

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF CHOICE OF CAREER ON LEARNERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract - As a result of prioritising education African children have to decide at a very young age which career paths they will have to follow when they get older. The sample population of the study consisted of grade 9 and 12 learners. A purposive sampling was used as a subtype of non-probability sampling. An open ended questionnaire was used as instrument of collecting data from participants (5 teachers) and (20 learners), with 5 learners selected from each grade. Data were analysed through the use of thematic content analysis, which identifies and summarizes message contents from respondents. The study found out that 76 percent of learners were aware of what a career concept is. The study revealed that many external forces such as parents' opinions, friends' influence, grade rates, access to information and financial status have a major influence on learners' mind-sets when they make career choices. The study recommends that parents and guardians including peer educators and government have important role to play in giving good guardians. They should be open to learners on the routes to follow and not to compel them through a preconceived self-centred path but rather to be objective and respect the opinion of the learners themselves.

Keywords - Learners, Career Choices, Contributory Factors, Parental Influence, Young People

I. INTRODUCTION

In the global competitiveness survey carried out by World Economic Forum, Switzerland ranks first for the sixth consecutive year in most areas underpinning competitiveness which includes innovation, business sophistication, higher education and labour market efficiency. Whereas in sub-Saharan Africa region there are large regional variations in competitiveness ranging from Mauritius 39th to Guinea at 144th position with South Africa somewhere in the middle. To turn current high rates into sustainable and inclusive growth, countries in the region must address the infrastructure deficit and provide their rising young populations with the necessary skills including quality education to engage in higher value added employment (World Bank, 2015). Worldwide, high school learners fail to choose streams that will lead them to good career choices. Most African countries are classified as underdeveloped and developing, and education is regarded as a priority in most African families. As a result of prioritising education African children have to decide at a very young age which career paths they will have to follow when they get older. South Africa (SA) is a developing country with a forever fluctuating unpredictable economy. Just like most countries, South Africans take education seriously. SA's education system is poorly developed (no computer laboratories, meaning learners and teachers cannot access the internet), which leaves learners and teachers uninformed about which subjects to choose when they reach grade 10 and "life after high school", which involves choosing career streams at university level.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out at Zwithuzwavhudi Secondary School, Vhembe District Limpopo Province. The school is a government funded secondary school situated in Gondeni village whose Ha-Tshivhase community which is diverse area dominated by Vhavenda tribe. The research design used was explorative and qualitative methods. The study used randomly selected learners (20) and teachers (5) as respondents. Out of all the selected respondents 52 percent of the respondents were female participants, and a total of 48 percent were male participants. Data were analysed through the use of thematic content analysis, which identifies and summarizes message contents from respondents.

III. RESULTS

The results show that a majority (76%) of learners know what a career is all. One of the student respondent mentioned that:

"Choosing a career depends on whether a person understands what a career entails or what a career is all about"

Majority (47.8%) of learners showed that they got their information on careers at schools, whereas a minority of learners showed that they heard about careers at career exhibition (13%), whereas 21 percent of learners got the information from friends and siblings, and 17 percent actually used social media to enhance their perception about careers.

According to one of the students who says:

“Information about career exhibition is always announce by the school authority and sometimes arrangements are made for transportation to the venue of the exhibition”

The average grades that a pupil gets may not be a major determining factor when it comes to making career choices; however, other factors including personality and attitude may have influence on learners performances. One of the students in grade 10 says:

“I am hoping to study Accounting because I always score high marks in the subject”

A teacher in grade 11 mentioned says:

“Students are guided not to base their choice of career on performance in subject only. They should consider other factors such as passion and interest in the subject”

Another teacher said:

“In order to know whether or not to continue with a particular curriculum, one needs to look at the average score that learners are getting”

A large percentage of students said that they get an average mark of (41-60 and 61-80) with each one of the mentioned categories scoring 29 percent, whereas 21 percent of the respondents got an average score of 81-100 percent and about 3 percent of the learners scored an average of 21-40 percent. No learner stated that they got 0-20 percent meaning that the category is 0 percent.

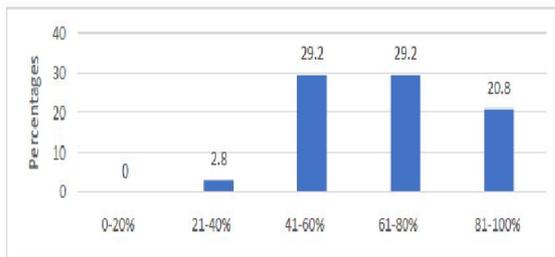


Figure 1: School average percentage

The findings show that the respondents were giving conscious answers, as the results have a positive correlation. The results reveal that 72 percent of the respondents have made a career choice whereas only 28 percent of the respondents have not made a career choice. One learner said:

“I live with my parents and they have mentioned that I should study Law in the university”

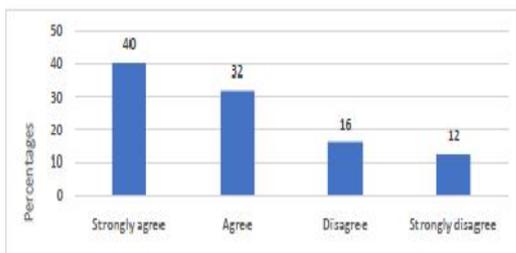


Figure 2: Career decision made early enough

The results show that 48 percent of the respondents have not made a career choice whereas 52 percent of the respondents have made a career choice. One student said:

“I have no idea about what career I should pursue in the future”

One of the teachers confirmed that:

“Students are only allowed to choose a career path when they are in grade 11. Many of them are assisted based on their performances in various subjects offered”

As stated by Neuman (2011), parents/guardians and friends have the most influence on youngsters’ lives.

