

Trait-Factor Counselling Approach on Senior Secondary Student's Career Choice in Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper examines Trait-Factor Counselling Approach on Senior Secondary Student's Career Choice in Kogi State, Nigeria. Students are faced with the dilemma of choosing a lucrative and befitting career that they would pursue in time. This makes students prone to different opinion from parents, teachers and peer. Hence, the need for proper career counselling using the trait-factor counselling approach. The trait and factor theory operates under the premise that it is possible to measure both individual talents and the attributes required in particular jobs. Trait-factor counselling approaches assume that career choice may be facilitated and career outcomes optimized through a fairly straight forward process of matching an individual's most relevant work-relevant characteristics (abilities, interests, values, etc) with information regarding job activities, demands, rewards, and availability. The counselling process for this approach typically starts with a client interview, then proceeds to extensive psychometric assessment of the client's work-relevant characteristics, and is finalized with an interpretation of assessment results with connections being drawn between these results and one or more occupational classification systems. Many factors can influence or come into play in students' career choice such as interest in field, academic ability, familiarity, economic stability, and influential people can all play a role in their career choice. Conclusions and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Trait-Factor Counselling Approach, Career Choice, Career Counselling, Career Guidance and Counselling, Career Decision Making

1. Introduction

The emphasis on careers in human life is imperative, because at a certain stage in human development, the need for a career becomes so apparent that individuals cannot but begin to plan, explore, choose and begin to seek ways of how to develop a chosen profession or explore other opportunities that come one's way in order to have a fulfilling career and live a life full of joy and satisfaction. Career is not merely a job, but it is about embracing ideas of planned and structured advancement that lead to career development. Career development is one of the key areas of practices for Human Resource Development. The most popular goal in career development activities is to encourage the exploration of many alternatives in the profession. One of the constructs of career development is career aspiration.

A clearer knowledge of the dynamics of human choice is essential in understanding their career development better. One of the most important choice that shape the life of an individual is career aspiration. A healthy career choice might affect the whole of an individual's life. Critical career choice are made during the first year of senior secondary school education. In that period, senior secondary school students should concentrate their efforts on their personal traits and occupations. Career information is therefore an indispensable necessity in the life of every potential worker, to create an opportunity for healthy choice of their vocation. The necessity of career choice in the life journey of every individual can neither be marginalized nor overemphasized.

Both sociologists and psychologists have made cogent efforts to improve career choice of students. Career choice has predictive value in identifying future occupational choice, and researchers (Gottfredson, 2005) have used the knowledge of career choice as a way to gain a better understanding of individuals' career choice and their progress in making appropriate career decisions.

2. Trait and Factor Counselling Approach

Frank Parsons is regarded as the founder of the vocational guidance movement. He developed the talent – matching approach, which was later developed into the Trait and Factor Theory of Occupational choice. Frank Parsons (1854 – 1908) is known as the father of Vocational Guidance. He is best known for his interests in helping individuals make occupational and career choices. At the center of Parson's theory is the concept of matching (Zunker, 2002).

Parsons states that occupational decision making occurs when people have achieved: an accurate understanding of their individual traits (aptitudes, interests, personal abilities), a knowledge of jobs and the labour market, and rational and objective judgment about the relationship between their individual traits and the labour market. Some of the basic assumptions that underlie this theory are: Every person has a unique pattern of traits made up of their interests, values, abilities and personality characteristics, these traits can be objectively identified and profiled to represent an individual's potential; Every occupation is made up of factors required for the successful performance of that occupation. These factors can be objectively identified and represented as an occupational profile; It is possible to identify a fit or match between individual traits and job factors using a straight forward problem-solving decision making process; The closer the match between personal traits and job factors the greater the likelihood for successful job performance and satisfaction.

The trait and factor theory operates under the premise that it is possible to measure both individual talents and the attributes required in particular jobs. It also assumes that people may be matched to an occupation that's a good fit. Parsons suggests that when individuals are in jobs best suited to their abilities they perform best and their productivity is highest. In his book, 'choosing a vocation', Parsons maintains that personal counsel is fundamental to the career search. In particular, he notes seven stages for a career counselor to work through with clients:

Personal data: Create a statement of key facts about the person, remembering to include every fact that has bearing on the vocational problem.

