

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF CAREER DECISION MAKING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

By

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive value of socio-psychological factors: peer group attachment and personality traits, on career decision-making among secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significant. The study adopted correlational research design. Using Taro Yamane a sample of 339 students were drawn from public secondary schools, data was collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using simple and multiple regression analyses. Findings revealed that Peer group exhibited a weaker positive predictive value ($\beta = 0.28$) but was still significant. Among personality traits, extraversion ($\beta = 0.23$) and openness ($\beta = 0.18$) showed weak positive contributions, while neuroticism ($\beta = 0.004$) was not a significant predictor. The implications of these findings suggest the need for school-based interventions, such as career counseling, self-efficacy-building activities, and enhanced parental engagement to strengthen students' career decision-making confidence. Recommendations include the engagement of guidance counselors, parental involvement programs, and personality development activities within the school curriculum.

Keywords: Career Decision-Making, Socio-Psychological Factors, Peer Group, Personality Traits



Introduction

Career decision making is a critical process that significantly influences the future academic, professional, and personal trajectories of individuals. It holds particular importance for secondary school students as they navigate the choices that will shape their educational and career paths. Career decision making is necessary in providing appropriate guidance and supports. By doing so, it enhances career outcomes and promotes overall well-being. Hence, a career is seen as a chain of related jobs usually pursued within a single industry or sector, e.g. a career in teaching or a career in the share market. Anything which helps the individual's movement in any sphere of life is considered as career. A person's lifetime progression and acts, particularly those that are connected to their jobs, can be characterized as their career. Instead of merely referring to one's position, a career is sometimes made up of the positions held, titles obtained, and work completed over a lengthy period of time. Career could also be defined as the sum total of life experiences including paid and unpaid work, community, volunteer and family activities (Brand & Halaby, 2016). Microsoft Encarta defines career as somebody's progress in a chosen profession or during that person's working life, or the general path of progress taken by somebody. Omeje (2015) opined that career refers to the wide-ranging activities of a person in the course of life, and encompasses chains of similar occupations, vocations, job positions, engaged by an individual from cradle to grave or from one educational level to another throughout his life. In a student's life, secondary school is the initial stage of embarking on a chosen career path. This selection process necessitates thorough exploration and comprehension of the numerous available choices. Because of their youthful age, students lack the necessary maturity, hence their need for continual assistance, engagement, and direction to make a well-informed decision about their future profession. Establishing a welcoming and inclusive environment is of utmost importance, because it will enable students to explore and grasp different domains before reaching any final assessment. At this stage, it is crucial for students to break free from relying solely on their family and school. They must take the initiative to conduct thorough research and not simply rely on their surroundings. Making decisions requires students to recognize their individual capabilities and interests.

The skills for making appropriate career decisions is very central to the psychological adjustment of the school going adolescents. Secondary school is a stage in education that the adolescents actively explore their interest and aptitudes and develop career-related goals and aspiration Datar and Ahmed (2019). Improved quality of life and social status have been the goal of many individuals as well as societies. The achievement of this quest calls for making an informed career decisions. Invariably, poor career decisions constitute poor quality of life as indicated by unemployment and maladjustment in various fields of endeavor. The inability to make career related decisions among adolescents and young adults is a common problem caused by so many socio-psychological factors such as parental attachment, peer influence etc (Braunstein et al, 2014).



Decision making regarding a career is an important task which occurs among school going adolescents in early years of high school and it is always associated with watershed.

Career decision making is one of the principal gridlocks which poses difficulties in any student's life. Many factors which are intricately knotted play out in this process (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). This implies that the process of career decision making is not a simple process and involves a difficult activities and decisions. In our day, career decision making does not only demand the development of calculated plans but also exhaustive career consultation to fiddle with the ever budding socio-economic state of affairs. Nearly every one of the students in secondary schools lacks precise information about occupational opportunities to help them in navigating their career path thus, the anticipated life expectations marred (Ombaba et al, 2014).

The career decision-making process among secondary school students is influenced by a myriad of socio-psychological factors. Studies have shown that contextual supports and barriers, such as future barrier perceptions and career decision-making self-efficacy, play a significant role in shaping career choices (Lent et al., 2019). Additionally, family pressure has been identified as a key factor influencing the choice of nursing as a career among students (Emenike et al., 2022). Furthermore, the availability of career services, psychological and social factors, and the influence of peer groups have been found to be important determinants of career decision-making among secondary school students (Vaghela, 2019; Akter et al., 2022). Moreover, creative thinking, openmindedness, and interest in vocational programs have been identified as significant predictors of career choices among secondary school students (Vivian, 2023). The influence of socio-economic and prestige factors on career aspirations has also been examined, indicating their impact on the career decisions of secondary school students (Ocansey, 2018).

