

The impact of school on career choice among secondary school students

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Abstract

Many factors affect how people make career choices. The study sought to investigate school influence on career pathways among secondary school students in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The investigation serves as a springboard to establishing a career guidance model that would assist career guidance teachers in high schools in their endeavours to help students make career choices from a well-informed perspective. A self-designed questionnaire was used in collecting data from the participants. One thousand and ten high school students and 20 career guidance teachers participated in the study. Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 19 was used to calculate the percentages that were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that schools had an impact on secondary school students' choice of careers. The geographical location of schools was cited as quite influential in the choices of careers by students and career guidance teachers are allowed to teach career guidance.

Keywords: Career, career choice, guidance, secondary school;

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1. Introduction

Career guidance is offered at institutions of learning such as schools, colleges and universities. Secondary schools are a transition to higher institutions of learning and the world of work, so they have a critical role in assisting students to choose careers (Baloch & Shah, 2014; Jalala, Latifoğlu, & Uzunboylu, 2020). If students have too many choices of careers or have not made a decision on which career to take, school career guidance helps select their study paths and identify their potential strengths to enhance their competitiveness for positions (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014; Miah, Rahman, Sayok, Samdany, & Hannan, 2021; Sun & Yuen, 2012). Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of career development, which informs this study, emphasises teaching people career development techniques so that they can give career guidance in schools. Similarly, Lapan, Tucker, Kim, and Fosciulek (2003) stated that the transition from high school to university, or the world of work, has been understood as one of the most difficult developmental challenges confronting adolescents, and schools play a pivotal role in guiding the students towards a career.

Edwards and Quinter (2011) emphasised the influence of Kenyan schools on students' choices of careers when they argue that it is in school where students learn about and explore various careers before they make career choices. Korrir and Wafula's (2012) study highlighted the influence of the school on choosing a career. It investigated the factors that influence the choice of hospitality careers at Moi University. They concluded that Kenyan students' interest in this career could have been developed in high school. The study was carried out at a university and looked at a particular career. The current study does not look at a particular career, but at careers in general. Also, the participants in Korrir and Wafula's study are different from the current study, which looks at high school students in Zimbabwe. Similarly, Faiter and Faiter (2013) emphasised that American students were influenced in high school to follow STEM subjects which eventually prepare students for scientific careers.

1.1. Literature review

Decision-making is an important tool in career choice. This is in line with Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory which informs this study that emphasises career decisions. According to Ferreira and Lima (2010), decision-making is a complex process that can often be difficult and confusing for many Spaniards. In general, career guidance interventions in American schools are concerned, not with telling students what to do, but with helping them acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help them make better career choices and transitions, hence ameliorating the problem of career decisions (Astuti et al., 2022; Watts & Sultana, 2004). Similarly, Hansen (2006) stated that, in Switzerland, school career exploration and career decision-making activities can be used to broaden students' awareness of their interests and abilities, as well as the career opportunities that exist. Decision-making is one of the basic tenets of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory which emphasises self-efficacy. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy entails the belief in one's capability to succeed on a given task. Hence, students are likely to choose careers based on whether they can do well in their chosen careers. If career guidance enhances the acquisition of self-efficacy, it was critical for the current study to establish its influence in Zimbabwe.

Kimiti and Mwova (2012) reported that Kenyan school career guidance positively influenced career decision-making, understanding of careers and career-related adjustments about students' career choices. Moreover, the study revealed that when students are not guided in their choice of careers, they do not know what is good for them or even what they want. Hence, a lack of career guidance may cause students to make wrong choices and enrol in studies they know little or nothing about (Dahlan, Idris, & Susanto, 2020; Ismaili & Mustafai, 2018; Kimiti & Mwova, 2012). This implies that schools play a pivotal role in preparing students for future careers. Similarly, a South African study by Shumba and Naong (2012) found that career choices are decided long before the learners

come to universities. The majority of respondents in the study attributed their career choices at universities to subject choices they made while they were still in school.