Self-analysis: Self-examination is done in private and under the instruction of the counselor. Every tendency and interest that might impact on the choice of a life work should be recorded.

The client's own choice and decision: This may show itself in the first two stages. The counsellor must bear in mind that the choice of vocation should be made by the client, with the counsellor acting as guide.

Counsellor's analysis: The counsellor tests the client's decision to see if it is in line with the "main quest".

Outlook on the vocational field: The counsellor should be familiar with industrial knowledge such as lists and classifications of industries and vocations, in addition to locations of training and apprenticeships.

Induction and advice: A broad-minded attitude coupled with logical and clear reasoning is critical at this stage.

General helpfulness: The counsellor helps the client to fit into the chosen work, and to reflect on the decision.

Much of Parsons' work still guides career counselling today, though it is not without criticism. Matching assumes a degree of stability within the labour market. However, the reality is that the market's volatility means individuals must be prepared to change and adapt to their circumstances. Trait-factor theory has been around for a long time and is still being used by many career practitioners in one form or another. Many of the aptitude, personality and interest tests and occupational information materials that emerged from this approach have evolved and remain in use today (e.g; True Colours, General Aptitude Test Battery, Data-People-Things Interest Test, Occupational profiles and the ever expanding computer – based career guidance programs).

Trait-factor counselling approaches assume that career choice may be facilitated and career outcomes optimized through a fairly straight forward process of matching an individual's most relevant work-relevant characteristics (abilities, interests, values, etc) with information regarding job activities, demands, rewards, and availability. The counselling process for this approach typically starts with a client interview, then proceeds to extensive psychometric assessment of the client's work-relevant characteristics, and is finalized with an interpretation of assessment results with connections being drawn between these results and one or more occupational classification systems.

Trait-factor counselling assumes that having been provided with accurate information about self and jobs, most individuals will be able to make a rational choice career (Arnold, 2007).

3. History of Trait-Factor Counselling

Conceptually, the origins of trait-factor approaches to career counselling can be traced to Frank Parson's pioneering efforts to better match individuals with jobs. This matching process involved using an accurate understanding of an individual's work-relevant attributes (skills, aptitudes, interests, etc.) and thorough knowledge of both jobs and the employment market to optimize job choice. Parsons proposed that once self-knowledge about jobs, a rational decision could be made regarding the best match between the two for a given individual. One of the greatest challenges to this approach, then and now, involves how to best define individuals and jobs (Robinson, 2009).

It was not until the 1930s that statistical applications and psychometric methods had advanced to the point that the matching dimensions could be empirically derived and quantitatively evaluated. The Minnesota Employment Stabilization Research Institute was established at the University of Minnesota to assist workers who had lost their jobs due to the Great Depression. The Minnesota researchers operationalized Parson's basic concepts using the research methods of differential psychology to develop psychometric instrumentation and occupational classification systems. During this decade, Edmund G. Williamson was appointed director of the University of Minnesota Testing Bureau (now the University of Minnesota Counselling and Consulting Center). Williamson successfully adapted the methods developed by the Minnesota Employment Stabilization Research Institute to address the career development concerns of college students. Williamson wrote so prolifically and influentially on his approach that it is sometimes referred to as the Minnesota points of view (Robinson, 2009).

4. Concept of Career Choice and Career Counselling

Career is not merely a job, but it is about embracing ideas of planned and structured advancement that leads to career development. Callanan (2003) conceptualizes that career development as one of the three areas of practices for Human Resource Development. The most popular goal in career development activities is to encourage the exploration of many alternatives in the profession.

One of the constructs of career development is career aspirations. A clearer knowledge of the dynamics of human aspirations is essential in understanding their career development better (Baruch, 2004).

Patton and McMahon (2014) argue that career choice exerts a major influence on the development of individuals' careers. This is due to the motivation of the employees themselves that has an ambition and desire to perform the best in their work. Powell and Butterfield (2003) explain that career choice refers to individuals' desires for future employment. Career choice is an aspect of the internal dimension of career that determines success of a career. Career choice essentially emerges from an individual, which in turn influences one's value, norms and beliefs. It is therefore influenced by the social context and strongly related to what motivates people to choose or remain in a certain career, job and lifestyle (Baruch, 2004).

