

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Prevalent Factors of Career Uncertainties among Ghanaian Senior High School Students

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Ethical Statement

Consent forms were distributed to parents and students who participated in the study. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that career uncertainty is a major issue that distorts the career trajectories of many adolescents, specifically, senior high school students as many of them are unable to make career decisions that will place them on a firm path of career development. The study explored the most prevalent factors of career uncertainty related to Ghanaian high school students. The research design employed was descriptive survey and 426 students were selected for participation by means of a multi-stage sampling. Data were gathered with a four-point Likert-type Scale questionnaire on Career uncertainty for senior high school students. Data analyses were done using descriptive statistics. The results depicted, among all the factors investigated to determine career uncertainty of senior high school students, self-awareness, fear and anxiety in decision-making, inadequate career information, inadequate career counselling, peer pressure, family interference, and academic accomplishment challenges were the most prevalent factors of career uncertainty. Recommendations made was that, school guidance coordinators need to be sensitive to issues of self-awareness, fear and anxiety in decision-making, inadequate career information, inadequate career counselling, peer pressure, family interference, and academic accomplishment challenges throughout counselling sessions to facilitate well-informed and wise career decisions. It was recommended that all stakeholders in Ghana's Educational Sector should collaborate to formulate and implement policies that encourage students to plan, develop and make career choices before the end of their high school years.

Keywords: Career Uncertainty, Prevalent, Senior High School Students

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INTRODUCTION

Students entering their senior year of high school, are at crossroads in terms of potential career paths and personal growth. This is the time when most high school students decide which college major best fits their professional goals. Only few of them go on to pursue other options, such as starting their own businesses, attending trade schools, or starting apprenticeship programs. Otuei (2017) identifies this as a crucial juncture at which the person is forced to confront the importance of choosing a future profession. Yet, these are the moments when people have difficulties in deciding on a job path, which may lead to uncertainty.

During the decision-making process that occurs after a person has progressed through several phases of development, career selection has always been an integral part of man's social existence. According to Nyarko-Sampson (2013), an adolescent's career choice is a pivotal decision that may either pave the way for future possibilities or block doors. Adolescents may be unable to settle on a professional path because they are afraid that one misstep may permanently end their options in that field. According to Bandura et al. (2001 as cited in Nyarko-Sampson, 2013), this situation in adolescence is crucial since it necessitates selecting a vocational option while in secondary school. Tagay (2014) argues that the choices teenagers make about their schooling and future careers are among the most consequential decisions of their lives.

Otuei (2017) argues that a person's professional choices set the foundation for how they live their lives. As a result, one's career options at any given moment are heavily influenced by the choices made in the past regarding fields of study, educational paths taken, jobs accepted, and desired work assignments (Otuei, 2017). The ability to solve problems and manage one's career successfully depends on knowing how these choices are made, as Beach (2014) explains. If one does not have a good grasp of the fundamentals in decision-making in career choices, one will be prone to career uncertainty.

Students at the senior high school level of their education struggle with making a career decision because they are still debating on what jobs to choose with regards to their incompletely understood course of study at this stage of their schooling. Therefore, indicating that they have not yet acquired professional maturity. Additionally, they have relatively little awareness of their vocational interests, abilities, and goals as they have not fully developed their vocationally relevant attributes, which make their situation worse. Moreso, they are still investigating which careers are consistent with their personal and psychological self (Omosho et al., 2014). The idea advanced by Gianakos (as cited in Goliath, 2012) that roughly 50% of the challenges students face are related to career uncertainty is echoed by anecdotal reports from some senior high schools across the country, where school counsellors indicate that approximately 50% to 60% of the cases senior high school students present for counselling are related to career uncertainty. Numerous factors, including personality type elements, aptitude, cultural standards, and attachment style behavior, have been studied in relation to career uncertainty. As indicated by literature, additional factors that affect senior high school students' career uncertainty include inadequate career information, challenges with their academic performance, decision-making anxiety, fear, and knowledge-awareness about oneself. It is therefore safe to assume that a large percentage of Ghanaian senior high school students will continue their education after high school, making career uncertainty an even more pressing concern thus, leading to such a study.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the prevalent factors that usually make Ghanaian senior high school students to be uncertain about choosing a career path. In line with this purpose this paper seeks to answer the research question: What are the prevalent factors of career uncertainty among Ghanaian senior high school

students?

