

Psychosocial Variables in Occupational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of some psychosocial factors on occupational aspirations of secondary school students. Specific factors examined in the study were self-concept, gender and parental role. Three hypotheses of the study were tested at 0.05 levels of significance while a questionnaire with a reliability index of 0.815 was used for data collection. Independent t-test statistics was utilized to analyze data from two hundred (200) respondents within the context of Ex-post facto research design. Result of the study revealed a significant influence of the three key variables (self-concept, parental factor and gender) on occupational aspirations of respondents in the study. Based on the findings, it was recommended that occupational information should be made available to young people as early as in the primary school years so as to exert positive moderating influence on their aspirations with a view to avoiding wrong occupations that do not reflect their unique needs, interests and abilities.

Keyword: Occupation, aspirations and self-concept

INTRODUCTION

Decision-making concerning appropriate occupational preference is one of the most critical tasks facing many Nigerian secondary school students today. To a large extent, this may not be unconnected to poor career guide and unavailability of Careers guidance services especially within the context of industrialization, technological development and urbanization which has resulted to increase in the range of career opportunities. Hence, general students' outcomes in this regard seem to be unrealistic aspirations, confusion and frustration.

A person's occupation is one of the most important aspects of human endeavour because it involves a person's total life (Asuquo, 2007). It determines one's income, choice of friends, pattern of dress, the extent of influence in the society as well as the amount of risk one is exposed to. Occupational aspiration is defined as the thoughts, feelings and fantasies that individuals visualize about their jobs which are capable of affecting their motivations and decision-making in respect to their occupational choice. Also included in the definition are the reasons and goals a person has in taking decision about an occupation. Ngwu (1999) adds that occupational aspiration entails a process of development of self-concept and identity whereby a person incorporates within his decision making, his interest and adequate knowledge of occupational information. It is also a process in which an individual perceives himself; how he evaluates and how he feels others evaluate him. Therefore, a comprehensive knowledge and

understanding of self and the world of work is required to help an individual make a realistic aspiration.

Occupational aspiration may be influenced by multiple factors which are either intrinsic or extrinsic (Echebee, 2009). These may include interest, self-concept, personality, cultural identity, role model and available resources. Many youngsters are likely to be influenced by careers that their parents favour or their religious orientations. Others may follow the careers that their education choices have opened for them while some may choose follow their interest and passion regardless of the outcome. Yet some youths are seen to go into occupations that are prestigious with high income while some prefer occupation with job security and some are influenced by teachers and peers in their occupational aspirations. By and large, it is observed that young people today aspire to occupations mainly because of the prestige attached to the jobs while others are due to parental and peer-group influences which do not reflect their needs, interests and abilities. Be that as it may, realistic occupational aspiration depends largely on the quality and the amount of occupational information made available to youths especially at the secondary school level (Asuquo, 2007).

As indicated above, aspirations to the right occupations continue to be a great need and a major source of anxiety, worry and frustration to many young people and also a major concern to their parents and educational sponsors at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria. Most secondary school students who are in their adolescence period are inexperienced, ignorant and immature and some are not well guided at this phase to aspire to occupations that suit their interests, values, abilities, skills, aptitudes and personality characteristics. For them (especially during the early adolescent period) whose days are filled with fantasies and dreams of greatness, it is easy to be a medical doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, a state governor, a president or any occupation that catches their fancies. As the child grows and develops, his choices are bound to change and become based on more realistic considerations. This is because in the school setting, he is exposed to different art and science subjects and may discover that he is more proficient at some subjects than others. Also, through his observation of adults at work he forms some idea of what is needed in various occupations and begins to aspire to one. He also realizes and learns that there are special physical, mental and emotional requirements for jobs against which he has to evaluate himself and choose from (Anwana, 2005).

It is observed that most Nigerian students are not properly guided to aspire and choose occupation that would cause them to maximize their potentials. Nwanadi (2015) asserted that most of the students in secondary schools do not have accurate information about occupational opportunities to help them make appropriate career choice. Occupational guidance and occupational aspiration are very essential for today's youths who are more than "motivated but direction less" (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Failure to make a realistic occupational decision leads to career frustration. Wrong choice of career occurs when a young person chooses occupation outside his ability, interest, achievement level and aptitude. This leads to obtaining non-functional university degree which one is neither proud of nor willing to use. Given that Young people are often confused and in a state of dilemma on what choice of career they should aspire to, they require the right occupational information since this is the foundation for the provision of career guidance services (Petters & Asuquo, 2009). Appropriate occupational aspiration has been found to lead to good vocational adjustment (Tang, Pan & Newmeyer, 2008; Petters and Asuquo, 2009) Those who are vocationally maladjusted due to wrong occupational aspirations are seen to be depressed, uncooperative and unproductive and at times exhibit maladaptive behaviours such as aggressiveness and withdrawal at the

workplace and at home. Such people may also lack positive self-concept and motivation to work hard. It is on the basis of this that the researchers deem it imperative to find out if psychosocial variables such as self-concept, parental factor, and gender have any influence on occupational aspirations of secondary school students.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the influence of some psychosocial variables on occupational aspirations of secondary school students. A sample of two hundred (200) students was randomly selected from public secondary schools in Calabar, Nigeria using stratified random sampling technique to ensure equal representation of the students taking part in the study. The research design was Ex-post facto. A dully validated Questionnaire was used for data collection. This instrument was equally subjected to reliability test using Spearman – Brown Prophecy Formula. An overall reliability index of 0.815 was obtained indicating that the instrument is reliable enough to generate the expected data for the study. The data collected was analyzed using independent t-test while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of self-concept on occupational aspiration of secondary school students. Result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of self-concept of students on their occupational aspiration (N = 200)

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	t
High self-concept	130	31.78	5.52	4.513*
Low self-concept	70	28.23	4.92	

Significant at 0.05; df = 198; critical t-value = 1.972

Result of analysis in Table 1 indicates that the calculated t-value of 4.513 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 level of significance, with 2 and 198 degrees of freedom. On the basis of this, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained.

