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A Comparative Study on the Influence of Formal (School) Career Guidance and Non-Formal (Parents) Career Guidance on Secondary School Students' Career Decisions in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study sought to compare two major sources of career guidance, formal and non-formal career guidance. The researcher carried out a causal comparative study on 93 participants (currently employees in four different employing institutions). These participants were purposively selected from a population of four research sites in Harare; (ministry of education, ministry of health, business office and industry). Each participant completed a 45-item, closed form questionnaire indicating their perceptions about the most influential source of the career guidance they received during secondary school. The results were analyzed using SPSS. A Chi-square test was carried out to compare the expected and observed frequencies. A Chi-square value of 0.025 was obtained and therefore the hypothesis was rejected. There is a significant difference in the observed and expected numbers of individuals influenced by formal and non-formal career guidance. Almost twenty one percent (20.9%) of the participants indicated that they were influenced by formal career guidance whilst 44% reported to have been influenced by non-formal sources of career guidance. However 35.2% of the participants reported to have been influenced by both formal and non-formal sources of career guidance. Among these non-formal sources, parents emerged as the most influential sources of influence in the choice of a career by most secondary school students. Schools, (through career guidance programs) were reported to be the second most influential sources of influence in career decisions by secondary school students. Since parents seem to be among the most trusted sources of career guidance, yet they do not have a formal channel of implementing their career guidance, it is therefore recommended that a collaborative approach to providing career guidance to secondary school students be adopted. A collaboration of

the two major sources of career guidance, formal and non-formal career guidance, might most probably result in optimal career satisfaction levels for the student since he/she might get the best from both sources of career guidance.

Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of developing identity and a career is one of those ways that help an adolescent develop his identity. Careers are among some of the key means by which many individuals get self-fulfillment and satisfaction in life; for careers may determine one's social and financial status (Dubrin, 1992; Belkin, 1988; Hoppock, 1957). According to Papalia (2009, p. 386), career planning is very critical for the adolescent. It is one of the ways an adolescent can develop his identity. Papalia (2009, p. 386) asserts that the question, "What shall I do in life?" is very close in meaning to "Who shall I be?" Given the gravity of the matter, career choices may not be made on a trial and error basis (Murwira, 1995). Hence there is an urgent need for career guidance for the inexperienced adolescents for it greatly determines their identity.

The process of choosing a career is of great significance to most adolescents. A good career choice can have lasting satisfaction whilst a poor choice may lead to a career life of misery and frustrations. Researches indicate that employees who make the right career choice are more likely to attain job satisfaction and career satisfaction (Zaidi & Iqbal, 2011; Ipaye, 1986). According to Papalia (2009), people who feel that their career is something worthwhile will tend to do it well, feel good about themselves and conversely those who feel that their career is of less significance both to them and society, or that they are not good at it tend to wonder about the meaning of their lives.

Background to the study

Career guidance is imperative, for if left unguided students are more likely prone to choose occupations without directly relating them to their interests and abilities (Ipaye, 1986, p. 144). Without adequate career guidance, adolescents may scramble for non-existent careers that have become obsolete (Shumba, 1985). The media is full of advertisements on careers, but researches have indicated that

information alone is not enough; the young adolescents need systematically directed career guidance from loving individuals that have a relationship with them (Davidson, 2009). Such individuals are mainly the adolescent's parents, school administrators, school counsellors and teachers. Ipaye (1986, p. 127) observed that "what children will be when they grow up has been a matter of intense interest to mothers, teachers and to some extent, manpower planners." According to Singh (2005), both the school and the parents have the most positive influence on the adolescent's career choice. The parents know their child best and the school has the record on the student's academic performance and they know the student's abilities.

Parents influence their adolescent children's career decisions in various ways. They influence their children's career development from early childhood, through socialization. Parents play a major role in the primary socialization of the child and continue to exert great influence on their children throughout life (Zvobgo, 2009). Right from birth, the parents begin influencing their children through the toys they buy for them and the home duties they assign their male children. Gender stereotyping of careers can begin as early as during infancy, when parents buy toys for their little ones. A message is communicated by the type of toys we buy for our babies; this might lay a foundation for the choice of a career. For example, building blocks are usually bought for boys and dollies for girls. Campenni (cited by Bussey & Bandura, 2012) noted that parents view feminine toys and activities as more gender stereotypical than masculine toys and activities, which also contributes to their greater acceptance of cross-gender conduct by girls than by boys. This lenience in favour of girls will instil a desire in these same girls as they become older females to venture more into unisex or the so called masculine careers. O'Bryant et al. (1978, p. 298) cite Siegel's observation that; "in fact by second grade children have absorbed societal expectations of sex appropriate work, are aware of their own sexual identity at some level and have selected the traditional and cultural stereotype for themselves". The more parents stereotype mathematics, computer studies and engineering as naturally male domain, the more they underestimate their daughters' math abilities, overestimate the difficulty of the subjects for them, and attribute any successes in these areas to a result of extra hard work. This way parents

