

FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ONITSHA EDUCATION ZONE

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Abstract

Career choice is a complex decision for students since it determines the kind of profession that they intend to pursue in life. As students try to make career choice while in secondary school, they face problem of matching their career choices with their abilities and school performance. Every year, senior secondary students make career choices before sitting for their final examination. However, studies indicate that most students enter into careers that are totally different from the ones they chose while in secondary. The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing career choice among SS1 secondary school students in Onitsha. The study was conducted using descriptive survey design with a population of 332 students. The data for this study was collected using questionnaire and interview schedules and was analyzed using one way ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study indicate that availability of advancement opportunities and learning experiences are the most influential factors affecting career choices among students. While males reported learning experiences and career flexibility as the most influential factors, females however reported availability of advancement opportunity and opportunity to apply skills as the most influential factors. However, no variance was reported for persons influencing career choice by gender.

Background

Career choice has become a complex science with the advent of information technology, the emergence of post industrial revolution and job competition. It was a common practice in the old days to find feudalism converting it into a family affair where the son of a blacksmith was destined to become a blacksmith and a feudal was born a leader. Industrialization and post industrialization has made it possible for a common person to be richer as long as she or he has due skills and knowledge (Wattles, 2009). Today, one has not only to make due career planning but also

exhaustive research before making a career choice so as to adjust with the evolving socio-economic conditions (Wattles, 2009). Most students in secondary schools do not have accurate information about occupational opportunities to help them make appropriate career choice.

According to Kerka (2000), career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self concept, identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and financial. Bandura et al (2001), state that each individual undertaking the process is influenced by several factors including the context in which they live in, their personal aptitudes, social contacts and educational attainment. According to Hewitt (2010), factors influencing career choice can either be intrinsic or extrinsic or both. Hewitt further states that most people are influenced by careers that their parents favour, others follow the careers that their educational choices have opened for them, some choose to follow their passion regardless of how much or little it will make them while others choose careers that give high income. Students perception of being suitable for particular jobs also has been found to be influenced by a number of factors including ethnic background, year in school, level of achievement, choice of science subjects, attitudes and differences in job characteristics (McQuaid and Bond, 2003).

In a study by Perrone et al., (2001), on role model influence on the career decisiveness of college students, it was found that role model supportiveness, and quality of relationship contributed to the career choice of students. The same study indicated that majority of the students selected same gender role models. Research on the role of spirituality and religion in career development although limited in scope has suggested that such factors relate positively to desirable career development outcomes such as decisions. For many people with spiritual or religious commitment, faith plays a critical role in the career decision making process (Duffy and Dick 2009). A Study on career choice in Ethiopia by (2007) indicated that the students had an external locus of control and believes that there are numerous external factors which influence their career choices. These external factors include political and economic considerations, previous work experience and the influence of key individuals in a person's life. Pummel, Harwood and Lavalley (2008), reports that external influences that helps to shape an individual's career choice are also influenced by significant others through social support from peers.

In a study by Natalie (2006), young adults through interaction with the context of family, school and community learn about and explore careers which ultimately lead to their career choice. One consistent finding in research suggests that adolescents' own aspirations are influenced by their parent's aspirations or expectations. Parental support and encouragement are important factors that have been found to influence career choice. Children may choose what their parents desire simply to please them (Taylor et al, 2004). According to Oyamo and Amoth (2008),

studies in Kenya show that rural students tend to seek help from parents more than urban students and that parents more than teachers play a major role in the career choice of students.

Generally, the choice of a career is influenced by parents, friends, and counsellors. Variations occur from one population to the other. In Kenya, every SS1 secondary school students make their career choices before sitting for their final West African Examination Council. The result of this final examination determines who joins university since admissions into careers are determined by grades obtained from it.

