

## Parental Background Variables and the Career Choice of Secondary School Students in Uyo Local Government Area, Nigeria

Udoh, Nsiong Anthony  
Sanni, Kudirat Bimbo

Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling  
University of Uyo, Nigeria.

Doi: 10.5901/mjss.2012.03.01.497

---

*Abstracts* The study investigated the influence of parental background variables (Parents' attitudes towards occupations, Parents' levels of formal education, and Parents' occupation) on the career choice of secondary school student in Uyo Local Government Area. Three hypotheses were raised to guide the study. This ex-post-facto survey employed the simple random sampling technique in obtaining data from a sample of 200 SS3 students from 11 public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area using the "Parental Variables and Career Choice Questionnaire" (PVCQ) designed by the researchers. The hypotheses were subsequently tested using chi square at  $p \leq .05$  level of significance. Data analyses revealed that parents' attitudes towards occupations, parents' level of formal education, and parents' occupation exert influence on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. It was recommended that parents should desist from pressuring their children into taking up careers they do not possess the requisite abilities and that government should train and employ more career counsellors to assist these students in their career choice and preparation through the implementation of a comprehensive programme of career education.

*Keywords:* Career Choice, Career Counselling, Parental background, Senior Secondary School Students, School Counselling.

---

### 1. Introduction

The problem of career choice has implications for national development. In every society, the quality of workers as well as their degree of job satisfaction contributes directly or indirectly to economic stability and the smooth running of the affairs of the nation. If workers are unable to derive satisfaction from their job, frustration sets in with accompanying decline in productivity and civil unrest due to the workers thwarted goals. Occupation according to Onyejiaku (1987) is a way of life. It moulds one's character, determines one's social status, income, style of life, choice of friends and, mental and physical health (Denga, 1968). This implies that the choice of occupation has a persuasive connection with one's entire way of life.

Generally, it is believed that the primary motive behind the pursuit of various occupations is the fundamental human need to 'make ends meet', to satisfy needs. While this has some truth in it, the contemporary society with its dynamic and sophisticated social and economic systems have taken the problem of occupational choice a step or two further by making it both complex and intriguing.

On the other hand, many are the variables that operate to decide which occupation an individual chooses. Practically, every effort put forth to decide an occupation translates, in the light of significant factors, to an effort to limit oneself from entering into a wide array of careers. In other words, occupational choices made imply foregoing several alternatives. A number of these factors tend to impact more strongly than others. A universal hierarchy of these factors in order of extent of influence eludes us because, at least, no two individuals are the same. What may significantly influence the occupational preference of one person may have less significance for another. However, while it is difficult to determine the relative potency of these variables, it is true that there is some form of interaction among them where one modifies the other. While some of these variables are psychologically and biologically rooted, others have socio-economic undertones. Still, it is not uncommon for individuals to get into an occupation by accident or chance (Onyejiaku, 2001).

This research delves deeply into the influence of sociological factors on career choice. Specifically, it picks on the influence of parental background variables on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. Of all the socio-economic forces shaping the career pattern of an individual, the family unit has ever been among the most influential. Being the first agent of socialization, it exerts the earliest influence on the psycho-social life of the child, thus making its role very critical.

## 2. Literature Review

Before the advent of formal education in Nigeria, the family used to have veto powers on the occupational decisions of its members. Speaking of that era, Onyejiaku (1980) maintains that vocational guidance which used to be the prerogative of the parents no longer commands such influence, that is, the influence of parents, because of the changed and dynamic socio-economic conditions in the country. But then, it would be wrong for one to assert that the family has completely lost its influence on the vocational life of its members because directly or indirectly, it still has.

Bear and Roeber (1969) state that through family influences, everyone is exposed to values, attitudes, feelings, and a climate for learning. This underscores why the family has profound influence on the evaluative aspects of the child's development including his judgement of which career to pursue. A child's desires, his satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and his sense of values are influenced by the educational statuses in the family too. As the family is the social group with which the child has direct contact, it determines not only the individual's personality but also his vocational interests, at least to some appreciable extent.

