International Journal for Early Childhood Care and Educational Research

Navigating Career Choices: How Parental and Counsellor Guidance Shape Ghanaian Postgraduate Students' Decisions

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Abstract

The study explores the impact of parental influence and career counselling on career choice. The data were collected from 103 postgraduate students from universities in the Tema and Accra metropolises using a survey questionnaire. Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the data and test the hypotheses. The results indicate that career counselling, career choice, and parental influence significantly influenced their lifestyle. Career counselling had a positive impact on career choice. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of career guidance and counselling in helping postgraduate students make informed career decisions. The results have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and career counsellors who aim to promote career development among postgraduate students. It is recommended that career counselling services be made readily available to postgraduate students and that parents and guardians be encouraged to play a more active role in supporting and guiding their children's career decisions.

Keywords: Parent, Decision, Career, Counselling, Guidance.

Introduction

Career choice greatly affects individuals' future earnings, social standing, and personal development, impacting national economic health (Jones & Larke, 2005). Poor decisions can result in dissatisfaction and low productivity. Alemu (2013) emphasises "career conventions," like peer discussions and parental guidance, in decision-making. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) illustrates how these influences shape postgraduate students' self-efficacy and career goals. Holland's RIASEC model further suggests that aligning careers with personality types aids in identifying appropriate paths, enhancing students' career satisfaction and success.

Problem Statement

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in graduates' future success (Oomen, 2016), but many parents are unaware of relevant career paths for their children (Amani & Mkumbo, 2018; Ngussa & Rehema, 2019). In Ghana, high school students lack career guidance, hindering informed decision-making (Ngussa & Rehema, 2019). This often leads to choices based on social pressures, resulting in dissatisfaction (Edith Cowan University, 2009). This study will investigate the combined effects of parental support and career counselling on postgraduate students in Accra.

Objectives / Aims

Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows.

i. To investigate the influence of parents on career choice among postgraduate students.
ii. To explore how career counselling predicts career choice among postgraduate students.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will guide the study.

i. Hypothesis 1 H_A: *Parental influence significantly predicts career choices among postgraduate students.*

ii. Hypothesis 2 H_A: *Career counselling significantly predicts career choice among postgraduate students*.

Literature

Career Choices

Latin and French are the languages that have contributed to the development of the word "career." According to Cohen (2007). A career refers to a social or economic activity that an individual can adopt during their educational process at an institution of higher learning or elsewhere and continue throughout their lifetime. Newton and Grayson (2003) defined a career as a person's collection of jobs, responsibilities, tasks, and work experiences. When individuals struggle to choose a specific occupation, they are said to have a career decision. Making a wise career decision is crucial, as it determines an individual's future challenges during adolescence. A career decision not only impacts one's livelihood but also influences overall success, satisfaction, and recognition within the community. It is worth noting that making the wrong decision or frequently switching careers can lead to negative psychological impacts. Therefore, understanding the influencing factors behind career choice has become an area of recent research focus.

Numerous studies conducted worldwide have identified significant correlations between certain factors and career choice. Talib and Aun's study (2009) found that vocational identification, occupational awareness, and academic success were all highly significant predictors of job choice. However, it is important to provide more specific details about these influencing factors, such as cultural background, parental expectations, personal interests, or

socioeconomic status, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of career decision-making.

Influence of Parents on Career Choice

Families significantly influence children's career choices by shaping their attitudes and behaviours from an early age (Cohen, 2007). Parents serve as trustworthy sources of career advice, with children often inspired by their parents' occupations. For example, a child witnessing a parent's work in healthcare may develop an interest in that field (Shumba & Naong, 2012). Parents sometimes guide their children towards careers aligned with familial goals, such as taking over the family business. However, children may seek different paths, especially if parental jobs limit quality family time (Shumba & Naong, 2012). To offer relevant advice, parents must remain aware of economic and technological changes. Research indicates that supportive parental guidance fosters confidence, motivation, and resilience in children, encouraging them to pursue careers aligned with their passions and interests (Simmons, 2008).

Influence of Guidance and Counselling on Career Choice

Guidance and counseling are essential for helping individuals understand themselves and their environment, enabling informed career choices. Career counselors assist with planning and decision-making, promoting job satisfaction by shaping students' academic, emotional, and psychological aspects. These services provide critical career information, such as educational requirements, job roles, and salary potential (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004), which aids individuals in making informed decisions. Additionally, counseling helps develop key skills like problem-solving, decision-making, and communication (Obiunu & Ebunu, 2010), enhancing career readiness and success.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The research is based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), formulated by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994. SCCT highlights three main elements of career development: the development of career interests, educational and career decisions, and perseverance in job

performance. The theory highlights the role of cognitive factors—such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals—in influencing academic success and persistence (Amissah et al., 2020). SCCT explores the interaction between individuals and their work environments, considering cognitive-person factors, interpersonal dynamics, and external influences (Lent et al., 2002). According to Rogers & Creed (2011), SCCT examines how self-efficacy, outcome expectations and career goals shape career planning. Wong & Liu (2010) emphasise SCCT as a comprehensive model that considers both cognitive-person factors and contextual elements, such as gender, ethnicity, and social support, in shaping career development. Lent et al. (1994) outline two stages: the first involves cognitive-person factors influencing career control, while the second examines how environmental and experiential factors affect career interests and decisions.

Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Environment

Holland's Personalities and Environments theory (1959) focuses on person-environment fit, suggesting that career satisfaction arises from alignment between personality and work settings. Conversely, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) emphasises self-efficacy and contextual factors influencing career development. Empirical studies present varied findings on parental and guidance impacts on career choices. For instance, Brown (2002) highlighted the key role of parental influence, especially from fathers, for Indian management students, while Simmons (2008) noted physician parents' reluctance to recommend medicine. Cultural context also affects decisions, with variations in focus between collectivist and individualistic cultures underscoring the need for more research on these influences.

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was utilised to investigate the research questions, allowing for data collection at a single time point to analyse variable relationships concurrently. This efficient methodology, often used in population-based surveys, gathers quantitative data from samples to infer findings about larger populations. Standardised questionnaires aid in collecting exploratory and descriptive data, while statistical analysis of closed-ended responses supports generalisation to the target population. This design is cost-effective for reaching dispersed subjects and facilitates the simultaneous analysis of parental guidance, career counselling, career choice, and job satisfaction, addressing the study's aims effectively.

Target Population

The population of the study

The population of a study is the totality of all potential subjects, subjects' items, or subjects' measures (Hatton et al., 1999). The designation of the research's target demographic will aid in focusing on the particular objects that will be the focus of the examination. All postgraduate students in the Tema and Accra Metropolis form the study's population.

Sampling Technique and Sampling Size

A sample of 103 postgraduate students was recruited for this study using convenience sampling. As Cheng and Dornyei (2007) explain, convenience sampling involves selecting members of the target population who meet certain practical criteria. The inclusion criteria for participants in this study were: 1) currently enrolled as a postgraduate student; 2) aged 18 or older; and 3) willing and able to complete the study survey. Convenience sampling was utilised because it provided an efficient way to access the target sample of postgraduate students meeting the inclusion criteria within the time and resource constraints of the study. While

probability sampling may have yielded a more representative sample, convenience sampling offered a reasonable balance between recruiting an adequate sample size for statistical power and the feasibility of obtaining qualified participants. The sample of 103 postgraduate students was recruited from Methodist University and Datalink University College based on the established inclusion criteria and accessibility through the researchers' network.

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, data was collected from graduate students using a questionnaire, as emphasised by Birmingham and Wilkinson (2003) regarding the importance of research instruments for consistent data analysis. Grey (2004) suggests instrument selection aligns with research aims, while Punch (2003) notes that surveys can be original or adapted. This empirical study involved a questionnaire developed from a comprehensive literature review (Barako & Gatere, 2008). It included four sections: demographics, career choice influences, career counselling perceptions, and parental influence on career intentions. Except for Section A, respondents rated items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are essential for empirical studies. Cohen (2007) characterises validity as the degree to which a study meets its goals. To maintain validity, the research employed standardised, validated instruments, featuring a questionnaire reviewed by experts. Reliability indicates the stability of results across different periods (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). This was evaluated by examining internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha. The comprehensive Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.938, surpassing the acceptable limit of 0.7 (Demakakos et al., 2016), thereby validating the reliability of the constructs.

Method of Analysis

Data Management and Analysis

Hsu & Sandford (2007) posit that the process of testing, evaluating, or tabulating quantitative or qualitative data to answer the basic intention of the research is known as data analysis. The econometric analysis for this study was done with the help of Excel 2016 and Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 26.0. The hypotheses were tested using the regression models stated below and Pearson's Correlation.

Model Specification

The below models were specified for the regression analysis. Equation 1 is for hypotheses 1 and 2 $X_3 = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_2 Sex_i + \beta_3 WorkExperience_i + \beta_4 Age_i + \varepsilon$ Eqn (1)

Where:

X_1 = Parental influence X_2 = Career counselling β, δ, and γ, are the respective coefficients and Ɛ is the error term.

The background profiles of the respondents were added to the regression as control variables to check whether they impacted the dependent variables.

Background Statistics

The research gathered responses from 103 individuals, showing a gender distribution of 62.1% male and 37.9% female, highlighting a greater involvement of males. In terms of age, the majority of participants were aged 25 to 40 years: 26.2% were below 25, 23.3% were aged 25-30, another 26.2% were 30-40, and 24.3% were 40 or above, indicating a predominantly young group. Experience levels varied, with 36.9% possessing under 3 years and 31.1% having 10 or more years, indicating a blend of career stages. Table 1 offers further background statistics.

