

Assessment of the Rationality of Senior High School students' Choices of Academic Programmes in Kwabre East District of Ghana

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Abstract

The study sought to find out whether Senior High School students in Kwabre East District make rational choices of academic programmes in school. The population of the study was all students in the six Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District. However, the Form 3 students were purposively sampled for the study. Stratified random sampling technique with proportional allocation was used to sample 331 Form 3 students from the various programmes in each school for the study. A self-made questionnaire was used to gather data from the 331 respondents. A total of 320 copies of the questionnaire were obtained from the respondents. Statistical Product for Service Solutions was used to analyze the data. Frequencies and percentages were analyzed to answer all the research questions. It was found out that generally Senior High School students in Kwabre East District make rational choices of their programmes of study. This is because most of them assessed their strengths and weaknesses and sought information on their programmes before choosing them. Again, most of them chose their programmes based on their abilities or interests. However, few of them sought counselling from qualified counsellors before choosing their programmes. It was recommended that school counsellors should reinforce students' rational programme choice behaviour by intensifying counselling in schools so that students will continue to make rational choices of programmes in school.

Keywords: career choice, rational choice, academic programmes, Senior High Schools.

Introduction

Milton (cited in Appiah, 1994) defines education as "that which enables a man to perform justly, skillfully and with satisfaction the offices both private and public whether in peace or in war" p. 12. Appiah (1994, p. 14) noted that "education aims at cultivating the mind or the intellect, ensuring social reformation, ensuring love in society, bringing about self realization and ensuring good life".

In the traditional educational set up, parents took their children through the values and norms of society and also taught them occupations which became their career. The children were taught farming, hunting, black smithing among others to enable them fit well into society. With the inception of western education, the idea of training the young to acquire employable skills was not discarded. According to McWilliams and Kwamena-Poh (1975), "the Bremen Mission's efforts in technical education were also for many years unique in this country. Industrial establishments were opened at Christiansborg which gave courses for joiners, wheelwrights, carpenters, lock-smiths, shoemakers and book-binders" p. 31.

Successive governments over the years till now, have laid serious emphasis through educational reforms, on the need to have programmes in schools that will train the youth to occupy their positions in society. According to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2004) White Paper Report of the Education Reform Review Committee, the main purpose of the 2004 Education Reforms was to come out with human capital in the country better trained and better prepared to meet the challenges of the modern world. This the government recognizes in the report, can be done through serious emphasis on guidance and counselling so that pupils can make right choices of programmes in schools, make good plans and decisions and promote discipline in schools. This view is supported by Gibson and Mitchell (1990), when they said that "Guidance and counselling help pupils to assess their potentials and make proper career development in life" p. 61.

According to Unachukwu (1989), there are three major focuses of guidance and counselling namely vocational guidance, personal-social guidance and educational guidance. Vaughan (cited in Unachukwu, 1989), sees vocational guidance as helping people to choose work in which they will be reasonably contented and successful within the limits of their abilities. Peters and Farwell (cited in Unachukwu & Igborgbor, 1991) are of the view that educational guidance is the assistance given to pupils individually and through group techniques to help them function more effectively in their school progress. The above implies that in schools, there are a lot of problems facing the child and these include the choice of subjects, how to study, anxiety on whether to pass or fail examinations, choice of schools to attend, how to combine subjects so as to pursue any area of study, disillusionment with chosen subjects, problem of coping with a course of study, lack of interest and lack of motivation.

The Senior High School (SHS) is the second phase of the high school system. In Senior High School, students need proper channeling of their interests, aptitudes and abilities. They should be guided in order not to make wrong choices of subjects in life. The counsellor through educational guidance helps students to solve most of the educational problems they encounter. Educational guidance takes into consideration the total individual, his needs and aspirations. It makes sure that each student makes appropriate choice of courses and institutions on the basis of interest, ability and aim in life.

In Ghana, Junior High School (JHS) students make choices of programmes to pursue at the Senior High School level. This is the level where individuals decide on the career to pursue in life. Students choose from the Arts, Science, Agriculture, Visual Arts, Home Economics, Business and Technical programme options. Students need proper educational guidance in Senior High School so that they can make intelligent choices of their programmes of study. Choices of programmes or careers are based on factors like Socio-economic background (Hannah and Kahn, 1989), age (Essuman, 1986; Salifu, 2000; Asaolu 2001), job security (Harvighurst and Neugarten 1962), Intellectual ability (Bruce and Shelly 1976), Interest (Olayinka 1993).

