

Career Info,
Counseling And
Occupational Choices
Among Learners In
Secondary In Mbarara
District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing demand for career info and counselling services worldwide. Push and pull factors arising from labour market reforms and modernization of education and training systems in developing and middle-income countries call for the improvement of career info and counselling provision. Thus this study intended to determine the association between career info and occupational choices among secondary schools in Mbarara district, Uganda. 11,316 form six learners aged 17-20 took part in the study. This study adapted a causal-comparative research design. Simple random sampling was used to select 383 participants. Researcher-made questionnaires were used to collect data. Data analysis was done using Pearson's correlation coefficient r with the help of R (R Core Team, 2015). The results of the study showed that there was a positive significant association between occupation choice and career info and counselling ($r= 0.127, p\{0.019\} <0.05$). Counsellors in schools need professional training and skills to enable them to use standardized assessment instruments including the Self-Directed Search and Strong Interest Inventory to simplify and clarify learners' personality, career interests, ability and principles. Again, career resource libraries with job search webs and manuals and information on employers should be established in secondary schools.

Keywords: Career Info, Counseling, Mbarara, Occupation, Uganda

1. BACKGROUND

There is an increasing demand for career info and counselling services worldwide. This is because about one-third of the 1.1 billion youths in the world suffer from a deficit of decent work opportunities (www.eurostat). There is a need for capacity building in systems in developing and middle-income countries to increase the employability of their graduates. Much has been written about the difficulties learners face when transitioning from their role as students in schools to adults in the workplaces (Kanuka, 2010; Kasworm, 2008; Cranton, 2006). One aspect of this transition that is not often addressed, however, is the need for career info and counselling to assist learners in making informed educational and professional choices about their future and facilitate their successful transition to the world of work. A misperceived career choice directs all individual efforts and resources in the wrong direction. This would not only be frustrating and draining of the individual energy but also wastage of resources (Kazi, Nimra & Nawaz, 2017). The right career choice for the learners entering into professional education is critical because it has an impact on their professional life and future achievement (Sultana & Watts, 2008). The career choice of the learners should be based on strong knowledge and complete info, matching individual personality type, interests, abilities, desires, and values. This significantly increases the chances for success and fulfilment in their professional life and at the same time will avoid the waste of human talents and resources through wrong occupational choices. Thus, the learners need to be oriented on new emerging trends, future opportunities, and challenges in the context of career occupation options.

The discrepancy between the skills graduates possess and the rising demand for skills in the labour market throughout the country suggests that career info and counselling cannot be underestimated. It is widely acknowledged that career info and counselling is beneficial not only for the individual's choices for the future but also contributes to achieving public policy goals in the labour market. Career info and counselling in secondary schools helps learners to be responsive to the best choices while selecting an academic and a career direction (Gumisiriza, 2012). Learners select such career paths based on their personality dispositions, interests, abilities and values. Thus, career resource libraries are a vital element in helping learners when making critical decisions that may affect their career paths. However, such modern facilities lack in most secondary schools in Uganda and Mbarara in particular. Additionally, most professional counsellors and more so teacher counsellors in Africa generally and Uganda in particular lack skills to use standardized assessment instruments like the Self-Directed Search and Strong Interest Inventory which help to clarify learners' personality, values, abilities and career interests. Due to such incompetence, learners may not make basic occupational decisions at all phases of learning or training which affects their switch into the job market (MOES, 2011).

According to Erikson's (1968) model of development, adolescents want to know the kind of work they will do in their lives. Such curiosity can be adequately dealt with only if the right info and professional counselling are provided. Only occupations corresponding to a person's desires, abilities, values, personality, and interests lead to efficacious work and creativity. Kumar (2016) argues that choice of a career is a topic of concern in an individual's life because it determines whether one will be successful or not. Without career info and counselling individuals will be misfits in their workplace and consequently will be less productive and efficient, and therefore are unable to enjoy their work or achieve their goals. Although adolescence is generally recognized as a critical time in career development, there has tended to be an overemphasis on studying career aspirations, and a lack of research on other important aspects of learners' career development.

In Uganda, secondary schools and colleges have been facilitated to build physical structures to strengthen and provide counselling and info among learners. Thus close to 62% of secondary schools in Uganda have designated offices and career masters. Their major duty is to attend to the career needs of learners. The government through the Ministry of Education and Sports provides training, training manuals and the required information. This has generally led to increased career choice making among learners (the Republic of Uganda, 2017). However, inadequate technical staff and expertise to provide professional counselling and info are serious challenges threatening the gains so far achieved (Wambu, & Fischer, 2015). This is confirmed by a national survey regarding the parents' concerns on secondary education in Uganda. According to the survey lack of professional career counselling and info was ranked second at 12.5% after school fees at 26.5% (New Vision, 2018).

