

Peer pressure as a predictor of career decision-making among high school students in Midlands Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Career decision-making, particularly among high school students, is something that all students should carefully consider since it has ripple effects in one's life. This paper presents an overview of peer pressure as a factor that influences career decision-making among high school students in Midlands Province, Zimbabwe. A quantitative research approach was used in the current study. A survey design that made use of questionnaires in collecting data was used. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. A total of one thousand and ten student participants and 20 career guidance teachers who were randomly selected participated in this study. Results from the study indicated that students are influenced by their peers in making career decisions in a number of ways. Chief among the predictors were peer advice, encouragement and peer education. However, students denied that they seek validation of their career decisions from their peers. The study recommended that a similar national study be carried out to enable generalisation of the results to a wider community.

Keywords: Peer influence, career choices, decision-making, Midlands Province.

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1. Introduction

The major part of people's life is spent in occupational activities and these pursuits do more than simply provide income for livelihood (Bandura, 2002). There is a widespread agreement that the high school years are crucial for adolescents to become prepared for the transition from school to work or college (Amoah, Kwofie & Kwofie, 2015, p. 57; Ombaba, Keraro, Sindabi & Asiengo, 2014; Rowland, 2004). Secondary school years present the transition from the cooperatively sheltered life of the primary school to the freedom and responsibility of either tertiary education or employment (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Watts & Kidd, 2000).

Peer influence cannot be underestimated as it was found to be influential in career choices. Faiter and Faiter (2013) and Alika (2010) in America; Abbasi and Sarwat (2014) and Edwards and Quinter (2011) in Nigeria; Shumba and Naong (2012) in South Africa; and Kimiti and Mwova (2012) in Kenya found that students were influenced by their peers in a variety of ways, such as peer counselling, peer interaction, peer advice and peer relationships. Peer counselling is a way of relating, responding and helping, which is aimed at exploring feelings, thoughts and concerns with the hope of reaching a clear understanding (Odirile, 2012). In schools, peer counselling is a phenomenon that was established to help students in schools solve problems (Bett, 2013). The main goal of peer counselling is to enable students to appreciate each other, as well as to understand the importance of education (Odirile, 2012). Studies in Kenya (Kaaria, Nyaga, Oundo & Mureithi, 2014; Marangu, Bururia & Njonge, 2012) revealed that peer counsellors are important in mentoring students, sharing information and supporting each other.

Bett (2013) purported that the rationale of peer counselling is based on the assumption that people who share similar characteristics and ages tend to influence one another. Similarly, Chireshe (2013) in Zimbabwe reiterated the importance of peer counselling in schools when he argued that information was easily disseminated through peer counselling. Peer counselling is consistent with the social cognitive theory which informs this study and which purports that social variables, such as peers, which may influence earners' career choices.

Peers influence career choice through peer interactions. It was revealed in Uganda (Okiror & Otabong, 2015) and in Kenya (Walaba & Kiboss, 2013) that peer interactions influence students in choosing careers. As the students interact, they share information about careers. This is in line with Krumboltz' social learning theory, which emphasises the importance of learners interacting with one another in their environment.

Students' interactions with peers play a central role in how students think about themselves (Yi-Hui, 2006). In his study in China, Yi-Hui (2006) revealed that students' interactions with peers of diversified interests, races and backgrounds have the potential to stimulate reflection, knowledge and beliefs which may lead to new ways of thinking about the world, other peers and eventually themselves. For peers to understand the world of work, their interaction makes it possible for them to venture into careers they were unaware of. Kiuru (2008) also revealed the importance of peer interaction in Finland when he stated that the academic orientation typical of the peer group to which they belong may potentially have a long-term impact on individual adolescents' vocational careers.