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the country, Senior High School students make choices of programmes to pursue at that level of education. The programmes students pursue at Senior High Schools are Arts, Science, Agriculture, Visual Arts, Home Economics, Business and Technical. Each student at Senior High School level is supposed to choose and pursue one of the above mentioned programmes. In the past and recent times, there have been concerns about how students make choices of programmes in school.

Olayinka (1973) stated that, the choices of programmes or careers are often made at an age when most of the students are too young and immature to be fully aware of the consequences of some of the choices they may make in terms of the continued education and the sort of life they will have open to them in future. Ashong (2002) discovered that students entering Senior High School in Ho in the Volta region of Ghana, lacked information on programme offerings in Senior High School and career opportunities after school. In fact 80 percent of the respondents of his study lacked information on programmes offered at Senior High School. They thus chose wrong programmes at Senior High School.

In Ghana, no known current study has been done to ascertain how true the above assertions are. Therefore do Senior High School students make choices of programmes after finding out if they can do well or not? Do they make the choice after finding out the career opportunities in the area or they just rely on mere suggestions from others? Do they base their choices on any realistic thinking or do they choose the programmes for choosing sake? The problem that this study sought to address was how rational or irrational do Senior High Schools students in Kwabre East District choose their programmes? A rational choice is a choice in tune with reality or a choice based on one's careful assessment of his strengths and weaknesses (Ellis, 1962).

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study.

- 1) To what extent do Senior High School students in Kwabre East District find out if they would perform well or not in a programme before deciding to do it?
- 2) What factors influence Senior High School students in Kwabre East District in their choices of programmes?
- 3) To what extent do Senior High School students in Kwabre East District seek information on their preferred programmes before choosing it?
- 4) To what extent do Senior High School students in Kwabre East District seek counselling from qualified counsellors in their choices of programmes?

Methodology

Research Design

The research design chosen for the study was descriptive survey. "A descriptive survey involves asking the same set of questions (often prepared in a form of a written questionnaire or ability test) of a large number of individuals either by mail, by telephone or in person" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 11). Responses are tabulated and reported, usually in the form of frequencies and percentages of those who answer in a particular way to each question.

Population

The Kwabre East District in Ashanti region was used for the study. The target population consisted of all students in the six (6) Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District. The accessible population of the study was all Form 3 students in Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District. They totaled 2032.

Sample and Sampling procedure

A sample size of 331 students was used. The sampling procedure used was Stratified random sampling technique.

This ensured a fair representation of respondents from the various academic programmes in the schools.

Instrument

The instrument used for the study was questionnaire. A 20-item questionnaire made up of open-ended and closed-ended items was used to allow for both objective and subjective data to be collected.

Reliability of instrument

The reliability of the instrument was computed using the Cronbach Coefficient alpha. The alpha value was 0.733. In terms of reliability, the most important figure is the Alpha Value. This is the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. Robinson, Shaver & Wrightsman (as cited in Whitley, 1996) suggest that a minimum internal consistency coefficient of 0.70 is good. Since the alpha value of the instrument was above 0.70, the instrument was considered as reliable with the sample.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher went to each Senior High School and contacted the School's Guidance and Counselling Co-ordinator and explained the plan to conduct the study in the School. The researcher together with the Counselling Co-ordinator went to see the headmistress or headmaster of the school to ask permission to conduct the study in the school. When approval was given, the researcher requested for the class lists of all Form 3 classes to help him sample the members to be used for the study.

After this had been done, the researcher with the assistance of the Counselling Co-ordinators, met the students sampled for the study and explained the rationale of the study to them. They were assured of confidentiality of whatever information they would provide. The respondents were then taken through the questionnaire. An agreement was reached with the respondents that the questionnaire would be collected in two days time. On the agreed dates, the researcher together with the Counselling Co-ordinators went round and collected all the completed copies of the questionnaire. The number collected was 320 out of 331 which gave a return rate of 97%. The 320 students were made up of 118 Arts students, 3 Science students, 43 Business students, 66 Home Economics students, 27 Visual Arts students, 37 Agriculture students and 26 Technical students from all the schools used for study.

Results and Discussions

The results of the study are presented and discussed as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent do Senior High School students in Kwabre East District find out if they would perform well or not in a programme before deciding to do it?

Table 1: Extent to which Students Assess Themselves before Choosing their Programmes in School

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	239	75
No	81	25
Total	320	100

The data in Table 1 shows that 239(75%) of the respondents found out whether they would perform well or not in the programmes they were pursuing before they chose them. On the other hand, 81 (25%) of the respondents indicated that they did not find out whether they would perform well or not in their programmes before choosing them. Table 2 below shows how the 239 respondents assessed themselves.