A child is raised in accordance with the values of the family and as he grows he learns, internalizes and concretizes the behaviour patterns to which he is exposed. All these behaviour patterns and training which the child learns from the family often determines his job perception and subsequent occupational decision. Roe (1956,1957), Switzer (1962), and Onyejiaku (1987), among others have postulated some positive relationship between children's early rearing experiences and their occupational choice, since children spend most of their years at home and they naturally regard the family as their reference group with parents as significant figures.

Paul (1962) classified parental work attitudes into four broad categories as expounded below:

1. The silent attitude: here parents do not discuss work openly due to a lack of interest in the vocational life of the children. Parents here seldom discuss their own work and much less that of others. They do not make vocational plans for their wards thus leaving their children's occupational aspirations to chance.
2. The resentful attitude: parents with this kind of attitude only make incidental remarks about work. They leave their children's occupational choice to fate and schooling and never attempt to consciously discuss vocation with their children.
3. The participating attitude: parents with this kind of attitude are keen on their jobs and discuss them freely and with obvious enthusiasm with their children thus exposing their children to these occupations.
4. The candid attitude: this describes parents that openly and candidly discuss all aspects of work, the advantages and the disadvantages thereof, with their children.

According to Paul (1962), children from these categories of home will have differing attitudes towards work assuming that other influential variables are kept constant. Again, children from the third and fourth categories would mature vocationally earlier than children from the first and second categories.

In addition to parental attitude towards work, parental occupation and education also impact strongly on the occupational choice of children. Children raised in a home dominated by a certain occupation are likely to be influenced by that occupation. Some families are noted for maintaining certain occupations across several generations. A boy whose father and grandfathers, uncles and brothers are physicians or lawyers will invariably have different vocational interest from a boy raised in a family noted over the years as farmers,

teachers, accountants, or labourers (Onyejiaku, 1987). Studies of occupational mobility by Davidson and Anderson (1937) revealed a tendency for families to remain on the same occupational level through three generations. However, this tendency has dramatically changed. The high rate of competition for prestigious and lucrative occupations between the rich and poor families has seen rich parents compelling their children to train for the prestigious and lucrative positions in order to maintain the status quo, and poor families pressuring their children vehemently to train for the prestigious and lucrative positions too in order to liberate the family from the shackles of poverty (Onyejiaku, 1987).

The level of parental formal education is another factor that influences the vocational interests of children. Parental education level determines the amenities and the cultural level of the home. Parents armed with adequate education often get gainful employment. Thus, with their level of income and exposure, they are better disposed to procure educational materials for their children and discuss job opportunities with them. Without doubt, a child surrounded with good magazines, books, as well as intelligent discussions could be expected to develop different, and perhaps better, vocational interests than a child not exposed to those things (Onyejiaku, 1987). According to Denga (1990), children from low income homes fail to develop interest in and acquire vocational training because of the educational inadequacies of the parents.

Carter (1999) in his study also supports the view that a child learns about occupations through examples of the parents as they visit their parents' work places. If the impression there is good then the child seeks to identify with the occupation but if they are bad, the child rejects such occupation. Caplow (1994) and Wert (1997) in their separate studies found that career choice are inherited obviously and directly from parents. Furthermore, Miller (2000) in his study discovered that parental attitude and behaviour are positively associated with students' career maturity.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

Career choice tends to be a persistent problem for students in the contemporary society. That is why it is not uncommon for students to get into occupations that are not quite suitable to their abilities. Parental background on the other hand tends to be the single most influential factor in students career choice. More often than not, parents owing to personal idiosyncrasies pressure their wards into taking up family occupations and other careers even when they do not possess requisite abilities. What usually obtain in the end are job dissatisfaction, underperformance if not complete malfunction, frustration and inefficiency all of which translate in the long run to national economic crisis. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of parental background variables on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area.

#### 3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which parental background variables influence the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo local government area. Specifically, the study aims at finding out whether:

1. Parental attitude towards occupations influences the career choice of students in Uyo Local Government Area.
2. Parents' level of formal education influences the career choice of students in Uyo Local Government Area.
3. Parents' occupation influences the career choice of students in Uyo Local Government Area.

