

RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY TO THE CHOICE OF CAREERS: THE CASE OF YOUTHS IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

A survey design was adopted to examine the relationship of individual identity to the choice of careers, with particular reference to the youths in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Five villages were purposively selected from each of the four clans constituting UyoLGA while simple random sampling was used to select a total of 400 youths between the ages of 15 and 34 years from the five villages. Questionnaire was used for data collection and analyzed using frequency count, percentages and mean. The findings revealed among others that the youths do not consider their personal endowments and aptitudes in their choice of careers/jobs but venture into any available career/occupation with reasonable income. Thus, youths should be guided to choose careers/vocations that reflect their interests, abilities, skills, values and personalities.

Keywords: *Individual identity, choice of career, youths, relationship*

INTRODUCTION

Career choice is one of the most important decisions an individual has to make in life, especially in societies with abundance of career possibilities. Young people face a major life decision challenges during the early adulthood and late adolescence period in the choice of occupation or career (suitable work role). This period also coincides with the fifth stage in Erikson's eight stages of the lifespan, that is identity versus identity confusion which usually occur at about the same time as adolescence. This is a time of being interested in finding out who one is, what one is all about, and where one is heading in life (Santrock, 2006). It is important for young people to be able to identify themselves and clarify their goals in life to be able to make decisions on what to do for a living, whether in the form of career, or occupation. Occupation refers to any job that is engaged by a person to earn a living, whereas a career refers to a job that requires intensive training for one to earn a living for life, such as law, medicine, engineering, etc. (Seifert, Hoffnung and Hoffnung, 1997).

Like other developmental milestones, career choice is the result of a dynamic interaction between person and environment (Berk, 2001). Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2004) explain that many factors enter in, including individual ability, personality,

education, socio-economic ethnic background, the advice of school counsellors, life experience, and societal values. Youths (or adolescents) experiment with the numerous roles and identities they draw from the surrounding culture. VanderZanden (1989) defines identity as a person's sense of placement within the world-meaning that one attaches to oneself in the broader context of life. Constructing an identity involves defining who you are, what you value, and the directions you choose to follow in life (Berk, 2001). Self-assessment is, therefore part of identity formation. An individual should be able to gather information about himself, such as his interest, values, roles, skills and aptitudes, preferred environment, developmental needs and realities of life. Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2004) observe that to form an identity, adolescents must ascertain and organize their abilities, needs, interests, and desires so that they can be expressed in a social context.

Miller (1991) maintains that knowing individual's interest and abilities is extremely important when deciding on a career, and that it should be the first step in making a career choice. It then follows that, self-definition or identity formation is important and must precede career choice if the right choice of career must be made. According to Graig and Kermis (1995), identity formation forms a framework for organizing and integrating behaviours in diverse areas of one's life. They explain that identity reconciles the person's own inclinations and talents with earlier identifications or roles that were supplied by parents, peers or society. Also, identity formation has been described as an explicit theory of oneself as a rational agent - one who acts on the basis of reason, takes responsibility for those actions he can explain them (Moshman, 1998). This search for what is true and real about the self is the driving force behind many new commitments to a vocation among others (Berk, 2001).

Identity also reflects people's values. Self-definition emerges when young people choose values and people to be loyal to, rather than simply accepting their parent's choices (Papalia, et al. 2004). Santrock (2006) advises that an important aspect of choosing a career is to match up with an individual's value. He explains that, when people know what they value most - what is important to them in life - they can refine their career choice more effectively. Among the values that some individuals think are important in choosing a career are working with people they like, working in a career with prestige, making a lot of money, being happy, not having to work long hours, being mentally challenged, having plenty of time for leisure pursuits, working in the right geographical location and working where physical and mental health are important.

Another aspect of identity that relate to career choice is one's personality. Research points to the fact that personality type is related to identity status (Clancy and Dollinger, 1993). Erickson was the first to recognize identity as a major personality achievement of young people and as a step toward becoming a productive happy adult. Some young people may venture into certain career areas because these match their personality traits. Personality type theory of John Holland, emphasizes that it is important to match an individual's personality with a particular career. Holland believes that when individuals find careers that fit their personality, they are

more likely to enjoy the work and stay in the job longer than if they had taken a job not suited to their personality. The six basic career-related personality types proposed by Holland include realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. He, however, explains that individuals rarely are pure types, and most person's are a combination of two or three types (Halonen and Santrock, 1997).