It is anticipated that the research will contribute to a body of information that will close the knowledge gap in the field of career uncertainty. It is again anticipated that it will provide school counsellors insight into the areas to focus on when offering career intervention to students. The research is crucial for developing policies that will encourage professional interest, choice, and growth in the educational sector since having a fulfilling and meaningful job is ultimately what will ensure an individual's survival in life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Career Uncertainty

In the 1930s, career uncertainty became a major worry for psychologists, who focused on students as their demographic interest since they could be dichotomously classified as either certain or uncertain. This curiosity was sparked by the fact that students regularly approached career counsellors with the issue of career uncertainty (Osipow, 1999). This uncertainty about one's future profession usually arises throughout the transitional phases of one's educational success in relation to career. Maree (2016) distinguishes between two sizable categories of persons going through transitional periods that are likely to lead to career uncertainty. The first category is made up of individuals who struggle with undecidedness when faced with a "natural" transition or crossroads that call for making choices about their careers. Such choices concern the choice of individual courses, a school type, a course of study, a tertiary training facility, or a particular job opportunity. The second category consists of people who start to wonder whether the decisions they made regarding, for instance, a school, a subject group, an area of study, a job, or an employer, were the "correct" ones. Considering this ongoing requirement, methods for evaluating and addressing career uncertainty must be developed (Osipow, 1999, Maree, 2016).

Inadequate Career Information

Inadequate information about the professional decision-making processes, such as not understanding how to do so optimally, is related to career uncertainty. Besides, it involves having a limited understanding of one's own strengths, interests, or character traits (Mubiana, 2010). Furthermore, according to Mubiana (2010), a lack of knowledge about occupations and what goes into them, as well as the few alternatives that are accessible, have a significant impact on career uncertainty. In their research, Mylonas et al. (2012) discovered a connection between career uncertainty and a lack of knowledge. According to Germeijs and De Boeck (2012), the challenges people face while making job-related decisions and the absence of other options, ways of acquiring information, and the decision-making process are the main causes of career uncertainty. Gati and Saka (2001) discovered in their research that career uncertainty is associated with a lack of knowledge. To determine whether 101 grade 12 high school students were aware that they had to choose a career, Mbale (2004) conducted a study to examine their career choices. She discovered that 33% of the students who participated in the survey were unsure of their job choices due to a lack of knowledge. In his research, Hocsons (2012) found that participants lacked adequate knowledge about employment choices. According to Nauta (2011), the five core factors of knowledge deficiency, information need, characteristic indecision, disagreement with others, and choice anxiety can all contribute to job uncertainty.

Fear and Anxiety in Decision-Making

The uncertainty of one's career is becoming a frequent cause of anxiety (Staunton, 2015). In essence, it is a

setback that keeps the person from achieving a professional objective. Kutz (2016) defines anxiety as the dread and apprehension of particular or general circumstances, individuals, and environments. It reflects the mental disorder that affects decision-making the most often. It has been shown that anxious people tend to avoid taking risks while making decisions (Kutz, 2016). According to Peng et al. (2012), most scholars testify to the existence of a robust association between career uncertainty and anxiety. According to Fuqua, Newman, and Seaworth (1988), worry is the main indicator of those who are persistently unsure (as cited in Peng et al., 2012). The relationship between state and trait anxiety and career indecision was examined by Morgan, Abdul-Kadir and Soheil (2011), and the findings indicated a positive link between the variables. According to research by Austin et al. (2010), negative career ideas are manifested through emotional, verbal, and behavioural reactions that have an impact on choosing a career. According to research, worrying thoughts about one's work increase anxiety. This anxiety makes it hard to decide what to do in school, avoid getting a job, avoid searching for work, choose a career, be a perfectionist, and make career decisions (Austin et al., 2010).

