

Factors that Influence Career Choice for Children in High School

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Abstract:

The process of choosing a career is an essential milestone in the lives of high school students, shaped by an intricate blend of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This paper examines key influences on career choices, including gender, parental involvement, personality, peer pressure, socioeconomic status, societal expectations, and market needs. By exploring these dimensions, it highlights the challenges faced by students in aligning their aspirations with opportunities. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to address gaps in career guidance, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive educational programs, industry collaborations, and tailored counseling to support informed decision-making.

Introduction:

The prevailing trend for many professions since the early 20th century has been towards specialization, requiring even those individuals early in their career to have some form of tertiary education to be accepted by potential employers. As a result, many high schools students face substantial amounts of pressure to choose a career path quickly and then make academic choices to take them towards that chosen profession.

Factors that influence high school students' career choices

A variety of factors influence career choices among high school students, ranging from personal preferences to external social factors. Studies have identified significant elements such as gender, interest, personality, environment, and opportunity as crucial in shaping career paths (Huang).

Gender:

Studies indicate that career aspirations often begin during childhood, heavily influenced by gender perceptions. Boys and girls exhibit different interests in jobs traditionally categorized as masculine or feminine (Cunnien).

The impact of gender on career choices is evident in trends where boys lean towards technical roles and girls gravitate towards service-oriented positions. Such tendencies necessitate gender-sensitive career guidance to break traditional stereotypes and encourage exploration of diverse fields (Huang).

For example, in Nigeria, societal and educational influences shape gender-specific career aspirations. Despite societal pressures, many girls aspire to high-pressure occupations, reflecting a growing desire to challenge norms (Denga).

Parental Influence:

Parental involvement in career decision-making plays a dual role, capable of both guiding students positively and creating undue pressure. Excessive control can lead to negative societal outcomes (Effiom).

Conversely, positive parental involvement aids in raising awareness about potential career paths and supports students in making informed choices (Njogu et al.).

Personality:

Personality plays a critical role in determining career choices. Adolescents whose chosen careers align with their personality traits exhibit greater confidence and career certainty (Jemini-Gashi and Bërxulli). Furthermore, personality factors, combined with interests, environment, and opportunity, heavily influence career decisions (Huang).

Peer Pressure:

Peer pressure significantly influences career decision-making among high school students, as evidenced by multiple studies across different regions. In Zimbabwe, peer advice, encouragement, and education were identified as key factors affecting students' career choices, although students denied seeking peer validation for their career decisions (Mtemeri). Similarly, in Ghana, peer pressure was found to positively correlate with career choices among adolescents (Abomah). This correlation was also observed in Nigeria, where peer pressure significantly impacted career aspirations (Hassan et al.). Such findings suggest that educational institutions should harness the potential of peer networks through mentorship and collaborative career exploration programs.

Socioeconomic Status:

Socioeconomic status (SES) significantly influences career choices among high school students, with various studies highlighting the role of family income, parental expectations, and perceived barriers in shaping these decisions. Research indicates that lower SES is associated with more fixed career choices, possibly due to limited access to resources and opportunities (Risonar et al.). Additionally, students from higher SES backgrounds tend to have broader career aspirations, but also face discrepancies between their aspirations and expectations. (Altman). This is because limited access to resources further restricts career choices among underprivileged students, emphasizing the need for initiatives like scholarships, mentorship programs, and digital tools to bridge the socioeconomic gap.

Societal Expectations:

Societal norms and expectations also shape career aspirations, often limiting students' exposure to unconventional paths. The prestige associated with specific professions frequently influences career interests, as do parental values and cultural norms (Agyei; Fouzan).

Parental imposition of career choices can lead to dissatisfaction, highlighting the importance of early career education programs that promote diverse opportunities (Anzaa and David).

Market Needs:

Studies indicate that high school students are significantly influenced by labor market demands. The evolving job market and socioeconomic factors create a complex environment that students must consider when deciding on a career path, often balancing personal passions against economic realities (Reyles et al.). The research also underscores the importance of being future-oriented and the need for schools to provide adequate career guidance that aligns with market needs and personal student preferences (Mamolo). Encouraging partnerships between schools and industries to provide students with real-world exposure and experience, which can guide their career choices can be a great way to push students in the right direction.

Overall, these findings suggest that a comprehensive approach, considering personality congruence and various influencing factors, is essential in assisting students in making informed career choices.

Challenges

Helping students choose the right career paths is a multifaceted challenge that involves addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that shape their decisions. The major challenges in the field of career choice for high school students include understanding the complex interplay of various intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as personal interests, family influence, and labor market trends. Open questions remain on how to effectively integrate career counseling with these factors to guide students more effectively (Lehal; Bui). Some specific challenges are examined further in this section.

Lack of Awareness about Career Options:

A significant challenge is the lack of exposure to the diversity of career options available today. Many students are only familiar with conventional careers, such as medicine, engineering, or law, often overlooking emerging fields like data science, renewable energy, or biotechnology. This lack of awareness stems from insufficient career guidance in schools and limited industry exposure.

Hughes and Karp observed that students in high schools with limited career counseling programs are less likely to consider non-traditional career paths. The research underscores the importance of introducing exploratory career modules early in education to broaden students' perspectives.

