

**THE DILEMMA OF CAREER CHOICE: A CASE STUDY OF KENYAN
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS****Kimiti Richard Peter**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the variables that influence career choice among secondary school students in Kenya. The study was guided by two objectives: to determine the influence of peer groups on students' career choice at secondary school level and to determine the impact of career guidance and information on students' career choice. The study adopted a survey design. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the sample of the study. The sample of the study comprised of 24 teacher-counsellors and 240 form four students in twelve selected schools in Machakos and Kitui Counties, Kenya. Two data collection instruments were used for this study; teachers' and students' questionnaires. The data was analyzed by the use of frequencies and percentages. The results of the study revealed that only 17.50% of the student respondents stated that they were influenced by their peers when choosing their future career. Presence of career guidance programmes was evident in all the schools selected for this study. Majority of the student respondents (89.5%) indicated that the provision of career guidance and information helped them to make better decisions in choosing their career. The study recommends that peer education should be emphasized in schools since students would be equipped with the proper knowledge and information on career choice. In addition all schools should put in place effective career guidance and counselling departments. The teacher-counsellors should also be in-serviced on issues related to career choice. This will help the students to have more confidence on the career

guidance services provide in schools and thus assist them to make proper decisions when selecting their careers.

Key words: *career choice, career guidance, peer influence*

Introduction

Most working people in the world prepare for their occupations by undergoing some form of organized education in high school, trade school, vocational school or college (Commission for Higher Education CHE, 2005). Brembeck (1966) argued that “student level of educational aspiration was positively related to peer-group membership” (p. 342). According to Loko(2005), peer group membership with a student with high career expectation influenced them to be inspired to certain careers. According to Holland (1985), *Birds of a feather flock together*. This sentiment implies that, people like to be around others who have similar personalities. In choosing a career, it meant that people chose jobs where they could be around other people who were like them (Jones, 2007).

Career guidance was first introduced in the Kenyan Education system way back in 1964 by the Ominde report, also known as *Kenya Education Commission's Report*, which recommended that schools provide some guidance to students. As a result, the MOE in 1971 started a subsection within the inspectorate section to deal with the implementation of career guidance in schools. A career handbook was published for career masters in schools and regular teachers who were appointed to provide some career guidance services to students in addition to their teaching load.

In the Development Plan (1979 – 1983), it was recommended that career guidance be part of the curriculum at the teacher training colleges and universities. Subsequently, the policy was put into action. However, there was concern that the content of the course was too inadequate to prepare effective counsellors. Thus, the greatest challenge in students' career choice in many schools is lack of exposure for teachers and students. Students make ignorant career decisions based on how far the teachers guide them out of the career information supplied from institutions of higher learning (Kariuki, 2006a). Gichohi(2005) argues that:

...there has never been a serious effort in Kenya to help students make right career choice. In most cases the students are entirely left alone. They grope in the dark and when they make the choice, they enrol for studies they know

little or nothing about. Even students in schools which have career guidance teachers, things are not much different because some teachers are not trained on career guidance and thus, not skilled enough to adequately guide them”.

According to Gichohi, (2005), many students in Kenya go through schooling with wrong career notions. The ‘celebrity jobs’ of engineering, law, architecture, medicine and bachelor of commerce are every student’s dream (Gichohi, 2005).

In support of Gichohi’s comments, Kariuki (2006a) adds that, parents are also to blame because some of them frequently visit schools to influence their children’s subject choice. This makes students pursue subjects they do not like in school, creating stress in them. In another study, Kariuki (2006b) further asserts that the greatest challenge in students’ career choices in many schools is lack of guidance services. This implies that the students make career choices based on limited career information informally acquired in their institutions of learning. He also asserts that many schools depended on career information handbooks whose information had become obsolete as a result of rapid change in technology and labour market conditions. This situation therefore calls for a continuous update of the career handbooks in schools so as to address the rapid changes and emerging challenges in the labour market (Kibera, 1993).