Table 1. Demographic Background of Participants

Postgraduate Students (n = 103)		
Variables	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Gender		
Male	64	62.1
Female	39	37.9
Age		
Less than 25	27	26.2
25 but less than 30	24	23.3
30 but less than 40	27	26.2
40 and above	25	24.3
Years of Experience		
Less than 3	38	36.9
3 years – less than 5	13	12.6
5 years – less than 10	21	20.4
10 or higher	31	31.1

Testing of Hypothesis

Regression analyses and Pearson's correlation were used to test the four hypotheses. Below are the findings for each.

Hypotheses 1 and 2

The first and second hypotheses, which state that "parental influence significantly predicts career choices among postgraduate students" and "career counselling significantly predicts career choice among postgraduate students," were tested with multiple regression analysis, and the output is presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Standard Multiple Regression Analysis on the Relationship between Guidance and Counselling, Parental Influence, and Career Choice

Postgraduate Students (n = 103)

Variables	B	Beta	t	Sig
Career Choice	-	-	-	-
Guidance Counselling	.436	.472	4.801	.000
Parental Influence	.196	.174	1.944	.044
Gender	.370	.143	1.669	.098
Years of Working Experience	.049	.049	.329	.743
Age in Years	-.268	-.239	-1.570	.120

To test the hypotheses, we examined the coefficients and statistical significance of the predictors in relation to the outcome variable, "career choice." Hypothesis 1 posited that "Parental influence significantly predicts career choices among postgraduate students." The assessment produced a coefficient of 0.196 for "Parental Influence," along with a beta value of 0.174, a t-value of 1.944, and a p-value of 0.044. Since the p-value is less than the standard threshold of 0.05, it can be inferred that parental influence significantly impacts career choices, thus validating Hypothesis 1. In relation to Hypothesis 2, which proposed that "career counselling is a significant predictor of career choice in postgraduate students," the findings showed a coefficient of 0.436 for "guidance counselling," along with a beta value of 0.472, a t-value of 4.801, and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is significantly under 0.05, this indicates that career counselling is a notable predictor of career choice, thereby affirming Hypothesis 2. Control variables such as gender, age, and years of work experience were therefore added to control for these various influences. Gender has a coefficient of 0.370 and a beta value of 0.143 but possesses a p-value of 0.098, indicating that it does not significantly influence career choices. Likewise, years of professional experience had a p-value of 0.743, while age displayed a p-value of 0.120, suggesting that both are weak predictors. The regression model explained roughly 35% of the variance in career choice, and the overall model was significant ($F = 10.451$, $p = 0.001$).

Discussions

The study explored parental influence on postgraduate career choices, confirming the first hypothesis (H1) that paternal guidance significantly affects decisions, supported by previous research highlighting Ghana's nepotism culture. However, Shellenbarger (2006) noted that many physicians discourage their children from pursuing medicine, advocating for personal interest over parental pressure due to evolving societal values. Physician parents, aware of the demanding nature and stressors of medical careers, may perceive these challenges as outweighing potential benefits, favouring a more balanced lifestyle for their children (Artino et al., 2014; Dyrbye et al., 2005). The second hypothesis (H2) suggested that "guidance and counselling significantly predict career choice among postgraduate students," with results affirming this claim. Career counselling emerged as a crucial factor in career decisions, echoing findings from Eremie & Ibifari (2018). The study reaffirms the beneficial role of career counsellors in students' decision-making and echoes Ibrahim et al. (2014), highlighting the integration of guidance and counselling in schools for informed career planning and overall student well-being.

Oats and Rukewe (2020) highlighted the importance of career guidance in aiding students' decision-making on career choices and recommended systematic programs in schools. Conversely, Orewere et al. (2020) found no significant effect of such services, suggesting that further exploration is needed on the contextual factors influencing guidance effectiveness.

The findings of this study hold particular significance within the Ghanaian cultural-educational context. In Ghanaian society, students navigating career choices contend with numerous influential factors, including prominent parental guidance steering children toward specific vocations or industries (Eremie & Ibifari, 2018). Such parental influence may potentially stem from nepotistic motivations or personal comfort with certain professional domains. However,

the present study suggests that formal career counselling and guidance can provide students with a broader outlook by enabling consideration of a more expansive range of career paths aligned with individual interests, skills, and aptitudes. The integration of systematic career guidance programs within Ghanaian schools is crucial, as it equips students with the supportive resources and information needed to make informed career decisions based on personalised aspirations and qualifications (Eremie & Ibifari, 2018). A counselling-driven approach empowers students to explore diverse professional options while comprehending the requisite qualifications and prospective opportunities across fields (Eremie & Ibifari, 2018). Overall, the findings underscore the value of institutionalised guidance to counterbalance other influences and facilitate self-directed choice for Ghanaian youth initiating their career journeys.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy implementations and recommendations are suggested:

Universities should establish dedicated career counselling centres for postgraduate students, staffed with trained professionals to provide supportive guidance for informed career selection. By creating centralised advisory resources, institutions can aid students in navigating influential factors and integrating self-awareness into their decisions. Additionally, educational entities must engage parents through information sessions highlighting career fit and satisfaction. Targeted workshops can equip parents with effective advising strategies, fostering a supportive family network that enhances students' career discernment within a multi-dimensional guidance framework.

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