Some scholars insist that students' career decisions are influenced by their peers. Peer influence refers to the impact that peers, or individuals within the same age group or social circle, have on an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making. It is the power of social interaction among peers that can shape and influence an individual's beliefs, values, and actions. Mtemeri (2020) believes that students are impacted by their peers in a variety of ways while they are selecting careers. Peer advice, encouragement, and education were the most important predictors. Students, however, disputed that they seek peer approval for their career choices. Yi-Hui (2016) observed that student contacts with peers having various interestsand being of different races and origins can promote reflection, knowledge, and beliefs that lead to new ways of thinking about the world, other peers, and eventually, about themselves. Similarly, Kiuru (2018) highlighted the significance of peer contact when he noted that the academic direction of the individual teenager's career path may be influenced in the long run by the peer group to which they belong. Okiror and Otabong (2015) stated that students seek mentorship, information, and guidance on professional concerns from peers who have had comparable experiences, especially when traditional routes such as school career guidance are not functioning well. Peer interactions



were shown to be a crucial component in helping students chooses jobs in a Nigerian study (Bankole & Ogunsakin, 2015).

Peers group and friends influence career decision making regarding professional careers, job selection, employment prospects, and earning tendencies (Naz et al., 2014). In the social sciences, however, Alika (2014) found no significant association between peer group influence and career choice. Conger and Little (2016) found that older siblings serve as role models for younger siblings in terms of how to navigate these transitions successfully, and that younger siblings gain from their older siblings' positive and negative experiences, as well as information about the nature of these transitions. Mileksky (2015) opined that those who have sibling back-up have higher life contentment and sense of worth as well as lower rates of depression and loneliness. Sibling social support is also a powerful compensation for low peer and parental support. Peer attachments also influence learners' self-efficacy in making career decisions (Wolfe & Betz, 2014).

Personality can also be affected by one's environment. Sears and Gordon (2015), for instance, if one is outgoing and assertive and works in an environment where he is not permitted to express his personality, he may have to tone down his vivaciousness, and consequently be unhappy at work because unable to be acting real. Certain personality characteristics are important in career decision making. Gregarious is a good example, a gregarious person does better as a politician or a sales representative than would a quieter and shyer person (Hooley, 2014). It is more helpful for one to know more about his or her personality because this increases one's self-awareness and may help one in identifying a preferred career choice. Sears and Gordon (2015) believe that the choice of an occupation is an expression of personality and that the members of an occupational group have similar personalities. They also maintain that occupational achievement, stability and satisfaction depend on congruence between personalities.

Career-related decisions reflect the degree of an individual's personal attributes and career maturity. It is very difficult for individuals who having lower cognitive ability, self-esteem and personality to gain and maintain employment in a formal organization (Fugate et al, 2019). The empirical research on individual differences (Hogan et al, 2015) in career success is focused on the objective indicator, as some people are predisposed to evaluate their career favorably. Several studies highlighted the importance of personality characteristics/attributes.

However, the specific ways in which these socio-psychological factors operate within the context of Secondary Schools in Anambra State, and how they impact on career decision making among secondary school students, have not been empirically explored, hence the present study.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, an alarming number of secondary school students in Anambra State have been observed making career choices that do not align with their individual strengths, interests, or future



job market demands. This misalignment has led to various negative consequences, including underemployment, unemployment, and career dissatisfaction, which severely limit these students' potential for future economic and personal success. For instance, many students, influenced by societal pressure or parental expectations, select careers they may not be passionate about or suited for, only to face difficulties in achieving success and fulfillment later in life. This career misalignment, if not properly addressed, could perpetuate cycles of economic instability, frustration, and diminished professional growth, not only for the individuals involved but also for the broader economy of Anambra State.

The root causes of these misguided career decisions are multifaceted and include a combination of socio-psychological and cultural factors. Parental influence, while well-intentioned, often places undue pressure on students to pursue careers based on family expectations rather than the students' personal interests or abilities. Furthermore, peer influence contributes significantly to shaping students' career choices, sometimes encouraging conformity over individual exploration. However, a crucial set of factors that have been less explored are the internal psychological dynamics of students specifically, self-efficacy, academic self-concept, and personality traits which play an equally important role in how students make career decisions. These factors influence students' confidence in their ability to succeed in specific career paths, their understanding of their academic potential, and their capacity to handle the challenges that come with career decision-making.

