Departments and one principal from the five schools participated in this study. At one school no school manager was willing to participate in the study. With the help of the school managers in the targeted schools, class lists were used to select 10 male learners using stratified random sampling. In this study, male learners were classified into strata which represented the pre-vocational subjects they had chosen.

The school managers randomly selected grade 8 male learners from each class group for all the subjects presented, for instance if three male learners were from the Accounting class, then two were from Design and Technology, depending on the pre-vocational subjects offered at the school as well as the number of learners involved in those subjects. This resulted in 10 male learners (who had not taken Home Economics) in total from each school. Stratified random sampling yielded a path for the researcher to get views of male learners from different subject groups. Therefore, a total number of fifty male learners from five schools, four male learners enrolled for Home Economics, four school managers in the //Kharas Educational Region formed the study sample.

Research instruments

The researcher collected data using questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were used to collect biographical data like age, pre-vocational subjects chosen, language spoken by

participants and views of male learners on Home Economics as a subject. Interviews were used as a follow up strategy to clarify certain areas that were not clearly stated in the questionnaire. Interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to directly interact with the Home Economics male learners and the school managers. This was done to probe reasons why male learners do not opt for Home Economics.

Data analysis

The quantitative data that were generated from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and figures) to identify general characteristics among the participants' views on factors influencing male learners' choice of Home Economics as a subject in the //Kharas Educational Region. However, the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and the interviews were analysed using the content analysis technique and was organised into categories. This method assisted the researcher to identify patterns, ideas and themes that emerged from the data (Neuman, 2011).

The researcher then used methodological triangulation to triangulate the data by dividing the text data into meaningful categories that were guided by the research questions and the interview themes. In this study, data triangulation was relevant thus different responses to the same questions from the open ended questionnaire, focus group interviews and standardised interview were compared with one another to help check the validity of the responses. Finally, data triangulation was also employed by the researcher to compare multiple sources of data (male learners not enrolled in Home Economics, school managers and Home Economics male learners) to help finalise the themes.

Findings

The data is presented according to the following themes in accordance with the main research questions:

- *Cultural/traditional norms perceived by male learners that hinder their choice to study Home Economics as a school subject in the //Kharas Educational Region.*
- *Parents', principals', and teachers' influence on male learners' decision to take Home Economics as an area of study in the Junior Secondary phase.*
- *Strategies to change the perceptions and increase the enrolment of male learners in Home Economics.*

Research question 1: What socio-cultural/traditional norms hinder male learners' choice to study Home Economics as a school subject in the //Kharas Educational Region?

Table 1: Male learners' agreement on statements pertaining to their perceptions toward Home Economics as a subject

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Home Economics is a subject for girls.	10 (20.4%)	16 (32.7%)	19 (38.8%)	4 (8.2%)
2. Home Economics is an easy subject to study.	8 (16.3%)	26 (53.1%)	11 (22.0%)	4 (8.2%)
3. I see no career in Home Economics.	5 (10.2%)	10 (20.4%)	20 (40.8%)	14 (28.6%)
4. I love the other elective subject more than Home Economics.	23 (46.9%)	19 (38.8%)	6 (12.2%)	1 (2.0%)

For Statement 1 (Home Economics is a subject for girls), 53.1% of the respondents Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement. It is also interesting to note that 69.4% of the male learners were of the view that Home Economics is an easy subject to study. The respondents gave the following reasons to the question: "Do you believe you will not have a career if you choose Home Economics as a subject?" Those who opted for a "yes" said that:

"Because later on, your male friends will tease you because you chose a career that belongs to girls";

"Because most boys will call me a moffie"

"Because Home Economics only unlocks one door which is becoming a chef";

"A career as a chef is not easy to find in Namibia";

From the other statements, especially the third one: "I see no career in Home Economics", 69.4% of the male learners disagreed. However, 85.7% of male learners agreed that they loved the other elective subjects more than Home Economics. Among the five schools where the study took place, only three schools had male learners enrolled for Home Economics as a subject in Grade 8. All the participants were interviewed through a focus group discussion. During the interviews with the male learners enrolled for Home Economics, the interviewees gave reasons as to why they chose Home Economics. Some male learners indicated they were struggling with other elective subjects and changed to Home Economics as they believed it to be an easy subject for them. They wanted to show other male

learners that Home Economics is not a subject for girls only. These learners also indicated that they chose Home Economics because they loved the practical part of cooking and in general, liked the subject. Home Economics enrolled participants also indicated that they were encouraged by their mothers to take Home Economics. This showed that some parents in the //Kharas Educational Region were involved in the subjects their male learners chose to study.