This means there is a significant influence of self-concept on students occupational aspirations.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant influence of parental factor on occupational aspiration of secondary school students. Result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of parental factor on students' occupational aspiration (N = 200)

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	t
High parental factor	126	32.46	4.99	7.115*
Low parental factor	74	27.27	4.96	

Significant at 0.05; df = 198; critical t-value = 1.972

Result of analysis in Table 2 indicates that the calculated t-value of 7.115 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 198 degrees of freedom. This means there is a significant influence of parental factor on students' occupational aspirations.

This implies that the students' occupational aspirations were greatly influenced by the parents. By this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate upheld.

Hypothesis three

There is no significant influence of gender on occupational aspiration of students. Result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on students' occupational aspiration (N = 200)

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	T
Male	114	31.67	5.64	3.380*
Low parental factor	86	29.05	5.13	

Significant at 0.05; df = 198; critical t-value = 1.972

Result of analysis in Table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value of 3.380 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 198 degrees of freedom. This means there is a significant influence of gender on students' occupational aspirations. By these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate upheld.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Self-concept and students occupational aspiration

This hypothesis sought to find out if there was a significant influence of self-concept on students' occupational aspiration.

The result of this study indicated that there was a significant influence of self-concept on students' occupational aspirations. The null hypothesis was rejected contrary to the wide speculations that external factors such as high salary, prestige, peer group factors exhibited a great influence on students occupational aspirations. This study shows that self-concept of a person which is an internal factor has an influence on the occupations and careers student aspire into. This study is in consonance with Echebe (2009) who states that individuals select careers that they perceive as falling in line with their self-concept. This implies that some youths tend to implement self-image in choosing their occupations. A comprehensive knowledge and understanding of self and the world of work may help an individual student to make a wise occupational aspiration. This work is also in support of Lee (1984) who listed self-concept among the factors that influence career aspirations. Those with high self-concept seem to prefer professionally-oriented-occupations while young people with low self-concept have high preferences for occupations such as farming and cooking.

Parental influence and students' occupational aspirations

This hypothesis sought to find out if there was a significant influence of parental factor on students' occupational aspirations. Null hypothesis was rejected and this indicated that there is a significant influence of parental factor on students occupational aspirations. In our present Nigerian society, children from high income families attend the best primary schools and on completion of their primary education, some of these parents send their children to high ranking top private secondary schools where exorbitant fees are paid. Such children become motivated at a very early stage to aspire into lucrative and prestigious professions. On the other hand, those from low income families lack such opportunities and they end up going for any available career in their immediate surroundings. Poor parental background affects their

occupational aspiration and this consequently limits their vocational development. This study is in support of Denga (2001) that explained that parents occupy a significant role in the life of the child in terms of occupational aspirations. Some parents encourage what is known as a family occupation by shaping up the interests of their children to take after their own profession.

However, this study also is in disagreement with Olayinka (1993) in which the result of his study showed that only 35.5% of his study sample (173) in Lagos consulted their parents on their occupational choice. About 41% got occupational information from relatives such as brothers, sisters and cousins. Petters & Asuquo (2009) carried out a study on awareness of occupational and labour market information among in-school youths in Calabar. The result in this present study is on agreement with their work that the commonest sources of occupational information which is capable of influencing occupational aspirations include parents, friends and mass media. In this case, students whose progress are closely monitored by parents perform better academically and are also guided into pursuing good careers. Parenting style is important in that autocratic parent makes great demand on their children in terms of career aspirations. Permissive parents seem not to care about grades and career aspirations and allow their children to aspire into any occupation whether it is lucrative, prestigious or not.

Gender and students' occupational aspirations

This hypothesis sought to find out if there was a significant influence of gender on students' occupational aspirations.

Null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate upheld. This means there is a significant influence of gender on students' occupational aspirations. There are sex differences in career aspirations. Males and females are found to differ significantly in their occupational aspirations. This study is in support of Echebe (2009) who stated that certain occupations are designated for males and some for females. More girls seem to have preferences for nursing, teaching, home economics, home management, cosmetology, weaving technology. Males however are found to go for engineering, building, accounting, mining, military services and other occupations that require physical activities. During adolescence, students start to have an adult's level of understanding of the sex type and prestige level of common occupations. Females students might avoid choosing occupations that are generally perceived as too masculine e.g. career as a miner.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of some psychosocial variables on occupational aspirations of secondary school students in Calabar, Cross River State. Findings revealed that self-concept which is the self-image a student has about himself has a positive influence on the type of occupation he aspires into. Parents can affect their children's education by becoming seriously involved in their academic progress and sending them to the best schools in order to aspire into appropriate career that suit their interests, abilities, values, aptitudes and personality types. In terms of gender, female students might avoid choosing occupations that are generally perceived as too masculine e.g. career as a miner. Based on the results, it was recommended that occupational information should be provided early to children right from the primary school to secondary school levels. Career counselling should be strengthened at the senior secondary school level to ascertain students' vocational interest.

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