

CAREER GUIDANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICES: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE AGONA EAST DISTRICT OF THE CENTRAL REGION OF GHANA

ABSTRACT

As an individual goes through Senior High School education, s/he encounters situations which require them to take appropriate educational, vocational and social decisions. This highlights the need for guidance and counselling services in learning institutions. Its importance cannot be overstated. Research has shown that young people think about careers within the context of life more than in terms of qualifications and training. This study explored the knowledge of senior high school students in the Agona East district, about career counselling and how career guidance has been of benefit to them. The qualitative approach of descriptive survey using the purposive sampling technique was adopted. The data gathered was analysed using two main themes consisting of several sub-themes. It emerged from the study that for each occupation, different interests, abilities, personality traits and professional values are required. The findings also revealed that career counselling helps students to link what they learn to their interests, capacities, aspirations, and match these with existing opportunities. Going forward, the study recommends that schools assist students to identify their interests and make them aware of the importance of academic qualifications in making career choices. It further recommends to policy makers; especially the government of Ghana, to reinforce Guidance and Counselling programmes in senior high schools.

Key Words: Career Choice, Career Guidance, Career Services, Counselling

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counselling started around 1900-1909 in the United States of America, where Frank Parson; “father of guidance” founded the Boston’s Bureau in 1908 (Essuman, 1999(1). The work of Frank Parson, Clifford Beers, Jesse Davis, Eli Weaver, and a host of other pioneers created momentum for the development of a school counseling profession (Essuman, 1999) (1).

According to Essuman (2001) (2), serious work in establishing guidance and counseling in schools began in the late 1960s when the Curriculum Research Development Unit was instituted to cater for programmes in school welfare services, education for the handicapped, and guidance and counselling. In 1975, the Ghana Education Service organized its first guidance and counselling course for 37 secondary school tutors and officers from regional directorates at the University of Cape Coast. In August 1979 and March 1984, the Ghana Education Service organized national conferences for guidance coordinators leading to the formation of the Ghana Association of Guidance coordinators (Essuman, 1999) (1). Between 1976 and 1986, the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in conjunction with the Ghana Education Service had trained 296 Guidance and Counselling coordinators.

It appears Career Guidance within senior high school (s) has historically been given low priority and funding when compared to other curriculum areas (Nguyen & Do, 2016) (3). Often there is only one counsellor in a senior high school who is tasked with delivering school-wide and timely careers guidance to all year levels. Traditionally, the school Counsellor has moved from a classroom teaching role into careers education with no specific training or background. The Ministry of Education mandated compulsory Guidance and Counselling for all students from Basic through secondary to tertiary level (Agbodeka, Aweso & Fiorgbor, 2019) (4).

Research has shown that young people think about careers within the context of life more broadly than qualifications and training, considering lifestyle, relationships, living arrangements, identity and personal circumstance, yet, these things are not well covered in current careers education guidelines (Levin, 2000; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Vaughan, 2008) (5).

In the normal school structure, the eventual aim of teaching, and guidance and counselling is to formulate and direct students into a healthier future. Though Guidance and Counseling might not be a planned activity as teaching, McLaughlin (1999) (6) states that it carries an educational function. This means its place in the school structure is no less significant. The failure to excellently deliver guidance services has mostly led to incorrect career path decisions that have unpleasantly affected the victims and Ghana at large. Absence of interest in a selected field, emotive depression, low productivity at work, and absence of concentration in life are some of the costs of bad career decisions that were made by students (Fox & Butler, 2007) (7). The need to make best use of the profits of school-based facilities like guidance and counselling therefore becomes important. However, convincing students to talk to counsellors remains impractical given the changing insights students hold about counsellors which deter the normal human discussion process among both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007). Short of such a discussion, good career decisions, which are a product of this conversational method, will not be likely. And since counsellors hold great secrets and information in stock, these resources are misplaced continually to the students.

The natural question facing most students who have completed secondary schools is, 'What is next?' This study giving a student a clear understanding of one's own personal identity and characteristics and potential capabilities are crucial aspects to establish one's personal occupational life paths. By understanding one's self-concept, one can proceed to develop reachable personal goals. Personal, Social and Career Development studies of this sort can help in this regard.