The participants who answered “No” said:

“With Home Economics I can become a qualified chef”;
“Chefs and fashion designers are needed”;
“There are a lot of careers in Home Economics”.

Moreover, all respondents interviewed, agreed that they were happy to be studying Home Economics and that they loved it. Interviewees provided reasons as to why they thought Home Economics should be taken by both male and female learners. They stated that Home Economics is actually a subject for all and that it is an important subject like any other subject. Respondents also stated the importance of Home Economics to teach everyone whether male or female on how to handle the environment, to know which foods are good for a balanced diet and learn about personal hygiene.

One principal and three HoDs in the five schools were part of the study. They were all interviewed through a standardised open-ended interview protocol and the researcher used pre-determined questions as a guide. School managers were interviewed on what they thought were the reasons why male learners at their schools were not enrolling for Home Economics. Two HoDs indicated that it’s a gender, cultural and an academic issue.

They further explained that Home Economics was regarded as a subject for girls since it is traditionally believed that cooking is for women. School Manager B1 remarked:

“I believe it’s about stereotyping that boys in this region believe cooking is for girls, and that’s the reason why male learners do not choose to study Home Economics.”

One school manager indicated that male learners did not choose Home Economics as they were afraid to be teased by fellow male learners if they chose Home Economics as a subject. School Manager D1 similarly remarked:

“It’s the mind set of our learners. They believe that males should not do women’s work like cooking for example.”

However, Home Economics was also regarded as an easy subject and so low-performing learners were placed in Home Economics classes. In addition, school managers also believed that there were no careers in studying Home Economics. The results given by the school managers supported the results given in the questionnaire for boys not enrolled for Home Economics that Home Economics is a subject for girls only. One HoD said:

“When it comes to subject choice at my school, we look at the interest of the learners as well as the symbols. For instance, those learners who had passed Mathematics with good symbols are placed in the Accounting class. There is a myth that is not proven that learners performing well in Mathematics are believed to perform well in Accounting. However, with Home Economics we allow learners who have done Home Ecology in grade 4-7 to proceed with Home Economics in Grade 8.”

Research question 2: How do parents, principals and teachers influence male learners' decisions to take Home Economics as an area of study in the Junior Secondary phase?

Male learners not enrolled for Home Economics were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement regarding the

influence of parents and teachers on their choice of Home Economics as a subject in the Junior Secondary phase.

Table 2: Parents' and teachers' influence on male learners taking Home Economics as perceived by male learners

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. My parents discouraged me to take Home Economics as a subject.	4 (8.5%)	3 (6.4%)	18 (38.3%)	22 (46.8%)
6. Teachers encourage girls to take Home Economics and not male learners.	6 (12.8%)	8 (17.0%)	15 (31.9%)	18 (38.3%)
7. I am not free to express my opinions in a Home Economics class.	6 (12.8%)	18 (38.3%)	14 (29.8%)	9 (19.1%)
8. I was already discouraged by my primary teachers not to take Home Economics as a subject.	4 (8.5%)	6 (12.8%)	17 (36.2%)	20 (42.6%)

The results showed that 85.1% of respondents disagreed with Statement 6 (My parents discouraged me to take Home Economics as a subject). However, 70.2% of respondents also disagreed that teachers encouraged female learners to take Home Economics and not male learners. Additionally, the majority of respondents

(78.8%) disagreed that they were already discouraged by primary school teachers not to take Home Economics as a subject. Table 3 shows responses regarding the cultural/traditional factors that hinder male learners' enrolment in Home Economics in the //Kharas Educational Region.

