

## An Assessment of Factors Influencing Career Decisions of in-School Youths

Folajogun V. Falaye and Bamidele T. Adams

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

**Abstract:** The study explored factors influencing career decisions among secondary school youths. The population for this study consisted of students at the final stage of a six-year secondary school education. A sample of 318 students made up of 153 females and 165 males was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A self administered career interest scale, which was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using t-test and multiple regression analysis. Findings indicated that gender and school type significantly influence students' decisions on career choice. Father's educational qualification and mother's occupation are also predictive of students' career decisions. The findings have implications on career development and decision making process of young people. The need to provide comprehensive vocational guidance services to young persons while in school was suggested.

**Key words:** Assessment, factors, decisions, youths, students

### INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental decisions people have to make, especially young persons, is choosing a life long career. The decisions made are propelled by intrinsic and extrinsic factors to the individual undertaking the decision. Bandura *et al.* (2001) opine that the factors influencing the process of career development include the context in which the individuals live, their personal aptitudes and educational attainment.

In developing countries and indeed other parts of the world, the philosophy of education is based among many others, on the development of the individual into a 'sound and effective, citizen fully integrated into community' (NPE, 2004). Therefore, different nations, have vigorously pursued and adopted innovative changes in their education sector to satisfy their societal needs, most especially the need to prepare individuals for the world of works and make them economically self-reliant. Apart from impartation of knowledge, education is seen as a 'meal ticket' and a 'lunch pad' into the world of works. This underscores the need to make appropriate career decisions among the wide opportunities that exist for life long vocations. Hence, an important function of education is to prepare youth for their future career.

Most often, adolescents and youths find it difficult to make career decisions that will satisfy their personal, economic and intellectual goals, either because they do not have the knowledge to explore different career options and possibilities, or they do not have the knowledge of the prerequisites of such careers. Sometimes they base their choices on external influence. For example, many

youths make career decisions based on social status, monetary rewards and prestige attached to certain careers. In addition to the motivational factors and rewards that attract people into a certain career (Zoldoske, 1996) some people pick careers based on parental influence (Fisher and Griggs, 1994) while some of the choices youths make are considered unrealistic (Sokan and Akinde, 1994; Salami, 2004). This situation poses a challenge to educationists and curriculum developers to build necessary skills needed by students to make appropriate educational goals and achieve career aspirations (Bajema *et al.*, 2002).

This study examines the factors that influence career decisions. Findings from the research will help to explain why young people select certain careers.

A career is viewed as the totality of an individual's lifetime of learning and work (Akinboye, 1990; Super, 1990) hence, career decisions are critical. Wrong choice of career can lead to serious dissatisfaction and frustration.

Many factors influence the choice of career individuals make. Broadly, they could be grouped as demographic, environmental and psychosocial factors. Super (1990) highlighted educational level, socio-economic status, interest, intelligence and values as determinants of career choice, while Geshinde (2001) listed sex role, age, religion, family and peer influence as factors influencing career choice, in addition to several other psychosocial determinants such as personality, self-concept and identity, interest and values.

The home provides the basis for making career decisions through interaction within the family. The home variables associated with career interest and decision

include parents' socio-economic status, level of education, family size, temperament (DeRidder, 1990; Montgomery, 1992; Penick and Jepson, 1992) teacher and school influence (Sokan and Akinade, 1994). Some other factors include gender (Borchert, 2002; Houser and Yoder, 1992; Jones and Larke, 2001; Salami, 2004; Uwe, 1999) parents' level of influence (Fisher and Griggs, 1995) and self-esteem (Wilson and Fasko, 1992).

Esters and Bowen (2005) identified factors influencing the career decisions of students who graduated from an urban agricultural education programme to choose or not to choose careers in agriculture. The students reported career opportunities; high school educational experiences and work experiences as factors influencing their choice. Of the former students who did not choose a career in agriculture, factors cited included having other career interests, a lack of career opportunities and personal factors. Furthermore, a discriminant model of selected factors did not discriminate between those who chose or did not choose a career in agriculture after graduating from the urban agricultural education programme.