In a study on the effects of career guidance on students’ career choice at secondary school level in Kitui County, Kaloki (2009) reported that most of the content on career choice used by teachers was also outdated. For example, the 1989 career guide book was the most common in schools. Teachers used general career guidance sessions for all students in career guidance. This did not take into account individual career needs for each student. Career guidance was found to be necessary to enable students choose appropriate careers depending on their talents and abilities. Majority of the students had high expectations on their future careers and some of them wished to join careers whose secondary school subject requirements were not matching with their subject interests and abilities (Omokhoa & Godson,2008). In essence, students needed proper career guidance to establish the existing career opportunities which were compatible with their talents, interests and academic ability.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing students' career choice at secondary school level. This purpose was facilitated through the following research objectives:

- to determine the influence of peer groups on student's career choice at the secondary school level and
- to determine the impact of career guidance and information on students' career choice

Methodology of Research

Research design

The study adopted survey design. The survey design was selected due to its suitability as it is commonly used in preliminary and exploratory studies (Luck & Ruben, 1992; Orodho, 2003). Survey research deals with incidence, distribution and interrelations of educational variables and emphasizes on answers to one question given by all respondents (Orodho, 2003). This design aimed at collecting information from students on their opinion in relation to factors influencing career choice during their secondary school education. Secondly, it also allowed the researchers to collect data, summarize, present and interpret it for the purpose of making concrete generalizations and suggestions for further research.

Location of the study

The study was carried out in Kitui and Machakos Counties, Kenya. Kitui County is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. It borders Makueni and Machakos counties to the West and South West, Embu County to the North, Garissa County to the East. The County is located between latitudes 37° 45' and 39° 0' east lying between 400 meters and 1800 meters above sea level, covering approximately 20400 square kilometres including 6903 square kilometres occupied by uninhabited Tsavo National Park [Ref DDP 2002-2008].

Machakos county is situated 336 kilometers south (186⁰) of the approximate centre of Kenya and 64 Kilometers (130⁰) South East of Nairobi. It covers an area of 6,251.4 Km². Machakos district stretches from latitudes 0⁰ 45' south to 1⁰31' south and longitudes 36⁰45' east to 37⁰67' east. It borders Nairobi county (latitudes: 1⁰16'58" south to 1⁰17'00" south, longitudes: 35⁰49'00" east to 36⁰39'00" east) to the Embu county (latitudes: 1⁰ 32'50" south to 2⁰ 43'02" south, longitudes; 37⁰49'00" east to 38⁰ 00'67" east) to the East. It also borders Kiambu county (latitudes: 0⁰ 08'12" south to 0⁰ 37'99" south, Longitudes: 36⁰48'00" east to

37° 35'04" east) to the North and Makueni county (latitudes: 1° 48'00" south to 2° 06'00" south: 37° 8'60" east to 37° 37'00" east) to the South as shown in Appendix: F (Machakos District- Survey Office, 2009).

The researchers selected the two counties, since students in the secondary schools from the two counties experienced problems when choosing their optional subjects as they joined form three, which eventually determined their career choice. The counties were also easily accessible to the researchers. Having being tutors in both counties, the researchers were familiar with most teachers in it. This implied data collection exercise was met any hostility or suspicion from the respondents.

Research instruments

The research instrument used for data collection in this study was a questionnaire. There were two questionnaires used in this study: Students' Questionnaire (SQ) and Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ). In the process of developing the questionnaires, the researchers consulted experts in career guidance and counselling. The Students' Questionnaire had both closed and open-ended questions to solicit information on students' career choice and the guidance services they received from teachers. On the other hand, the Teachers' Questionnaire focused on the same areas but with major emphasis on the effectiveness of the career guidance services in schools.

Validity and reliability of research instruments

The researcher instruments were piloted in a secondary school in Makueni County before the actual data collection process. The data collection instruments were administered by the researchers through a split-half test design. The purpose of piloting the research instruments was to establish their validity and reliability. The validity of the instruments was to minimise ambiguity in the various questions and thus adjust the poorly prepared ones. The validity was carried out through discussions with subject specialists in the area of career choice and vocational guidance; teacher-counsellors, curriculum developers and experts from Price-Water house consultants in Kenya.

The research instruments were piloted once in the selected pilot school. The responses were scored using an excel programme. The items in each questionnaire were splitted into two; even and odd numbers. A comparison between answers

obtained in the piloting exercise was made to establish how close the responses were, so as to ascertain for consistency in the answers. The Spearman Brown Correlation formula was used to compute the correlation coefficient. A correlation coefficient of 0.82 was obtained in the pilot study. This value was classified as good according to Bell (1993) and hence the instruments were found to be reliable for the study.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling technique used in this study was simple random sampling method. Twelve secondary schools were randomly sampled with respect to the study objectives. Simple random sampling procedure used to select 5 schools from Kitui County and 7 schools from Machakos County.