Before making their career choices, students are often provided with a list of careers from which they are to make choices. Most of the students lack adequate information regarding various careers hence the choices that they make are embedded in their perception of the ideal job and the subjects they study in secondary school. The only support students get within the school is from career masters or counsellors as they are mostly referred to and the teachers who are expected to support students in their career. When the final examination results are released and depending on the grades, students are then admitted to the universities based on the career choices that had made while in school. When these students graduate from the universities, some of them enter into occupations that are totally different from the ones they had chosen and trained for. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors influencing career choice among SS1 secondary school students in Onitsha.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted using descriptive survey research design. The study was done in Onitsha. From the thirty one secondary schools in Onitsha, Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 332 SS1 students who took part in this study. Data for this study was collected using both structured and unstructured questionnaire and interview schedules which were presented to students. In order to remove the ambiguity and biasness and make instruments reliable, a pilot study was conducted in three schools that did not form part of the study sample. Quantitative data was analyzed using One Way ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance and descriptive statistics such as graphs, charts, frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data was transcribed and into emergent themes.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors influencing career choice among senior secondary school One (SS1) students in Onitsha. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the students were provided with a list of 15 pre-determined

factors so that they could indicate how much each of the factors influenced their career choices and the results of which are presented in the following section.

Outcome Expectations

As individual makes career choice, there are often certain benefits that one expects to come with the career chosen. These benefits are referred to in this study as outcome expectations. In an effort to determine the outcome expectations that influence students' career choices eight aspects of outcome expectations were given to the students to indicate their level of agreement. The results are shown in table 1. The result presented on table 1 indicates that a high number of students 47.3% strongly agreed that availability of jobs influenced their career choice, 24.3% agreed while 11.7% were neutral. 8.7% disagreed and 8.1% strongly disagreed. Availability of advancement opportunities in the careers chosen was also influential with 42.9% strongly agreeing and 34.4% agreeing which is more than half of the respondents. Less than 10% disagreed that their career choice was not influenced by availability of advancement opportunity. Employment security reported more than 50% agreeing. However, a big number were neutral 20% reporting the highest number of neutral respondents. Ability to choose career specialization within a given occupation was also considered influential with 35.6% strongly agreeing and 29.1% agreeing. More than 60% of the respondents reported that their career choice was influenced by their ability to apply the knowledge and skills learned while only 12.8% did not consider this as an influential factor.

Table 1: Outcome Expectations

Aspects of outcome expectations	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagreed	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Availability of advancement	136	42.9	109	34.4	42	13.2	191	60	11	3.5
Availability of jobs	158	47.3	81	24.3	39	11.7	29	8.7	27	8.1
Employment security	111	33.7	85	25.8	66	20.1	38	11.6	29	8.8
Career flexibility	116	35.7	109	33.5	55	16.9	27	8.3	18	5.5
Prestige associated with the profession	94	29.7	82	25.9	63	19.9	50	15.8	28	8.8
Ability to	116	35.6	95	29.1	70	21.5	26	8.0	19	5.8

Factors influencing career choice among secondary school students in Onitsha education zone

choose career specialization										
Self employment opportunity	95	29.9	90	28.3	57	17.9	45	14.2	31	9.7
Opportunity to apply skills and knowledge	148	45.3	96	29.4	41	12.5	22	6.7	20	6.1

Career flexibility was also considered influential in students' career choices with 35.7 strongly agreeing and another 33.5 agreeing. Only 8.3% disagreed to this while 5.5 % strongly disagree. Prestige associated with the profession reported 55.6% of the respondents responding in the affirmative, 19.9% were neutral and 24.6 responded in the negative. Most of the students' choices were also influenced by the opportunities for self employment. From the results, 29.9% strongly agreed, 28.3% agreed, 17.9% were neutral, 14.2% disagreed and 9.7% strongly disagreed. In general, all the above factors reported more than 50% of respondents agreeing that their career choices were influenced by the 7 factors.

Gender as Individual Variants

Another factor that was considered to be important in influencing career choice among students was gender as an individual variant. The results of the influence that gender has an individual variant on career choice is presented in explain Figure 1. The result shows that most respondents did not consider gender as an influential factor in their career choice with 20.4% strongly agreeing and 16.4 agreeing. However, 49.2% disagreed that gender did not influence their career choice. This shows that most students were not influenced by their gender when choosing their careers.