Table 2: How Students Assessed Themselves before Choosing their Programmes

Factor Assessed	Freq.	%
By filling occupational interest inventory	0	0
By considering my performances in terminal examinations	110	46
By considering my interests in life	129	54
Total	239	100

In Table 2 above, it is observed that none of them assessed himself/herself by filling occupational interest inventory. However, 110(46%) of them assessed themselves by considering their performances in terminal examinations. One hundred and twenty nine (54%) did so by considering their interests in life.

The analysis shows that majority of Senior High School students in Kwabre East District assess themselves before they choose their academic programmes. This disagrees with Adadevoh's (1991) assertion that most students choose programmes by not considering their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the programmes. The finding supports Olayinka's (1993) postulation that interest is one of the most influencing factors in students' occupational choices.

Research Question 2: What factors influence Senior High School students in Kwabre East District in their choices of programmes?

Table 3: Factors that Influence Students in their Choices of Programmes

Factors	Freq.	%
Popularity of the programme	10	3
Interest in the programme	130	41
High academic performance in the area	69	21
Suggestions from teachers	5	2
Suggestions from parents	4	1
Pressure from parents	1	0
Importance of jobs in the area	95	30
Importance of the programme	5	2
Not based on any criterion	1	0
Suggestions from friends	0	0
Total	320	100

The results of the analysis in Table 3 indicate that, interest in the programme is the factor that influences most Senior High School students in Kwabre East District in their choices of programmes. A total number of 130 (41%) respondents chose their programmes because of their interest in them.. This is followed by importance of jobs in the area 95 (30%), student's high academic performance in the area 69 (21%), Popularity of the programme 10 (3%), suggestions from teachers five (2%), importance of the programme five (2%), suggestions from parents four (1%). The least influencing factors of students' choices of programmes were suggestions from friends zero (0%), not based on any criterion one (0%) and pressure from parents one (0%). This finding agrees with Olayinka (1993), Rice (cited in Salifu, 2000), Morgan, Isaac and Sansone (2001) and Obu (1997) that interest plays key part in people's selection of careers in life.

Research question 3: To what extent do Senior High School students in Kwabre East District seek information on their preferred programmes before choosing it?

Table 4: Students' Indication of whether or not they Sought Information on their Programmes before Choosing them

Response	Freq.	%
Yes	253	79
No	67	21
Total	320	100

From Table 4 above, more than half of the total respondents sought information on their programmes before choosing them. A total number of 253 (79%) respondents sought information on their programmes before choosing them. On the other hand, 67 (21%) of the total respondents did not seek information on their programmes before choosing them. The 253 respondents who sought information on their programmes before choosing them sought information in these areas: careers available under the programme, areas of further studies in the programme, attributes required in the career and admission requirements of programmes in the area". Therefore most Senior High School students in Kwabre East District seek information on their programmes before choosing them.

Table 5: Extent to which Students Seek Counselling before Choosing their Programmes

Responses	Freq.	%
Yes	37	12
No	283	88
Total	320	100

It is seen in Table 5 above that only 37 respondents representing 12% of the total respondents for the study sought counselling from qualified counsellors before choosing their programmes of study. However, 283 (88%) did not seek counselling at all before choosing their programmes. Of the 37 respondents who sought counselling before choosing their programmes, twenty eight (76%) of them indicated that they sought counselling from their School counsellors while five (13%) sought counselling from their District Guidance and Counselling Co-ordinator. Only 4 (11%) respondents sought counselling from their Church Counsellor.

Summary and Conclusion

The research therefore reveals that:

- a) Most Senior High School students in Kwabre East District find out if they would do well or not in a programme before choosing it.

- b) The factors that influence Kwabre East District Senior High School students most in their choices of programmes are their interest in the programmes and the importance of jobs under the programmes. The factors that influence them least in their choices of programmes are making choices not based on any criterion, making choices based on suggestions from friends and making choices based on pressure from parents.
- c) A greater number of Senior High School students in Kwabre East District seek information on their preferred programmes before choosing them. More than half of the respondents sought information on their programmes before choosing them.
- d) Many Senior High School students in Kwabre East District do not seek counselling from qualified counsellors before choosing their programmes in school.

The choices of academic programmes by Senior High School students in Kwabre East District are largely rational.

Recommendations

- a) Counsellors should assess students to enable them arrive at their real interests in life. Counsellors can do this by administering career interest inventories on students.
- b) Counsellors must strengthen information service programmes in schools to enable students acquire the right information on their programmes before choosing them.
- c) Counsellors should publicize and intensify their work in schools.
- d) Counsellors need to encourage students to base their choices of programmes on their interest and academic abilities.

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