Mismatch between Interests and Opportunities:

Students often face a mismatch between their personal interests and available career opportunities. This misalignment may result from a lack of self-awareness regarding their strengths, personality traits, or interests, which are crucial in determining a satisfying career path.

The need for congruence between an individual's personality and their career environment to achieve career satisfaction and success. Students often require structured guidance to identify careers that align with their unique traits. (Holland).

Limited Career Counseling Services:

Many educational institutions fail to provide adequate career counseling services. Counselors are often overburdened with administrative tasks or lack specialized training in career guidance. This shortfall leaves students with inadequate support to explore career options or identify pathways that align with their goals.

In a 2004 review of career guidance programs across 10 countries, Watts and Fretwell found that schools with underfunded career counseling services fail to provide students with the necessary tools to make informed decisions. They recommend integrating career counseling into the curriculum to ensure universal access.

Rapidly Changing Job Market:

The modern labor market is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by advancements in technology, globalization, and shifting economic trends. Students often struggle to keep up with these changes, leading to decisions based on outdated career paradigms. Careers in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and sustainability, for instance, may not yet be fully understood by students or their advisors. The increasing automation of traditional jobs and the growing demand for STEM-based careers, emphasizing the need for updated career counseling that reflects market trends. (Frey and Osborne).

Psychological and Emotional Stress:

Students often experience anxiety and stress when making career decisions, compounded by societal pressure to choose "successful" careers. This emotional burden can impair decision-making, leading students to prioritize external validation over their genuine aspirations.

Decision-making difficulties related to career choices often stem from emotional stress and information overload. They recommend that career counseling programs include psychological support to help students manage stress (Gati and Saka).

Future Plans

Given the diversity of factors that influence students' career choices, school systems should focus on ensuring that their students have access to the necessary knowledge and guidance to make informed choices.

In terms of techniques to assist students in making informed career choices, Wu suggests the use of career anchor assessment methods to help students establish a scientific career outlook. Additionally, Lehal recommends enhancing career counseling services and involving parents in the counseling process to provide more comprehensive guidance.

Furthermore, Huang points out the importance of considering personal satisfaction, security, and motivation when guiding students towards making career choices, indicating that these factors are crucial in influencing students' decisions. This is echoed by Jin et al., who advocate for improved career planning from middle school to help students find suitable career paths.

A multifaceted approach to career guidance, incorporating both intrinsic personal factors and extrinsic influences from the environment and market needs, supported by targeted counseling and assessment techniques.

What Can Be Done

There are certain measures that can be taken to improve the situation for the future, let us look at some of them.

- Implement Career Education Programs: Career exploration can be made a mandatory part of the school curriculum from middle school onwards, covering both conventional and emerging career opportunities. This will enable students to begin thinking about career options when the stakes are low. Combined with age appropriate counseling strategies that focus on personal interests for younger students, and labor market trends and educational pathways for older students who may need to choose specific academic tracks. Online tools and resources can be integrated into these counseling programs to provide easy access to information about diverse career opportunities and pathways and enable students to explore options effectively in a digital age.
- Prioritize Personality and Interests: Ensure that career guidance aligns with students' unique personalities and interests, focusing on what inspires and motivates them rather than solely addressing market demands. Educational programs aimed at parents should emphasize the importance of supporting careers that align with their child's personality rather than imposing preferences. Encouraging students to reflect on their strengths and motivations can help them find fulfilling career paths (Anzaa and David)
- Enhance Counselor Training: Provide specialized training for career counselors, equipping them with the tools to address modern challenges, including technological advancements and evolving job market demands.
- Expand Access to Resources: Students from low-income families often prioritize financial security over passion when choosing careers, narrowing their aspirations to what they perceive as "safe" or "affordable" options. Additionally, access to extracurricular activities or advanced educational

resources, which are often necessary for certain career paths, is limited for underprivileged students. (Perna). By offering more scholarships, mentorship programs, and online career exploration platforms, the resource gap for underprivileged students can be bridged to some extent.

- Engage Families in Career Guidance: Research suggests that schools should engage parents in career guidance programs to ensure students make informed choices that align with their interests and strengths (Anzaa and David). It is recommended that parents discuss career options with their children, focusing on the child's strengths and preferences, and avoid imposing their choices (Gamariel and Blaise). Additionally, schools are advised to adopt strategies that assist students in making appropriate career choices independently (OppusuPaapaAgyiri). By conducting workshops and seminars for parents to familiarize them with current career trends, they will be better equipped to support their children's individual interests effectively.
- Promote School-Industry Partnerships: Expanding on the theme of expanding mentorship programs, collaborations between schools and industries can be established to provide students with hands-on experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships, and career fairs. This would benefit students across SES categories.

Conclusion

Career choice is a multifaceted decision shaped by a blend of personal interests, environmental factors, societal norms, and market dynamics. Addressing these influences requires a comprehensive approach that includes parental involvement, targeted career counseling, peer support, and exposure to real-world opportunities. By implementing structured career education and bridging resource gaps, schools can empower students to make informed decisions that align with both their aspirations and the demands of the future job market. Ultimately, fostering a supportive ecosystem is essential in guiding high school students toward fulfilling and sustainable careers.

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