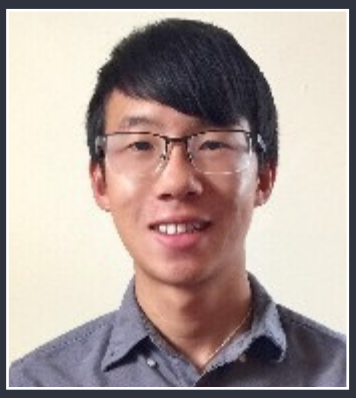
Addressing gender imbalance in the construction industry: investigation of intervention to promote construction industry in secondary school



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Background: the construction industry, a vital part of the economy, faces a significant skills shortage and negative perceptions among young people. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and innovative work environment.

The study employs a two-pronged methodological approach: stakeholder consultations and a school-based intervention. Stakeholder consultations involved in-depth interviews with industry leaders, graduates, apprentices, and educators to identify barriers and enablers related to participation in construction; a key challenge in construction was examined: gender inequity. Then, a school-based intervention targeted students in Somerset to expose schoolchildren to the construction industry; the intervention provided educational sessions and real-world insights into construction careers, aiming to change potentially negative perceptions of the industry and inspire interest. One of the aims of the intervention was to encourage

schoolgirls to enter the construction field. This was done to help address the problem of gender imbalance in the construction sector. Following the intervention, interviews with students took place to gather their insights.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted following the stakeholder consultations and student interviews, and NVivo software was used to analyse the data, identifying themes and subthemes.

Results: Findings from the stakeholder consultations reveal persistent stereotypes and work culture challenges that deter many from entering the construction industry. Key enablers identified include early engagement, role models, and mentorship programs. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of adolescent influences, noting that parents and schools play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' perceptions and interests in construction careers. The school-based intervention demonstrated that educational activities effectively broadened students' understanding and awareness of construction careers. Many students expressed increased interest and recognized the diverse roles available, including project management, data analysis, and engineering. Interviews revealed that male students were more likely to consider careers in construction compared to female students, highlighting persistent gender stereotypes and the need for targeted interventions to encourage schoolgirls.

Conclusion: The dissertation concludes that promoting construction careers through targeted educational interventions can significantly enhance interest and participation in the industry. Key strategies include integrating construction-related topics into school curriculums, providing role models, and offering mentorship programs. The study found that addressing gender-specific challenges, particularly for schoolgirls, is crucial. Stakeholder consultations highlighted the importance of tackling persistent stereotypes and improving work culture to make the industry more inclusive. Overall, these findings offer valuable insights for the construction sector and underscore the importance of early, inclusive, and sustained engagement to foster a more diverse workforce.