

Full Length Research Paper

Career aspirations and decision making self efficacy: Secondary School Students' assessment based on KCSE exams in Kenya

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The purpose of the study was to determine career decision making self efficacy by assessing career aspirations and attainment in National examinations. The objectives of the study were to: Find out the students sources of career information, assess career aspirations, and to determine career decision making self efficacy. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study population consisted of 4200 students. A sample size of 420 was selected using stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires and document analysis guide were used for data collection. Reliability was computed using test re-test and the co-efficient was 0.7. Content validity was ascertained in literature. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was noted that 55.08% of the students relied on their career masters for career guidance. Career aspirations were presented in a table. It was found that the students had poor career decision making self efficacy. Only 10.6% of the students attained the cut off points for their career aspiration. The study may be useful to teachers, counselors, administrators and parents who will be able to assist students in making worthwhile career choices.

Key words: Career choice, academic achievement, career aspirations, career decision making self efficacy, secondary school, Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams, career interest, national exams.

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, all learners undergo compulsory education up to high school level. This gives them an opportunity to sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exam which determines what career students can pursue as well as the level at which they may begin. There is provision for starting at the artisan, certificate, diploma or degree level and progressing upwards (KUCCPS, 2019).

Career guidance refers to services and activities

intended to assist individuals at any point in their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices as well as manage their careers (KUCCPS, 2019). This will require the concerted efforts of class teachers, subject teachers, career masters and the Guidance and Counselling Department or Committee. Guidance and counseling must be started as early as when students join form one. Indeed (Ombaba et al., 2014) reiterate

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that career education should be part of a student's curriculum from the moment she/ he enters school. At this level the school exposes students to a wide variety of subjects. Students will later choose eight subjects using KCSE guidelines. By the time students are choosing these subjects, they consider their preferences, capabilities and subject combinations in tandem with the 8-4-4 system requirements (Wangari, 2018). There is need for career masters to help students gauge their academic abilities early so as to make the best available career choices. Some students have career aspirations which need higher marks, than their academic abilities, leading to poor career decision making self efficacy.

Statement of the problem

Kenya has made progress in provision of career guidance, although the direction of movement it has taken is to give secondary school students information on the courses offered in tertiary institutions with little support on how to match their skills, interests and values to the courses and a specific career path. To a great extent, the most important determinant for a career path of most students in Kenya is their academic achievement in KCSE. Student's need guidance on how to predict their academic achievement in KCSE based on their present achievement in school in order to be able to make wise career decisions. This study was therefore crafted to find out if the students' academic achievement enabled them to qualify and begin the journey on their career path towards their career aspiration. It is a confirmatory study to find out whether students have career decision making self efficacy.

Objectives of the study

With the continued emphasis on career guidance the current study sought to find out the level of career choice exposure. In this respect, the objectives were:

- (i) to find out the students' sources of career information.
- (ii) to find out the students' career aspirations by type of school and
- (iii) to determine the students' career decision making self efficacy.

Significance of the study

This study may be useful to career masters, mentors, teachers and administrators as it emphasizes the role of aptitude in determining career choices for higher education especially in circumstances where there are financial constraints. The study may also be useful to students as it may make them become aware of the need to ensure they understand their academic capabilities

and use it to choose the best career choice options that are available.

Limitation of the study

The study was based on descriptive survey research design, of the cross sectional approach where data is gathered at one point in time. The results on career progress cannot be deemed conclusive because learners keep progressing in their career paths and may still achieve their aspirations through a longer route.

Sources of career information

Finding out the sources of career information is important. Onuoha et al. (2013) conducted a study on sources of career information among 200 students in Nigeria. They used questionnaires to collect data and found that parents, teachers and churches were their sources of career information. On the other hand, Theresa (2015) conducted a study in Ghana among 400 students and found that 31.6% of the parents, 7.4% of the class teachers, 3.6% of the counsellors influenced the students' choice of subjects. Majority of the learners 47.6% made career choices out of their own volition. Keller and Whitson (2008) in their study found that parents played an important role in career choice. In Kenya, KUCCPS established that close to 65% of the 2017 KCSE candidates selected their courses based on influence drawn from their parents, friends, teachers and relatives.

Career aspirations

Obura (2007) conducted a study among Kenyan students and found that engineering, law, medicine and teaching accounted for 64.2% of the male students' choices as well as 61.7% of the female students' choices (Carranza et al., 2009) in their study of Mexican adolescents found that there was a high perceived parental educational involvement with regard to career aspirations. The present study sought to find out the career aspirations of students who were in their final year of study.

Career decision making self efficacy of students

Career self efficacy is the belief a student holds about his academic ability with regard to his or her career aspirations. Self efficacy affects career choice behavior jointly with contextual factors as well as personal attributes (Tang et al., 2008). Taylor and Betz define career decision making self efficacy as the extent to which individuals believe that they can evaluate, collect career information, select goals, make plans and solve problems relevant to career decision making (Wang et

al., 2010). The main hindrances to career decision making self efficacy are students' interests, talents, skills and subject strengths (KUCCPS, 2019). In Kenya, since the introduction of self-sponsored students who pay fees at the university a number of students may be able to get into careers of their interest since they have financial resources.

Oigo and Kaluyu (2016) found that ad hoc methods used for career guidance had no effect on student career decision making. They concluded that other studies carried out where there were established career guidance programs with systematically arranged activities that included career decision making, career exploration, career maturity and career self-efficacy have shown more positive effects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. Descriptive survey research in education involves making careful descriptions of educational phenomena as it currently exists (Mertler and Charles, 2012).