### 3.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the research:

1. Parents' attitudes towards occupations do not significantly influence the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo local government area.
2. Parents' levels of education do not significantly influence the career choice of students in Uyo local government area.
3. Parents' occupations do not significantly influence the career choice of students in Uyo local government area.

### 3.3 Significance of the Study

The dynamic and sophisticated socio-economic system of the contemporary society with accompanying innovations in science and technology present a wide array of occupations for our youths to choose from. However, several factors operate to make a realistic choice in this respect somewhat difficult. Prominent among these factors are parental background variables namely: attitudes towards occupations, level of formal education, and occupation.

This study is significant in that it would expose the influence of these variables on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo LGA wherefore students could be helped to make realistic occupational choices. Furthermore, from the findings of this study parents would, through PTAs (Parents-Teachers Associations), be dissuaded from compelling their children into taking up occupations that are not at par with their personal characteristics and abilities.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Sample

The population of this study consisted of all senior secondary three (SS3) students in all the public secondary schools in Uyo LGA. There were a total of 11 public schools with 2,347 students in the SS3 category, at the time of this study, in Uyo Local Government Area. Using the stratified sampling technique, a sample of 200 SS3 students from 11 public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area was randomly selected for this study. 18 students were selected from each of the first ten schools, while 20 students were picked from the 11th school.

### 4.2 Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the "Parental Variables and Career Choice Questionnaire" (PVCQ) developed by the researchers. The instrument had sections A and B. *Section A* solicited responses on personal data while *Section B* of the questionnaire had 14 items which sought information on how parental background variables influence the career choice of the students. In order to ensure the content and construct validities of the instrument, draft copies were given to experts in test and evaluation in the Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling, University of Uyo, Uyo, to assess the suitability of the items on the instrument. Their professional recommendations were well integrated in the final copy. Furthermore, the formulation of the items was guided by a comprehensive review of professional literature on issues pertaining to family influence on occupational choice. The 14 items on the instrument

yielded a test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.85 for parents' attitude, 0.55 for parental level of formal education, and 0.87 for parents' occupation—an indication of internal validity.

#### 4.3 Design and Statistics

This research adopted the ex-post-facto design because in the course of conducting this research, the researcher had no control over the variables under investigation. Copies of the questionnaire were given to the respondents in their respective schools with the assistance and cooperation of the schools' staff personnel. In addition to instructions written on the questionnaire, the respondents were given verbal instructions and clarifications where necessary. All the 200 copies of the questionnaire administered were properly filled according to instructions and returned. The data collected were represented in tables and analyzed using chi square statistics. The three research hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at  $p \leq .05$  level of significance with appropriate degrees of freedom.

### 5. Result Presentation

**Hypothesis One:** The first hypothesis proposed that: Parents' attitudes towards occupations do not significantly influence the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. This hypothesis is tested in *Table 1* below:

**Table 1. Parents' Attitudes toward Occupations and the Career Choice of Students**

S/N	ITEM	<i>Strongly Agreed</i>	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>	<i>Strongly Disagreed</i>	TOTAL
1	It is my parents that told me to choose the career I have chosen	67	51	45	37	200
2	I was able to make a rational career choice because my parents discussed with me everything I needed to know about careers	43	71	57	29	200
3	My parents always warned me never to choose certain careers that is why I am careful not to pick the one they won't like	71	36	63	30	200
4	I picked the career I have chosen to pursue because my parents always speak favourably of it	56	68	51	25	200
5	My parents never bother me about which career to choose that is why I am not yet sure of which career to choose	49	46	55	50	200
Total		286	272	271	171	1000
Expected frequencies		57.2	54.4	54.2	34.2	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .05$  level ( $df = 12$ ; Calculated value of  $X^2 = 40.6$ ; critical  $X^2 = 21.03$ )

**Decision rule:** It could be observed from the analysis in Table 1 that the calculated value of  $X^2$  is 40.6 whereas the critical value at .05 level of significance, at 12 degrees of freedom, is 21.03. In view of this, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that parents' attitudes towards occupations exert a significant influence on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo LGA.

