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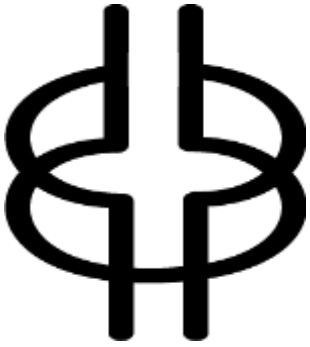

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Preferred Careers of Senior High School Students in Ghana: A Revisit of Holland's Career Development Theory

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Abstract

The study investigated the preferred careers of senior high school (S.H.S) students in Ghana using Holland's classification of work environments. The participants comprised 364 SHS students who were selected from four senior high schools in Koforidua through the use of multi-stage sampling technique. Data were analysed with the use of frequencies, percentages and rank order. The findings of the study showed that Social careers prevailed as the most preferred among SHS students in Ghana. Artistic careers were ranked second, followed by Conventional and Enterprising careers respectively. Investigative careers were the least in rank order. The implications for counselling for these findings were emphasised.

Key words: Counselling, career, career preference, career counselling, adolescents, Holland's theory.

Introduction

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions in life. Many people usually make this decision during the adolescent period because this is the time they choose their secondary and tertiary educational programmes to conform to their future careers. The process of career choice is a universal phenomenon because career serves as a major avenue through which people express themselves, offer services to humanity, and get financial rewards to sustain themselves and their families.

Scholars have defined career in many ways. According to Oladede (2007), career is a chosen pursuit, life work and one's profession. It is also the sequence of major positions occupied by a person throughout his or her lifetime. Arnold (1997) has indicated that a career is the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person. A career is the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989).

The various definitions of career point to the fact that it is a "sequence" ─ it is a long process rather than a simple incident. In other words, career interest and choices do not appear all of a sudden during a particular period in life but as a result of developmental process. Career also, goes a long way to boost the economy of nations. A vocational choice is in itself a process of growth, reflecting other phases of development. It requires sufficient maturity since its influence on adulthood is significant, if the future of the individual would be bright (Kochhlar, 2006).

Omotosho (2004) has called attention to the need for guidance in career choice. He argued that the rapid changes going on in the adolescent's private world as well as in the world of work around him call for careful planning and guidance so that the chances of making errors will be reduced to the barest minimum. Furthermore, Omotosho (2014) has posited that an enormous cost in time and energy through floundering, hit-or-miss method and indecision are economically and psychologically too expensive and should not be allowed to plague any youth any longer. He, therefore, advocated that school counsellors as well as guidance and counselling coordinators should plan the career development programmes of schools and design the activities and services that would facilitate the meeting of the career needs of students. According to him, the counsellor should conduct student assessment in the areas of their abilities, interests and personalities.

A lot of factors contribute to the career decision of an individual. These factors include the family, socio-economic status of parents, societal influence, ones' mental ability and physique, and other personality characteristics. Basing his theory of career development on personality, Holland (1997) expounded his theory on how an individual can fit in the right career. He believes that there are six basic personality types, namely realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and

conventional. He represented these by their initial letters thereby coming up with the acronym RIASEC respectively. Each individual resembles any one of the given six basic personality types. The more the individual resembles a personality type the more that person exhibits the traits of that personality type.

He further explained that the six personality types are also synonymous respectively with six types of work environments which are realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (RIASEC). According to Holland, an individual performs best when he finds himself in a work environment that is the same as his personality type. For instance, if a person who has a social personality type finds himself in a social work environment, the person is most likely to perform well in that environment.

Some studies in Africa (Kankam & Onivehu, 2000; Okeke, 2000; Okon, 2001; & Mburza, 2002) and some in other parts of the world (Aghamechi, 1998; Kochhlar, 2006; Shakya & Singh, 2013; National Society of high School Scholars, 2015; & Singh & Singh, 2015) have identified certain factors that influence the career preferences of youths. The factors so identified include the family, socio-economic status of parents, mental ability and physique.

The family is the primary agent of socialisation that an individual encounters in a lifetime. As young individuals grow up, they are exposed to the careers of their immediate family. This initial exposure may influence the individual in later life. Kochhlar (2006) is of the view that in a family in which aesthetic values play part in their daily lives, children may have preference for artistic careers. On the other hand, individuals from families in which intellectual activities and achievement are valued have probable tendencies to veer into intellectual pursuits in adulthood. Studies conducted by Okeke (2000) and Aghamehi (1998), on parental influence on children's career choice revealed that as much as 60% of children aspire to be in their father's career whereas only 25% want to be in their mother's career.

Mburza (2002) opines that career choice among youths is also affected by **socio-economic status of their parents**. When parents are financially sound they can sponsor and support their children with all the resources they need in pursuing their desired careers. The reverse is true when parents are not economically sound. Where parents belong to aristocracy or nobility stratum, their children could hardly aspire to

be garbage collectors, labourers, shop attenders or be in any career that society does not have high regard for.

