

# The Concept of Wealth on Career Choice: A Case Study of Senior High School Students in the Akuapem North District of Ghana

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## Abstract

Career decision is very vital in one's life. This study assesses the perception of wealth and its impact on career choice of Senior High School students. The study is descriptive in nature, with a survey conducted at the Akuapem North District of Ghana. A total sample size of 250 (50 per school) was drawn for the study. Stratified and simple random techniques were employed to get the needed sample. A set of questionnaires was developed to capture the required information on the subject under consideration. The responses of the survey were analysed using frequencies, to obtain the percentage values of the responses from the respondents to draw conclusions. This study reveals that most of the career decisions of the youth are based on limited factors like wealth, specifically money, housing, and other fringe benefits that they presume they might get. It is revealed that the youth are also substantially influenced by their family and religious beliefs in their career choice. They are, however, disappointed sometimes because their expectations are not met, which sometimes results in unemployment. It is also revealed that the youth to some extent make their decisions based on limited factors such as what they wish to get from their preferred career. Recommendations include encouraging the youth to pay more attention to guidance and career programmes that are organised for them and also, career and guidance service providers should intensify their effort in educating the youth about the varied factors one needs to consider before career decisions and job preferences are made.

**Keywords:** Career, Wealth, Guidance, Counselling, Influence, Senior high school, Youth.

## 1. Introduction

One of the major problems facing Ghanaian Senior High School students is the task of making an appropriate and realistic occupational choice. This then implies that it behoves the Ghanaian educationists to ensure that proper steps and measures are taken in order to help students make the right career choices. Denga (2001) suggested that, choosing an appropriate career is one of the most difficult or serious decisions which a man or woman makes. Similarly, Bakare (1970) asserts that the most insistent problem confronting young people today involves choosing an appropriate occupation, preparing for it, liking it, and keeping it. In the olden traditional system in Ghana according to Agbor (1990) occupational preference was not often a problem since an individual had to take on an occupation trusted on him/her by the elders in the society. Such decisions by the elders were made after a comprehensive review of the situation surrounding the individual and the identified interest pattern of both parents and the individual as well as that of the society in which he/she lives.

Agbor (1990) further explains that in the present day Ghana, such practices of dictating careers by parents and elders to their young ones has ceased to be functional and effective. This is because the Ghanaian economy has become so complex in nature, ranging from high literacy level to high rate of technological advancement, which makes occupational choice on the part of the students a problematic decision to make. The decision is further fuelled by the fact that new careers are continually being created in the economy, such that the former traditional advice from parents and elders were often made in most cases in complete ignorance of these new professions and their requirements.

Students need career counselling to enable them have a smooth transition from school to the world of work, which shall eventually lead them to a desired occupational choice. Career counselling in most of our schools is, however, non-existent. This situation does not give most of our students the opportunity of receiving appropriate career counselling while in school. Those mostly affected are the students in the Senior High School (SHS), who are transiting into adulthood and the world of work. A recent phenomenon that has even worsened the case of Ghanaian youth is the "get wealthy or rich quick" attitude. This has made many people take decisions about their career by using limited factors such as their perception of wealth and money. According to Acher (2006) wealth can be seen by others as a concept by others. Those people define it as money, oversized bank account, fantastic mansions, a collection of rare paintings and others. Economists however define wealth as the "possession of an asset that generates income" like a plot of agricultural land, herds of cattle, and factory. Transport and commerce also produce income. Most young people desire to possess one thing or the other and it therefore becomes part of their career plan or plans.

When the word career is mentioned, it brings into memory so many thoughts as to what it really means! It should be noted, however, that it can severally be defined or explained. Zunker (1994) defines career as the activities and positions involved in vocations, occupations, and jobs as well as related acts associated with an individual's life time of work. Hall (2002) also defines career as a job or profession for which one is trained and

which one intends to follow for the whole of one's life. He further adds that it is the sequence of work-related experiences and attitudes that occur over the span of the person's working life. Over the years the activity of imparting and acquiring knowledge through teaching and learning has helped learners to make various decisions that affect their lives as individuals. Education which is the vehicle for imparting knowledge has therefore been seen as an asset by quite a greater number of people if not all. Education provides the basis for each beneficiary to take a decision as to how he or she may want go through the process. The call for career guidance and counselling in schools has become more urgent now than it was in time past. This is partly because the world has become what we call a global village where the entire world assesses the 'resources and information' of each member country from wherever one finds him or herself. This phenomenon named 'globalization' mentioned earlier on has made job search very competitive. One also sees many people in mid-career still acting out earlier scripts about the importance of money. Career and/or college major choice can be highly stressful for high school students (Dollarhide, 2003). Students may assume and receive messages from peers and parents that career and/or college major decisions are irreversible (Gati *et al.*, 1996) and that if they choose poorly it will be costly in terms of personal well-being (Jarvis, n.d) and satisfaction (Krumboltz, 1981).