**Hypothesis Two:** The second hypothesis stated that: parents' levels of formal education do not significantly influence the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. This hypothesis is tested in *Table 2* below:

Table 2. Parents' Levels of Formal Education and the Career Choice of Students

S/N	ITEM	<i>Strongly Agreed</i>	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>	<i>Strongly Disagreed</i>	TOTAL
1	Because my parents are highly educated, they knew how to assist me in making my career decision	56	34	67	43	200
2	Because my parents are well educated, they knew the relevant educational resources to provide to aid my career development	43	61	48	48	200
3	Because my parents are highly educated and exposed, they knew which career to choose for me	57	41	55	47	200
4	Because my parents are highly educated, they have a good job and so are able to finance my vocational aspiration	61	50	54	35	200
Total		217	186	224	173	800
Expected frequencies		54.2	46.5	56	43.2	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .05$  level ( $df = 9$ ; Calculated value of  $X^2 = 18.0$ ; Critical  $X^2 = 16.92$ )

Decision rule: It could be observed from the analysis in Table 2 that the calculated value of  $X^2$  is 18.0 whereas the critical value at .05 level of significance and 9 degrees of freedom is 16.92. In view of this, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that parents' level of formal education exert a significant influence on the career choices of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area.

Hypothesis Three: The third hypothesis postulated thus: Parents' occupations do not significantly influence the career choices of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. This hypothesis is tested in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Parents' Occupations and the Career Choice of Students

S/N	ITEM	<i>Strongly Agreed</i>	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>	<i>Strongly Disagreed</i>	TOTAL
1	I will not like to take after my father's occupation, instead I will go for a better one	65	57	46	32	200
2	I will not like to take after my mother's occupation, instead I will go for a better one	71	33	62	34	200
3	I will like to take after my father's occupation because I admire it	51	35	66	48	200
4	I will like to take after my mother's occupation because I admire it	69	38	60	33	200
5	My parents want me to follow in their line of occupation	50	31	73	46	200
Total		306	194	307	193	1000
Expected frequencies		61.2	38.8	61.4	38.6	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .05$  level ( $df = 12$ ; Calculated value of  $X^2 = 30.5$ ; Critical  $X^2 = 21.03$ )

Decision rule: It could be observed from the analysis in Table 3, that the calculated value of  $X^2$  is 30.5 whereas the critical value at .05 level of significance, at 12 degrees of freedom, is 21.03. In view of this, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that parents' occupations exert a significant influence on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area.

## 6. Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the findings of this study centres on the three hypotheses that were tested in the study. From the statistical analyses of *Hypothesis 1*, the result reveals that parents' attitudes towards occupations significantly influence the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. This is in consonance with the submission of Paul (1962) who maintained from his study that parents' attitude towards occupations whether silent, resentful, participating, or candid does influence children's career choice. Similar results were obtained by Onyejiaku (1987). Furthermore, Miller's (2000) finding that parental attitudes and behaviour are positively associated with students' vocational development serves as a basis to the findings of this study.

The result of *Hypothesis 2* showed that parent's level of formal education significantly influences the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. This is in agreement with the findings of Denga (1990) who discovered that due to the educational inadequacies of parents and the resultant low socio-economic condition, children may be disinterested in certain careers and therefore fail to acquire training thereof. Furthermore, the finding here agrees with the study of Onyejiaku (1987) who found that well educated parents are better able to provide needed assistance to their children in career choice and preparation.

The result of *Hypothesis 3* showed that parents' occupations have significant influence on the career choice of secondary school students in Uyo LGA. This finding gets acceptance in the findings of Carter (1999) who discovered that children learn about and seek to adopt or avoid occupations through the examples of their parents as they visit the parents' workplace. Again, the findings of Caplow (1994) and Wert (1997) that career choices are inherited obviously and directly from parents support the result of this study. In sum, the findings of this study agree with that of Onyejiaku (1991) who found that the family has profound influence on the career choice of children.