In a qualitative study to explore factors that are central in rural high school seniors and young adults' career choice process, the cultural and social context of family and community were found to play key roles in youths' career development and their choice process (Ferry, 2006).

In order to ensure satisfaction with life long vocations, individuals need to consider very critically various factors and carefully choose careers that will satisfy their personal, economic and intellectual goals.

**Statement of the problem:** Secondary school students select careers based on many factors they perceive appropriate. Most often their choices and decisions are uninformed thereby resulting in dissatisfaction. This study specifically set out to investigate factors influencing career decisions of students at the final year of their secondary school education.

**Research questions:** The following research questions have been raised based on the stated problem.

- Does school type influence students' career decisions?
- Does gender of students influence their career decisions?
- To what extent would home factors influence students' career decisions?
- What are the relative contributions of home factors to the prediction of students' career decisions?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sampling procedure and sample:** The sample was selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling procedures. First, schools were stratified on the basis of ownership (public and private). Five schools each were randomly picked from the lists of public and private schools, making a total of 10 schools.

At the school level, 35 students were randomly selected from each of the ten schools that participated in the study. The sample included in the study was made up of three hundred and eighteen (N = 318) senior secondary school students in their final year (SS III). Only those who fully supplied the required information in the instrument were included. The sample was made up of 153 female and 165 male students. Their ages range between 15-21 years.

**Instrumentation:** A career interest scale developed by the researcher was used for data collection. The self-administered questionnaire was representing in this study. The sought information about respondents background such as gender, religious affiliation and family background. The research is made up of 20 statements on a 4-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. Negatively worded items were scored on the reverse. Items were checked for content validity, while the Cronbach Alpha yielded a reliability index of 0.74 and validity index of 0.70.

**Data analysis:** The data collected were analyzed using t-test and multiple regression analysis. The t-test was used to determine the influence of school type (public and private) and gender (female and male) on students' career decision. The multiple regression analysis was used to determine the composite and relative effects of the independent variables (home factors) on the dependent variable (students' career decisions).

## **RESULTS**

### **Does school type influence students' career decisions?:**

Table 1 reveals that  $t_{316}$  is -2.48, while its corresponding p value is 0.014. The t observed is significant at 0.05 alpha level ( $p < 0.05$ ). It shows that there is a significant relationship between school type and students' career decisions. This therefore means that school type influences career decisions students make.

### **Does gender of students influence their career decisions:**

The results presented in Table 2 shows that  $t_{316}$  (2.412) and its corresponding p-value (0.016) are

Table 1: School type influence

School type	N	Mean	S.D	T	df	Sig. (p)
Public	219	50.62	5.76	-2.48	316	0.014*
Private	99	52.23	4.33			

\*p<0.05

Table 2: Students gender and career decisions

Student Gender	N	Mean	S.D	T	df	Sig. (p)
Female	153	51.88	4.89	2.412	316	0.016
Male	165	50.42	5.78			

significant at 0.05 alpha level ( $p < 0.05$ ). The results reveal that there is a significant relationship between students' gender and career decisions, meaning that students' gender influences the decisions made with regard to their career.

**To what extent would home factors influence students' career decisions:** The result presented in Table 3 indicates the composite effects of the home factors (Family type, father's highest education, mother's highest education, father's occupation and mother's occupation) on students' career decisions.

The multiple regression coefficients between the independent variables (home factors) and the dependent variable (students' career decision) is 0.103. The R square (0.011) implies that only 1.1% of the variability in the prediction is jointly accounted for by the independent variables. Given the F-ratio of 0.617 and the p-value of 0.645, the contribution is not significant at 0.05 level. It therefore, means that the 5 home factors did not jointly exert significant influence on students' career decision.