Because of the perceived gravity of this decision, they may avoid making even preliminary choices (Gata and Saka, 2001) or avoid entering the first task of career decision-making, orientation to career, as described by Germeijs and Verschuere (2006) during which adolescents gain awareness that career decisions need to be made and become motivated to begin the decision-making process. When making career and/or college major decisions, students do present school counselors with a mixture of positive and negative feelings or thoughts (Saginak, 2003). Students may be excited when beginning to explore their options, but may be overwhelmed by and anxious about the task. Anxiety pertaining to decision-making has been associated with career and or college major indecisiveness (Germeijs *et al.*, 2006) and decision-making confusion (Sampson, 1996). Furthermore, Gati *et al.* (2000) discovered that participants who found career decision-making difficult per the counsellors' judgment also lacked motivation in the career decision-making process.

Lack of varied factors that influence career choice may affect students readiness to make tentative decisions about career and/or college major choice (Gati *et al.*, 2000) including, but not limited to, students exploring personal interests, values, and strengths (Ginzberg *et al.*, 1951) interviewing someone who's career and/or college major is of interest to him, and/or researching the career and/or college major on the internet. Many students may need help in identifying alternatives available to them (Germeijs *et al.*, 2006). 'Sakawa' a local name for people who use unorthodox means to get money has been prevalent among the youth. A typical night walk about and visits to internet cafes shows a worrying spectacle of school going-age, youthful or young looking people browsing the internet, not really for study purposes but to be able to deceive people to 'dupe' them. With the advent of a table of those who are rich and the show of affluence by the rich both worldwide and locally, people tend to focus on the money and wealth with little or no consideration to the best way to acquire it Acher (2006). People use various means to get to the level of the so called 'world richest chart'.

African and Ghanaian youth desire to accumulate money and wealth as westerners do. The only challenge now is the tendency of the youth to use any means to acquire money and wealth. According to Acher (2006) most young people spend sleepless nights surfing the internet with wrong identity to 'dupe' all manner of people. Their "ill-gotten wealth" is splashed around their localities. This behaviour often attracts the curiosity of their colleagues. It sometimes even affects their attitude towards school. It seems many Ghanaian students lack adequate knowledge about the available occupations marketable in their environment, their job demands and skill requirements. There is no doubt that it is this lack of adequate knowledge of factors that influence career choices such as parental influence, values, abilities, interests, skills, etcetera. The study therefore sought to investigate how the youth perceive wealth and its impact on their career choice as well as the role of the family in making occupational choices.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Design of the Study**

The study is descriptive in nature, as well as survey in form. Descriptive research according to Best and Kahn (1998) is concerned with the condition or relationship that exist, such as determining the nature of prevailing conditions, practices and attitudes, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, and evident or trends that are developed within a group. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), survey is to scan a wide field of issues, populations and programmes in order to measure or describe any generalised features. It actually provides a relatively simple and straight forward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. The strategy lends itself to the use of questionnaire which can generate large volumes of quantitative data that can be analysed statistically (Denscombe, 1998).

### **2.2. Population and Sample**

The study was conducted at the Akuapem North District of Ghana. The population consisted of all students from

the nine governments assisted senior high schools in the district. Five schools were purposefully selected for the study. The choice of the five schools was motivated by the fact that they were among the oldest schools in the district. Another reason was the distance between these schools. A total sample size of 250 (50 per school) was drawn for the study. Stratified and simple random techniques were employed to get the needed sample.

### 2.3. Research Instrument and Data Collection

A set of questionnaires was developed. It was brief, but provided valuable points to capture the required information on the subject under consideration. The questionnaire was categorised into two sections. Section A consisted of background information of respondents such as gender, age and class. Section B consisted of 25 items under 5 thematic areas. Each item had four responses: Strongly agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly disagree. Decision was arrived at by merging all factors to get agreed or disagreed percentages for analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data. Responses to each item were converted into percentages and the highest percentages were taken as the general opinion.