Self-Awareness

"Insight into one's nature that allows one to know what one is capable of" is what is meant by the term "self-awareness" (Mbetse, 2002, p. 83). This suggests that understanding one's own interests, talents, and skills constitutes having self-awareness. According to Nyarko-Sampson (2013), expressing self-knowledge involves showing a comprehension of the connection between individual behaviour and self-concept. Students must better understand themselves to make wise career decisions since self-awareness includes a grasp of how personal qualities connect to social, academic, and professional goals (Nyarko-Sampson, 2013). According to Rossier (2015), some personality characteristics might either be risk or protective factors for challenges in selecting a profession. In the light of this, several studies have shown a connection between personality attributes and professional ambiguity.

Family Interference

Familial and family influences are crucial in choosing a vocation. Wong and Liu (2010) claim that families have a big impact on their children's career choices. This is due to the expansion and complexity of both family and job. Family members play an important influence in job choice by serving as role models, offering tangible proof of success in a specific field of work, and guiding individuals toward professions that fit the family's business needs (Tokar et al., 2003). Family members serve as mentors and assist the individual in overcoming traditional challenges (e.g., by assisting the individual in obtaining employment within the family business and avoiding the interview process) and networking the individual to obtain support from powerful individuals they know already around the individual's career choice. When family members disagree with a ward's professional decision, they often create hurdles, such as creating financial or emotional barriers to a vocation they believe is inappropriate. If a child does not follow the academic path that their parents have chosen, they may refuse to pay for college or they may heavily punish them (Mau, 2004).

According to family system theorists, a child who does not adequately separate themselves from their family of origin will have trouble forming their identity, which is a problem that contributes to career uncertainty. Families who have too much control over their children's professional choices

cause problems for the young adults. Career-related support (parents who offer advice and practical support to help their children make decisions), interference in career choices (parents who overly regulate their children's career actions and choices), and lack of engagement (due to parents' lack of interest in their children's career decisions or careers) are the three types of career-specific behaviours identified by Dietrich and Kracke (2009). Thus, large degrees of interference cause significant amounts of difficulty making professional decisions, which ultimately results in career uncertainty.

Peer Pressure

As children start to distance themselves from their parents, peer interactions have grown to be a crucial concern in job development, according to Hellman (2014). Peers and friends have a significant impact on people's development and social adjustment, according to developmental psychologists (Harter, 1999; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Hymel et al., 1996; Rubin et al., 1998). Williamson et al. (2008) discovered that a person's general psychological adjustment and sense of self-worth were impacted by peer connection. According to Guay et al. (2003), adolescents prefer to talk to their close friends about personal matters rather than their parents. Teenagers spend 29% of their waking hours with their friends, which is the cause. As a result, they are more inclined to talk to their close friends about their career possibilities than their parents. According to Hellman (2014), more peer attachment indicates less environmental exploration, which is a predictor of career uncertainty. He continued by saying that spending more time with peers means less time is spent considering job options. Since communicating with peers via current technology (texting and social media) has become a major source of distraction, such people spend a lot of time interacting with peers rather than learning about their workplace environment (Hellman, 2014).