Table 3: Frequency of male learners' agreement on statements pertaining to cultural/traditional factors that hinder enrolment in Home Economics

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. In my culture, male learners are not allowed to become chefs.	2 (4.1%)	4 (8.3%)	16 (33.3%)	26 (54.2%)
10. Some cultural beliefs in my community are in conflict with the opinion that male learners can do Home Economics.	11 (23.4%)	8 (17.0%)	14 (29.8%)	14 (29.8%)
11. In my tradition male learners are regarded as capable	6 (12.8%)	18 (38.3%)	12 (25.5%)	11 (23.4%)

of learning Home Economics as girls.				
12. I find it worthless to choose Home Economics because my future is not there.	14 (29.8%)	16 (34.0%)	11 (23.4%)	6 (12.8%)
13. In my culture, male learners are expected to take subjects that are related to domestic science e.g. Home Economics.	3 (6.3%)	4 (8.3%)	29 (60.4%)	12 (25.0%)
14. In my tradition adults motivate male learners to do Home Economics.	2 (4.1%)	6 (12.5%)	21 (43.8%)	19 (39.6%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents (87.5%) disagreed with the statement 5 (In my culture, male learners are not allowed to become chefs). In addition, 59.6% of male learners also disagreed with the view that cultural beliefs in the community are in conflict with the opinion that male learners can do Home Economics. However, 63.8% of male learners were of the view that it is

worthless to choose Home Economics because their future is not within this field. Table 3 shows that the respondents were not influenced neither by culture nor traditional norms not to choose Home Economics. Table 4 shows the responses of the respondents regarding the beliefs male learners hold about Home Economics in the //Kharas Educational Region.

Table 4: Male learners' beliefs about Home Economics

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. I underestimate my ability to do Home Economics.	4 (8.2%)	20 (40.8%)	16 (32.7%)	9 (18.4%)
16. Male learners in my school are willing to do Home Economics.	6 (12.2%)	17 (34.7%)	15 (30.6%)	11 (22.4%)
17. Home Economics is a subject for girls only.	6 (12.2%)	5 (10.2%)	16 (32.7%)	22 (44.9%)
18. I believe that it is a usual practice for girls to do Home Economics.	19 (38.8%)	19 (38.8%)	9 (18.4%)	2 (4.1%)

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the male learners in this study disagreed with statement 16 (Male learners in my school are willing to do Home Economics). This belief is further confirmed by a large number of male respondents (77.6%) who agreed that it is a usual practice for girls to do Home Economics, even though an almost equal number of males (49.0% versus 51.1%) agreed that male learners

and female learners had equal abilities to do Home Economics. This shows that male learners strongly agreed that Home Economics is a girl's subject even though male learners can perform equally well in the subject as the girls.

School managers were interviewed on the current procedures in place at their schools regarding the choice of pre-vocational subjects as well as the advice

they gave to learners regarding subject choice. During the interview with the principal and the three HoDs, the school managers indicated that pre-vocational subjects were grouped on the application forms that are sent to the Primary Schools for Grade 8 enrolment at their schools. One HoD remarked that such arrangements were made to help learners make the right choices with the help of their parents. Another HoD indicated that parents were invited to a meeting before applications were released to explain the elective subjects to the parents, regarding their benefits and what they entailed. However, all HoDs conceded that when Grade 8 learners showed up for the new academic year, they were all taken to a venue where the subject teachers explained to them the structures of the pre-vocational subjects in order to encourage learners to make right

choices. The school managers were interviewed on the advice they gave to learners when they approached them when confused about which subjects to choose. The school managers indicated that they first talked to such learners about their interests and what they wished to become, as these were regarded as career-driven subjects. The school managers clearly indicated that they did not force learners to take subjects they did not want to take, but usually consulted their parents with regard to what subjects they should choose. However, one school manager indicated that at their school, learners not performing well in Accounting or Keyboard and Word Processing (KWP) classes were requested to change to Home Economics classes. The results to some extent showed that learners were given a choice to make decisions on the subjects they wanted to study.

Research question 3: What could be done to change the perceptions and increase the enrolment of male learners in Home Economics?

Four school managers indicated that male learners had the chance to become chefs too, either in hotels or holiday resorts, for instance on ships. The tourism industry in the country is growing and therefore, there would be better opportunities for them if they chose to study Home Economics as a subject. School managers indicated that male learners should be encouraged to take Home Economics through community awareness. Results showed that parents and the whole community at large should be enlightened on what Home Economics is all about and the careers involved in it. School managers were asked to state if there has been a stigma against male learners choosing to study Home Economics or those enrolled for the subject at their schools, as this might be one of the reasons male learners shy away from choosing Home Economics as a subject. School managers indicated that male learners who were enrolled in Home

Economics were labelled as girlish. One school manager emphasized that a male learner seen wearing an apron was teased by other male learners that he was a lady. Male learners were also mocked by other learners that there was no future in Home Economics. Results indicated that there is stigma towards male learners enrolled for Home Economics and school managers dealt with these cases. This showed that the mocking and the teasing from peers could be one of the reasons male learners did not take the subject.

