

Parental Involvement and Self-concept as determinants of Career Choice among students with Special Needs in Lagos State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This Study, therefore investigated parental involvement and self-concept as determinants of career choice among secondary school students with special needs in Ojo LGA, Lagos State. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of correlational type. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 160 participants from senior secondary school (SS2) in Ojo. Three research instruments used were: Parental Involvement Scale ($r = 0.89$), Self-concept ($r = 0.75$) and Career Choice ($r = 0.72$). Data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance. There was significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice ($r = .859$; $N=160$; $p<0.05$) among secondary school students with special needs. There was significant relationship between self-concept and career choice ($t = 3.87$; $N=160$; $p<0.05$) among secondary school students with special needs. Therefore, parental involvement and self-concept were potent predictors of career choice among students with special needs.

Keywords: *parental involvement, self-concept, students with special needs, career choice*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Career plays a vital role in a person's life, as everyone engages in career-related activities to secure a livelihood. One of the key challenges individuals face is deciding on a career path. Alam (2014) describes a career as encompassing various roles related to work, including those of students, employees, and retirees, along with complementary roles in civic, familial, and vocational spheres. Careers exist because people actively pursue them, making them inherently person-centered. Selecting a career is a significant life decision, and for individuals with special needs (PWSN), additional considerations come into play. Persons with special needs refers to individuals that have visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health impairment, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, albinos, gifted and talented persons. Career choices for PWSN should not only reflect their personal interests, strengths, and goals but also factor in the accessibility, inclusivity, and support systems available in their chosen field.

Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) emphasize that "self-determination is essential in empowering individuals with disabilities to make informed career choices." Vocational training, often provided through special education programs, is tailored to address the unique needs of these individuals. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates "transition services" to assist students with disabilities in transitioning from school to the workforce (Trainor, 2008). Choosing a career is crucial as it shapes an individual's future success. Selecting the right profession is a significant decision that greatly impacts a student's or individual's life. Career choice refers to selecting a specific vocation or career path and is influenced by several factors. These include personal preferences, abilities, aspirations, interests, goals, available opportunities, parental guidance, vocational counseling, and socio-economic status. Thressiakutty and Rao (2001) highlight that making an occupational choice requires balancing personal needs with available opportunities, while also considering limitations, challenges, and strengths. Influential factors in career selection include family, personal abilities, personality, economic circumstances, and the effects of industrialization.

Choice is a central concept in existentialism, emphasizing that every individual has the ability to make decisions because life offers a range of options. Whatever happens to a person, whether positive or negative, stems from the choices they make among the various possibilities life presents. Even deciding not to choose is, in itself, a choice. Therefore, the idea of being “choice-less” is incompatible with existentialist theory. It is important to recognize that the process of making choices, their availability, and their significance may be key factors distinguishing individuals from one another (Alliyu, 2002). When it comes to career selection, career counselors consider various factors such as socioeconomic status, family background, parental attitudes, peer pressure, self-efficacy, personality traits, interests, aptitudes, educational achievements, role models, decision-making styles, social class, family environment, cultural identity, globalization, and gender as significant determinants of career choices (Chukwu, Ogidigbo, Akanem & Ilechukwu, 2022). Research further highlights that parental involvement can significantly influence students career decisions.

Parental involvement refers to the active role parents or caregivers play in their children’s education, development, career choices, and overall well-being. This study was inspired by the significant influence parents have on their children’s career decisions, especially in light of the numerous and complex challenges faced by today’s youth. A notable concern is the large number of school leavers who end up on the streets without understanding their potential. It is essential to guide them in recognizing their abilities, interests, values, and beliefs, as well as to equip them with the skills needed to navigate the various challenges they may face in life (Morsel, 2009).

According to Latashia (2012), parental involvement refers to parents helping their children improve their school work by providing support, encouragement and establishing a suitable home environment for career development. It takes many forms including good parenting in the home, provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social, educational values high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship, contact with schools to share information, participation in school events and participation in school governance (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Children with actively involved parents tend to have a more positive attitude towards school and are in a better position to develop careers (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012)

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in shaping the career development of young adolescents, surpassing the influence of other factors. Whiston and Keller (2004) conducted a survey in Latin America examining the family’s role in career development, revealing that parental involvement significantly influenced what children learned about work and their work experiences. Additionally, it was found that parents’ attitudes towards school and work had a lasting effect on adolescents’ career choices, decisions, and plans. However, since this study was conducted over a decade ago in Latin America, it raises the question of whether parental involvement would similarly support youth with intellectual disabilities in learning about work and preparing for their future lives within the African context.