Faiter and Faiter (2013) and Roy (2016) in America; Goethner, Obschonka, Silbereisen and Canter (2009) in Germany; Njeri (2013) in Pakistan; Kimiti and Mwova (2012) in Kenya; Shumba and Naong (2012) in South Africa; and Egunjobi, Salisu and Ogunkeye (2013) in Nigeria reiterated the influence of peer advice on career choices. According to Migunde, Agak and Odiwuor (2012), when Kenyan students interact with their friends, they may take into consideration the career advice they receive.

In the absence of proper career guidance and teacher mentorship, students resort to peer mentorship. According to Njeri (2013) and Okiror and Otabong (2015) in Kenya, students turn to peers who have similar experiences for mentorship, information and guidance on career issues, especially when other proper avenues like school career guidance are not properly functioning. In Kenya, Koech

et al. (2016) emphasised the influence of peer mentorship in students' choices of careers. However, in United Arab Emirates (Ausman et al., 2013), peer mentorship was found to have little influence on medical students' choices of careers. Ausman et al.'s (2013) study concentrated on a certain group of people who were already training for a particular career, while the current study looked at students who are yet to engage in a career.

Peer relationships were also found to be influential in students' choices of careers. Kiuru (2008) purports that, in Finland, peer group members who are closely related are likely to end up in similar educational trajectories as they are likely to accept opinions from members who are similar to themselves. Kiuru (2008) further states that peer group members resembled each other, not only in their educational expectations, but also their subsequent educational trajectories. In a Nigerian study by Bankole and Ogunsakin (2015), peer relationships were revealed as a significant factor in helping students choose careers. Pakistani students who were close to each other in terms of friendship were likely to influence each other to take certain careers (Naz et al., 2014).

Alika (2010), Ho (2006) and Obwoye and Kibor (2016) espoused that peer encouragement was found to be a critical factor in influencing American students' choice of careers. This is in line with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which states that realistic encouragement leads to greater effort and eventually to greater success. Since high school students are adolescents, they may rely on people of their own age.

Hashim and Embong (2015) agree that the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence with regard to career choices. Adolescents are easily influenced by their peers because they rely on their friends to provide validation of the choices that they make, including career decisions.

A number of challenges were raised about the effectiveness of peer counselling in schools. Chireshe (2013), for example, cited lack of training among peer counsellors, and Kamore and Tiego (2015) enumerated that failure by Kenyan peer counsellors to resolve their own problems impacted negatively on their duties as peer counsellors.

Contrary to earlier findings, it has been observed in America that there was no significant relationship between peer group influence and career choices in humanities among secondary school adolescents (Alika, 2010). Peers were found to be less likely to influence high school students in choosing careers. The American study only concentrated on students who were in humanities. The current study did not look only at students specialising in a certain category but all students in Zimbabwean high schools.

2. Objectives

1. To identify ways in which peers influence students' career decision-making.
2. To assess whether gender plays an important role on the influence of peers in students' career decision-making.
3. To explore the types of peers who have an impact on students' career decision-making.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

A quantitative research approach was used in the current study. This approach allowed the researcher to quantify the magnitude and scope of the influence of peers on career choices among high school students. In a quantitative approach, a researcher will set aside his or her experiences, perceptions and biases to ensure reliability in the conducting of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). According to Muijs (2011), quantitative research provides information from a large number of units, thereby allowing the generalisability of results. It was, therefore, prudent for the researcher to use a quantitative approach in the current study since the sample used was large.

3.2. Research design

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) explained that surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared or determining the relationships that exist between specific events. The current study used survey design to assess factors that influence the choices of career pathways among high school students in Zimbabwe.

3.3. Population

For the current study, the population included all high school students and career guidance teachers in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. These included students in day schools, boarding schools, government schools and mission schools, including both boys and girls in Forms 4–6. The total population consisted of approximately 12,000 students and 200 career guidance teachers.

3.4. Sample and sampling procedure

Ten percent of the population in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe of both students and career guidance teachers were selected. A total of 1,200 students and 20 school career guidance teachers participated in the study. These were selected through a stratified random sampling technique. This was a sampling frame that was divided into subsections comprising groups that are relatively homogeneous with respect to one or more characteristics and a random sample from each stratum was selected (Colins, Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2007, p. 272). Twenty students perform (i.e., Forms 4–6) were given questionnaires. Schools were put in different categories which were day schools, boarding schools, government schools, mission schools, rural and urban schools. All the names of the schools in the province from each category were put in a hat for random selection.