Career counselling is a service that enables each learner in the global world to derive optimal educational benefits in choosing the career of their choice based on guidance from their counsellors so as to actualize their potentialities. Sambo (2008) opined that many careers or occupations are unknown to many people. As such, one cannot choose what he does not have an idea upon. One may stumble into an appropriate career by sheer luck, but the most important thing is making a wise choice.

The word career has been a derivative of French and Latin origin. Its simplest definition is given by Geciki (2002) as; the occupational, commercial or industrial activity that a person may adopt during his educational life or in some other part or till his death. Redman and Wilkinson (2001) clarify career as the application of a person's cognition and capabilities, providing command over profession, timely work expertise and a basis of developing and bettering business networks. Individuals choose career planning to pursue the professional objectives, getting informed about upcoming opportunities, their results and their timely evaluations. It is considered to be a beginning in the stages of career choices but still of paramount significance. People prefer the career that could provide them sound basis for an improved standard of living. Career planning done on individual basis is a plan as to how an individual would foster in his profession. As regards the organizational level, it talks about promotional aspects together with personal development quadrant. So briefly career planning is the process whereby the individual himself or his organization helps in pursuing

his growth objectives in conformity with his expertise in the area, capabilities and aims (Bayraktaroğlu, 2011).

A career can be defined as a pattern of work experiences comprising the entire life span of a person and which is generally seen with regard to a number of phases or stages reflecting the transition from one stage of life to the next. Similarly, Collin (1998) explains that the term career arises from the interaction of individuals with organisations and society. This interaction, as Savickas (2009) proposes, is no longer merely just a sequence of jobs but is now a story that working people build about themselves.

5. Career Guidance and Counselling

Career counselling basically consists of four elements: (a) helping individuals to gain greater self-awareness in areas such as interests, values, abilities, and personality style, (b) connecting students to resources so that they can become more knowledgeable about jobs and occupations, (c) engaging students in the decision-making process in order to choose a career path that is well suited to their own interests, values, abilities and personality style, and (d) assisting individuals to be active managers of their career paths (including managing career transitions and balancing various life roles) as well as becoming lifelong learners in the sense of professional development over the lifespan (UNESCO, 2002).

Practising career counsellors more and more call what they do “whole people” career counselling. Today, career counsellors are less concerned with helping people make initial choices and more concerned about planning a career path that will involve a series of occupations. They are also aware that many people who come for career counselling need either concurrent or separate work on psychological problems that inhibit or preclude them from making choices altogether (Brown & Brooks, 1991). This more comprehensive approach to careers guidance requires a wide variety of knowledge bases and skills as we now enter the twenty first century. They certainly put ever increasing demands on both the experienced and inexperienced Guidance Counsellor.

The place of Career Guidance and Counselling in education systems has been of great concern in many African countries. Its presence in the system can be likened to that of psychology in the USA in the late 19th Century that is why psychology as a discipline was regarded as a branch of philosophy. Hence, to many educationists in Africa, guidance and

counselling can be given any teacher, whether graduate or non-graduate teacher. A teacher in a school is appointed and is referred to as the career master/mistress or career adviser. In most cases, he/she has no training and has no insight into the functions of a guidance-counsellor. It is obvious, therefore, that there is much to be done before Career Guidance and Counselling can have a proper place in our education systems (Navin, 1985).

5.1 Types of Career Guidance and Counselling

There are two major types of Counselling, namely: individual counselling and group counselling. These include:

Individual career guidance and Counselling: This is referred to as one-to-one counselling. It occurs between the professionally trained Counsellor (Therapist) and his client (Counselee). The goal of this is to help the client to understand himself, clarify and direct his thought, in order to make a worthwhile decision. Through this, clients’ problems are alleviated. Onayase and Onayase (2009) remarked that it is mainly to bring about change in the client either by altering maladaptive behavior, learning the decision making process or preventing problems.