In light of this, it becomes essential to explore the underlying factors influencing career decision-making among secondary school students, with a specific focus on the socio-psychological dimensions. Addressing the psychological aspects of career choice such as self-efficacy, academic self-concept, and personality traits alongside the socio-cultural influences like parental and peer pressures, will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges students face. This understanding is vital for developing interventions and career guidance programs that not only empower students to make informed decisions but also enhance their confidence in their career paths. Despite the importance of these socio-psychological factors, there is still a notable lack of empirical research specifically addressing these influences in the context of secondary school students in Anambra State. The existing gap in literature underscores the need for targeted research that examines how self-efficacy, personality traits, academic self-concept, and external factors such as parental and peer influence intersect students' career choices. Thus, the present study sought to address this critical gap by investigating the socio-psychological factors that predict career decision-making among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:



- 1. What is the predictive value of peer group on career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra State?
- 2. What is the predictive value of personality trait on career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study;

Ho₁. Peer group will not significantly predict career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Ho₅. Personality trait will not significantly predict career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Method

This study employed correlational research design. The study area was Anambra state which spans an area of 4,816.2 square kilometers and is home to a population of approximately 5,084,195 people (NPC, 2015). This study encompassed a population of 13,742 SS2 students (6,600 males and 7,142 females) in public secondary schools within Anambra State. The schools in Anambra State are categorized into six education zones. These zones are Awka, Aguata, Nnewi, Otuocha, Ogidi, and Onitsha. The overall count of public schools in Anambra state stands at 268 (Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission, Awka, 2024). The sample of the study consist of 339 males and females of SS2 students. The sampling technique for this research study was determined using a proportionate stratified sampling which will follow a multi-stage sampling technique.

To address the research objectives, twobinstruments were utilized for data collection: Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) developed by Armsdenand Greenberg (1987). The original version consists of 28 parents and 25 peer attachment items, yielding two attachment scores. The Big Five Personality Inventory developed by (John et al, 1991) assesses the Big Five personality factors (and underlying facets) extraversion (assertiveness, activity), neuroticism (anxiety, depression), conscientiousness (order, self-discipline), agreeableness (altruism, compliance) and openness (aesthetics, ideas). It is a 4-point Likert scale, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The scale included items that were designed to measure the five domains of career decision self-efficacy; namely, accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future and problem solving. The answers were obtained using 4-point scale. The two scales were modified to 11 items and 8 items respectively. The instrument for data collection was validated through content and face validation by two experts in Guidance and Counselling and an expert in measurement and evaluation all in the



Department of Educational Foundations Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. A reliability test for the questionnaire was conducted by choosing a sample of thirty (30) (15 males and 15 females) respondents from two secondary schools in Enugu State to obtain the reliability score of the questionnaire. The value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency. The questionnaire reported coefficient values of Peer Attachment = 0.83, Personality = 0.87, and Career Decision Making = 0.81. The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of two research assistants who were briefed on how to administer and retrieve copies of the instrument, and the time allocated to the respondents. The complete copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot. Simple and multiple regression statistics were used to answer research questions 1 - 2 and test hypotheses 1 - 2 at 0.05 level of significance. The analysis were carried out using a software for data analysis called Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25

Results

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of peer group on career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra state?

Table 1: Simple Regression Analysis with Peer Group Attachment as Predictor of Career Decision-Making Among Students in Public Secondary School In Anambra State.

Predictor	В	SE	β	R <mark>e</mark> mark
(Constant)	20.81	1.47		
Peer Attachment	0.47	0.09	0.28	Weak positive predictive value
R =0.28				
$R^2 = 0.08$				
Adj = 0.08				

B = Unstandardized regression coefficients; SE= Standard Error; β = Standardized regression coefficients (beta weight)

The summary of simple regression result displayed in Table 1 shows students' peer attachment as predictor of their career decision-making. The regression R squared (R^2) = 0.08 shows that peer attachment contributes 8% in explaining the variance in students' career decision-making. The B value was 0.47 while the regression weight (β) = 0.28 suggests that peer attachment has a weak positive predictive value for career decision-making.



Research question 2: What is the predictive value of personality traits on career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra state?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis with Personality Traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neurotism and Openness) as Predictors of Career Decision-making of Students in public secondary school in Anambra State.