As an individual goes through the Senior High School level of education, he/she encounters, at times, situations which require him/her to take correct and appropriate educational, vocational and social decisions. Given that learners spend more time in learning institutions than at their homes, it is vital that schools have well established and maintained guidance and counselling departments (Owino, 2005) (8). Therefore, the need for guidance and counselling services in all learning institutions cannot be overstated. Globally, it is evident that learners at all levels of learning have needs that call for guidance and counselling services, which if unattended could lead to numerous disciplinary issues and wastage, (Owino, 2005) (8). Counselling in the educational system should aim at helping the human being; men and women alike, to develop their capacities to the fullest which include intellectual, social, physical and capacities (Essuman, 1999) (1).

Career Guidance offers an important connection between education and the labour market. Career Guidance is defined as, "services and activities proposed to assist individuals, of any age and at any point through their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices, and also to manage their careers", (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (9). This definition comprises making information about the labour market available and about educational and employment openings more available by organising it, systematizing it and having it accessible when and where people need it. It also comprises supporting people to reflect on their objectives, interests, competencies, personal attributes, qualifications and capabilities and to match these with available training and employment opportunities (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (9). It appears Career Guidance within senior high schools has historically been given low priority and funding when compared to other curriculum areas (Mariam & Tinatin, 2017) (9). Often, there is only one Counsellor in a senior high school who is tasked with delivering school-wide and timely career guidance to all levels. Traditionally, the school counsellor has moved from a classroom teaching role into careers education with no specific training or background. The Ministry of Education mandated compulsory Guidance and Counselling for all students from basic through secondary to tertiary level (Ansah, 2015) (10).

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In the normal school structure, the eventual aim of teaching, and Guidance and Counselling are to formulate and direct students into a healthier future. Though Guidance and Counseling might not be a planned activity like teaching, Ansah (2015) (10) states that it carries an educational function. This means its place in the school structure is no less significant. The failure to excellently deliver guidance services has mostly led to incorrect career path decisions that have unpleasantly affected the victims and Ghana at large. Absence of interest in a selected field, emotive depression, low productivity at work, and absence of concentration in life are some of the costs of bad career decisions that were made by students (Fox & Butler, 2007) (7). The need to make the best use of the profits of school-based facilities like guidance and counselling therefore becomes important. However, convincing students to talk to

counsellors remains impractical, given the changing insights students used to hold about counsellors which deters the normal human discussion process among both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007) (7). Short of such a discussion, good career decisions, which are a product of this conversational method, will not be likely, and, since counsellors hold great secrets and information in stock, these resources are misplaced continually to the students.

This study was inspired by our work as lecturers of Guidance and Counselling who frequently visit Senior High Schools that our students under training choose and go to for their Counselling Practicum. Recognizing how poorly controlled the profession is, as well as what little importance various school boards who oversee the school and Head Teachers who run the day-to-day operation of schools attach to this vital curriculum area, causing huge changes in what is being brought to students across SHSs in Ghana necessitated this study. This research also examined whether current career guidance being brought to SHS students is effective, appropriate and applicable to students' lives today.

It appears very little empirical studies have been conducted to find out the place of Career Guidance in students' career choices in Ghana, and it this gap in knowledge that prompted this study.

Based on the arguments raised, the following questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the knowledge of students about career counselling?
2. How has career guidance benefited senior high school students in the Atona East district?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method using the qualitative approach was adopted for the study. According to Creswell (2012) (12) qualitative research design is a systematic subjective approach used to define life experiences and give them meaning. To Creswell, qualitative research design is used to gain insight; and explore the depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon. Qualitative research is also defined as a re-counting model that happens in a natural setting that permits the investigator to develop a level of detail from high participation in the real experiences (Creswell, 2012) (12). It is evident from the above that qualitative research is an all-inclusive approach which is hinged on discovery. One identifier of a qualitative research is the social phenomenon being explored from the participant's perspective. There are diverse types of research designs that make use of qualitative research procedures to frame the

research approach. As a result, diverse techniques have theatrical effects on the research approaches explored. Qualitative research focuses on understandings and meanings through verbal narratives, observation and artefacts (Adentwi & Amartey, 2009) (13). The study, therefore, sought to describe the role of Career Guidance for students in senior high schools and its implications for their career choices.