It is the role of the school from early adolescence, to assist learners to find meaning in their present and future lives (Kelemen, 2018; Mampane & Bouwer, 2011). American school engagement involves behavioural and emotional components that play a mediational role in the association between developmental assets such as careers and academic competence (Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). According to Jackson and Nutini (2002), the goal of American school counselling is not to determine a delimited career choice but rather to expand students' learning about potential career and educational interests, abilities, beliefs and options.

Due to the difficulties encountered in making career choices in schools, many students seek guidance from career guidance teachers (Rosli & Suib, 2020). This is in line with Krumboltz's (1996) Social Learning Theory, one of the theories informing this study, which purports that career guidance teachers could take a proactive stand in encouraging clients to try out new activities to determine whether new interests can be identified. A Nigerian study among several other studies confirmed the role of school career guidance teachers when it established that school career guidance counselling has an effective and significant influence in increasing the students' career awareness when compared to a group with no career counselling (Eyo, 2011; Praraksa & Simpol, 2018; Xu, 2021). The major finding of Eyo's (2011) study was that students who are exposed to career guidance are more equipped with career-seeking techniques when compared to those who did not get the guidance. Hence, the more in-depth the counselling the students receive, the more proactive they become.

Career guidance teachers in schools have an important role in advocating for broad-based career plans that focus on the student's interests and abilities and that will increase future career options (Kalte, 2016; Mghweno, Mghweno, & Baguma, 2014). Similarly, Zayas and McGuigan (2006) emphasised the role of career guidance teachers when they stated that American school guidance teachers are uniquely positioned to stimulate students' interest in the health professions. In the same American study, it was revealed that many of the focus group participants felt career guidance teachers were largely helpful.

Bardick, Berns, Magnusson, and Witko (2004) revealed that a proactive career counselling approach that benefits Canadian students would include building trusting relationships with students, encouraging them to closely examine and explore their occupational interests, providing students with information about the stages of decision-making involved in career planning and guiding them in their search for information about careers. This could build trust and legitimacy in the counsellor making him or her influential in the student's career choices. Bardick et al. (2004) further purported that counsellors who wish to become more influential in students' career planning may need to become more actively involved in students' everyday lives. Career guidance is not only confined to the classroom but could be extended to the external world. The current study sought to establish whether counselling in schools in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe played a pivotal role in students' career choices.

Teachers were found to influence students' choice of careers. Several studies revealed the influence of teachers on a variety of careers, for example, in Pakistan, Abbasi and Sarwat (2014); in America, Faiter and Faiter (2013); in the Philippines, Aguado, Laguador, and Deligero (2015); and in Nigeria, Gbenga and Toyin (2014). High school teachers were found to guide students towards IT careers (McInerney, Didonato, Giagnacova, & O'Donnell, 2008). In addition, McInerney et al. (2008) stated that prior experience with technology in secondary school or university directs students towards IT careers.

School subjects were found to play a major role in influencing students to prefer certain careers over others. Studies have revealed the influence of school subjects on students' choices of careers. For instance, in Pakistan (Naz, Saeed, Khan, Sheik, & Khan, 2014) and America (Faiter & Faiter, 2013), school subjects were found to influence students in choosing careers. The quality of teaching, student participation in school activities, school practices and policies, and learning materials for the students were found to impact career choices among learners (Shumba & Naong, 2012). Schools, therefore, guide students towards certain careers by exposing them to a variety of activities. The current study sought to establish the extent to which Zimbabwean schools influence career choices among high school students.