## 7. Recommendations

In view of the dynamics of contemporary social and economic systems, there arises a need for secondary school students in Uyo LGA to make realistic career choices. As exposed by this research, the family has hitherto exerted a powerful influence on the career choice of students.

Therefore, it is recommended that parents should desist from compelling their children into taking up those occupations that they do not possess the required capacities, talents, interests, and/or aptitudes for. Additionally, parents should cautiously avoid the tendency to push their children into pursuing those wishful careers they were unable to pursue, putting them on the line as it were to accomplish their own failings.

Furthermore, parents should employ the assistance of professional career counsellors in helping their children to make intelligent career decisions. Also, the government and other relevant agencies in charge of educational planning and development should work towards the development and implementation of a comprehensive programme/curriculum of career education or career development from the primary school level to help students acquire sound vocational development. Finally, parents should be sensitized on the need to acquire adequate vocational information and discuss same freely with their children so that they may be able to make well informed decisions about their future careers.

## 8. Conclusion

Based on the outcome of this study, it becomes evident that parental work attitude which is often reflected in the conversations engaged in at home significantly influences students' attitude towards certain occupations and that this in turn influences their choice of career. Furthermore, it is also evident that the level of parental formal education has a significant influence on the vocational interests of the children as it determines, inter alia, the educational and vocational amenities provided and the socio-economic level of the home which in turn makes the pursuit of certain vocations feasible whereas others are simply unaffordable. Finally, it is clear that the occupation of parents may have some decided influence on children's vocational interests as children raised in homes dominated by certain occupations are likely to be influenced by that occupation especially if the impression they have of the occupation is favourable.

## References

- Anderson, H. D. (1937). Occupational Mobility in an American Community. In Onyejiaku, F. O. (2001). *Careers Guidance And Counselling Services In Schools*. Calabar: Vita-Nasco & Company Limited.
- Bear, M. F. & Roeber, E. C. (1969). *Occupational Information: The Dynamics Of Its Nature And Use*. Chicago: Science Research Association, Incorporated.
- Caplow, T. (1994). *The Sociology Of Work*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Carter, T. (1999). *Home, School, And Work*. Pergamon: Gowther Press.
- Cohen, A. (1984). Sociological studies of Occupation as a way of life. *Personnel and Audience Journal*. 43, 16-24.
- Denga, D. I. (1986). *Counselling In School And Non-School Setting*. Calabar: Centaur Press Limited.
- Denga, D. I. (1990). *Educational And Vocational Guidance Of Secondary School Students In Nigeria*. Jos: Savannah Press Limited.
- Miller, C. H. (2000). In Onyejiaku, F. O. (2001). *Careers Guidance And Counselling Services In Schools*. Calabar: Vita-Nasco & Company Limited.
- Onyejiaku, F. O. (1980). Occupational Choice Among Nigerian Youths And The Need For Guidance Counsellors. *The Calabar Educator*. 1 (1), 66-70.
- Onyejiaku, F. O. (1987). Family Influences On Vocational Aspirations Of Nigerian Secondary School Students. *An Unpublished Study*. University of Calabar.
- Onyejiaku, F. O. (1991). *Psychology Of Adolescents*. Calabar: Rapid Publishers Limited.
- Onyejiaku, F. O. (2001). *Careers Guidance And Counselling Services In Schools*. Calabar: Vita-Nasco & Company Limited.
- Paul, L. (1962). *The Transition From School To Work*. London: Industrial Welfare Society.
- Roe, A. (1956). *The Study Of Occupations*. New York: John Wiley.
- Roe, A. (1957). Early Determinants Of Occupational Choice. *Journal Of Counselling Psychology*. (4), 212-217.
- Switzer, D., Grigg, A., Miller, J., & Young, K. (1962). Early Experiences And Occupational Choice: A Test Of Roe's Hypothesis. *Journal Of Counselling Psychology*. 9, 45-48.
- Wert, T. R. (1997). *Parental Influence On African Students*. Kaduna: African Press Limited.