Strategies to change the perceptions and increase the enrolment of male learners in Home Economics

School managers' interview results indicated that pre-vocational subjects were grouped on the application forms that were sent to primary schools for Grade 8 enrolment at their schools. This was in accordance with the revised curriculum for

the Junior Secondary phase which states that Grade 8 learners should at least have two pre-vocational subjects (Ministry of Education, 2014). Usually, parents in these schools were invited to a meeting before the application process so that pre-vocational subjects were explained to them. This showed that both parents and learners were aware of the availability of different pre-vocational subjects and what they entailed. Parents are more likely to influence learners' decisions than the guidance counsellors (Malgwi et al., 2005) and this could be the reason why parents are well informed about the importance of the pre-vocational subjects before they make decisions with and for their children. It was clear from the findings that learners were requested to consult their parents when it came to choosing pre-vocational subjects. School managers indicated that they did not force learners to take subjects they did not wish to take. This clearly showed that learners' interests and what they wished to become was put into consideration since pre-vocational subjects were regarded as career-driven subjects. As noted by Anyakoha (2007), Home Economics is the only course that teaches skills that are focused on family well-being as well as opportunities in the job market.

The results from male Home Economics learners in this study indicated that Home Economics was a subject for both males and females. Results further indicated that Home Economics was seen as a foundation for male learners to also learn important topics needed for their futures. This view is in line with Anyakoha's (2007) belief that education and knowledge in Home Economics empowers individuals to fulfil their fundamental needs and to manage everyday life's scarce resources. The results also showed that there was stigma towards male learners studying Home Economics as a subject. Learners were teased and mocked by others that there

were no careers. School managers however enlightened parents and the community on the subject's importance and careers involved in it.

Discussion of the findings

The results show that the participants agreed that Home Economics is perceived and regarded as a subject for girls only. According to the literature, male learners perceive Home Economics as having to do with the home, since it deals with different food preparations and serving of meals, decoration of the home and its surrounding, making of clothes and child care (Azubuikwe, 2012). It can therefore, be concluded that Home Economics in the //Kharas Educational Region is perceived as a subject for females. Male learners in this study in the //Kharas Educational Region also perceived Home Economics as a "moffie" subject. Egun (2008) indicated that sex-stereotyped occupation of girls over boys is a tradition which has socialised males into believing that it is a ridicule of manliness to venture into an occupation that is traditionally female reserved. The results indicated that male learners preferred the other pre-vocational subjects more than Home Economics. This preference can be attributed to the fact that some schools in the //Kharas Educational Region offer a variety of pre-vocational subjects and therefore learners choose subjects that most learners enrol for in the school. Davies et al. (2006) lamented that the choices open to a learner depended on the average popularity of subjects in the school and this varied with the social mix of learners. This could be the reason male learners did not choose to study Home Economics as a subject in the //Kharas Educational Region, as there existed a number of pre-vocational subjects to choose from at their schools and because Home Economics was perceived as a female subject.

The study found that male learners in the //Kharas Educational Region were not

influenced by culture or tradition to not choose Home Economics as a subject. This was shown in Table 3 where male learners indicated that they were allowed to become chefs in their culture. Results also showed that cultural and traditional beliefs in male learners in this study's communities allowed them to take Home Economics as a subject. It can therefore be concluded that cultural beliefs were not in conflict with the idea that male learners can become chefs or that they could do Home Economics as a subject. The majority of male learners (45.8%) indicated that they would rather choose Design and Technology instead of the other pre-vocational subjects offered. Male learners believed that they would have better careers and that they would be able to work for themselves in future if they choose to study Design and Technology. Learners also stated that Design and Technology is a subject for male learners since they were strong enough to do the hard work. Results indicated that male learners who were enrolled in Home Economics were labelled as girlish. This showed that there is a stigma attached to male learners choosing to study Home Economics or those enrolled for the subject and this might be one of the reasons why male learners shy away from choosing Home Economics in the //Kharas Educational Region. It can therefore, be concluded that tradition and culture influenced male learners to choose Home Economics as a subject due to lack of careers. The male learners' responses in the questionnaire indicated that most of the learners' parents cared about which subjects they chose to study. This was because the parents encouraged their children to take subjects that will allow them to make more money in order to assist the family in future. This was supported by Okoh's (2006) findings that parents were often more interested in occupations or professions which would bring money and prestige to the family.