Field trips and school career days were found to have a significant influence on students' choices of careers. For example, in the United Kingdom, field trips were found to have an impact on students' choices of careers (Higgins, Dewhurst, & Walkins, 2012). Similar studies in America and Czechoslovakia also found that field trips and career days influence students' career choices (Behrandt & Frankline, 2014; Nabors, Edwards, & Murray, 2006; Prokop, Tuncer, & Kvasnic, 2007). Similar findings were obtained in Pakistan (Shakil, Faizi, & Hafeez, 2011), Ireland (Higgins et al., 2012) and Ghana (Amoah, Kwofie, & Kwofie, 2015) where the importance of field trips in influencing students' choices of careers was revealed. The current study sought to establish whether Zimbabwean school field trips and career days influenced students' career choices.

Another important aspect of schools concerning career choices was the geographical location of the school (Fizer, 2013; Perna et al., 2008; Roy, 2016). The constraints on providing career counselling vary across schools based on the characteristics of the students the school serves and the location of schools, in particular, district or state (Perna et al., 2008).

1.2. Purpose of the study

The current study was carried out in Zimbabwe and included both rural and urban secondary schools and intended to establish whether the location of the school influenced students' career choices. On the contrary, Ko et al. (2007) established that the geographical location of the school does not influence British students' career choices. The reason for these contrasting results could be the participants that were used in the study. The participants in Ko et al.'s (2007) study were foreigners living in Britain.

1.3. Objectives

- To identify school activities that influence career choices among secondary school students.
- To assess teachers' contribution to students' career choices.
- To examine the influence of the geographical location of the school on students' career pathways.

2. Materials and methods

The study used a quantitative research approach. Borrego, Douglas, and Amelink (2009) stated that quantitative research is useful to quantify opinions, attitudes and behaviours and to find out how the whole population feels about a certain issue. Since the current study sought to investigate the influence of schools on students' choices of careers, a quantitative approach was best suited as it allowed the researcher to compare the results between students at different types of schools in different locations.

2.1. Research design

The survey research design involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. It is an efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad spectrum of individuals and educational settings (Glasow, 2005). Schools in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe comprising boarding schools, mission schools, day schools and urban and rural secondary schools participated in the present study.

2.2. Participants

A total of 1,200 students and 20 school career guidance teachers, which was 10% of the total population of both the students and teachers, participated in the study. The participants were selected through a stratified random sampling technique. Twenty students perform (i.e., Forms 4, 5 and 6) were given questionnaires. Schools were put into different categories which were day schools, boarding schools, government schools, mission schools and rural and urban schools. All the names of the schools in the province from each category were put in a hat for random selection.

2.3. Data collection instruments

The study made use of the questionnaire in collecting data. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) purport that a questionnaire is a widely used and a useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured information, and often numerical data that is administered without the presence of the researcher and is often comparatively straightforward to analyse. Since the researcher did not intend to engage research assistants, the questionnaires were the best instruments since they could be administered without the presence of the researcher and were clear and precise.

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in this study. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 19 was used to analyse the data. Percentages and ratios were calculated for easier interpretation. Ratios were used to identify items that were positively or negatively rated in terms of their influence on career choices.

3. Results

In investigating how the school influences high school students' choices of careers, issues such as career guidance in schools, school career days and trips, teachers, school heads and career guidance teachers were explored. Screening of students, subjects studied at school and the curriculum were also assessed to find out whether they influence students' career choices. Table 1 presents students' responses on school influence on career choices.

Table 1. Students' response on school influence on career choice ($n = 1,010$)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Ratio
1.Career guidance is comprehensively offered at our school	187 (18.5%)	293 (29%)	151 (15%)	177 (17.5%)	201 (19.9%)	1,010 (8.33%)	1.3
2.School career days influenced my career choice	149 (14.8%)	260 (25.7%)	177 (17.5%)	226 (22.4%)	198 (19.6%)	1,010 (8.33%)	1.0
3.Career trips or field trips influenced my career choice	173 (17.1%)	191 (18.9%)	155 (15.3%)	224 (22.2%)	267 (26.4%)	1,010 (8.33%)	0.7
4.School career guidance cleared career confusion that I had	245 (24.3%)	222 (22%)	176 (17.4%)	154 (15.2%)	213 (21.1%)	1,010 (8.33%)	1.3
5.My class teacher was	148	239	176	236	211	1,010	0.9