Self-concept is an integral part of one's identity. Self-concept refers to domain (where specific evaluations of the self is carried out) - specific evaluations of the self. Individuals can make self-evaluations in many domains of their lives - academic, athletic, appearance, and so on (Santrock, 2001). According to Super as cited in Bigner (1994), people are better able to make a career choice as they become aware of their self - concept. For example, a man who perceives himself as introspective, generous, caring about others, and inquisitive about interpersonal interaction might choose marriage and family therapy as a career area. Students' self efficacy beliefs-their confidence in their educational and vocational prospects-shape the occupational options they consider and the way they prepare for careers.

Though self-definition or identity guides career choice among youths, several other factors influence decisions about an initial career choice or educational and vocational aspirations of young people. These include parent's values, gender stereotyping, which despite the greater flexibility in career goals today often influence career choice (Papalia et al., 2004). Other factors are family influences, teacher's role and parenting practices (Berk, 2001). Most youths face the problem of making career choice that match with their identity. Too often, individuals approach career exploration with little direction or guidance (Halonen and Santrock, 1997). Some adolescents appear shallow and directionless, either because earlier conflicts have been resolved negatively or because society restricts their choices to ones that do not match their abilities and desires (Berk, 2007). Some youths just drift, accepting any relatively attractive jobs that comes along, or take the first available job that comes after graduation. Others after many years of unemployment just make do with whatever job that is available (Rathus and Nevid, 1981).

Some parents pressurize their children too strongly in the direction of a particular career and become over invested in the son or daughter's career decisions. Other parents might put some pressure on their children to achieve a career status that is beyond the children's talents. A good number of other parents provide too little guidance and support for their children's career development (Halonen and Santrock, 1997). The Nigerian Educational System (6-3-3-4) has not achieved much in the area of career moulding. At the end of junior secondary school, certain category of students with special skills should be identified and directed towards vocational training; but this is not so. Almost all the students from Junior Secondary School proceed to senior secondary school without adequate training to expose their talents.

Apprenticeship system, which is common in industrialized countries like Germany is also lacking in the country. In this system non-college (university) bound students go to school part time and spend the rest of the week in paid on-the job training, supervised by an employer (Berk, 2001). The current apprenticeship training in skill such as dressmaking, hairdressing, motor mechanic, etc, most often are not

based on talents or interests but on prospective economic gains. According to Papalia et al. (2004), educational system itself may act as a subtle brake on some students' vocational aspirations. Students who can memorize and analyse tend to do well on intelligence tests that hinge on those abilities, and in classrooms where teaching is geared towards those abilities. Thus, as predicted by the tests, these students are achievers in a system that stresses the abilities in which they happen to excel. Meanwhile, students whose strength is in creative practical thinking areas critical to success in certain fields never get a chance to show what they can do. These young people may be frozen out of career path or forced into less challenging and rewarding ones, because of tests scores and grades being too low to put them on tract to success.

The craze for university education in the country has pushed many young people to read courses that do not match their identity, interest, and abilities. This pushes many to read any available course of study offered to them without giving considerations to their individual identities. Rathus and Nevid (1981) observe that individuals may change career because of boredom or lack of personal fulfilment or may find that careers are incompatible with their personal values. It is in the light of this that the research was carried out to determine the relationship of individual's identity to the choice of career. The main purpose of this study was to establish the relationship of individual identity to the choice of career, with particular reference to youths in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

Identify the factors that influence the choice of career/vocation or jobs by youths in the Local Government Area; find out if youths in the Local Government Area give consideration to their personal endowments and aptitudes -such as talents, abilities, interests, and values - in their choice of careers or occupations; find out if youths in the area match their perceived personality qualities with their chosen careers/vocations or occupations and determine their level of satisfaction with their chosen careers/vocations or occupations. To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What factors influence the choice of careers/occupations by youths in Uyo Local Government Area?
2. Do youths of Uyo Local Government Area give consideration to their personal endowments and aptitudes in their choice of careers?
3. Do youths of Uyo Local Government Area match their perceived personality qualities with their chosen careers/vocations or occupations?
4. Are youths in Uyo Local Government Area generally satisfied and happy with their chosen careers/occupations?

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was used for the study. This research design permits generalization to be made to a wider population even when only a sample was studied (Ndiyo, 2005). The study area was Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The Local Government Area comprises four clans with 81 villages and 20 electoral wards. It is made up of urban, semi urban and rural areas and also serves as

the seat of Akwa Ibom State Government. The population consisted of all youths within the age brackets of 15-34 years. Due to the size of the population, a purposive sample of 400 respondents was drawn for the study. Five villages were first purposively selected from each of the four clans in the Local Government Area, giving a total of 20 villages. the same technique was also used thereafter to select twenty (20) respondents from each of the 20 villages to give the total number of four hundred (400) respondents.