discourage their children from computer related courses and mathematically oriented careers.

For fear of being considered weird or 'Tom-boys' some young females shun careers of their aspirations and train for those that may not match their interests, personalities or abilities. They eventually find themselves as square pegs in round holes with no career self-efficacy; low job satisfaction, no career satisfaction and less carer-realisation for their performance will not be at their best.

The attitudes and perceptions of parents play a significant role in influencing their children into or away from certain careers. According to Desai (2012), research indicates that; parental perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes in turn influence their children's academic development and career choices among boys and girls. Gender biased attitudes and practices and in relation to subject selection may contribute to enhanced scientific literacy skills among boys relative to girls. By adolescence, girls and boys may have developed different attitudes and aspirations concerning science-related activities.

Parents also influence their adolescent children's career decisions as role models or as mentors. Parents provide social moral and financial support. This is greatly valued by the teen age child, because they are not experienced in the process of choosing a career and they still depend on their parents for financial support needed as training tuition in some careers. Hence, whatever piece of advice that comes from the parent is usually taken seriously.

On the other hand, schools easily win the confidence of the students. According to Singh (2005), the school is in the best position to asses and understand the abilities and aptitudes of the student for it keeps a record of academic performance and progress. Hence it is easier for the school to relate specific academic abilities to specific careers.

Schools influence students' career choices in various ways. The text books selected, the way students are taught about gender-suitability of careers; and indirectly, the teachers and administrators influence as role models. The textbooks used in schools also exert a profound influence

on socializing children into gender stereotyped careers. As early as primary school the typical picture of a miner, builder or carpenter is a male figure and a nurse, secretary or hairdresser is represented by a female figure. This is reinforced in the classroom and at play as children begin to imagine what they want to become for a career (Chawafambira, 2010).

As role models, the teachers can motivate students to aspire to enter certain careers or steer the male students away from the ones the teachers label as feminine and female students from the ones the teachers label as masculine career (Mutekwe & Modiba, 2012). As Singh (2005) puts it, teachers can develop the “I can do it attitude” in the students. Since teachers are considered as *in loco parentis* (Sikes, 1997, p. 61; Davidson, 2009), they can easily motivate, encourage and influence the students in their career decisions. According to the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) report, schools lay the foundation of career guidance through career guidance and counselling of students by teachers, in addition to consultation with parents. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999, p. 256,257) report notes that the criteria for channelling the student into a specific pathway are “the records of achievement, identified interests, teacher’s assessment, pupil’s choice and parent’s choice” whereas the final choice would be made by “the parent and the pupil, subject to availability of resources”.

Statement of the problem

Adolescents need career guidance in order for them to make informed and satisfying career choices. The home and the school have a profound influence on the career development of the adolescent. Most parents and teachers have a closer relationship with the growing adolescent than any other sources of influence to career choice. However, the parents and the school sometimes do not work collaboratively in providing career guidance to the adolescent. Consequently, the adolescent is caught in a dilemma not knowing which career advice to take; the schools' or the parent's.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to compare the influence of the home and the school, on the career development of adolescents.

Research objectives: The research objectives are to:

1. Find out to what extent the home and the school influence the adolescents' career decision making.
2. Compare the expected and observed numbers of participants influenced by the school and those influenced by the parents.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the influence of schools and that of parents on career decisions by secondary school students.

Review of literature

Adolescence stage is critical in making the right career choice. It is at this stage one lays the foundation of their future career life. A wrong career choice may mean a life of misery unless it is promptly corrected. Hence to avoid such pitfalls, it is best to catch them whilst they are still budding and give them the appropriate career guidance that will ultimately land them onto satisfactory careers. A dissatisfied employee is a liability to his employer. Researches by Zaman (2008) cited by Zaidi and Iqbal (2011), indicate that employees who are satisfied with their careers have better performance at their workplaces. According to the findings of Zaidi and Iqbal (2011), career selection is the base of an individual's satisfaction from any job in the career he/she chooses to pursue. Because job satisfaction represents an important goal of career counselling and is regarded as an indicator of effective career decision making, it is a widely examined outcome variable in vocational research (Spector cited by Borchet, 2004).