3.5. Instrumentation

The questionnaire was used in this study to collect data from high school students and counsellors regarding the influence of peers on students' career decision-making. Ross (2005) states that among the type of information that can be collected by means of a questionnaire are facts, opinions, activities, level knowledge, expectations, attitudes and perceptions. The current study sought to collect objective data and also facts, opinions, expectations and level of knowledge with regard to peer influence on career decision-making among high school students in Midlands Province in Zimbabwe.

3.5.1. Validity and reliability

Validity is a researcher's ability to draw meaningful and justifiable inferences from scores about a the sample or population (Creswell, 2005). Questionnaire items were developed from the reviewed literature. The questionnaires were given to other professionals in the field to check for errors and vagueness. Reliability is generally defined as the degree to which a measure of a construct is consistent and dependable. Consistency of the instrument was subjected to a similar group of participants to check for errors and ambiguity of the instrument.

4. Results

4.1. Students' response on peer influence on career choice

4.1.1. Factor analysis of students' response on peer influence

Table 1.

| | Initial | Extraction |
|--|---------|------------|
| Career education comes from other students | 1.000 | 0.420 |
| Peer influence regarding career choices is powerful | 1.000 | 0.524 |
| My friends have influenced me to choose a career | 1.000 | 0.523 |
| Peer advice on career guidance was helpful | 1.000 | 0.471 |
| My friends validated the career that I chose | 1.000 | 0.482 |
| Information given by my friends is always reliable | 1.000 | 0.468 |
| I chose a career that is similar to my friends | 1.000 | 0.438 |
| I embrace the advice I get from peers that I value most | 1.000 | 0.341 |
| My friends give comprehensive and proper advice on careers | 1.000 | 0.348 |
| Which of your friends were most influential to career you would like to pursue | 1.000 | 0.111 |
| Generally which of the following was most influential to your choice of career | 1.000 | 0.490 |

Statistically through factor analysis peer influence regarding career choice is said to be quite influential in career choices. Friends influence was also cited as critical factor in career choice.

Table 2. Truncated Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) output for the total variance explained for extracted factors

| Component | Total variance explained | | | Extraction sums of squared loadings | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Total | Initial eigenvalues % of variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 3.524 | 32.036 | 32.036 | 3.524 | 32.036 | 32.036 |
| 2 | 1.090 | 9.912 | 41.947 | 1.090 | 9.912 | 41.947 |
| 3 | 0.982 | 8.929 | 50.876 | | | |
| 4 | 0.919 | 8.351 | 59.227 | | | |
| 5 | 0.847 | 7.699 | 66.926 | | | |
| 6 | 0.755 | 6.862 | 73.788 | | | |
| 7 | 0.721 | 6.556 | 80.344 | | | |
| 8 | 0.614 | 5.580 | 85.925 | | | |
| 9 | 0.586 | 5.323 | 91.248 | | | |
| 10 | 0.498 | 4.523 | 95.771 | | | |
| 11 | 0.465 | 4.229 | 100.000 | | | |

Extraction method: principal component analysis.

Table 2 indicates that the combined percentage variance of the two critical components is 41.9%. This implies that they are quite influential.

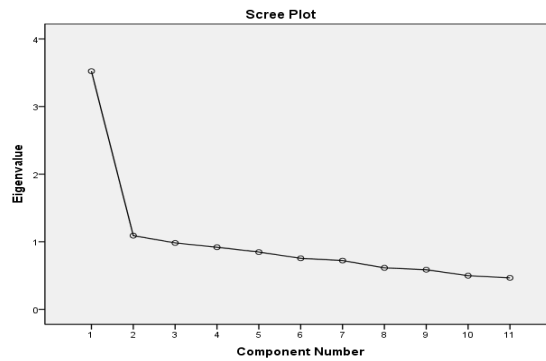


Figure 1. SPSS output for scree plot indicating peer influence

The scree plot in Figure1 shows all the 11 components analysed though factor analysis. There are two critical components with more than 1 eigen value and the rest have eigen values less than 1.