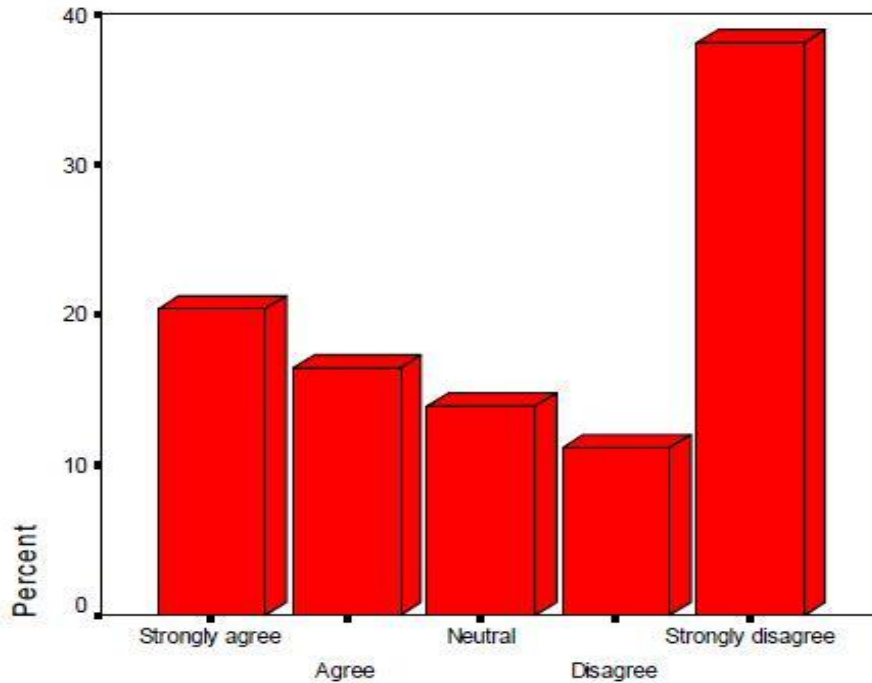


Figure 1: Gender as a Factor Influencing Career Choice Personal Interests

In the study personal interest of a student was considered important in influencing an individual’s career choice. The students were therefore asked to state to what extent their personal interest influences their career choice. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Personal Interest as a Factor Influencing Career Choice Frequency = (F) Percentage = (%)

Factors	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Personal interest	156	48.3	74	22.9	37	11.5	28	8.7	28	8.7

Matching personal interest with career choice often leads to job satisfaction. From the results on Table 2, 48.3% of the students strongly agreed while 22.9% also agreed that their career choice was influenced by their interests. Less than 20% disagreed that their career choice was influenced by their interests. These results are in agreement with those of Dediemko (2005) and Perrone, et al., (2001) who reported that students' interests provide the main motives for their career choice. This results show that when choosing careers most students consider their interests.

Learning Experiences

The researcher was interested in finding out if learning experience of a student has any influence on his or her career choice. This was important because while students are in school they go through varied learning experiences as they interact with curriculum depending on the courses and subject that they learn in school. The students were therefore asked to indicate the level of agreement on the extent to which learning experiences influenced their career choice and the students' response is presented in Figure 2.

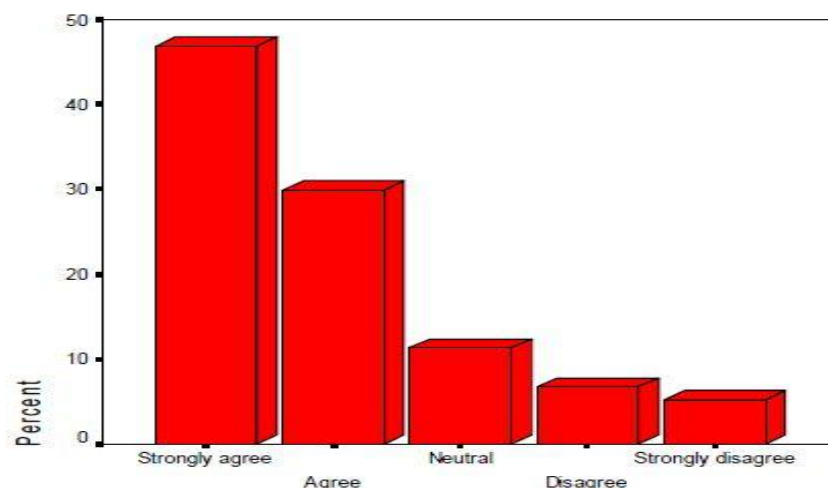


Figure 2: Learning Experiences as a Factor Influencing Career Choice

The results in Figure 2 shows that 46.8% strongly agreed, 30.0% agreed while only 11.9% did not agree, 11.3% were neutral. This shows that learning experiences influenced most of the students' careers choices.