The study sample consisted of 24 teacher and 240 student respondents who were randomly selected from the selected schools. 43% of the respondents were selected from Kitui County, whereas 57% were from Machakos County, which constituted a proportional representation of the entire target population from each County. The student respondents comprised of 102 female and 138 male student respondents.

Statistical Techniques for Data analysis

The data collected through the questionnaires was grouped according to the research questions. Statistical tally system was used to generate frequency tables out of which percentages were calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analyzed data was presented in frequencies and percentages.

Results of Research

Peer Influence on students' career choice

The first objective sought to determine the influence of peer groups on the student's career choice. The study findings indicate that only 14.4% of the girls were influenced by their peers to choose their careers while 35.6% of them did choose careers out of their own interest in the career. On the other hand, out of the sampled population of the boys, 20% of them were influenced by their peers and 30% were not influenced and chose careers out of their own interest in that career. This implies that boys were influenced more by their peers when choosing their career compared to girls. This translated to total of 17.50% of the student respondents who stated that they were influenced by their peers in choosing their careers.

With regards to the specific careers, the findings of the study further indicated that 8.1% of the student respondents were influenced by their peers to choose a career like medicine (doctors), but those who had interest in choosing such a career were 16.9% more than the number influenced. Peer influence on the choice of business and aviation careers was rated at 15.6% and 21.9% respectively. The peer influence on the accounting career had a relatively low rating (1.9%) as compared to the actual number of student respondents who chose it (38.1%). This implies that majority of those who choose it did so out of their own personal interest.

The study results also showed that the choice of careers in teaching, engineering, law and nursing were slightly influenced by peers with a rating of 5.6%, 3.8%, 2.5% and 1.9% respectively. On the general preference in the careers stated above, each career was chosen as follows: teaching (24.8%), engineering (34.4%), law (56.3%) and nursing (33.1%) respectively. Careers like journalism and Agricultural engineering were also popular with the respondents with 44.4% and 43.2% respectively. Careers such as preaching, artisan, farming, games, driving, publishing, house help and IT although influenced by the peers did not attract a lot of interest from the respondents. This could be due to low financial attachment going with them. From the findings, it can be argued that the careers with the most peer influence were medicine, engineering, teaching, journalism and law, (8.1%, 3.8%, 5.6%, 2.5%) respectively. The most popular careers with the student respondents were law (56.3%), journalism (44.4%) and agricultural engineering (43.4%). This could be due to the high financial gains going with them. This means that, although many students were influenced by their friends to choose certain careers, very few of these respondents chose careers according to their friends' advice.

Impact of Career Guidance Teachers on Students' Career Choice

Out of the 24 teachers sampled, 77.8% of them indicated that there were career guidance programmes in their schools while 22.2% said there were no career guidance programmes in their schools. When the students were asked to indicate whether they had career guidance teachers, 79.4% agreed while 20.6% replied that they had no career guidance teachers in their schools. Though the teachers might have lacked professional training on career guidance, they seem to have made some effort by creating career guidance programmes in their schools. Presence of career teachers and career guidance programmes was an indication of teachers' influence on students' career choice through career guidance.

Teachers were asked to indicate the frequency at which they organized career guidance sessions in their schools. Study results showed that 44.4% of the teachers sampled reported once per term, 22.2% said weekly, while 16.7% said annually, 5.6% reported once per month and 11.1% said they had no career guidance sessions in their schools. This indicated that there was a small number of sessions to guide students on their career choices. This was thought to influence student's career choice for they were not accorded enough time for career guidance.

This study also sought to determine the impact of career guidance services availed in schools on student's career choice. The students were asked to state how career information was disseminated to them in their school; 55% reported the use of guest speakers and 13.8 % reported that they used career hand books. On the other hand, 12.2% reported that the information was disseminated through notice boards, 6.1% said through magazines /news papers, 4.4% said through advertisements in mass media (Radios) and 1.3% said that the information was disseminated through workshops. This was an indication that most schools do not have adequate career guidance materials for exposing their students to.