4.2. Career counsellors’ responses on peer influence on career choice

4.2.1. Factor analysis of career counsellors’ response on peer influence

Table 3. SPSS output for communalities

| Communalities | Initial | Extraction |
|--|---------|------------|
| Peer advice on careers is essential to fellow students | 1.000 | 0.886 |
| The interactions of students is a powerful tool for children to choose certain careers | 1.000 | 0.842 |
| Students rely on encouragement from students of their age | 1.000 | 0.855 |
| Entrepreneurship information is more influential if it comes from peers | 1.000 | 0.814 |
| Validation of careers is provided by peers | 1.000 | 0.701 |
| Information given by peers is always reliable | 1.000 | 0.849 |
| Peer group pressure influence is sometimes used as pressure to induce young adolescents into predetermined careers | 1.000 | 0.804 |
| Female students are more likely to be influenced by peers to choose careers | 1.000 | 0.801 |
| Male students are more likely to be influenced by fellow male students to choose careers | 1.000 | 0.776 |
| Students in peer groups are likely to choose similar careers | 1.000 | 0.749 |
| Career behaviour modification comes from peers | 1.000 | 0.854 |
| Peer groups are more likely to accept career advice from members whom they value most | 1.000 | 0.699 |

Extraction method: principal component analysis.

Table 4. Influential friends (N1010).

| Items | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Classmates | 296 | 29.3 | 29.3 | 29.3 |
| Friends at school | 265 | 26.2 | 26.2 | 55.5 |
| Schoolmates | 218 | 21.6 | 21.6 | 77.1 |
| Home friends | 231 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 1.010 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 4 shows four important responses by teachers on the impact of peers on students’ choices of career. The most important aspects according to factor analysis include peer advice as essential to fellow students with regard to choosing careers and the encouragement from fellow students regarding career choice. Also revealed in Table 3 is that career behaviour modification comes from fellow students. All other factors are less important and have little influence. Interaction of students on career issues was also found to be critical in career choices as reflected by the student participants.

Table 5. The truncated SPSS output for the total variance explained for extracted factors

| Component | Total variance explained | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Initial eigen values | | | Extraction sums of squared loadings | | |
| | Total | % of variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 4.221 | 35.175 | 35.175 | 4.221 | 35.175 | 35.175 |
| 2 | 2.881 | 24.006 | 59.181 | 2.881 | 24.006 | 59.181 |
| 3 | 1.380 | 11.498 | 70.679 | 1.380 | 11.498 | 70.679 |
| 4 | 1.147 | 9.557 | 80.236 | 1.147 | 9.557 | 80.236 |
| 5 | 0.767 | 6.394 | 86.630 | | | |
| 6 | 0.482 | 4.019 | 90.649 | | | |
| 7 | 0.338 | 2.815 | 93.464 | | | |
| 8 | 0.311 | 2.591 | 96.056 | | | |
| 9 | 0.222 | 1.847 | 97.902 | | | |
| 10 | 0.138 | 1.149 | 99.051 | | | |
| 11 | 0.075 | 0.629 | 99.680 | | | |
| 12 | 0.038 | 0.320 | 100.000 | | | |

Extraction method: principal component analysis.

As reflected in Table 5 four important aspects have a cumulative percentage variance of 80.24%. This implies that eight other factors have a cumulative percentage of less than 20% which reflects their weak influence.