Mental ability, to a large extent, also determines the type and the level a person can reach in the pursuit of a particular career. Kankam and Onivehu (2000) and Okon (2001) indicate that intellectual ability exert a considerable influence on career preference. Hence, it is often seen that, while bright students choose science-oriented careers, mediocre students opt for careers within humanities, while weaker children aspire for arts-biased and technical vocations. Okon (2001) posits that the **physique** of an individual sanctions entry into certain fields of endeavour. He further stated that no matter how talented a child may be, career in the military and paramilitary may be outside his/her range if he/she failed to attain some predetermined height or weight.

Several studies in the areas of career preference have identified the choice of careers of students. In 2015, the National Society of High School Scholars in US conducted a study on career trajectories that students want to pursue. The researchers sampled 18,000 high achieving students, within the ages of 15-29, from eight states: Texas, California, Florida, New York, Georgia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Maryland. The findings of the study revealed that 40% of respondents prefer medicine or health-related careers, 21% and 28% respectively prefer careers in Technology/ Engineering and Science. The remaining 11% of the respondents were interested in careers in areas like Arts/ Entertainment/Media and Business/Administration/Corporate.

In India, Shakya and Singh (2013) researched into Career Preferences among Degree College Adolescents in Kanpur City. Three hundred adolescents (137 boys and 163 girls) were randomly selected from 6 degree colleges to assess their career preferences in the areas of science and technology, commerce and management, tourism and hospitality, mass media and journalism, art and designing, medical, agriculture, defense, law and order, and education using a standardized career test. Data on career preferences revealed that education and science and technology were the most preferred career of adolescents and agriculture as the least.

A more recent study conducted by Singh and Singh (2015) in India explored the career preference of secondary level students in

Bareilly, U.P. India. The study used the survey method to measure the career preference of secondary level students. The results indicated the following order of students' career preference: 31% Science and Technology, 19% Law and Order, 16% Education, 10% Artistic and Designing, 9% Mass media and Journalism, 7% Defense, 6% Medical, 1% Tourism and Hospitality, 1% Commerce and 0% Agriculture.

Abiri (1977) also confirmed the craving for science-based careers in his research that randomly sampled 1,254 third, fourth and fifth years grammar boys and girls in Ibadan to identify, among other things, their occupational aspirations. The students were made to respond to a self-developed questionnaire, the Prophetic Ability Questionnaire (PAQ), which was divided into 3 parts. The first part required information on parental background, as well as contemporary circumstances and feeling. The second part required supplying information on future aspiration about themselves, while the third section required essay writing on one's future life with special references to education, occupational achievement, possessions, family life and his or her eventual demise. With the use of the simple percentage for the data analysis, the findings showed that medicine, pharmacy were the students' most aspired occupations with 47.3% score. These were followed by engineering scoring 20%, police force was seen to be least aspired by them with just a score 0.01%. Although more junior students preferred medical to judiciary profession, more of the senior boys preferred engineering, university teaching, scientific occupation and military.

On the basis of Holland's categorization of personality traits and work environments, the current researchers sought to discover the career preferences of a selected sample of school-going adolescents in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Research Question

The research question that directed this study was:

What are the career preferences of senior high school students in Koforidua Municipality, Ghana?

Methodology

Research Design

The research design that was used for this study was the descriptive research design. Creswell (2009) opines that descriptive design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population. Descriptive design was, therefore, chosen for this study because it sought to find the opinions of senior high school students on their career preferences hence it lends itself to descriptive design.

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

All SHS in Koforidua Municipality formed the population for the study. From this population, students in four public senior high schools formed a target population of 7,157. A sample of 364 students was drawn out of the target population of 7,157 using a multi-stage sampling technique. The sample size of 364 respondents was arrived at by the use of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for selecting sample size.

Stage 1: Cluster sampling was employed to group senior high schools into, option 1, option 2 and option 3. Option 1 schools are schools with students who have below average academic performance, Option 2 schools are schools with students who have average academic performance and Option 3 schools are schools with students who have above average academic performance (Ghana Education Service, 2015). The researchers considered students from the various options because the academic abilities of students from the various options vary.

Stage 2: Purposive sampling was used to select the only single-sex school from the municipality. Without purposely selecting this school (the only male students' school in the municipality), single sex school students would have been excluded from the study.

Stage 3: One school was randomly selected from each cluster using the lottery method.

Stage 4: The researchers selected approximately equal numbers of students from sampled schools on the basis of gender, programme and class. This procedure led to a sample size of 364 students.

Instrument

A questionnaire titled "Career Preference Questionnaire" (CPQ) was used for data gathering. It was structured based on Holland's (1997) categorization of careers. In other words, the various careers were grouped under the following categories of careers: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. Out of these six, the respondents were requested to indicate only their most preferred career category.

Validity

According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996), instrument validation is improved through expert judgment. The items were therefore handed over to three experts in guidance and counselling for scrutiny and vetting. The recommendations from the experts were the basis for its validation.