Population, sample and sampling technique

A sample constituting 10% of a target population of 4200 students was used, giving a total of 420 students (Nkpa, 1997). The questionnaire response rate was 90% giving a total of 380 questionnaires. A total of 11 schools were used in the study. Stratified sampling technique was used whereby stratification was done by school type. The schools were classified as Boarding, Provincial schools, Boarding District Schools and District Day schools. The schools were divided into 3 categories:

- (i) Category 1 was Provincial schools in which most of the students have high academic abilities going by the mean score of the learner.
- (ii) Category 2 was District schools in which the students have average academic abilities as well as financial resources.
- (iii) Category 3 was District day schools in which majority of the students have below average academic abilities and whose parents belong to the low socio economic status.

Data collection procedure

A research permit was sought from the Ministry of Education. Data was collected in two phases. The first phase of data was collected in the months of September and October during the final term of the fourth and final school year. The students filled in the questionnaires in approximately 20 min. The second phase of data collection was carried out in March as soon as Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (KCSE) which was also the summative evaluation results were out. It involved collecting the KCSE mark lists from schools which participated in the study and corroborating the questionnaires with the grades.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20. Frequencies and

percentages were used to summarize the data. Qualitative data on career aspirations was organized into themes and categorized. The data was then presented in tables. The students' performance in summative evaluation which was the result of KCSE results was used to ascertain whether the student made the cut off points used to assess the students career decision making self efficacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was made up of 380 students in form 4. Their mean age was 18.38 years with a standard deviation of 1.078. The number of boys was 220 whereas girls were 160. Mean scores for students in the three categories of schools were as follows:

County Boarding Schools had a mean of 7.98: Subcounty Boarding Schools had a mean of 5.94 and Subcounty Day Schools had a mean of 5.02. The mean scores for the three types of schools were in line with their entry marks in form one. The best performing students are usually admitted in National Schools of which there was only one in the county. However, the school was situated beyond the scope of the area of study. The other high performers are admitted in County boarding schools. This is followed by Subcounty boarding schools. Most of the parents who take their children to these schools are of middle income and most may struggle and take their children through higher education if they pass their exams. Last but not least we have parents who take their children to Subcounty day schools. Most of these parents are poor and majority live in the rural areas. Most of the students in this school category got very low marks in the KCPE examinations. However, there may also be some pupils who performed well but because their parents cannot afford to take them to boarding schools, they end up attending the day schools.

The first objective was to determine the student's main source of career information

The results show that, the students' major source of career information was the school. The students who derived their career information from the school were 55.08%. This reveals that as much as other sources are available for career information, most students rely on their career masters for information. The results also indicate that 9% of the students got career information from their parents, 23% got career information from the newspapers, 9% got career information from the internet and a total of 3.92% got career information from multiple sources. This result is not in agreement with Keller and Whitson (2008) who found that parents played an important role in career choice. This finding is important in that school principals need to ensure that their career masters are well trained and equipped. It also informs policy makers on the importance of enforcing policies

Table 1. Career aspiration by type of school.

Career aspiration	County boarding		Subcounty boarding		Subcounty day	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non Response	16	13.2	3	2.8	5	3.3
Accountancy	15	12.4	11	10.1	13	8.7
Teaching	2	1.7	5	4.6	16	10.7
Others	24	19.8	5	4.6	25	16.7
Business	10	8.3	2	1.8	8	5.3
Engineering	7	14	23	21.1	11	7.3
Forces	0	0	4	3.7	6	4.0
Journalism	3	2.5	11	10.1	16	10.7
Law	22	18.2	11	10.1	16	10.7
Medicine	12	9.9	13	11.9	17	11.3
Nursing	0	0	5	4.6	17	11.3
Total	121	100	109	100	150	100

Table 2. Students who qualified for the courses they aspired for.

School F	N	Mean	SD	B	%
1	379	6.46	1.753	40	10.6

Where N = Total number of students, B = Total number of students who qualified to do the course they aspired for.

related to guidance activities.

The second objective was to determine career aspirations

Table 1 shows career aspirations of students which represents interest. Table 1 shows that most of the students chose law, medicine, engineering and accountancy as their major career choices. These careers accounted for 44% of the students' choices. This pattern is in agreement with Obura (2007) who also found that engineering, law, medicine and teaching accounted for 64.2% of the male students' choices as well as 61.7% of the female students' choices. With regard to availability of financial resources as pointed out earlier, the students who came from Subcounty Day Schools are more likely to have financial constraints. This therefore means that they may not be able to pursue their career interests as expressed in Table 1.

With regard to performance in examinations, it is expected that County boarding schools would perform better than Subcounty day schools yet there are more students who wish to become Doctors and Engineers from Subcounty Day Schools than County boarding Schools. This therefore means that the students base their career aspirations on interest as opposed to aptitude. The current study also analyzed career decision making self efficacy by investigating achievement of

career aspirations by examining cut off points. The current study examined the cut off in regard to academic achievement depending on one's career aspiration. To determine career decision making self-efficacy, each students aspiration was evaluated against their achievement. The results are shown in Table 2. From the results only 40 students (10.6%) qualified for the career they aspired for. This therefore means that students have a very low career decision making self efficacy. Obura (2007) looked at the relationship between students' career aspirations and performance in exams. Students careers were classified into Arts based, Biological Sciences and Physical Sciences. She compared those with Grade A, B, C, and D using trial exams and got $\chi = 15.295$ 6 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.05$) a significant relationship.

Conclusions

It was concluded that more than half of the students get their career guidance from the school career master. Students had a variety of career aspirations. In the present study it was concluded that students did not have career decision making self efficacy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- (i) schools particularly strengthen their career guidance departments to satisfy the large number of students seeking specialized career services.
- (ii) learners are exposed to a greater number of careers that resonate with the changing times.
- (iii) Teachers help learners predict their overall performance in KCPE as well as subject performance based on school exams to enable them make prudent career choices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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