Newman (2009) investigated the role of family involvement in the education of secondary school-aged children with disabilities in the United States. The study revealed that most youths with disabilities whose parents held high expectations for their success in transitioning to adult roles after high school received significant support from their parents in career development. Although this research was conducted over 13 years ago in the U.S., questions remain about whether similar outcomes would be observed among youths with intellectual disabilities in Africa, particularly in Zambia.

Self-concept refers to how individuals perceive themselves both publicly and privately (Duane, 2002; Hamacheck, 1987; Hassan, 2006). It encompasses an awareness of one’s values, beliefs, emotions, abilities, intellectual capacity, education, socio-economic standing, and other traits and characteristics. According to Super (1953), individuals select careers as a means of expressing and actualizing their self-concept. This concept evolves over time and is influenced by life experiences. Self-concept is shaped by both the environment and the influence of significant others. The environment can have either a positive or negative impact on students with special needs.

When the home, school, and societal environments are supportive and nurturing, students tend to develop a strong, positive, and healthy self-concept (Okereke, 2006). Within the home, this fosters a sense of self-worth, confidence, and esteem. Positive communication and meaningful experiences encourage adolescents to view adults as role models. However, according to Okereke, the absence of these factors, along with challenges such as poverty, alcoholism, marital conflicts, and large family sizes, can negatively affect adolescent's self-concept.

Woolfolk (2006) describes self-concept as a key factor in self-development, particularly in children. A child's growth and development are evident over time, as each child is a unique individual. Therefore, collaboration from various stakeholders is essential to foster a positive self-concept in children. Hormuth (2010), in a study, connects self-concept to self-assessment or self-perception, highlighting it as a reflection of an individual's confidence in their own traits. This concept also signifies how individuals evaluate themselves based on the importance they attribute to their achievements. Prescott (2006) defines self-concept as a combination of mental awareness, preconceived notions, and ongoing self-interest. Its components include the physical, psychological, and social aspects of well-being, all of which are influenced by attitudes, habits, beliefs, and ideas. These elements collectively form self-image and general self-appreciation.

Super's research suggests that self-concept is shaped by an individual's physical and mental development, observation of jobs, identification with adult careers, and overall life experiences. As a person's knowledge and experiences grow, their career self-concept becomes more intricate. Super also proposed a developmental approach rooted in social phenomenological psychology. In his study, he identified four key stages in career development. The first stage involves exploring potential vocations, followed by achieving vocational maturity. This leads to the integration of self-concept into a vocational self-concept, culminating in the establishment of a career pattern (Super, 1957).

In some instances, the career choice of students with special needs is significantly influenced by impactful experiences or impressions in their lives, resulting in a clear career decision. Active parental involvement in guiding their children toward suitable career paths, combined with the children's self-awareness, plays a crucial role in determining the profession they ultimately pursue. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the role of parental involvement and self-concept among students with special needs in Lagos State.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Providing career development services to individuals with disabilities poses significant challenges for career counselors. People with disabilities often face vocational adjustment difficulties, such as limited marketable skills, low income, underemployment, and unemployment. Harritigon (1997) highlights that students with disabilities frequently graduate without employable skills or the ability to live independently. Furthermore, their limited early vocational and social experiences narrow their perceived career options, hinder their decision-making abilities, and disrupt their long-term vocational development. These constraints can lead to specific career development issues, such as an inconsistent or underdeveloped personality pattern, an unclear vocational identity, and the pursuit of careers that do not align with their abilities or interests.