Reliability

The reliability of a research instrument concerns the extent to which the instrument yields the same results on repeated trials (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The instrument was pilot tested in New Juaben Senior High School, in New Juaben District, Koforidua. The choice for the piloting was due to the similarities borne by the selected school and the other schools that were used for the main study. A sample of 40 students was randomly selected from New Juaben S.H.S. in New Juaben District, Koforidua to take part in the pilot study. According to Hill (1998), 10-30 participants are ideal for feasibility studies. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability obtained from the study was 0.87.

Data Analysis

Completed copies of the questionnaire were sorted, coded, and entered on a computer-assisted programme (Statistical Package for solutions and Services, version 22.0) for analysis. Responses to items addressing the research question were analyzed using, frequencies counts, percentages and rank order. These statistical tools were used because they gave indication of the students' preferred careers from the most preferred to the least preferred.

Results

Research Question: *What are the preferred careers of S.H.S. students in Koforidua Municipality, Ghana?*

Table 1: Preferred Careers of S.H.S. Students (n=364)

Career Preference	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Social	90	24.7	1st
Artistic	66	18.1	2nd
Conventional	63	17.3	3rd
Enterprising	60	16.5	4th
Realistic	44	12.1	5th
Investigative	41	11.3	6th
Total	**364**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Data, 2016.

Table 1 displays the preferred careers of S.H.S. students in Koforidua Municipality. Social careers came first in the ranking with 90 (24.7%) students out of 364. This gave the picture that almost a quarter of the respondents (or in more practical terms, one in every four senior high school students) would like to be engaged in careers like teaching, nursing, counselling, human resource management, social work and other careers that put them in a position to render services to people.

Artistic careers were the second in rank order with 66 students representing 18.1% of the total number of respondents. Hence, in this study, next to Social careers, students were most likely to consider careers in acting, architecture, book editing, clothes designing, graphic designing, interior designing, singing and painting, which are all found in the arts category. The least preferred careers were Investigative types which had 41 (11.3%) of the students preferring it. Investigative careers encompass careers in engineering, medicine, law, optometry, mathematic, surveying, and so on. Realistic careers were placed second least preferred careers with a frequency of 44 (12.1%) students. Realistic careers include piloting, firefighting, mining, policing, truck driving and farming.

A research conducted by Huern, Khairuddin, Ismail and De (2015) is supported by the findings of the current study which has demonstrated that the majority of students are interested in Social and Arts types of careers while a minimal number have interest in

Investigative careers which were more science-based careers. The study of Huern, Khairuddin, Ismail and De (2015) on Career Preference indicated that 65% of the students opted for careers in the area of Arts, In the Arts stream, 59% of the students chose Arts and Communication. About a third, or 33% of the students in the Science stream chose Health and Medicine as their preferred careers.

Again, the findings of the current research corroborate that of Shakya and Singh (2013) which revealed students' strong desire for taking careers in education in addition to science-based careers. In their study, data on career preferences revealed that education and science and technology were the most preferred careers of adolescents and agriculture was the least preferred. However, the findings in the current study did not support the findings of the study of the National Society of High School Scholars (2015) in the US which demonstrated a strong preference of students for science oriented careers. In their findings, 40% of respondents prefer medicine or health-related careers, 21% and 28% respectively prefer careers in Technology/Engineering and Science. The rest of the respondents were interested in careers in areas like Arts/Entertainment/Media and Business/Administration/ Corporate.

In sum, and in answer to the main question of this study, S.H.S. students' career preference demonstrated that students are more interested in social and artistic careers than investigative and realistic careers. The order of their career preference is as follows: Social, Artistic, Conventional, Enterprising, Realistic and Investigative.

Implications for Counselling

1. School guidance coordinators should make efforts in assisting students in their career decision-making and offer adequate career information.
2. As part of the career guidance and counselling process, counsellors should use psychometric assessments such as Bakere's (1977) *Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale* (MOPS). They should also use adapted versions of such widely used career assessment instruments like the *Strong Interest Inventory* (SII, Harman, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994), the *Career Decision Scale* (SDS, Osipow, 1987), and the *Career Development Inventory* (CDI, Super, Thompson,

Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1988). These should be used to assist students in identifying their interests and to ascertain that their majors correspond with their interests (Corkin, Arbona, Coleman & Ramirez, 2008). In this regard, students can chart career paths that suit their personalities because job success and satisfaction are as a result of a congruent match between a person's abilities and interests on the one hand, and a position's requirements and rewards on the other (Holland, 1997).

3. School counsellors should have more of one-on-one counselling sessions with students in order to give them the confidence to be able to communicate all their career related challenges. Norris (as cited in Ruan, 2009) states that individual counselling is an ideal means of reducing career indecision that students experience.
4. Counsellors should come up with career development programmes which would enable them to assist individuals to identify and learn the skills by which they can be more effective in planning for and in choosing careers. Consequently, students can make effective transitions and adjustments to work and in managing their own careers.

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