Based on the above-mentioned problem on career aspirations among secondary school students, secondary school graduates need serious help (Nwachuku, 2000). Besides, making the right career choice has always been

a major source of anxiety and problem for students and teachers in secondary schools. Sadly, the pressure for getting the best grades which are also a basis for determining what learners can do force the learners to make inexpedient decisions, thus affecting their future careers. This is clearly demonstrated by program or course changes and increased dropout rate of university students (Kunnen, 2013). With learners choosing careers that do not suit their interest, values and personality, then three worrying scenarios could emerge:

- Retention problems and an increased dropout rate of university students, thus losing money, time and talents,
- Learners completing the courses which do not match their interests, personality and value and end up choosing different career paths and,
- Learners doing courses which do not match their interests or personality and may get jobs based on such “wrong courses” but with dire consequences. These are the misfit and less interested managers, unhappy and serial absentee employees.

The present study envisioned to provide evidence that there is an association between career info and counselling and occupational choices. It was therefore hypothesized that there is no statistically significant association between career info and counselling and occupational choices among secondary schools in Mbarara district.

2. METHODS

A causal-comparative research design was used in this study. Different groups were analyzed and compared regarding career info and occupational choices of the participants. This enabled the observation of the impact of career info and learners' occupational choices.

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

The comparison groups comprised the different categories of different schools secondary schools in Mbarara district. The target population was 11,316 form six learners. These learners were in their final phase in secondary school education. At this stage, learners are expected to choose subject combinations that propel them into career occupations. Counselling and info are essential during this phase because that is when learners make life-changing decisions (Hirschi, 2007). Simple random sampling was used to select 18 secondary schools. Using a table by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) a sample size of 383 including 198 boys and 185 girls was determined. This information is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Gender

Gender	N	Percentage
Male	198	51.7
Female	185	48.3
Total	383	100

Table 1 demonstrates that more than half (51.7%) of the sample respondents were male while the female respondents constituted 48.3%. Results show that the number of male respondents was 3.4% bigger than that of the female respondents. This difference notwithstanding, the size of both female and male respondents was good enough for the study to capture gender-balanced experiences of career info and career choices in Mbarara district.

2.2 INSTRUMENTS

Data collection was done through researcher-made questionnaires. Validity was determined through pretesting. The internal consistency for tools was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the alpha was 0.82 which was considered very satisfactory.

2.3 PROCEDURE

Instruments were administered to respondents at pre-arranged times in their respective schools. Administrators including headteachers or deputies were contacted through phone calls, emails, and letters. Respondents were contacted physically through administrators of the schools. Afterwards, the survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who filled them and were later collected for onward analysis.

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology granted permission to collect data from the respondents. The researcher also acquired ethical approval from the National HIV/AIDS Research Committee. Informed written consent was obtained from respondents and they were guaranteed of confidentiality. Respondents anonymously completed the questionnaires within the time allotted to the researcher.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

All statistical analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2015) with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. The Shapiro–Wilk test results showed that the respondents' scores were normally distributed. Pearson's correlation coefficient r was used to determine the association between the independent and dependent variables.

3. RESULTS

The first objective of the study was to find out whether there was a statistically significant association between career info resources and occupational choices. Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient r analysis was conducted to establish the intended association between variables of interest. Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient matrix of several career information resources that learners were aware of and their occupational choices.

Table 2: Correlation of career info and occupation choices

		Career info	Occupational choices
Career info	Pearson Correlation	1	.127(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.019
	N	383	383
Occupation choices	Pearson Correlation	.127(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.
	N	383	383

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows that the level of occupational choices had positive and a significant relationship with the career info ($r= 0.127, p\{0.019\} <0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was thus *rejected*. This implies that more career info and counselling offered improve better decision making with respect to occupational choices.

4. DISCUSSION

Generally speaking, career choice has increasingly become a problem among Ugandan youths. There is pressure on learners to choose a careers and end up making inexpedient decisions, which may affect them in the long-term. The higher institutions of learning do not help much either because they often demand top performance for certain courses. However, career info and professional counselling provide make students understand their personality propositions, values, abilities, their problems and world at large (Lunenburg, 2010). But most importantly, with professional counselling, learners can choose careers which match their interests, abilities, values and personality.

The present study complements existing literature which indicates that a relationship exists between career info and occupation choices. The result of this finding is in support of Kemijika (2008) who observed that career info and counselling should start early in life right from the primary and in secondary schools. Learners should be acquainted with the realities of life and what faces them after leaving school. The study also indicated learners have to be directed to realize their capabilities, interests and values. These results again mirror the results of Njeri, Sindabi, and Chepchieng (2017) in their study on the influence of career information on the choice of degree program in universities in Kenya. The results discovered that career information had an association with the choice of the degree program of learners in public universities in Kenya.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The more info the learners receive the more they make the best choices concerning career choices. A vast amount of information introduces learners to the various career paths they could take. The current study has proved that providing career info helps the learners to make better choices regarding careers. Thus without

career info and professional counselling is detrimental for employers who will tussle to keep excellent employees interested in careers that they no longer want.

Trained counsellors, not teacher counsellors should be employed in schools. Due to a limited number of trained and qualified counsellors in the country, then short courses on career training and assessment should be given to the teacher counsellors. Counsellors in schools need professional training and skills to enable them to use standardized assessment instruments such as the Strong Interest Inventory, the Self-Directed Search and other instruments designed to clarify career interests, values, personality, or self-identified skills. Again, career resource libraries with books on a wide range of career options, job search webs and manuals and information on employers should be established in all secondary schools. Without career info and counselling, the learners may not know what to do when they finish education.

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