Group career guidance and Counselling: This is a counselling session that takes place between the professionally trained counsellor and a group of people. Number of this group should not be more than seven, or at least ten, in order to have a cohesive group and an effective well controlled counselling session. Members of the groups are clients/counselees whose tasks or problems that are meant for resolution are similar. During group counselling, a free atmosphere is allowed and freedom of speech is encouraged. The counselees are free to express themselves individually as counselling progresses so that problems to be resolved would be open for all to consider and benefit from. All counselees express their feelings and the counselor during group counselling is to help remove the marks covering the problem. He helps open up the problem with the professional competence and knowledge he possesses. The counselor is not just a member of the group; he is to direct the affairs and situations.

5.2 Career Guidance and Counselling Activities / Programmes

This section presents relevant related literature on career guidance and counseling in other nations.

5.2.1 Career Guidance and Counselling

In Malta, there is a career guidance policy that is implemented by the government. Career guidance in schools largely focuses on helping students make important educational decisions at particular points in time, especially during the last years of secondary schooling, when students make choices on subject clusters and start seeking information on post-secondary educational institutions or job opportunities (Super, 1990).

(i) Transition Talks: The students are provided with specific guidance to facilitate their transitions throughout their compulsory education and beyond especially from one level to the next.

(ii) One-to-one Interventions: To further assist students in choosing their career path, guidance teachers in Maltese schools conduct one-to-one helping interventions with students with special emphasis to the secondary students who need to make subject related choices, and with fourth and fifth form students who seek to clarify their thoughts about their future career plans. The aims of such interventions include those of helping students explore their feelings and concerns, reflect on the information they have collected, and work on any emotional difficulty which students may experience in making career decisions.

(iii) Career Seminars: Career Seminars organised by the Guidance and Counselling Unit for school leavers give students an opportunity to understand better the choices they have to face when they reach the end of their secondary education. This programme is only compulsory for state secondary schools and runs on a “first come first served” basis for independent and church schools in Malta.

(iv) Career Orientation Visits: Introductory work place visits are organised by guidance teachers in order to encourage direct exploration which helps students to make some tentative choices about particular interests and investigate those choices more thoroughly before making commitments.

(v) Work Experience: Although there is no formal requirement of work experience during compulsory schooling, some guidance teachers also organise work placements or job shadowing experiences for fifth formers. These activities motivate students to become more accustomed to working realities and provide a firmer basis for career decisions. A number of schools also organise “mock interview sessions” to help students get accustomed to prepare for and attend interviews.

(vi) Career Week/Days: The aim of Career Week/Days is to raise awareness among fifth formers who are at a key decision making point in their life on issues relating to careers and the world of work.

(vii) Parental Involvement: Parental support is particularly critical to adolescents’ career choice. Guidance teachers organise talks for parents both on topics of a personal nature and on topics related to careers. Occasionally, schools invite parents and alumni to address students on career-related topics.

6. Factors Influencing Students’ Career Choice

Many factors can influence or come into play in secondary school students’ career choice. Students will typically take into account the quality of life they want when they are older. Factors such as interest in field, academic ability, familiarity, economic stability, and influential people can all play a role in their career choice (Beggs et al., 2008).

Interest in Field: Some students grow up knowing what they want to do in life. These are the students who will go the extra mile to reach their dream job. However, students often settle on a different path due to many factors they can’t control. Students will research their career choice path and explore everything about it. The salary and benefits of that job do not play a role in this career choice. In a research study the factor “match with interest” rated over job characteristics, major attributes, and psychological and social benefits in importance when students aspire a major. Students will seek out schools that are well known for that major or trade. Most students today are more concerned with the amount of money they can earn. However, there are a few students who pursue their dreams.

Academic Ability and Aptitude: Many students choose their major based on their academic ability. However, some students do not have the ability or the work habits to succeed in some majors that may require more study than other fields of studies. These students may find a better fit in a less work intensive major that requires fewer difficult classes. This affects the career aspirations paths of these students. Other students have the ability to handle majors with greater workloads and aspire the career path that will lead to a job requiring more education. Examples in this category include veterinarians, doctors, or lawyers. For jobs such as these, students need more than one degree.