Based on the results, it is possible to assume that teachers in the //Kharas Education Region were not involved in the selection of subjects for their learners. It appeared that male learners made choices of their own regarding which subjects they wanted to study. Furthermore, the results indicated that school managers believed that learners who performed poorly in the previous grade should be placed in the Home Economics class as it was believed to be an easy subject. This finding supports finding by Osuala (1998) who emphasised that Home Economics was believed to be designed for the less intelligent learners since it is easy. This could be one of the reasons there seemed to be few or no male learners in Home Economics classes in //Kharas Educational Region. The latter was due to the fact that it was believed that boys were more intelligent than girls (Nnubia, 2013). The results also emphasised that a male learner seen wearing an apron was often teased by other male learners. Dike (2006) emphasized that the wrong perception of Home Economics can be dated back to the colonial era where men were servants in the houses of the masters. This made it difficult for the perceptions to change. In addition, male learners were being mocked by other learners that they had no future in Home Economics. It could thus be concluded that in the //Kharas Educational Region, parents cared which subjects their male learners chose to study while teachers were not involved in the choice of subjects. Parents therefore discouraged male learners from taking Home Economics as a subject because they cared which subject their children took. Poorly-performing learners were placed in Home Economics classes as it was believed that Home Economics was an easy subject.

Conclusion

Findings of this study revealed that most participants perceived Home Economics as

a subject for girls. Male learners would rather choose to study Design and Technology as they believed that it was a subject meant for males. Although Home Economics had been available for many years in some schools, male learners viewed the subject differently and lacked information regarding what Home Economics really entailed. According to the data collected, male learners that chose to study Home Economics in the schools in //Kharas Educational Region were teased and mocked by fellow male learners. Remarks such as; “being not men enough” were often directed to them because they were accused of having ventured into a school subject that was meant for girls. The results further indicated that Home Economics was believed to be an easy subject and that was one of the reasons why low-performing learners were placed in Home Economics classes. However, the data also showed that male learners were not influenced by culture/tradition not to take Home Economics as a subject. Cultural beliefs in the community were not in conflict with the idea that males could become chefs. Parents were in most instances involved in the selection of their children’s subjects as evidenced by the questionnaire results. Parents cared about what subjects their children chose to study. Parents encouraged their children to study subjects which would allow them to make more money in the future.

On the other hand, results pointed out that teachers treated male learners differently during pre-vocational subject lessons and this resulted in male learners opting not to choose subjects that were believed to be female oriented like KWP and Home Economics. The findings in this study further indicated that pre-vocational subjects were grouped on the application forms for Grade 8 enrolment at schools, which gave both parents and their children the opportunity to choose the pre-vocational subjects they preferred. Parents

were invited for a meeting before the school application process and pre-vocational subjects were explained to them in detail. Added to this, in situations of choosing pre-vocational subjects, learners were requested to consult their parents before they made a final decision.

Recommendations

In order to address the factors influencing boys’ choice of Home Economics as a subject in the Junior Secondary phase, the researcher recommends the following actions:

1. Male learners should be sensitized by teachers and parents to give up their negative views about studying Home Economics, that is, their view of the subject as a feminine subject.
2. There is need for a campaign through seminars and mass media about the importance of Home Economics and the career opportunities that the subject could provide to learners and the society. This is necessary because many people are not aware of the importance of the subject in national development.
3. Career days should be organised from time to time at both primary and secondary school levels to motivate and stimulate the learners' interest in pre-vocational subjects such as Home Economics.
4. The Government should encourage males studying Home Economics through incentives for example scholarships or bursary awards.
5. Learners should be taken on excursions/field-trips to various establishments in the industry where Home Economics was being utilised such as food processing industries, textile mills and sewing institutions. This will give them the opportunity to see both males and females employed in these areas.

6. A similar study is recommended to investigate the selection of pre-vocational subjects in the Senior Primary phase where there exists a choice between Elementary Agriculture, Home Ecology and Design and Technology.
7. Further research should be carried out on a large scale including other educational regions in Namibia to investigate the factors that influence learners' choice of pre-vocational subjects.

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