Inadequate Career Counselling

According to Schofield (2017), career counselling has used a variety of techniques to support decision-making on job choices. Career counselling is the use of particular and general interventions that have an influence on an individual's self-understanding, job choices, career happiness, and balance between work, family, and leisure, according to Engels et al. (as cited in Baig, 2012). As a result, career counselling helps students make decisions about altering or selecting their majors, defining goals, applying for employment, and obtaining resources to assist them in choosing occupations (Baig, 2012). This means that a lack of career counselling activities will leave students indecisive. According to Swanson and Parcover (2008), career counselling in schools has several challenges that impede its operations and, as a result, contribute to students' lack of career decision-making. The absence of enough human and financial resources, both within the school and the local community, to ensure that these resources have been allocated to career advising, according to Mung'ara (2012), is one of the root causes of some of these problems. Galassi, Grace, Martin, Jones, and Wallace have investigated the argument that career counsellors do not provide career counselling to interested students (as stated in Mung'ara, 2012). According to studies done in the UK, 45% of

those over the age of 14 and 70% of those under the age of 14 reported receiving no, inadequate, or just minimal career counselling, respectively (Jackson, 2011; as cited in Mung'ara, 2012).

Academic Accomplishment Challenges

Academic accomplishment challenges include repeating a class or failing, as well as doing badly in a specific subject. Mung'ara (2012) asserts that students who consistently struggle in a subject/course are led to feel they are incapable of succeeding. They, thus, get uncertain about their decision to pursue jobs in that field. Students are led to feel they are incapable of succeeding in other areas in addition to the disciplines in which they are doing poorly academically. These people believe they are not intellectually inclined, which makes them uncertain about their professional choices. According to research done by Kavas (2011), there is a negative correlation between academic success and career uncertainty. The literature is not unanimous regarding the relationship between struggles with academic excellence and career uncertainty.

METHOD

Research Design

The descriptive survey design was chosen since the primary objective of the research was to identify the factors that most commonly contribute to senior high school students' career uncertainty regarding their future careers in Ghana. These factors include inadequate career counselling, inadequate career information, fear, and anxiety about making decisions, self-awareness, family interference, peer pressure, and academic accomplishment challenges. Again, the research design paves way for data collection from a wider population to offer descriptive information on the study's core variables. This is achievable since the design supports such data collection. The goal of a descriptive survey, according to Fraenkel & Wallen (2006), is to observe, describe, and record characteristics of a phenomena as it happens in its natural condition. The design included gathering data from all participants selected for the research through the administration of a questionnaire that solicited participants' thoughts on career uncertainty among senior high school students in Ghana.

Setting and Participants

The target population was all form two senior high school students from nine public schools with three schools selected from each geographical zone. The accessible population of 5,845 constitute senior high school students within the nine schools from which the sample size for the study was obtained. A multistage sampling approach was utilized for the selection of the sample. The 1st stage used the cluster sampling to cluster the country into three geographical zones (Northern, Middle and Southern). For the 2nd stage, simple random sampling was used to select a region from each zone. In the 3rd stage, the purposive sampling approach was used to select a Metropolitan Assembly/District from a region. The 4th stage employed the simple random sampling to select three schools from each Metropolitan Assembly/District. The 5th stage used the systematic sampling approach to select participants from each school.

Determination of sample size was based on the sample size table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and so for an accessible population of 5,845, the sample size obtained was 354 which was estimated to 426 for a richer representation and generalization. Estimation is based on Creswell (2014) who proposed a higher sample

size estimation therefore, the sample size was increased by approximately 20.5%. Thus, out of 426 students selected for the research, 214 (50.2%) were males and 212 (49.8%) were females.

Research sample for the study constituted from two students selected from public senior high schools across the country. These students in form two (2) were chosen because, at this point in their education, they are still trying to figure out what careers they should choose in relation to their courses, which they have not yet fully comprehended.

Instruments

Data was gathered using two instruments. Students who were not sure about participating in the study's initial phase were chosen using the opinion survey. This tool gave students an explanation of the concept of career uncertainty before asking about their current status. Career Uncertainty Questionnaire, a four-point Likert-type scale namely, Strongly-Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Strongly-Disagree = 2 and Disagree = 1 created by the researcher, was used to gather the real data during the second phase. The questionnaire had two main sections, Demographic as section A and Factors of Career Uncertainty as section B which was further put into sub-sections namely, Self-Awareness, Inadequate Career Information, Inadequate Career Counselling, Fear and Anxiety in Decision-Making, Peer Pressure, Family Interference and Academic Accomplishment Challenges. Each of these factors had 10 statements students were to respond to. Face and content validity was established by giving the instrument to expert hands who subjected the instrument to scrutiny and the suggestions made were implemented to refine the instrument to serve its purpose. The test-retest method as well as the Cronbach's Alpha formula was used to establish the reliability co-efficient of 0.83. All issues concerning ethics of anonymity and protection of vulnerable participants, confidentiality and informed consent/assent were adequately addressed.