This is basically because without the necessary experience a lot of people tend to look at others for guidance and encouragement. The results show how many respondents actually made their own career choices and how many had external influential forces (from family and friends). One students said that:

“I would like to be a nurse because I love the way my mum dresses to work every time”

A teacher in grade 12 said:

“The advice of teachers on career choices have been proven to be correct most of the time. Some of the learners do not know the combination of subjects to do for a particular career, hence they are guided accordingly”

Only 28 percent of the respondents showed that their parents actually made their career choices for them, whereas 72 percent of the respondents showed that they actually made their own career choices. One learner in grade 12 said:

“My father told me to study Business management when I get to the university because he wanted me to take over his business in the future, even though I would have love to study Engineering”

The findings show external forces such as friends playing a role, and 45.8 percent of the respondents agreed that their friends had a major influence on their career choices. A learner in grade 12 said:

“I had about Actuarial science from a friend of mine and I decided I am going to pursue it as career”

A teacher in grade 10 said:

“Availability of government scholarship in certain career forces learners to decide to choose them because of poverty”

In addition, 54.2 percent of the respondents showed that their friends did not have an influence on their career choices. The two figures show that there is still a reasonably strong influence coming from parents and friends when it comes to making career choices.

Even though many respondents disagreed with the fact that their parents made their career choices for them, the majority (67.7%) of the respondents started with agreeing, disagreeing and showing uncertainty towards the posed question, with two respondents leaving the question completely blank on the questionnaire. A majority (67.7%) of the respondents stated that they thought that parents should take part in the career decision making process, whereas a

minority (32.3%) of the respondents stated that parents or guardians should not take part when it comes to choosing a career. According to literature, parents make great role models; however some tend to become the sole decision makers, which is not a good thing (Walstrom et al., 2008). A learner in grade 9 said:

“My mother is forcing me to do life sciences because she wanted me to study it in the university”

Funding is a major part of any project/decision taken, 65.3 percent of the respondents stated that they thought that there were not enough funds to support learners through their tertiary schooling. Many of those who said there were not enough funding based their argument on the ‘fees must fall’ movement that was experienced throughout the country in the year 2015 and 2016. On the other hand, 34.7 percent of the learners stated that they thought that there was enough funding available for learners; they based their argument on the fact that there are open bursaries and student loans available in South Africa. This may be because some of the respondents had not done any financial research about how to pay their tuition. A teacher expressed concern as she said:

“Government bursaries and scholarships are very important for the educational advancement of learners but they should not tie this to policy to build capacity in certain sector as it is happening now. Many students are compelled to choose a career based on government policy at their own personal detriment”

DISCUSSION

Children are often more resilient when their parents offer dependable, constant and similar parenting styles when providing their children with guidance, discipline and expectations (Dykeman, 2013: 170). Peer pressure was also indicated as a factor that influenced career choice, and this concurs with Arudo (2008). The researcher also found out that besides parental and financial influence there are other external influences such as average grades, access to information and influence from friends and had an impact on the respondent’s mindset when making a career choice. As stated by de Jong et al. (2008), when one understands something it makes it easier for them to decide on what they want and how to achieve it. The quality of education in South Africa also has an impact on the mindset of the participants. In the study, it was discovered that learners do not invest time in doing career research on their own. Cavanagh (2007) states that when an individual chooses a career it is mainly because of what they are interested in achieving from that career; some embark on careers because they want money whereas some have passion and love for what they want to study. Government policy on prioritizing education on

growth and development may be a contributing factors as it may influence learners toward a particular career choice rather than the other (World Bank, 2015). Lucrative incentives on prioritized programme may lure a learner into choosing such a career path. In support, Chen (2008) states that availability of financial support and bursaries may play a significant role when it comes to learners choosing career paths. According to the respondents, the ‘fees must fall’ movement’s has an objective to reduce government influence on career choices as they are agitating for education to be free at all levels to all. Learners will no longer have difficulties in the career choices they made due to lack of resources.

CONCLUSION

The researcher found that many respondents are aware of their career routes whereas some of the respondents were still not sure about their careers. The researcher also found out that average percentage score, availability of opportunities, parents’ academic achievements, position in the family, availability of funds and the quality of education are some of the major factors when it comes to making a career choice. The study found out that making a career choice is a lifetime decision, and making such a decision brings a lot of doubt and uncertainty to everyone, even those who have made a career choice. The government of South Africa should have more programmes aimed at helping rural learners to know more about different careers that they can embark on, especially making learners aware of all the scarce skills that exist worldwide.

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