The population of the study comprised Presbyterian senior high school at Agona Nsaba and Kwanyako senior high technical school at Agona Kwanyako. The population for the study consisted of all SHS students, and all SHS school counsellors in the Agona East District.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select Presbyterian Senior High School and Kwanyako Senior High/Technical School for the study. The schools were used because they were the only SHSs in the district. Twelve students from the schools were sampled using Convenience sampling method. Based on this, seven students were sampled from each of the schools. Purposive sampling method was also used to select the school counsellors because they were the only SHS counsellors in the selected schools. In all, there were fifteen (15) participants; 13 students and 2 school counsellors, for the study. This number was used due to the fact that qualitative studies do not focus on generalization (Creswell, 2012) (12).

Two sets of interview guides; one for students and the other for the school counsellors, were developed to gather data for the research. Face and content validity of the instruments were done by colleague lecturers in the Department of Psychology and Education, University of Education, Winneba.

Face-to-face interviews using a recording device was conducted for students and counsellors. The two schools were represented with alphabets 'A' (for Agona Nsaba Presbyterian senior high school) and 'B' (for Agona Kwanyako senior high/technical school) while the student-participants were represented with numbers 1, 2, 3, up to 13. Five students were chosen from School 'A' and seven students from school 'B'. The two school counsellors were also interviewed. While the interview for the school Counsellor 'A' was done through a mobile phone call because of his absence from school for about two weeks owing to ill-health, the interview for school Counsellor 'B' was done face-to-face.

Clear questions were asked during the interviews, reducing bias and subjectivity making the study dependable and consistent. Explanation of the position of the study was given to participants together with the reporting process and findings. This was to make the study transparent which is a way of enhancing the dependability of research findings.

As one of the researchers asked participants questions the two others also took down notes of the discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee. At the end of each interview, the interviewer played the recorded voice for the interviewee to be aware of what has been recorded.

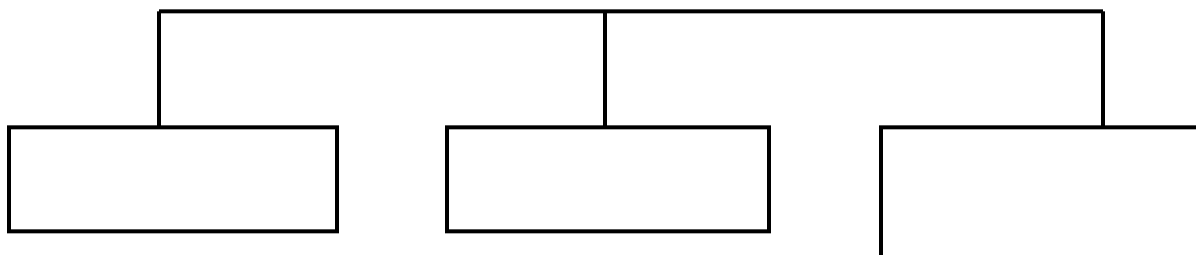
THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The thematic method of data analysis was employed. Thematic Analysis is an approach used to dealing with data that involves the creation and application of 'codes' to data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016) (14).

The data gathered during the interview were analysed using two main themes which also consisted of several sub-themes. This was done after the researchers had studied the content of the responses in depth. Pseudonyms were used to represent the research participants. A summary of the qualitative data is represented below:

1. Research question 1: What career information is disseminated to students in the Agona East District?

Theme 1: Dissemination of Career information



a) Available Career

All of the student participants provided similar meanings and definitions for the term "career". The student participants also identified the types of careers as based on work environments. They identified Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional. This is in line with Holland's

1959 theory that emphasized an examination of the different aspects of person-environment fit. The school counsellor of school 'A' said that she organises Career Guidance for the students in the form of teaching in the classroom situation like any other subject. She said that she tries to let the students identify the types of work environments that exist.

In School 'B', one student said:

I now know that some people like to work with animals, tools, or machines. These people generally avoid social activities like teaching, healing, and informing others. Also, while others like to study and solve mathematics or science problems and avoid leading, selling, or persuading people, others like to lead and persuade people, and to sell things and ideas; and generally, avoid activities that need careful reflection and scientific, analytical thinking.