Data Analysis

Data was collected from respondents using a questionnaire. The analyses were done with version 21 of the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS). The questionnaire had a few statements that made respondents to think through the factors that affected their uncertainty about a career. Means and standard deviations were used to analyse data for the research questions. This statistical tool was selected as it paves the way for the researcher to know how frequently a certain phenomenon occurs, the mean average of the data gathered, as well as the extent of variability between the variables (Dane, 2011). Again, means and standard deviations help to make interpretation of results more meaningful for conclusions and recommendations. Analysis of data was also based on the establishment of a Scale: 1–1.99 = Low, 2–2.99 = Moderate, 3–3.99 = High, 4 =Higher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research sought to determine the particular factors that commonly prevail and that are anticipated to contribute to the uncertainty of a professional path among senior high school students in Ghana. In addition, it attempted to identify from among the aforementioned factors, those that are most frequently and closely associated with students' situation of career uncertainty. The cut-off points (1–1.99 = Low, 2–2.99 = Moderate, 3–3.99 = High, 4 =Higher) established were used to interpret the data. Low indicates a negative agreement to students' career uncertainty and moderate, high, and higher indicate a positive agreement.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Factors of Career Uncertainty

Variables	M	SD	Grade No.
Self-Awareness	2.5	0.62	Moderate
Inadequate Career Information	2.5	0.62	Moderate
Inadequate Career Counselling	2.6	0.62	Moderate
Fear and Anxiety in Decision making	2.4	0.60	Moderate
Peer Pressure	3.0	0.67	High
Family Interference	2.9	0.64	Moderate
Academic accomplishment challenges	2.8	0.57	Moderate
Mean of Means	2.7	0.44	Moderate

Note: Scale: 1–1.99 = Low, 2–2.99 = Moderate, 3–3.99 = High, 4 =Higher

All the variables in Table 1 predicted participants' status of career uncertainty with mean of means of 2.7 (SD = 0.44) which falls within the scale (1-1.99= Low, 2-2.99= Moderate, and 3-3.99= High, 4=Higher) established. Overall response per the scale shows a moderate response indicating that participants agree that variables such as Self-Awareness, Inadequate Career Information, Inadequate Career Counselling, Fear and Anxiety in Decision-Making, Peer Pressure, Family Interference and Academic Accomplishment Challenges variables are responsible for their being uncertain about their career choices. Thus, the responses from participants ranges between 2.4 (SD = 0.60) and 3.0 (SD = 0.67).

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Rank Order of prevalent factors of career uncertainty

Variables	M	SD	Grading	Rank
Peer pressure	3.0	0.67	High	1 st
Family interference	2.9	0.64	Moderate	2 nd
Academic accomplishment challenges	2.8	0.57	Moderate	3 rd
Inadequate Career Counselling	2.6	0.62	Moderate	4 th
Self- awareness	2.5	0.62	Moderate	5 th
Inadequate Career Information	2.5	0.62	Moderate	5 th
Fear and Anxiety in Decision- Making	2.4	0.6	Moderate	7 th
Total	2.7	0.44	Moderate	

Note: Scale: 1–1.99 = Low, 2–2.99 = Moderate, 3–3.99 = High, 4 =Higher

Table 2 displays rank order of the factors that influence career uncertainty. It reveals that peer pressure ranks first (M = 3; SD = 0.67), family interference comes in second (M = 2.9; SD = 0.64), and academic accomplishment challenges come in third (M = 2.8; SD = 0.64 0.57), making them the most prevalent factors among Senior High School students. Furthermore, it may be said that the mean scores (M = 3, 2.9, and 2.8) are higher than the sum of the mean scores (M = 2.7) for all the variables. This is not to say that inadequate career counselling, self-awareness, inadequate career information, and fear and anxiety in decision-making do not influence career uncertainty of senior high school students in Ghana; they do, but not very significantly, as demonstrated by the other three variables (Peer pressure, family interference and academic accomplishment challenges).