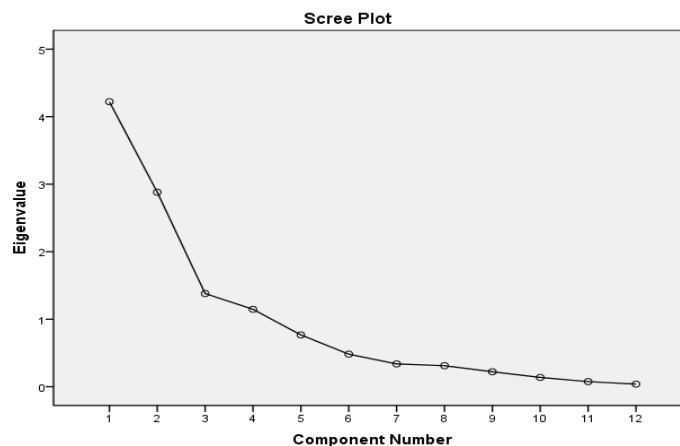


Figure 2. SPSS output for scree plot indicating peer influence

The scree plot in Figure 2 shows the four important factors which account for 80.2% of the total variance. The most important is peer advice which has an eigen value above 4. The biggest change is between component number 3 and 4 where the curve begins to fall.

4.3. Most influential friends on career choice

Peers at school and at home are quite influential to students' choice of career. However, classmates and friends at school are the most influential and schoolmates are the least. Generally, the four groups of friends have a bearing on their peers' career choices. The difference in percentages between the most influential and the least influential is very minute giving credits to all the factors.

4.4. Information that students receive from friends regarding career choice

Students cited the following as the type of information they receive from students: salary-related information, working conditions, career opportunities and tertiary institutions that offer careers they want to pursue.

5. Discussion

It emerged from this study that peers influence students' career choices. This is consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory which purports that peers are sources of social learning as they model and sanction styles of conduct and serve as comparative references for appraisal and validation of personal efficacy (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Other students and friends were seen as providing career education likely to influence their peers. The above assertion is consistent with previous studies such as Hashim and Embong (2015, p. 81) in Malaysia, and Kimiti and Mwova (2012, p. 364), Migunde et al. (2012, p. 23) and Alika (2010, p. 179) in Kenya, who established that career education emanates from peers.

The current study revealed that career education, which comes from peers and friends, was influential in students' choices of careers. As students interact with peers and friends, they share important information on career choices. Career guidance teachers were in agreement with student participants as they reinforced that career advice from friends was influential to students' choices of careers. This finding is consistent with Kiuru (2008, p. 34) in Finland; Abbasi and Sarwat (2014, p. 811) and Naz et al. (2014, p. 1,196) in Pakistan; and Okiror and Otabong (2015, p. 18) in Uganda, who purported that friends and peers influence students' choices of careers.

Career guidance teachers in this study revealed that both male and female students were likely to be influenced by peers in choosing careers. There was no gender segregation on the influence of peers. In other words, both boys and girls were equally influenced by peers in their choice of careers. Such findings are consistent with Hashim and Embong (2015, p. 255) in Malaysia and Kimiti and Mwova (2012, p. 366) in Kenya, who argued that boys and girls are influenced by peers in choosing careers.

Career guidance teachers in this study espoused that students' interactions with their peers was a powerful tool in their quest to choose careers. Students are likely to share important career information during these interactions. The finding of the current study that students' interactions with peers was a powerful tool in choosing careers is in tandem with previous studies, for instance, Fizer (2013, p. 28) in America, Okiror and Otabong (2015, p. 18) in Uganda, Walaba and Kiboss (2013, p. 12) in Kenya and Igbinedion (2011, p. 335) in Nigeria, which revealed that peer interaction influenced students' choices of careers.

Career guidance teachers in the current study further revealed that students rely on encouragement from fellow students. Peer encouragement may influence students to continue with their careers. The finding of the current study is in tandem with previous studies such as Bates (2015, p. 69) and Taylor, Harris, and Taylor (2004, p. 2) in America and Shumba and Naong (2012, p. 171) in South Africa, which purported that students in schools rely heavily on their peers' encouragement on career selection. Peer encouragement is likely to have a bearing on students' choices of careers. This is in line with Bandura's social cognitive theory which informs the current study and which purports that encouragement through social persuasion encourages individuals to attempt certain careers (Mills, 2009, p. 10). Bandura (1988, p. 285) also asserted that realistic encouragement leads to greater effort.