Other Factors Influencing Career Choice

Data collection for this study also involved interview with students. Through interview, students were asked to state if there are other factors that may influence their career choice. Other than the listed factors, students were asked to indicate other factors which influenced their choice of career. The most common factor identified by students was having a friend or relative in certain career was the most common influence mentioned since getting jobs in certain occupations is not easy unless you knew someone who is willing to support you. Religion was also mentioned as one of the factors that influenced students' career choices. For those with religious commitments, faith plays a critical role in important life decision such as career choice.

Another factor that was cited by the students was the political climate in the country. The political climate in a country keep changing from time to time, whenever there is political instability most of the resources in a country are destroyed hence leading to loss of job opportunities. The above results agree with Stebleton (2007), who reported that one of the most cited factors by respondents in his study was political consideration which was also reported by some of the respondents in this study.

Level of Influence of Factors on Career Choice

The second objective of this study was to find out the level of influence of the factors on career choice. The mean for the factors influencing career choice were computed and then comparison was made. Based on the scale of measurement used, the factor with the lowest mean is the most influential while that with the highest mean is the least influential. The results are shown on Figure 3

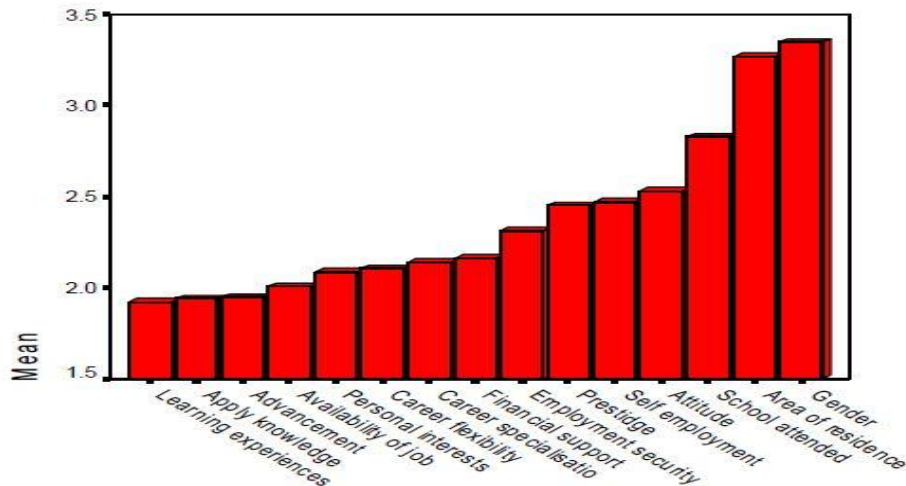


Figure 3: Level of Influence of Factors Influencing Career Choice by Mean

From the results in Figure 3, out of 15 factors presented to students it was found that 13 influence student's career choices while only 2 factors were reported as not influential by the students. Learning experiences was the most influential factor ($M=1.92$) followed by availability of advancement ($M=1.93$). The third most influential factor was opportunity to apply skills and knowledge ($M=1.99$). The least influential factor was school attended ($M=2.79$). The respondents reported that residence ($M=3.21$) and gender ($M=3.30$) are the factors that least affect students' career choice. These results differ from those of Perrone et al., (2001) who reported that interest provides the main motive or influence for students' career choice. These findings also differ from those of Myburgh (2005) which shows availability of employment as the most influential factor in students' career choices. Dlamini (2004) and Stebleton (2007) also reported economic reasons as the most influential factors when it comes to career choice. These differences could be as a result of the difference in the list of factors provided in the different studies. The results in the present study show that outcome expectations appear to be a major influence in students' career choices with the least influential reporting a mean value of 2.17. This means that most of the respondents agreed that their career choices are influenced by the outcome expectations once they are involved in their careers of choice. Gender and environmental reasons were reported as the least influential factors. This suggests that the environment an individual develops in and gender will shape their interests but not directly influence the choices they make.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to find out factors influencing career choice among SS1 students in Onitsha education zone. The analysis of the study was based on the following six factors: outcome expectations, gender, personal interests, and other factors. On expectations of students from career return the results reported on table 1, indicates that each element of expectation outcome factor reported more than 50% of the respondents responding in the affirmative and less than 30% responding in the negative. This shows that when students are making career choices, outcome expectations play a very influential role in their final decisions. These results are similar to those of Khami et al., (2008), Rodrigo et al (2005), Perrone et al., (2001) and Myburgh (2005) who also found out that outcome expectations influence individuals career choices. These similarities confirm that when students make career choice their decisions are much influenced by what a particular career is likely to give in returns. As to whether gender influences career choice or not, this study shows that most students who took part in this study are not influenced by gender. However, a few of the students still consider their gender when making their choices. These results differ from those of Hall (2010) who reports that individual's career choices are influenced by gender. This difference in the research findings