### 3. Results

From the analysis, it was observed that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 15-19 and therefore shows that majority of respondent are teenagers. The table shows that 94.7% of the youth are teenagers while only 5.3% of the respondents are above the teenage age. The result from Table 1 shows male respondents constituted 47.4%, while female respondents were 52.6%.

**Table-1.** Background information

Variable		Percentage
Sex	Male	47.4%
	Female	52.6%
Age	Below 15 years	0%
	From 15-19 years	94.7%
	Above 19 years	5.3%
	Total	100%

#### 3.1. Perception of Wealth and Money

From Table 2, majority (73%) of the respondents disagreed with the fact that whatever means that one uses to get his or her money is not important. This confirms what values are to teach us in life. Lindhard and Dlamini (1992) explains that a value is an enduring, personal belief that certain life goals and behaviour are preferable, for example, material wealth; aesthetic values; status or security. Again, majority of the respondents agreed that they could not work for a period of two months without salary. When respondents were asked whether people who have money are powerful, famous and influential? Most (69%) of the respondents agreed confirming the statement that a rich man was respected and listened to, while a poor man was despised and ignored. More than half (59%) of the respondents disagreed that money could do everything that they wanted in life. As to whether money should be the only consideration in whatever one does in life? Three-fourth of the respondents disagreed on the assertion.

**Table-2.** The youth's perception of wealth and money

Statement	Agree Frequency %	Disagree Frequency %
Whatever means I use to get money is not important; the money is what I care about.	27	73
I can work for a period of two months without salary.	73	27
People who have money are powerful, famous and influential.	69	31
Money can do everything that I want in life.	41	59
Money should be the only consideration in whatever one does in life.	22	78

### 3.2. Career Choice

**Table-3.** Choice of career to pursue in future

Statement	Agree Frequency %	Disagree Frequency %
I will not choose a job that is voluntary in nature.	56	44
A job with a high salary or pay and other incentive is what I will consider as a job.	68	32
I will not waste my time on jobs that will not let me become rich quickly.	36	64
I will only take up a job that has a good corporate and brand name.	64	36
Loyalty, commitment, sincerity, and hard work are essential in becoming successful on a job and in life.	90	10

In Table 3, more than half (56%) of the respondents said they will not choose a job that is voluntary in nature. This contradicts Langley (1989) five life roles that every human being is expected to live with. By first being student-like, a worker, a homemaker, a 'leisureite' and a community member. On whether the literate youth will only consider someone to be employed when his or her job pays higher salaries and other incentives, most of them said they agree. This assertion seem to agree with that of Bandura (1986) along with Betz (1992) when he posited that people need proactive behaviour when preparing to enter a particular career. Again majority (64%) of the respondents said they disagree to the statement that they will not waste or spend much of their time on jobs that will not let them become rich quickly, According to Bandura (1986) individuals choose to engage in or avoid a specific task based on their self-judgment of their competency in accomplishing the task. Similarly, majority of respondents said they agree that they will take a job that has good corporate and brand name. On whether respondents consider loyalty, commitment, sincerity and hard work as essential in becoming successful on a job and in life, an overwhelming percentage (90%) agreed to that. This affirms Legum and Hoare (2004) ascertaining that as students begin to connect their academic accomplishments with the expectations of the world of work they are more likely to understand the significance of remaining in school and may make more prudent decision concerning their short and long term futures.

### 3.3. Reasons for Choice of Career

To find out reasons why people will choose a particular career, job or occupation, 78% of the respondents agreed with the statement that they will choose career, job, and occupation because it will pay them higher salary with equally good fringe benefits such as accommodation, car, and other things. Again, more than half of the respondents disagreed that their career, job, and occupational choice will be seen to be successful if they are seen by others to be rich. On another note, majority (53%) of the respondents believed their success will be measured by the amount of wealth and money that they owned, but not hard work. From Table 4, 69% of the youth believed society looked at what one possessed and not what one did. A greater percentage (52%) of the respondents believed one would not be considered to have worked or to have had a good career, job and occupation if one could not become rich in his or her life time.