Career guidance teachers revealed that peer group pressure induces adolescents into predetermined careers. Peer group pressure is beneficial if it conveys proper career information but harmful if it brings incorrect information about certain careers which may lead other students to take certain careers. The result of the study concurs with previous studies, such as Naz et al. (2014, p. 1,195) in Pakistan, Goethner et al. (2009, p. 25) in Germany, Koech et al. (2016, p. 61), Njeri (2013, p. 45) and Migunde et al. (2012, p. 235) in Kenya and Egunjobi et al. (2013, p. 301) in Nigeria, which stated that peer group influence is used as a pressure group to influence career decisions.

Student participants in this study revealed that peer advice on career guidance was helpful in their choices of careers. Students are more likely to accept career advice from peers they trust than any other sources. Peer advice may clarify certain issues regarding careers. The study also revealed that friends give comprehensive and proper advice regarding careers in common language to perpetuate career information. Senior students at schools may share their experiences on career information that they received from their predecessors. According to social cognitive theory that informs this study, advice from former successful students has an impact on students' career choices (Mills, 2009). The above revelation about peer advice confirms previous studies, such as Faiter and Faiter (2013, p. 113) in America, Goethner et al. (2009, p. 25) in Germany, Naz et al. (2014, p. 1,194) in Pakistan, Njeri (2013, p. 45), and Kimiti and Mwova (2012, p. 364) in Kenya, Shumba and Naong (2012, p. 171) in South Africa, and Egunjobi et al. (2013, p. 302) in Nigeria, which revealed that students embrace career decisions that come from their peers.

Student participants in the present study rated lowly the notion that their careers were validated by their peers and that information they got from their friends was always right. This may be because they may not have consulted their colleagues to assess their contribution in validating their careers. Such validations may come through informal discussions. The results of the current study are inconsistent with a study by in South Africa that shows that validation of the students' choices of careers comes from fellow students. The possible explanation of these differences could be caused by the participants in Shumba and Naong's (2012) study, which were university students, while the current study used high school students.

Student participants in the current study also rated lowly the notion that they chose careers that were similar to their friends' choices. However, career guidance teachers noted that students were likely to choose careers that were similar to those of their friends. The difference in career teachers and students' perceptions in the view that students choose careers that are similar to their peers, may arise as a result of different experiences. Career guidance teachers may have witnessed this over time during their tenure at school. The students may not be aware that their career choices are similar to their colleagues' choices. Previous studies, for instance, Goethner et al. (2009, p. 25) in Germany, Naz et al. (2014, p. 94) in Pakistan and Koech et al. (2016, p. 61) in Kenya, are in agreement with career guidance teachers who purported that students choose careers that are similar to their peers.

It also emerged from this study that peers influence students' career choices through career behaviour modification. Career guidance teachers rated favourably that students' career behaviours are modified by their peers. Students are likely to join high school with certain careers in mind but may change careers due to their interaction with their peers who give them comprehensive career information. The result of the current study is consistent with previous studies, such as Hashim and Embong (2015, p. 810) in Malaysia, and Edwards and Quinter (2011, p. 255) in Kenya, which revealed that career behaviours are likely to be modified by peers.

6. Conclusion

The study revealed that students were influenced by their peers in the form of peer advice and encouragement. Peer education was also cited as another way in which students were influenced by their peers. There was no gender disparity between boys and girls as regards peer influence. Friends were cited as quite influential in students' career decision-making. On the contrary, the study revealed

that students do not seek validation of their career decisions from their peers. They also denied that they choose careers that were similar to their peers.

7. Recommendations

This study recommends that a similar study be carried out at the national level to enable generalisation of the results to a wider community.

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