Students with special needs around the world often face challenges when deciding on a career path for their future. Many struggle to identify their job interests, making it difficult to choose a vocation, academic course, or career direction. Selecting an unsuitable career path can lead to frustration, unfulfilled aspirations, declining interest, a lack of motivation to achieve goals, and overall reduced productivity. These young individuals with disabilities often appear directionless and unfocused when it comes to making career and post-secondary education choices, presenting themselves as unprepared to make critical life decisions. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of parental involvement and self-concept as determinants of career choices among students with special needs in Lagos State.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to assess parental involvement and self-concept as determinants of career choice among students with special needs in Lagos state. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to;

- i. Examine parental involvement as determinants of career choice among students with special needs
- ii. Investigate self-concept as determinants of career choice among students with special needs

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were tested.

- i. There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs
- ii. There is no significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among students with special needs.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of correlational type. This research design was employed in the study in order to examine the relationship that exist between the variables of interest in the study. The population of the study was all secondary school students with special needs in four secondary schools in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos state. The Stratified Random Technique was used to select one hundred and sixty participants (160) as sample size. Three instruments were used for data collection. Parental involvement scale as measured for parental involvement was developed by Ngai (2005) with test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.89. Self-concept scale was developed by Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina and Allen (1980) with test-retest co-efficient of 0.75 Career choice scale was developed by the researchers, the scale consists of twelve items and was developed on a 4 point response. A reliability co-efficient 0.72 was got in this work during a pilot study.

RESULTS

- Research hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs.

Table 1: Pearson's correlation on parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs

	Parental Involvement	Career Choice		
Parental Involvement Pearson Correlation	1	.859**		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	N	160	160
Career Choice Pearson Correlation	.000	N	160	160
Sig. (2-tailed)	.859**	1		

** Correlation is significant at the 0, 05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 reveals the relationship that exists among the independent variable (parental involvement to the determinant of the dependent variable (career choice). The Pearson correlation yielded ($r = .859$; $N = 160$; $p < .05$) respectively. The hypothesis which state that there is no significant relationship between between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs in Lagos was hereby rejected. Hence, there is significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs in Lagos

- Research hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among students with special needs

Table 2: T-test statistics on self-concept and career choice among students with special needs

Source	N	STDEV	df	t	P-value
Self-concept	160	1.38	9	3.87	>.05
Career Choice	160	1.91			

The calculated t-test ($t = 3.87$, $N = 160$, $P < 0.05$) is greater than value of 2.27 which is statistically significant at 9 degree of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among students with special needs in Lagos

DISCUSSION

The first research hypothesis states “there is no significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs. The result revealed that there was significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs. The result of the finding is in line with Cheung & Pomerrantz (2012) affirmed that children with actively involved parents tend to have a more positive attitude toward school and are in a better position to develop careers. The outcome of this study lends credence to the study conducted by Whiston and Keller (2004) that parental involvement significantly influenced what children learned about work and their work experiences. This study is also in line with Trainor (2010) that found that parental involvement in transition planning (a critical phase of special education) has a direct impact on career outcomes for students with disabilities. This implies that parent help advocate for resources, guide their children toward vocational pathways and provide emotional support.

The result from tested hypothesis two revealed that there was significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among students with special needs. The finding of this study affirmed the findings of Nota, Ferrari, Soresi & Wehmeyer (2007) that found that a positive self-concept significantly influences career choices and ability to pursue meaningful employment. They further emphasized that students with disabilities who developed strong self-determination and positive self-concept were more likely to make realistic and fulfilling career choices. This study also supports Hitching, Retish & Horvath (2005) that revealed that adolescent with disabilities who have a strong and positive self-concept are more likely to pursue careers that align with their interests, strength and values. Negative self-concept, however led to career indecision and limited opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researchers examined parental involvement and self-concept as determinants of career choice among students with special needs. The result showed that there was significant relationship between parental involvement and career choice among students with special needs. It was also revealed that there was significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among students with special needs

RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Schools should establish career counselling services tailored to the needs of students with disabilities. These services should include career exploration tools, skill assessments and vocational training programs to build self-awareness and confidence in career choices

2. Teachers and counsellors should be encouraged to receive training on strategies to actively engage parents in the educational career planning for students with special needs
3. Parents should focus on fostering a positive self-concept in their children. This can be achieved by offering encouragement, celebrating achievements and providing realistic but optimistic feedback on their abilities.
4. Government and educational authorities should establish policies that encourage and facilitate parental involvement in the career development of students with special needs. This could include providing resources, parental training and financial support for career planning programs

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