Another participant in the same school said:

We discussed the types of people that we have; our education and job conditions of the various types of jobs. For instance, whether the job that I will do will promote me to the highest level of the institution or whether the job has some benefits for my family members to enjoy from. I had actually wanted to be a nurse because I know that their salary is good, but upon this rare guidance sessions I have decided to be a teacher.

b) Matching Interest with Career

John Holland states that, "Career choice is an expression of, or an extension of, personality into the world of work, followed by subsequent identification with specific occupational stereotypes (Osipow, 1998) (15). The data collected show that students' desire to take up certain jobs upon completion of school has urged them to tilt to the study of certain or particular programmes so that they can qualify to apply for the said jobs in the future. A participant in School 'A' said:

"I changed from Visual Arts to General Arts programme because I like to do things to help people - like, teaching, nursing, or giving first aid, providing information. I do not like using machines, tools, or animals while working. So, knowing that my interest is in the area of helping people, I studied to become the social type of personality".

In his own words, the school counsellor in school 'B' said:

“Upon relating the various job types to the students, most of them applied to change their programmes of study. When I asked them why, they explained that they wished they had these pieces of information at the junior high school level before choosing their various programmes. One of them even told me that he thought finishing SHS was the only problem. He said he did not know that one needed to know his interest and relate it to his future job”.

c) Matching Career with Educational Qualification

It is possible to match the traits of persons with the trait requirements of occupations on a rational and actuarial basis. Klein & Weiner (1977) (16) puts it this way, “the closer the fit between a person's traits and the trait requirements of that person's occupation, the greater the likelihood for successful job performance and personal satisfaction”. It emerged from the interviews that it is not only the interest and the availability of jobs that gives one a dream job. They explained that they are now aware that they need educational attainment to a certain degree to be able to pick up a particular job. A student from School 'B' corroborated this by saying:

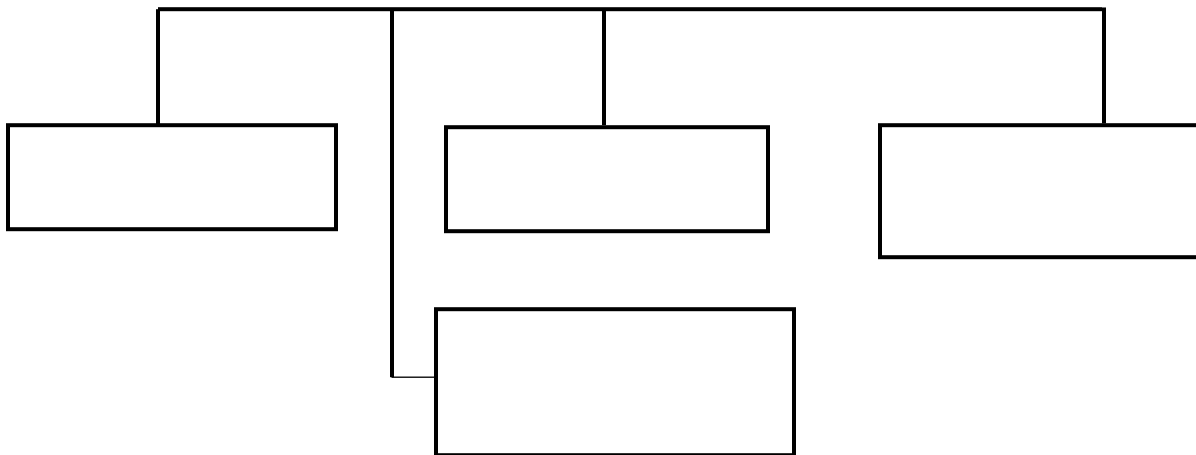
“I had all along dreamt of becoming a journalist. I did not know that I needed to read a particular course at SHS that will lead me to apply and go and Journalism school at the Ghana Institute of Journalism and have at least a Diploma certificate that will lead me to get this job. Thank God I chose General Arts; and my electives are Government, Christian Religious Studies, Literature and French. During the orientation upon arrival here, we were taken through Career Guidance and lo and behold, my courses fell within those that can actually lead me to become the journalist that I wanted to be”.