influential in the career I want to pursue	(14.7%)	(23.7%)	(17.4%)	(23.4%)	(20.9%)	(8.33%)	
6.The career guidance counsellor was influential to the career I want to do	122 (12.1%)	281 (27.8%)	160 (15.8%)	260 (25.7%)	187 (18.5%)	1,010 (8.33%)	0.9
7.The school head was influential to the career I want to do	150 (14.9%)	178 (17.6%)	160 (15.8%)	250 (24.8%)	272 (26.9%)	1,010 (8.33%)	0.6
8.The subjects I do influence my career decision	459 (45.4%)	300 (29.7%)	92 (9.1%)	91 (9%)	67 (6.6%)	1,010 (8.33%)	4.8
9.Former students' careers had a positive influence on my career choice	204 (20.2%)	276 (27.3%)	199 (19.7%)	184 (18.2%)	147 (14.6%)	1,010 (8.33%)	1.4
10.School career exploration and career decision-making activities broaden students' career horizons	208 (20.6%)	261 (25.8%)	254 (25.1%)	157 (15.5%)	130 (12.9%)	1,010 (8.33%)	1.6
11.My preferred career is linked to my favourite subjects	479 (47.4%)	277 (27.4%)	156 (15.4%)	53 (5.2%)	45 (4.5%)	1,010 (8.33%)	8.0
12.Screening leads students towards certain careers	388 (38.4%)	337 (33.4%)	134 (13.3%)	74 (7.3%)	77 (7.6%)	1,010 (8.33%)	4.8
Total	2,912 (24.03%)	3,115 (25.7%)	1,991 (16.43%)	2,087 (17.22%)	2,015 (16.63%)	12,120 (100%)	

The ratios in Table 1 have positively indicated the influence of the school on students' career choices. Most of the items have ratios above 1, which resemble positive ratings in terms of their influence on students' career choices. Student participants perceived school as influential to students' choices of careers. The students indicated that schools influenced their careers mostly through subjects taken and the screening of students that led them to prefer certain careers over others. Former students' careers and career guidance offered in schools were quite influential to students' choices of careers. Also critical in influencing students' choices of careers were school career guidance (47.5%), school career explorations and school career decision-making activities (46.4%). Table 1 shows that school career trips and career days, class teachers, career guidance teachers and school heads were identified as having little influence by most of the students.

Table 2. Career teachers' responses on school influence ($n = 20$)

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Ratio
1 Career guidance in schools is concerned with clearing students' career confusion	6 (30%)	11 (55%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	0	20 (9.09%)	8.5
2 Students enjoy career guidance lessons the school provides	4 (20%)	10 (50%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	0	20 (9.09%)	7.0
3 Location of the school has a bearing on students' choice of careers	5 (25%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	6 (30%)	0	20 (9.09%)	2.0
4 Career experts are invited to the school to offer career guidance lessons	3 (15%)	10 (50%)	2 (10%)	5 (15%)	0	20 (9.09%)	2.6
5 Students tour different	3 (15%)	6 (30%)	5 (25%)	5 (15%)	1	20 (9.09%)	1.5

workplaces as a career exploration								(5%)	
6 Career guidance helps children acquire knowledge and skills about certain careers	10 (50%)	9 (45%)	0	1 (5%)	0	20 (9.09%)	18.9		
7 School career guidance widens the students' career horizons	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	0	1 (5%)	0	20 (9.09%)	18.8		
8 Career guidance in schools positively influences career decision-making skills	10 (50%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	0	20 (9.09%)	16.9		
9 Quality of teaching positively influences students' career choice	6 (30%)	7 (35%)	5 (20%)	2 (10%)	0	20 (9.09%)	6.5		
10 School policies influence career decision-making	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)	5 (25%)	0	20 (9.09%)	2.0		
11 Mentors in the form of teachers provide students with introductory aspects of professions	3 (15%)	13 (65%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	0	20 (9.09%)	8.0		
Total	66 (27.5%)	101 (42.08%)	34 (14.1%)	37 (154%)	1 (0.42%)	240			