White Collar vs. Blue Collar: Most parents want their children to go college and get great jobs. However, not all high school students want to or have the ability to go to college. Some students want to be carpenters and construction workers. The workforce will always need the blue collar people who do manual labor jobs. Even though technology continues to evolve and grow, there will always be a

demand for trade centered who want to work straight out of high school. Some high school students join the armed forces after graduating. Such students may want to follow the path of their parents or find that military service is a way to pay for more education. The armed forces can help students who struggle with structure and motivation, something that students need when continuing on to college or trade school. Some students will go to trade schools instead of attending college. Trade schools can provide training in fields such as mechanics, welding, electricity, or plumbing. The short school year allows students to go to work more quickly after graduating from high school instead of having to stay in school for four or more years. Trade schools also allow students to work in a field of interest while going to school.

Personality: Personality is another important factor in career choice. Studies have shown that students will choose a major that they think will fit their personality type. The confidence that a student has can determine how far a student will go with their education. Students who believe in themselves have more confidence and are more likely to go for what they want instead of settling for something that is comfortable. The personality of students can also play a role in career choice. According to studies, students who have an investigative personality are more likely to major in science fields. Students with an artistic personality are more likely to major in arts and in interdisciplinary fields. Students who are very social people are more likely to major in the social sciences.

Influential People: Family and friends are considered to be an influential part of students' career choice. Parents with a career background most often have an impact in where students go to college. Family role models have more of an influence on what students major. There are many people in a student's life who can influence their career aspirations. Most of the time, parents and friends play a large role, but coaches and teachers can also have a huge impact on a student's life. Teachers and coaches can help a student to do better in school, to get into college or to get on a better career choice. The impact that these adults have on young students can have a major influence on their career aspirations. Academic or athletic coaches are role models for students and also play a big part in molding future generations. Coaches help prepare young men and women for the challenges outside of high school by exposing them to challenges including situations in and out of the classroom. How students react to these lessons early in life can play a big part in what decisions students make down the road. A bad role model or coach can have a negative influence leading to bad life choices,

while a good role model or coach can have a positive influence leading to good decisions.

Family Business: Students whose parents own and operate small businesses may want or feel obligated to follow in their parents' footsteps. Students may consider the ease of life that is available to them because a job would be available to them right out of school, they could hold a high position within the business, and there is a possibility that they might own and operate the business one day. However, children of family business owners often have more experience with how the business world operates. These students have often worked in the family business their whole life, experiencing all of what their parents went through in the day to day operation of the business. This can have a positive or negative effect on the student.

Economic Stability: Many students believe that to live a comfortable lifestyle they need to be economically stable. When these students look into career aspirations, they seek out the higher salary jobs or they look for majors that involve the most job security. The financial aspects that students consider include high earning potential, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Given the current economy, and American culture, many students think they need a high paying job to make it in society these days. Along with stability during their career, some students may even look ahead to retirement. Students want to make sure they are secure for the rest of their lives, and may look into careers that have benefits to help them in the long run.

Gender: In the past, gender roles in the work force have been uneven and unfair. Women usually had lower paying jobs than men. Currently the playing field between the two are more even. However, when looking at the workforce you can still find men and women in stereotypical job fields. Studies have shown that young men and women have different styles when it comes to choosing a career. Men have a more liberal and progressive style of thinking. Women prefer a hierarchical style of thinking.

Race: Along with gender differences in employment, there are also differences in race. In the past, minorities faced many barriers when trying to enter the workforce. However, the workforce is now required to have ethnic diversity among employees. The gains in diversity have been small because of career choices made by minorities, going from blue collar jobs to jobs in corporate and business settings. Studies have also shown that colleges have trouble bringing more ethnicities into agricultural majors. A major portion of ethnic students career aspirations, whereas the Caucasian race still represents a major part of the student body in colleges.