**Table-4.** Reasons for choice of career

Statement	Agree Frequency %	Disagree Frequency %
I made a particular career, job and occupational choice because it will pay me a higher salary with equally good fringe benefits such as accommodation, car, etc.	78	22
My career, job and occupational choice will be successful if I am seen to be rich in the eyes of the public.	42	58
I believe my success will be measured by the amount of money and wealth that I own.	53	47
I believe the society looks at what you have and not what you do.	69	31
One cannot be considered to have worked, or had a good career, job and occupation if one could not become rich in his or her life time.	52	48

### 3.4. Other Influencing Factors on Career Selection

From Table 5, 85% of the respondents said they would consider their interests and abilities before they took a decision concerning their career, job, and occupational choice. Again, 45% of the respondents were of the view that their social class would affect their career and occupational choice. Additionally, 84% of the respondents would consider the situation or conditions that exist at a time before they make a career, job, and occupational

choice. Sixty-three of the respondents believe that their religious beliefs, culture and ethnic identity are critical and important in making their career, job, and occupational choice. More than two-thirds of the youth would consider their physiological, biological, safety, love, self-esteem and their need to actualise before they make their career, job, and occupational decisions.

**Table-5.** Other influencing factors on career selection

Statement	Agree Frequency %	Disagree Frequency %
I will consider my interest and ability before I take decision concerning my career, job and occupation choice.	85	15
My social class will affect my career, job and occupational choice.	45	55
I will consider the situation or conditions that exist at the time before I make a career, job and occupational choice.	84	16
My religious believes, culture and ethnic identity is critical and important in making my career, job and occupational choice.	63	37
I will consider the physiological, biological, safety; love, self- esteem, and my need to self- actualize before I make my career, job, and occupational decisions.	86	14

### 3.5. Reasons for Change in Career Choice

Sixty percent of the youth said, they will consider changing their career in mind if they receive additional information about alternative careers and other essential factors like values and dignity in working hard for money. A greater percent of the youth said their school authorities give much attention to career programmes in their school. Majority (94%) of the respondents confirmed that guest speakers are invited to share their career experiences with them. Again, 80% of the respondents said their career choices and decisions have been informed by sufficient information received. From Table 6, (69%) were of the view that more career information is still needed for proper career decisions and choices to be made by them and others.

**Table-6.** Reasons for change in career choice

Statement	Agree Frequency %	Disagree Frequency %
I will consider changing my career in mind now upon receipt of additional information about alternative careers.	60	40
My school authorities do give much attention to guidance programmes.	53	47
Guest Speakers are invited to my school to share their experiences with us.	94	6
My career choice has been influenced by career guidance programme and information received up to date.	80	20
I will want more career information to be given to us to help us and others.	69	31

## 4. Discussion

In a broader sense, the role of the family is outstanding as an influence on ontogenetic development including career development (Kerka, 2000). Family members including one or both parents, older siblings, and uncles could role model specific competencies and challenges related to particular careers as well as general work competencies and risks. More broadly, many of the settings in which children and youth participate are dependent on choices of parents. Parents' decisions and choices of where to live, what to provide materially and relationally in the home, which school to enroll their children in, how to structure out-of-school time for children, thus, impacts children's development in ways that would be meaningful for later success in the world of work. From the responses given, it could be said that most literate youth care about how they should acquire wealth and money. It also shows clearly that most members of the literate youth will not take on task that is voluntary in nature. They believe that people who possess wealth and money are powerful and influential. Though a greater number of the youth believe having money makes one famous and powerful, they do not think that money can do everything. They also do not think that money should be the only consideration in whatever one does in life. Literate youth can therefore be described as having great interest in getting money but will be mindful of what they do to get it.

There is a clear indication from the interpretation of Table 2 that most literate youth are not interested in offering voluntary services. It is also observed that most of the youth prefer jobs that will pay them higher salaries and incentives and will not entertain jobs that will not let them become rich quickly. In addition, most of the youth prefer jobs with good corporate names and brand. They also think loyalty, commitments, sincerity and hard work contributes to one's success. Responses from Table 3 points out that most of the youth will choose a career that will pay them higher or huge salary and other fringe benefits. Again, most of them think that when

one is seen to be rich in the eyes of the public, it means that the person had a successful career, job, and occupation. Most of the youth also believe that their success would be measured by the amount of money and wealth that they own. According to the responses given, most of the youth believe that society looks at what one has and not what one does to get what he or she has. Majority of the youth hold that their success would be measured by the amount of money and wealth that they own, they would, therefore, consider themselves to have been successful if they became rich during their life time.