The ratios in Table 2 reflect a high rating by career guidance teachers on the influence of schools in influencing students' career choices. Career guidance teachers supported the idea that career guidance in schools has, for instance, an effect on clearing students' career confusion as reflected by the ratios in Table 2. Career guidance teachers believe that the school has an influence on the students' careers through career guidance offered in schools. They believe that career guidance widens the students' career decision-making and clears confusion. Table 2 shows that career guidance teachers saw mentoring (80%) and the invitation of career experts to schools (65%) as influential to students' choice of careers. The table shows that students enjoyed career guidance lessons (70%) and also that career experts were invited to the school to offer career guidance lessons. The quality of teaching was seen as a factor that influenced students' choice of careers so the location of schools was found to be influential in students' career choices. School policies (50%) were found by career guidance teachers as having a bearing on students' career choices. Career guidance teachers also indicated that students toured different workplaces as a career activity. The next section pursues gender issues in career choices.

4. Discussion

The study revealed that the school had a bearing on students' career choices. The school environment has the potential to share career issues through career guidance and other school activities. The results are in line with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises the influence of environmental factors, such as career counselling (Lent & Worthington, 2000). This finding is also in tandem with early studies, such as Naz et al. (2014) in Pakistan; Li et al. (2010) in China; Pendergrass (2008) in America; Amoah et al. (2015) in Ghana; and Edwards and Quinter (2011) in Kenya, who established the importance of schools in preparing students for careers. Schools instil career knowledge through the career guidance services they offer. The finding on the influence of schools on students' career choices is in line with current studies, like Sun and Yuen (2012) in China; Mghweno et al. (2014) and Obiunu and Ebunu (2013) in Nigeria; Shumba and Naong (2012) in South Africa; and Kimiti and Mwova (2012) and Lazarus and Chinwe (2011) in Kenya, where school career guidance was found to influence students' career choices.

Career guidance teacher participants in the present study agreed that career guidance positively widens the horizons of students in secondary schools, helps in career decision-making and the quality of teaching and school policies were critical in influencing career choices. The above observations are consistent with previous literature, for example, Aguado et al. (2015) in the Philippines; Abbasi and Sarwat (2014) in Pakistan; Ferreira and Lima (2010) in Portugal; Rowland (2004) in the Bahamas; Flores and Obasi (2005) and Watts and Sultana (2004) in America; Kimiti and Mwova (2012) in Kenya; Shumba and Naong (2012) in South Africa; and Petters and Asuquo (2009) in Nigeria, which emphasised that the quality of teaching increases career horizons.

The study also revealed that career guidance in schools helps students understand career issues, such as the subjects to do to pursue a certain career. Career guidance in schools has the potential to communicate important career issues. The above finding concurred with previous studies, for example, Faiter and Faiter (2013) in America; Kimiti and Mwova (2012) and Edwards and Quinter (2011) in Kenya; Mghweno et al. (2014) in Tanzania; Gbenga and Toyin (2014) in Nigeria; and Shumba and Naong (2012) in South Africa, having established that career guidance helps students gain knowledge about careers.