A structured questionnaire titled "Youth Career Choice Questionnaire" was used for data collection. This was developed based on the literature and on the purpose of the study. The instrument was divided into two main sections, A and B. Section A was structured to obtain personal data information, while section B was based on the objectives of the study. The instruments were administered by personal contact to 400 respondents. The copies of the questionnaire were completed and returned on the spot. Some of the questions were interpreted to semi-illiterate respondents who were also helped to complete the questionnaire. Administration of the instrument to all respondents covered a period of two weeks. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and means. A mean of 2.50 and above was considered as an accepted response, while any item with a mean below 2.50 was considered as an unaccepted response.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 of this work shows the age distribution, sex, educational qualifications and occupations or vocations of respondents. It shows that 17.5% of the respondents were in either secondary schools or post secondary schools. The rest were actively engaged in one form of occupation or the other. Table 2 above indicates that out of the 11 items, the respondents agreed to 6 items as factors that influence their choice of career/vocation or job. However, some respondents disagreed to the remaining 5 items as factors that have influenced their choice of career/vocation or jobs. Similarly, table 3, indicates that the respondents disagreed to 7 items out of the 10 items while only 3 items had the nod of some respondents. This shows the extent to which they match their personal endowment and aptitudes with their choice of career/vocations or jobs.

Table 4 of this work shows the perceived personality traits possessed by respondents. Table 5 indicates that majority of the respondents (83.5%), do not match their chosen career/vocation or job with their perceived personality traits. Table 6 indicates that most of the respondents (79%), appear to be dissatisfied with their current careers/vocations and jobs and would opt for a change if given the opportunity. Only 21% of the respondents indicated unwillingness to change. Table 7 shows the various reasons why majority respondents would opt for a change of career/vocation or job if given the opportunity. From the study, factors that influence choice of career by youths include parental influence, career information or counselling received, attractive pay or economic gains and prestige attached to the job or career. This finding is in line with Papalia et al. (2004) and Berk (2001). The findings also reveal

that youths still prefer careers or jobs that are appropriate to their sex. It has been found that despite the flexibility in career goals today, gender-and gender stereotyping often influence vocational choice (Papalia et al., 2004; Berk, 2001). The findings also reveal that a greater number of youths choose their present jobs/careers because they had no other options. This corroborates the finding of Rathus and Nevid (1981) that some young people just drift, accepting any relatively attractive position that comes along, and that others simply take the first job that comes along after graduation.

Findings of the study also reveal that majority of youths do not relate their identities to their choice of careers/vocations or jobs. For instance, table 3 reveals that their chosen jobs/careers do not match their natural talents, interests, educational qualification, skills, abilities and values. This is in deviance to the advice by Miller (1991) that knowing ones interest and abilities is extremely important when deciding on a career that it should be the first step in making a career/occupational choice. This, however, supports Berk (2001), who observed that some young people appear shallow and directionless either because earlier conflicts have been resolved negatively or because society restricts their choices to ones that do not match their abilities and desires. This holds true for young people in Nigeria, as the system does not allow them to choose careers/jobs that match their abilities. It is a common place for people to work anywhere provided they have "God fathers" to put them in those positions irrespective of whether they have the interest, abilities or skills.

Findings further confirm that most of the respondents choose their careers not because of their interests, abilities, etc, but because they had no chance in their preferred careers or jobs, and just had to venture into something else after waiting for years. As such, they would not mind doing any work provided they are able to feed from it. It was also revealed that majority of the youths would prefer a career/vocation or jobs that would place them on an enviable height in the society. This means that they would like to be identified with the work they do. This supports the views of Westlake and Westlake (1992), that an individual's job or career constitutes part of his adult identity. Santrock (2006), also observes that some people define their identity through their work. Personality type has been found to be relating to identity and that individuals should match their identity with their work. Thus, the findings of this study have revealed the various personality traits possessed by the respondents.

The problem, however as revealed, is that they do not match their individual personalities with their chosen careers/vocations. This is not in agreement with John Holland's vocational theory, that it is important to develop a match or fit between an individual's personality type and the selection of a particular career. Holland asserted that when individuals find careers that fit their personality, they are more likely to enjoy the work and stay in their jobs longer than if they had worked at jobs not suited for their personality. Findings of the study reveal that majority of youths do not have economic, social and psychological satisfaction in their chosen careers/vocations or jobs. This is shown in their responses in table 6, as majority of them indicated that they would opt for a change of career/vocation or job if given a better opportunity.