Nancy recounted the knowledge she gained from Career Guidance by narrating that she has now seen that a combination of recognition of one's self and gathering information on jobs and vocations is not complete. She explained that contains the matching of the information that the individual recognized about own interests, abilities and career values and the information she gathered on the jobs and occupations. For each occupation, different interests, abilities, personality traits and professional values

are required. For the individual to make a healthy matching, it is necessary for the individual to have an interest and be fit into the career chosen so that when the educational qualification adds up, success will be accomplished.

2. Research question 2: How has Career Guidance benefited Senior High School students in the Agona East District?

Theme 2: Students' benefits from Career Guidance



a) Relating information with Career

It emerged from the data that students are able to relate the information that they gained during Career Guidance sessions with the types of careers available and known to them. One student from school A said:

“Now I know that most people can be categorized as one of six types of careers. I also know that there are six kinds of environments; and people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles. I know too that a person’s behavior is determined by an interaction between his personality and the characteristics of his environment”.

Another student also said Career Guidance has helped him to know more about congruence of one's view of self with occupational preference.

b) Selection of various academic requirements for Career

Career guidance service helps the individual to know the available educational and training options and the requirements for admission to assist him or her to select an appropriate field of study (Super, 1957) (17). This assertion by Donald Super was seen during the interviews. A student, participant in School 'A' said:

“Skills, abilities and talents and how they may fit a particular career is considered when one is taking on a career. In this case, you need to educate yourself in a particular field; and also, up to a particular level before you are qualified for that career. He said that career profiles for specific jobs as well as identifying individual differences, matching individuals to occupations based on these differences are higher qualifications that the employer is looking for.”

The school counsellor for school 'A' corroborated Akosua's narration by saying that the students are now fully aware of the various jobs in the field and the qualifications that they demand to offer jobs to employees.

4.2.3 Acquisition of Career information

With career information acquired, the students are able to link what they learned to their interests, capacities, aspirations, and match it with the existing opportunities. They explained that they are able to think through and foresee their dream jobs coming to fulfill their dreams in the near future. He said that the information they received during the Career Guidance session was so good and important to them. The school counsellor for school 'A' confirmed what the respondent said by saying:

“Career information should include relevant information about education and training opportunities, occupations and their characteristics and job demand. Similarly, career

information we gave our students covers career implications of educational decisions, and on the learning pathways that lead to particular career destinations. Once a while, you will see one or two of them (students) coming around my office to enquire and clarify issues that baffle them concerning their future careers”.

4.2.4 Exploration of Careers

The school counsellor for school 'B', said that she realised the population of the school is large, and since there is no assembly hall, she appealed for the teaching of Guidance and Counselling to be taught in the classroom. She said that she has used the opportunity to give students adequate information on the various types of careers.

A participant from school 'A' narrated that:

“Our School Counsellor taught us that there are six kinds of job types. These are Realistic type who likes to work with animals, tools, or machines and generally avoid social activities like teaching, healing, and informing others. The second one is the investigative type who likes to study and solve mathematics or science problems and usually will not like to lead or sell. The Artistic type of career will like to do creative activities like art, music, crafts, drama, dance, or creative writing and may avoid highly ordered or repetitive activities. Social type of careers like to do things to help people and sees themselves as helpful, friendly, and trustworthy. The enterprising type of career will see people who like to lead and persuade people, and to sell things and ideas and will avoid activities that require scientific and analytical thinking. The sixth type of career is the conventional type. This career type will see people who like to work with records, numbers, or machines in a set, orderly manner. The job does not like unstructured ways of doing things”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study is a wakeup call to schools to assist students to identify their interests so that they will be able to select their careers without many difficulties. Schools should make students aware of how important academic qualification is for career selection.

The findings from my study clearly indicate that the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education should resource Guidance and Counselling units in the senior high schools to enable students realise their interests for career selection. The Ghana Education Service should also give more study leave quota to teachers who want to pursue Guidance and Counselling in higher education so as to boost the number of School Counsellors.

Also, it is recommended that the Ghana Education Service should introduce Guidance and Counselling at the basic school level to help shape pupils from that level before they get to the Senior High School level.

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