Discussion

The study showed that all the factors (self-awareness, inadequate career information, inadequate career

counselling, fear and anxiety in decision-making, peer pressure, family interference, and academic accomplishment challenges) predicted students' career uncertainty. In terms of the most common and prevalent factors of career uncertainty, the survey found that peer pressure stands at the top of the list. This means that most adolescents have a stronger relationship with their peers, which does not drive them to make the effort to commit to making career choices. One explanation for this result is that adolescents at this period of life are considerably more interested in gaining attention and approval from their peers, since this provides a sense of belonging and recognition.

According to the findings, family interference is the second most important factor influencing students' career choices. In Ghana, the family is seen as having a significant influence on an individual's upbringing. Most Ghanaian parents prefer to decide on professional paths for their children rather than letting them to do it on their own. The findings support the work of theorists like Bratcher (1982), Roe (1957), and researchers like Blustein et al. (1995), as well as Lopez and Andrews (1987) who have all claimed that family impacts career choices.

Students identified academic accomplishment challenges as the third most common cause of career uncertainty, according to the study. The findings can be ascribed to students experiencing academic challenges including below and average performance, failing certain difficult subjects, or repeating their classes because of abysmal performance are unable to make career options. Such students, according to Mung'ara (2010), are indoctrinated to think that they will fail in their field of study, which leaves them to be uncertain about their future career choices. According to Mung'ara (2010), these students are not only pushed to assume that they cannot achieve in other areas but are also made to believe that they cannot succeed in domains where they are struggling with their work. In Ghana's educational system, expulsion of students for low academic performance is a common occurrence. It is not unexpected that among Ghanaian senior high school students, academic accomplishment challenges is one of the most significant causes of career uncertainty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Ghanaian context, peer pressure, family interference and academic accomplishment challenges are crucial determinants in shaping students' career choices and generating career uncertainty. The need for peer validation and a sense of belonging outweighs the urgency to make informed career choices. Family interference which is deeply embedded in Ghanaian culture, often usurps the autonomy of the students in choosing their careers. Students who face academic accomplishment challenges tend to develop a pessimistic view of their capabilities, which in turn influences their career choices.

The Ghana Education Service, particularly its curriculum designers and guidance coordinators, should collaborate with the Ministry of Education to create and implement policies that encourage career planning, development, and choice. It is also suggested that school counsellors or guidance coordinators, with the support of the school management committee, take advantage of opportunities presented by the Parent Teacher Association to educate parents on how to assist or guide their children in making career choices that are in the best interests of both parties. Teachers are urged to pay special attention to students who are having difficulty in the classroom so that they may help them make well-informed and individualized decisions about their future careers. Counsellors in schools should also help students develop their skills for making well-informed professional choices.

Since the home life of a client is a reliable indication of career uncertainty, it is imperative that school

counsellors include family members in the career counselling process. School counsellors and instructors should hold workshops to teach students how to deal with the pressures of peers. Counsellors and instructors should pay more attention to students who are having trouble in the classroom. Counsellors in schools should teach pupils how to stand up for themselves so they can resist the pressure to conform to what their peers want from them. The findings underline the pressing need for revisiting peer, family dynamics and academic policies in Ghana. They suggest the importance of empowering students to have a more active role in their career and call for academic systems that are more rehabilitative than punitive. Thus, understanding these influential factors is crucial for implementing effective career guidance and educational strategies in Ghana.

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