Parental Factors: The role and influence of parents as partners in career planning of their children is however described that when they said that adolescents' self-esteem and ability to make decisions are related directly to the quality of parent-adolescent communication; as high school students have cited their parents as offering more assistance in career planning than teachers, counsellors or peers. Even though parents are influential in the career development process of their children, and they often wish to be included, yet a specific role for parents is often not defined. But in all these, a career crisis may develop when there is a mismatch in terms of the ego strength of the child and the environmental pressures that challenge their identity. Adolescents straddle the line of childhood obedience and adult independence. In a sense, they are learning how to make up their own minds, perhaps ignoring what they are told.

7. Career Decision-Making

Research indicates that career decision-making among students in contemporary society has not been well understood (Beukes, 2009). There have been certain factors that have been identified as contributing to career decision-making among young people. Harren (1999) describes disillusionment in career decision making processes among students as being high and attribute this to situations where students and academia are caught up in a dilemma brought about by changes in the working world and changing economic trends. These changes contribute to students evaluating their college education in terms of the market value often leading to students making unrealistic and idealized career plans.

According to Harren (1999), the career decision making process involves six tools. These include engaging in making a choice and knowing that one needs to make a decision and thinking about it; understanding one's self and one's options; identifying, expanding and narrowing a list of possible options; deciding on a study plan or occupation; acting on or implementing the plan; and finally, reflecting on decisions made and knowing that one has made a good choice.

Langley's comprehensive model of career development (as cited in Beukes, 2009) also proposes similar tools that may assist young people in making successful and appropriate career decisions. These tools consist of identifying needs; evaluating life roles; identifying interests; identifying other relevant factors relating to personal or socio-cultural factors, for example; evaluating career maturity; evaluating decision-making ability; obtaining career information; integrating self-

information with career information; making a career choice and finally planning one's career.

According to Harren's decision-making theory which was developed from career decisions made by college students, there are three career decision-making styles:

- The rational style where individuals adopt a logical and systematic approach to decisions
- The intuitive approach where there is more reliance on internal affective states in decision making processes
- The dependent style where decisions are contingent upon the reactions of friends, family, and peers.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Career counsellors must understand that when they implement strategies and techniques as career interventions, a student's career choice is dependent on a number of factors, some of which may be or may not be controlled by the student. Some students face enduring physical and intellectual difficulties to complete any kind of work whilst other students draw on different values to direct their career pathways. The approaches used by career counsellors therefore need to reflect these circumstances. The approaches must also reflect the many influences that impact on a student's career decisions such as individual variables (beliefs, health) social context (family, socio-economic status) and environmental context (political decisions, employment market) plus culture, community, the school the student attends and the geographic location of the school.

Finding the correct strategy and technique for students is important. This is because for some students, the idea of working full time after they leave secondary school creates emptiness in their life. Career counsellors have a role to implement career interventions that help find meaning in work for the student and the meaning students place on their future careers.

The strategies and techniques developed from career interventions could also be based on narratives, dialogue and written journals. This allows the students to understand that there needs to be a balance between work and family and that obstacles and hurdles are a part of life. It is also important that students are made aware of chance moments and making the most from the opportunities that arise. Through these types of approaches students are encouraged to set goals, explore new ideas, review and reflect and accept new challenges in life.

Career counsellors should allow students to overcome their difficulties by changing their views of society and by understanding that jobs are not necessarily linked by the stereotyping imposed by society. Students can therefore draw upon past writings and stories as a process of providing meaning to their life. Through conversations and writings students may ask questions such as, Why has this happened to me? or Why is life like this? In the end a career counsellor implements strategies and techniques to provide students with the skills necessary to equip themselves for life.

Interventions in schools are required because there is a growing trend in developed countries toward career dissatisfaction and apathy. To overcome this, educators (career counsellors) need to help students to resist the tendency to be routine and take measures necessary to find their element. Element is regarded as the point at which natural talent meets personal passion. When students arrive at their element, they feel most themselves, most inspired and achieve at their highest levels.

Career counsellors can help students to reach their element then the students will feel they are doing exactly what they were born to do. This is important for a number of reasons namely: personal (who they are and what they are capable of being and doing with their life), purpose (effort to find it), economic (sense of direction). Therefore if students find what they want in life it will help them to find work that fulfills them. Strategies and techniques include positive encouragement, mind-mapping, vision boards.

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