Discussions

The results of the study indicated that the student respondents were influenced by other peers when making their career choice. This finding concurred with that of Kilonzo (1981), in his study on students' career awareness in Kitui County. The results of this study (Kilonzo's), also found out that there was a significant relationship between peer influence and educational aspiration of a student when making a career decision. This researcher attributed this result to lack of career guidance services in many schools in Kenya. He also alleged that, most of the students in the same groups during their group wished to pursue /attain the same level of education and had this consequently influenced them to take up the same career. However, this finding differed with that of Ndambuki (1987) in her study which found out that both boys' and girls' career choices were not significantly influenced by their peers. Similar findings in support to those for Ndambuki had also been reported by Aswani (1991) in another study when he pointed out that there was no positive relationship between peer influence and a child occupational choice. Hence, there are other factors that may influence one's occupational choice other than peer influence.

In the school environment, the teacher plays an important role on students' career choice. Prior research has found that students are influenced by high school teachers and in particular career guidance and counsellors in making decisions that affect their future such as

their career choice. Brok, Fisher and Scott (2005) indicated that the more dominant and cooperative a teacher is being perceived, the greater the students' enjoyment. Since the teachers have more contact hours with the students, they are likely to influence their career choice either negatively or positively. They also act as role models for the respondents; therefore they are easily imitated by the respondents. This finding seems to agree with those of the current study as shown in the results when, it was reported that provision of career guidance services prompted students to make better decisions related to their career choice.

However, according to Jones (2007), one of the factors that frequently cause career indecision is that important information is missing. It is therefore necessary to ensure that resource materials and references are available for use so as to provide career information (CHE, 2005). The study of Omokhoa (2009) revealed that a significant factor influences a student's career choice was lack of information about courses, careers, entry requirements, entry procedures and detailed up to date information on units, personnel and practices. It was also reported that lack of information was higher in rural schools than in urban schools in Western Australia. These findings were in agreement with those of Obonyo (1994), who found out that, teachers neither attempted to create career awareness nor provide sufficient information on career preferences. He also noted that there was the assumption that the awareness promotion was to be done by the career guidance unit, which was non-existent in many schools. Career guidance required a lot of information on the part of the counsellor and high-level trust on the part of the clients (students).

The absence of career information leaves schools with the option of using guest speakers (55%) who are very seasonal. Guest speakers though rare, are good sources of career information. In the recent past, guest speakers have become more popular because schools are becoming more interactive and invite professionals to address students about their professions. This would explain the major influence of visiting professionals on the student's career choice. This concurs with Hughes and Krap (2004) whose study revealed that career guidance at school positively influenced student's career choice. These researchers also reported that career guidance at schools positively influenced career decision-making, understanding of careers and career related adjustments. Sukovieff (1989) also reported that teachers were the second most influential factor after parents. Singaravelu (2005) stated that school guidance counsellors had a significant influence in career choice and that students benefited from career counselling.

Cherrington (1997) appears to support these findings by pointing out that teachers do not attempt to create career awareness to students. He concluded that the insufficient information that the students had could be attributed to lack of guidance from teachers. This guidance is necessary so as to ensure that students harmonize their education and career expectations (Brooks & Brown 1990). Jason & Stephen (2009) also noted that many schools did not have career guidance sessions; therefore the students were entirely left on their own to make their career choices. Apparently, when students are not guided, they never know what is good for them or even what they want. Therefore when they make choices, they enrol for studies they know little or nothing about.

Apart from the results related to the two objectives of this study as formulated earlier, other factors that influence a student's career choice were also highlighted by the respondents. These factors include mentorship; lifestyle and financial rewards and geographical location were considered very important with respect to students' career choice. This finding was also in agreement with that of Adeleye (2010), when he also noted that personal interest played a significant role in career choice compared with the above mentioned variables. Among many other factors that influence a student's career choice, individual's interest in a given career plays a leading role. This clearly indicates that, the interest of the student will predict the type of career he/she chooses. The students would have liked these careers due to the high value attached to them in terms of prestige, fame and monetary gains. This makes almost every person to like associating with these high rated careers.

Conclusions

The peer influence was assessed by looking at the students' perception of their colleagues' impact on decision making with respect to their career choice. The study revealed that student respondents were influenced on their career choice by their peers. The level of peer influence varied from one school to another. The male students were influenced more in choosing a career by their peers compared to their female counter parts. Careers chosen by these student respondents included teaching, nursing, engineering and law. This implies that the effect of peer influence among secondary students on their career choice should not be ignored since it may lead students to making wrong choices

The study results also showed that the student respondents said that they chose their careers based on the information they received from the career guidance teachers. The student respondents also acknowledged the fact that they were more knowledgeable because of the

availability of information on career choice in their schools. According to these findings, it was also concluded that the provision of career guidance services positively influences students' decision on their career choice.

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