Unfortunately, many adolescents face the challenge of having to choose a career on their own, or with only the assistance from their parents whilst they may ignore the career guidance offered by the school. And conversely, some adolescents ignore their parental guidance and just make subject selections without consulting the parents or their school or subject selections in consultation with the school only. In most cases the child will eventually find themselves in a dilemma. In this case, neither the school, student nor the parents is happy. When these three major stakeholders, the school, the parent and the student do not work collaboratively there will be a tug of war. Consequently, there might be a sabotage of support from the parents or the school through active or

passive resistance (Triddel, 1992). This is a common challenge with adolescents in Zimbabwe, since the social fabric is strong, the adolescents depend more on their parents and relatives than on other formal sources of influence like the school (Mapfumo & Chireshe, 2005).

In countries with a strong social fabric, like Zimbabwe, career decisions are based on what is socially acceptable. Rarely do you get an adolescent who wants to go against the grain and be considered weird. To a great extent, parents and other relatives influence the children's attitudes towards or away from different careers. This strong social influence on career decisions could be due to relatively strong social contexts. A strong social fabric tends to promote non-formal career guidance. Ipaye (1986, p. 28) concurs with this observation as he noted that "cultural biases in career development are promoted by the strong social fabric of the African communities/families".

Parents have a very significant role in the career development of their children, since most parents always have good intentions for their children (Davidson, 2009). They desire the best for their children and hence they can be a source of moral, social and financial support to the adolescent. However, Young (1997) cited in Davidson (2009), posits that parental influence on career guidance is relatively effective for it is usually an intentional and goal directed action. This influence stretches over a relatively longer time in the life of the individual.

Schools are in an optimal position to provide useful career guidance (Davidson, 2009; Singh, 2005; Melgosa, 2001). Schools provide formal career guidance which is structured and systematically designed according to the Guidance and Counselling curriculum. This is offered in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe. According to Singh (2005), schools are in the ideal position to offer career guidance because they have the student's academic records. In addition, they are constantly in touch with the employing organizations; hence they know the entry requirements to various careers. In addition, teachers are also considered by most students as role-models or mentors.

Research methodology

The researcher carried out a descriptive survey, using a quantitative approach to compare the relative influences of parents and school on the career decision making process of adolescents.

Sample and sampling

The 93 participants of this research were drawn from a population of employees of 4 different employing institutions: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, industry sector and business office sector, from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. These were purposively sampled according to the following criteria:

- a) A person who has received secondary school education;
- b) A person who has been employed for at least three years.

Although the schools were not directly selected, they were well represented in selecting the population in Harare. The 93 participants represented 71 different secondary schools from different parts of Zimbabwe. The researcher used stratified random sampling method to get proper representation of the population subgroups like gender, age bracket and position.

Data collection

A 45-item questionnaire was used to solicit responses from the participants. The questionnaire comprised 3 sections; (Sections A, B and C) on a Likert scale, collecting information about the major sources that influenced the participant's career decision and self-reports on how satisfied they are in their current careers. This instrument was validated by carrying out a pilot study on 20 participants from similar research sites. Data was collected by the researcher. The questionnaires were distributed personally by the researcher.

Data analysis

The captured data was analyzed using SPSS. A Chi-Square test was used to compare the observed and the expected frequencies of the participants influenced by parents or by the school in their career decision.

Results

The findings of this research were analyzed using SPSS and these are summarized in contingency tables below.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Participants According to Type of Career Guidance

Type of career guidance	Frequency	Valid %
Formal (F)	19	20.9
Non-formal (N)	40	43.6
both	32	35.5
Total	93 (Missing =2)	100

More than forty three percent of the participants indicated that they were influenced by non-formal sources of career guidance whilst 20.9% indicated that they were influenced by formal career guidance.