**What are the relative contributions of home factors to the prediction of students' career decisions:** As shown in Table 4, two out of the 5 home factors, father's highest educational qualification and mother's occupation have positive beta weights, whereas the three others (family type, mother's highest educational qualification and father's occupation) have negative beta weights.

Also, the relative contributions of the independent variables (home factors) to the prediction of student's career decisions are displayed in Table 4. They are reflected by the value of standardized co-efficient (Beta weights). The table also shows the order of contributions of the 5 different home factors (family type; father's highest educational qualification; mother's highest educational qualification; father's occupation and mother's occupation) to students' career decisions. Father's highest educational qualification ( $\beta = 0.103$ ) ranked first, followed by mother's occupation ( $\beta = 0.007$ ). It therefore, means that father's educational attainment was most influential in career decisions young people make, followed by their mother's occupation.

Table 3: Summary of regression analysis of home factors on students' career decisions

Multiple Regression	=	0.103
R. Square	=	0.011
Adjusted R Square	=	0.005
Standard Error of Estimate	=	5.42
Significant (P)	=	0.645

Table 4: Relative contributions of home factors to the prediction of students' career decisions

Home factors	Standardized coefficient beta	t	Sig	Rank
Family type	-0.043	-0.747	0.455	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Father's highest Education	0.103	1.417	0.157	1 <sup>st</sup>
Mother's highest Education	-0.099	-1.369	0.172	5 <sup>th</sup>
Father's Occupation	-0.044	-0.761	0.447	4 <sup>th</sup>
Mother's Occupation	0.007	0.115	0.908	2 <sup>nd</sup>

## DISCUSSION

In the present study, some determinants of students' career decisions were assessed. Results indicate that the type of school students attends and their gender significantly influenced the decision they make concerning their future career.

The finding in this respect is in consonance with most research findings that indicate a strong relationship between adolescent career choices and their gender (Borchert, 2002; Salami, 2004; Uwe, 1999). The findings show that more female than male agreed that gender influences career choice of adolescents. These results can be linked to the gender barrier that had been witnessed over a long period of time in the traditional African and indeed the Nigerian society. The issue of gender still appears dominant in the choice of career between male and female. Even though females with the requisite aptitudes, abilities and knowledge are gradually being attracted to the male dominated professions like engineering, medicine and law, still career choice appears to be disaggregated along gender line.

Similarly, school type (public and private) influences the decisions students make about their future career. This finding may suggest that perhaps students are differentially prepared to explore career opportunities by the school they attend. Several explanations can be offered for this finding. A potent explanation is that private schools provide more comprehensive services to their students than public schools. Private school students may have been provided with information and counselling on career choices. Another reason is that, the type of school a child attends has facilitatory or inhibitory influences on the student behaviour. The influence of school type in career decision of students in this study is in line with Obemeata's (1999) assertion that academic environment plays a prominent role in students' socio-orientation. Students who attend private schools are not only prepared for improved cognitive achievement, they are orientated towards making informed decisions about their future career.

Although the joint influence of the home variables on the career decisions of young people is low, father's educational background and mother's occupation ranked first and second, respectively among the home variables considered in this study. It would appear that the higher the level of educational attainment of respondents' father and the occupational status of their mother, the more they get motivated to choose high ranking careers that will possibly enhance their status. Such parents also serve as role models to their children.

### CONCLUSION

Career choice is an important milestone in the lives of young people and many factors have been identified to play key roles in the choice they make. Findings of this study revealed that gender and the type of school students attend significantly influence the career decisions they make.

Even though family type, father's highest education, mother's highest education, father's occupation and mother's occupation did not significantly influence career decisions of in-school youths when considered jointly, however, father's educational attainment and mother's occupation were most influential.

Despite the limited generalizability of these findings, they have implications for student's preparation to make appropriate career choice. It is therefore, suggested that similar study be carried out to identify other factors that may influence the career decision making processes of young people. Also, career/vocational guidance services should be provided in schools to assist them in the choice of their future career.

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