Predictor	В	SE	β	Remark
(Constant)	10.25	1.62		
Extraversion	0.89	0.23	0.23	Weak predictive value
Agreeableness	0.29	0.15	0.11	Weak predictive value
Conscientiousness	0.48	0.16	0.02	Negligible predictive value
Neurotism	0.10	0.11	.004	Negligible predictive
Openness	0.65	0.20	0.18	Weak predictive value
R = 0.55				Moderate predictive value
$R^2 = 0.31$				
Adj = 0.30				
F = 29.31				

As displayed in Table 2, the multiple regression analysis with five-factor personality traits were used as predictors of career decision-making among students in Anambra state. The multiple regression R was 0.55 while the squared multiple regression R (R^2) was 0.31. The R indicates that jointly, the five personality traits have moderate predictive value for career decision-making among students while the R^2 shows that jointly, the students' personality traits explained 31% of the variance in career decision-making. Specifically, extraversion had the highest contribution as shown by the $\beta = 0.23$ while the least was Neurotism which has the lowest beta weight ($\beta = 0.004$).



Hypothesis 1: Peer group is not a significant predictor of career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra state.

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis with Peer Group Attachment as Predictor of Career Decision-making of Students in public secondary school in Anambra State.

Predictor	В	SE	β	t	P	Remark
(Constant)	20.81	1.47		14.15	0.00	
Peer Attachment	0.47	0.09	0.28	5.31	0.00	Significant

Table 3 shows that peer attachment is a significant predictor of students' career decision-making self-efficacy, β = 0.28, t = 5.31, p <0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected, since the p-value was less than 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2: Personality traits will not be a significant predictor of career decision making among secondary school students in Anambra state.

Table 4: Test of Simple Regression Analysis with Personality Traits as a Predictor of Career Decision-making of Students in public secondary school in Anambra State.

Predictor	В	SE	β	T	p	Remark
(Constant)	10.25	1.62		6.32	0.000	
Extraversion	0.89	0.23	0.23	3.78	0.000	Significant
Agreeableness	0.29	0.15	0.11	1.972	0.049	Significant
Conscientiousness	0.48	0.16	0.02	3.004	0.003	Significant
Neurotism	0.10	0.11	.004	.843	0.400	Not Significant
Openness	0.65	0.20	0.18	3.21	0.000	Significant
R =0.55						
$R^2 = 0.31$						
Adj = 0.30						
F = 29.31					0.000	Significant

As shown in Table 4, jointly, personality traits were significant predictors of career decision-making students in secondary school in Anambra state, R = 0.55, F(5, 333) = 29.31; p < 0.05. The



null hypothesis was rejected since the p-value was less than 0.05 level of significance. However, one of the personality traits (Neurotism) did not make significant unique contribution to career decision making self-efficacy of students.

Discussion

The results showed a significant positive relationship between peer group and career decision-making, with a regression coefficient (β) of 0.28, indicating a weak positive predictive value. The p-value was less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as the research by Mtemeri (2020) who found out that peer group influence career decision-making. Pointing out that students are influenced by their peers in making career decisions in several ways, which include peer advice, encouragement and peer education. Also, Ajayi et al. (2022) in their study examined the influence of selected social factors on career decision-making, and the results showed that peer attachment is a significant predictor of career decision-making. Bandura (1977) suggest that peer support can enhance self-efficacy in various contexts, including career decision-making. Similarly, social learning theory suggests that positive interactions and support from peers can foster confidence in making career decisions.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that personality traits collectively had a moderate predictive value, with an R of 0.55, $R^2 = 0.31$, meaning that personality traits accounted for 31% of the variance in career decision-making. Extraversion and openness had weak but significant positive predictive values, while neuroticism showed no significant contribution. These results support previous research, such as Borchert (2022) and Duru et al. (2021), which suggests that certain personality traits are positively correlated with career decision-making. This implies that students with outgoing and open personalities are more likely to have the confidence to make career-related decisions.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to determine the predictive value of peer group and personality traits on career decision-making among secondary school students in Anambra State. Based on the analyses of the data collected, it was revealed that these factors contribute significantly to students' confidence in making career decisions showed moderate predictive values, emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships and personal confidence in career-related self-efficacy. To this end, it is important for school administrators and educators to implement strategies that foster positive peer attachments among students. Career counseling programs could be enriched by peer support systems. Practical methods, such as experiential learning and self-reflection exercises, can further empower students to make informed career choices without undue stress or uncertainty. In the same vein, government and educational stakeholders should establish policies that encourage positive school environments where students are supported in developing confidence and interpersonal skills essential for their future. Career decision-making should be recognized as vital



to students' overall personal and academic development, impacting both their immediate achievements and long-term aspirations.

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