Also they gave various reasons why they would wish to do so. It was generally revealed that youths in this study do not relate their identities to their choice of careers/jobs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing an identity, choosing an occupation, establishing a career and developing in a career are some of the developmental tasks faced by youths in the country. Some youths manage to develop and clarify their identity promptly, others never really find themselves at all, while others have to struggle for years to be able to achieve self identity. This study examined the relationship of individual identity to choice of career, with particular reference to youths in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Findings from the study revealed the factors that influence the choice of career by the youths. It has also revealed that youths in this study do not consider their personal endowments and aptitudes such as interests, abilities, skills, values, etc, in their choice of careers. Findings also revealed that their personality traits did not match their career choices. It was revealed that majority of these youths were dissatisfied with their present careers and would be willing to change if offered better options.

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that: career subjects should be incorporated into both secondary and post secondary educational programmes so as to guide young people in the choice of careers/vocations; more trained guidance counsellors should be employed by both public and private schools and encouraged to perform their duties of guiding and counselling youths especially in career choice; youths should be guided to choose careers/vocations that reflect their interests, abilities, skills, values and personalities; and finally, broad-based programmes that actively involve the home, school and community should be pursued. This will enhance easy identification of special talents or traits in young people so that they may be guided in the right direction.

Table 1: Respondents personal information

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15 -19	78	19.5
20 - 24	148	37
25 - 29	102	25.5
30 - 34	72	18
<i>Total</i>	400	100
Sex		
Male	226	56.5
Female	174	43.5
<i>Total</i>	400	100
Educational Qualification		
FSLC	44	11
SSCE	140	35
Diploma/NCE	82	20.5
Degree/HND	106	26.5
Higher Degree	28	7
<i>Total</i>	400	100

Occupation/Vocation		
Students (Sec. and Post Sec.)	70	17.5
Apprentice	36	9
Artisan	32	8
Trading	32	8
Civil service	40	10
Teaching	34	8.5
Motor cyclist	62	15.5
Corporate firms/banks	30	7.5
Private offices	44	11
Labourers	20	5
<i>Total</i>	400	100

Source: Survey 2009

Table 2: Mean responses of factors that influence choice of career

Influence on choice or career or occupation	Mean	Decision
My career or occupational choice was influenced by my parents	3.45	Agree
Teachers in my secondary school influenced my choice of career	2.06	Disagree
I joined my friends since most of them are in this profession	2.14	Disagree
I chose my career following career counselling I received	2.84	Agree
I chose my career in line my parent and family	2.26	Disagree
My chosen career is just appropriate for my sex	2.80	Agree
I chose to work where it is near our house	1.86	Disagree
Attractive pay package can lure me into any career	3.76	Agree
There was no other job for me to do other than this one	3.60	Agree
My present career has always been my dream in life	2.25	Disagree
I prefer to choose a career that command prestige in society	3.82	Agree

Source: Survey 2009. n=400

Table 3: Mean responses on respondents consideration of their personal endowment and aptitudes in the choice of careers.

Personal Endowment and Aptitude	Mean	Decision
I chose a career that matches my natural talent	2.37	Disagree
My chosen career reflects my values in life	2.18	Disagree
I am happy with my career, it is my area of interest	2.41	Disagree
My career is good enough for my qualification	2.10	Disagree
The skills in my career were easy for me to learn	2.24	Disagree
My career stems from my ability	2.32	Disagree
I joined this career after waiting long for preferred job	3.16	Agree
I don't mind the nature of my career provided I'm able to feed	2.88	Agree
I like a career that places me in an enviable height in the society	3.86	Agree

Source: Survey 2009. n=400

Table 4: Responses on the perceived personality traits

PPQ	Frequency	Percentage
Realistic	224	56
Investigative	102	25.5
Artistic	186	46.5
Social	276	69
Enterprising	250	62.5
Conventional	206	51.5

Source: Survey 2009. PPQ = Perceived Personality Quality, n=400

Table 5: Responses on matching career with respondents personality traits

Career and personality traits	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	66	16.5
No	334	83.5
Total	400	100

Source: Survey 2009

Table 6: Responses on change of career if given a better opportunity

Would opts for career change	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	316	79
No	84	21
Total	400	100

Source: Survey 2009

Table 7: Responses on reasons for respondents to wish to change careers

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of job satisfaction	340	85
Low income	372	93
Does not match my qualification	256	64
Does not give good social standing	362	90.5
Job insecurity	252	63
Hazards/risks associated with the job	194	48.5
No longer interested	206	51.5
I'm not allowed to show-case my talent	102	25.2
Unfavourable work environment	136	34
Long working hours	178	44.5

Source: Survey 2009

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