Hypothesis testing

The chi-square test was used to test this hypothesis. A value of 0.025 was observed. Since 0.025 is less than 0.05; the null hypothesis was rejected. And the alternative hypothesis was accepted. There is a significant difference at 0.05% significance in the observed and expected numbers of students influenced by the school and those influenced by the parents in their career decisions. See the tables below:

Table 2

Observed and Expected Numbers of Participants per Career Guidance Type

Type of career guidance	Expected frequency	Observed frequency
Formal	31	19
Non-formal	31	40
Both	31	32

Table 3

Chi Square Test: Comparing the Expected and Observed

Null Hypothesis	Test	significance	Decision
There is no significant difference between the expected and the observed numbers of participants influenced by the formal, non-formal and "both" types of career guidance	One-sample Chi-square test	0.025	Reject null hypothesis

Discussion

There is a significant difference in the expected and observed numbers of students influenced by formal, non-formal and both types of career guidance. Whilst it would be expected that there would be 31 participants in each of the three categories, it was observed that many more participants were influenced by non-formal career guidance and much fewer participants were influenced by formal career guidance than the expected number. However, those participants who reported to have been influenced by both formal and non-formal career guidance are very close in number to the expected number. This intermediate group, influenced by both formal and non-formal career guidance, are likely going to enjoy the best from both types of career guidance, formal and non-formal. They are, most probably, the group that may experience the best form of career guidance. The findings of this research indicate that parents (44%) are the most influential sources of career guidance; and schools (20.9) are the second most influential sources in career selection of adolescents. These results concur with findings by Mapfumo and Chireshe (2005) that parents and relatives are the major sources of influence in career decisions.

Studies in South African schools by Bloomberg (1984, p. 77) indicate that fathers (52%) and mothers (40%) were rated as the most influential in relation to subject choices by secondary school students. Similar observations were made in Nigeria by Okeke (cited by Ipaye, 1996), whereby 60% of the students indicated that they are willing to take after their fathers' occupation and 25% after their mothers' occupations. Research in Nigeria by Gesindo (cited in Ipaye, 1996) indicates that parental influence was rated at 66% for the students in teachers colleges and 56% in students at technical colleges. Familial influences seem to

have stronger impact because it is intentional and persistent; parents, relatives, mentors and sponsors tend to follow through. Parental influence is both intentional and unintentional. Young (1997), cited in Davidson (2009), observed that parental influence is most helpful when it is intentional, planned and a goal-directed action. Most parents are so interested in their children's future that they know their children's goals and so assist them towards those goals. This is particularly easier for parents than for teachers since the former live relatively longer with their children than teachers.

Recommendations and suggestion for further research

To avoid overshooting to one extreme, career guidance counsellor should advocate for collaboration instead of a one-sided approach. In view of this, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

- ✎ Participation of all the stakeholders is important (neither on domineering), especially participation of the student in career decision-making as this is of paramount importance.
- ✎ There is need for the career guidance teachers to arrange meeting directly with parents of each student just like academic consultation days. This will eliminate the tug of war between school and home, thus enhancing the collaborative spirit and strengthen ties between home and school. A study by Sanders, Epstein and Conos-Tadros (cited in Davidson, 2009) indicate that parents of high school students are interested and would like to be involved in their adolescents' education. However, Trotman Smrekar and Cohen Vogel (2001) cited in Davidson (2009:95), observe that educators are often not welcoming to parent involvement at school level. Parent involvement seems to decline as students get older (Hava Family Research Project, 2007). To strengthen family-school ties, Akos (cited in Davidson, 2009) recommends that educators must go beyond interacting with families on an as needed basis by replacing the old model of educators as sole experts with co-expert or a collaborative model.
- ✎ Effective career guidance should involve all the major sources of influence stakeholders; these are the school and the parents

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➤ **The schools have the light; the parents are like the candle stand or are the hands that hold the torch to light the student's career pathway to career satisfaction and career realisation. Collaboration of these two sources will most likely result in optimal career satisfaction for the student when they are employed.**

Conclusion

The findings of this research seem to point out the significance of the synergistic impact of a collaborative venture between the two major sources of influence of career guidance; the home and the school. In addition to this, the third most important stakeholder in terms of career guidance and career decisions is the student. It is very imperative for the student to be actively involved. Other earlier research findings Way and Rossmann (cited by Davidson, 2012) seem to indicate similar observations. Research findings suggest that career counsellors and career educators should (1) shift the focus from the individual to the family system; (2) develop a new and richer view of parent involvement in schools; (3) help families become more proactive; and (4) consider ways of duplicating helpful types of family functioning in schools, especially for children whose families are not proactive.

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