could be as a result of the fact that Hall (2010), based his research on respondents who are already in the job market while this study is based on form four secondary school students. These findings demonstrate that there are other factors that influence students' career choices rather than gender.

Regarding the influence of personal interest on career choice, the study reported that more than 70% of the students who participated were influenced by personal interest when making career choice. These findings are not strange considering those students' interests are often shaped by their environment, the people they interact with and more so their life experiences as they grow. The results on learning experiences indicate that over 70% of participants agree that learning experiences influence their choice of career. These results agree with those of Dlamini et al., (2004), Myburgh (2005) and Khami et al., (2008) who reported intellectual challenges, performance and educational reasons respectively as influential in students career choices all of which fall under learning experiences. The influence of learning experience may be due to the fact that it is in schools that students learn about and explore various careers before they make their career choices and choose subject combinations that eventually lead to their career choices. It is also through their learning experiences while in school those students decide on what they would want to pursue in future in relation to their careers.

The findings of this study concur with Myburgh (2005)'s findings that discrimination in certain professions also prevent students from choosing certain careers. These results show that, despite efforts to attain gender equity, Africa still has a long way to go especially when it comes to career choice.

In most African cultures individuals have strong religious beliefs and value religious teachings and so this could be the reason why religion is among the factors that influence students' career choice. Peer pressure was also indicated as a factor that influenced career choice and this concurs with Arudo (2008). These results may be as a result of overloaded curriculum, overworked teachers who do not have time to advice students and parents spending less time with their children. This leaves the students in the hands of their fellow peers to offer the necessary guidance.

The second objective of this study was to establish the level of influence of factors on career choice. The results of this study show that outcome expectations appear to be a major influence in students' career choices with the least influential reporting a mean value of 2.17. This means that most of the respondents agreed that their career choices are influenced by the outcome expectations once they are involved in their careers of choice. Gender and environmental reasons were reported as the least influential factors. This suggests that the environment an individual develops in and gender will shape their interests but not directly influence the choices they make.

The findings of the current study however differ from those of Perrone et al., (2001), who reported in their findings that anticipated earnings are the most influential factors for males while females were mostly influenced by prestigious positions. These findings also differ from those of Rodrigo et al (2005), whose results reveal that females were more influenced in their career choice by the desire to work for other people while males were mostly influenced by monetary gains.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Students' career choices are influenced by numerous factors including outcome expectancies, individual variants such as gender, personal interests, learning experiences, environmental factors and personal contacts. Outcome expectancies were the most influential factors in student's career choices. However gender and the environment play a very minimal role when it comes to career choice. There are variations in the level of influence each factor has on students' career choices by gender. Family members are more influential in students' career choices as compared to other persons. As students interact with their peers, their advice is less important as compared to family members, teachers and career counselors. However, teachers are more influential compared to career counselors. There were no variations in the level of influence that each person had on students' career choice by gender.

Based on the conclusions that career choices are mostly influenced by the outcome expectancies of each career, this study recommends that career counsellors should provide students with experiences that expand the exploration process and a wide range of career information on all the available careers so that they can be able to explore widely before making their choices. The study further recommends that, after initial career decisions have been made, career counsellors can continue to encourage successful career development by identifying sources of psychosocial support available to students. Persons that offer career advice to students should ensure that they are well informed so as to provide accurate information that will lead students to correct career choice.

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