The study further revealed that teachers play a pivotal role in career guidance. This is in tandem with Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises teaching students to make career decisions (Schonorr & Ware, 2001). Career guidance teachers in the current study rated highly the influence of teachers in assisting students to choose careers. This is in line with previous literature, such as Fried and MacCleave (2009), Zayas and McGuigan (2006) and Flores and Obasi (2005) in America; Ogunyewo, Afemikhe, Ajo, and Olanlesi-alui (2015) and Durosaro and Nohu (2012) in Nigeria; and Kimiti and Mwova (2012) and Migunde, Agak, and Odiwuor (2012) in Kenya, which supports the importance of teachers in assisting students in their choices of careers. Several other studies, such as Bardick et al. (2004) in America; Mghweno et al. (2014) in Kenya; and Walaba and Kiboss (2013) in Nigeria, also established the positive influence of career guidance teachers on students' choices of careers. Student participants in the current study underrated the influence of teachers on their career choices. The possible reason why career guidance teachers and students differed on the influence of teachers and mentors could be that career guidance teachers in schools steer career guidance activities. However, students' perceptions about the influence of career guidance teachers are also consistent with studies by Salami and Salami (2013) and Durosaro and Nohu (2012) in Nigeria, which established that career guidance teachers had little influence on students' choices of careers.

The study also revealed that former students' careers and the students' favourite subjects influenced students' choices of careers. Students are likely to follow other students from the same school. If they find that the past students are doing well in their careers, they may emulate those students by taking similar subject combinations and engaging in similar school activities as those done by the former students. The result of the current study is in agreement with previous studies, for example, Naz et al. (2014) in Pakistan; Bossman (2014) in Ghana; and Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) and Mutekwe et al. (2011) in Zimbabwe, which established that former students' careers were influential in their choices of careers.

Career guidance teachers in this study revealed that the geographical location of the school affected students' choices of careers. This finding concurs with the literature, for example, Rowland (2004) in the Bahamas, and Chemeli (2013) in Kenya, which highlight the effect of the geographical location of the school concerning career choices, particularly in urban areas. Careers such as engineering and computer science may be more popular with urban scholars than rural schools since there are few engineers located in rural areas.

Student participants in the current study revealed that field trips did not influence their choices of careers. Contrary to the above findings, studies by Prokop et al. (2007) in Czechoslovakia; Behrandt and Frankline (2014) and Higgins et al. (2012) in the United Kingdom; Shakil et al. (2011) in Pakistan; Nabors et al. (2006) in America; and Amoah et al. (2015) in Ghana found that field trips are critical to the students' choices of careers. The lack of influence of field trips on secondary school students' career choices in this study is a surprising finding, given the influence of such trips in the literature. Possibly, in the current study, schools were poorly managing field trips to the extent that students found them unappealing concerning their influence on career choices.

Class teachers and career guidance teachers were cited by student participants as having little influence on their career choices. These findings contradict earlier findings (Aguado et al., 2015; AL-Momani & Jawarneh, 2022; Amoah et al., 2015; Kimiti & Mwova, 2012) that reveal the positive influence of career guidance teachers and class teachers. A possible explanation for the contradiction between the literature and the findings of the current study could be the way career guidance in Zimbabwe is executed. Teachers should exhibit knowledge of the subject area to the satisfaction of the students. In the absence of such knowledge, students are not inspired by such teachers. Most of the career guidance teachers in Zimbabwe have no prior training in career guidance.

5. Conclusion

School is found to be influential on students' career pathways. Career guidance affected secondary school students' career choices. There are several school activities such as subjects taught, quality of teaching and school policies that affected students' career decision-making. Teachers in schools contributed immensely to their scholars' choice of career pathways.

Former students' careers affected students' choices of careers. Students who were doing well career-wise would be taken as models by the students and hence influence career decision-making. The geographical location of the schools impacts the career choices of students. The study recommended that career guidance teachers be trained to enhance their effectiveness in instilling confidence and imparting proper knowledge on students' careers. The study further recommended that field trips be well planned for them to have a bearing on students' career decisions.

Schools play a pivotal role in helping students make informed career choices, hence the need to line up activities in their career guidance that promote growth in their endeavour to choose careers. Career guidance teachers must be acquainted with activities that promote growth in students. Activities such as engaging former students who are doing well career-wise should be invited to share their experiences. School policies that promote students' career development should be enacted in schools. Field trips must be well planned as they allow students to meet professionals in their fields.

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