From the above analyses, it could be said that majority of the youth would consider their interests and abilities before they take a decision concerning their career, job, and occupational choices. The majority of the youth further believe that their social class would not affect their career, job, and occupational choice. In addition, most of the youth said they will consider the situation or conditions that exist at a time before they make a career, job, and occupational choice. Those who disagree said their social class will not affect their career, job, and occupational choice. A greater percentage of the youth also said that their religious beliefs, culture and ethnic identity are critical and important in making their career, job, and occupational choice. Again, some said that their physiological, biological, safety, love, self-esteem and their need to actualise would be considered before they made their career, job, and occupational decisions.

Within the structure of opportunities provided by family members, children and youth exercise choices that impact their development considerably. There is evidence from this research of the reciprocally impactful key influences of family (and other social groups) and self. Part of this evidence has to do with the class and gender specificity of career choices of youth in this study. Despite most youth rating their own self as more or most important in making a career choice, all career choices were class specific and many were gender specific. Clearly, it is within a pool of careers, which would largely garner family approval (i.e., a pool of careers congruent with family expectations and aspirations, and family standards and lifestyle), that the youth have explained why they specifically chose to become, for example, a counsellor or a photographer. Their notions of autonomy and possibly “free will” appear circumscribed within the limits of what would meet family approval. Of course, this is exemplary of a systems view: the roles of the self and the family are interconnected rather than disparate, and therefore, judgments of own role subsumes the role of the family. In fact, the findings are in consonant with many threads in the literature. It echoes Gottfredson’s theory of circumscription and compromise. She states that adolescents “Occupational aspiration reproduces most of the class and gender differences of the parent generation” (Gottfredson, 2005). The finding is also an example of the contextual affordances and limitations that enable or constrain the agency of individuals, described in Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg’s framework (cited in Patton and McMahon (2006a)) and in action perspectives (Brandtstädter, 2006). Illustrative of such affordances and limitations, are the values, beliefs, expectations, aspirations and standards that families coalesce for their unit as a whole, and define specifically for a member of the family, including the daughter or son.

Outstandingly, the youth identified self and other influences as more or most important influences on their career choice. “Self and family” or “self, family and teacher” were oft-repeated combinations of influences. Interestingly, the conclusions from the current study are congruent with those obtained in job perception and job preference surveys in U.K., in particular a school survey of 2447 students and a college survey of 537 students (Millward *et al.*, 2006). Millward *et al.* (2006) concluded that their results (with regard to job preferences) indicated that the youth “were highly active in making their own decisions about what they want based on what they know they can and cannot cope with, combined with knowledge of what they are good at” (p. 36).

## 5. Conclusion

Career decision is very vital in one’s life. The type of job or occupation that one chooses is one of such vital decisions. It should, however, be done in a well-informed position. Despite the fact that students and the youth complain of high level of unemployment, there are many job openings that are advertised in the media which the youth may be qualified to take up or are just not interested due to the perceptions that they hold.

The study assessed the perception of wealth and its impact on career choice of Senior High School students. The study specifically attempted to identify some current trends in the effort to create awareness in the youth about the need to use varied factors in career decision-making and job choice.

The study concluded that the youth heavily depended on their own personal instincts or judgments of what were right for them. Personal experience was the foremost source of job knowledge, acquired through work observation, actual work experiences, or through talking to family or friends in those jobs. In making job decisions there were three outstanding influences: family advice/role models or informal chatting, work experience, and inspired by own interests/enjoyment. Students rated parental advice as the most used and most helpful source of career advice. In spite of most youth rating their own self as more or most important in making a career choice, all career choices were class specific and many were gender specific. The findings were in harmony with many threads in the literature as well as meeting the example of the contextual affordances and limitations that enable or constrain the agency of individuals. Finally, most of the youth will choose a career that

will pay them higher or huge salary and other fringe benefits.

The study therefore recommends that, among other things the youth should be encouraged to pay more attention to guidance and career programmes that are organised for them. Career and guidance service providers should also intensify their effort at educating the youth about the varied factors that one needs to consider before career decision and job preferences are made.

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