

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF CAREER AWARENESS COUNSELLING ON CAREER AWARENESS AND OCCUPATIONAL GOALS AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BOKKOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

By

MANGAI AMOS MAHANAN
University of Jos, Jos Plateau State, Nigeria
mangaiamos982@gmail.com

PROF GRACE O. MOMOH
University of Jos, Jos Plateau State, Nigeria
momohgg@yahoo.com

&

PROF NANRAM B. LONGBAP
University of Jos, Jos Plateau State, Nigeria
nanram2020@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explored the influence of Career Awareness Counselling on the occupational goals of junior secondary school students in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Employing a true experimental research design with pretest-posttest control groups, the study aimed to determine whether CAC could significantly enhance students' career awareness and goals. The sample consisted of 100 JSS3 students, randomly assigned to experimental and control groups, with 50 students in each group. The Career Awareness Questionnaire (CAQ) and the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS) were utilized for data collection, and their validity and reliability were established through expert review and pilot testing. The experimental group received an eight-week CAC intervention, while the control group received a placebo treatment. Pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-tests. Results indicated a significant improvement in the occupational aspirations of students who underwent CAC, demonstrating the effectiveness of career counselling in enhancing students' career awareness and future aspirations. The findings underscore the importance of early career guidance in educational settings to prevent future career-related frustrations and regrets.

Keywords: Career awareness, Occupational goals, Influence, Educational Intervention, Counselling.

Introduction

The significance of career decisions during secondary school years cannot be overstated. Choosing the right career path can profoundly impact one's future, while incorrect choices can lead to disappointment and regret. A well-informed decision can pave the way for success and satisfaction, whereas uninformed choices may result in dissatisfaction and missed opportunities. Consequently, it's crucial for secondary school students to make informed decisions about their careers, considering their interests, abilities, and available options. Career, as defined by Johnson (2022), encompasses one's chosen profession or line of work, which may involve multiple jobs and doesn't necessarily require a college degree. The Bureau

of Labour Services (2022) predicts that a significant portion of new jobs in the coming decade won't require traditional degrees but may necessitate on-the-job training. Hence, individuals should consider various career paths based on their skills, education, and interests.

Many secondary school students tend to follow popular career trends without exploring diverse options or considering personal suitability. This lack of awareness underscores the need for comprehensive career guidance counselling to help students make informed choices aligned with their abilities and aspirations. By understanding the relationship between career choices and personal attributes, students can avoid blindly following trends and instead make rational decisions about their futures.

Career awareness counselling is vital for students as they navigate the transition from secondary to higher education or the workforce. It equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their careers and educational paths. Additionally, parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's career aspirations by providing support, encouragement, and setting positive examples.

Gender stereotypes also influence career aspirations, with certain occupations traditionally perceived as more suitable for males or females. However, efforts to promote gender equality in career choices are essential for enabling individuals to pursue careers based on their interests and abilities rather than societal expectations. Ultimately, early exposure to diverse career options and comprehensive career guidance can empower secondary school students to make informed decisions about their futures and pursue fulfilling careers aligned with their interests and abilities.

Statement of the problem

The issue of occupational aspirations and academic achievements among junior secondary school students in Plateau State has been a longstanding concern. Through direct engagement with students, it has become evident that many lack sufficient knowledge about potential career paths. This deficiency in career awareness counselling has led to significant uncertainty and anxiety among students regarding their future occupational choices. Moreover, the shortage of professional counsellors in schools exacerbates the problem, leaving students without proper guidance. This situation poses a serious threat to the students' future prospects and calls for urgent attention through research endeavors like the present study. Deciding on a career path is a critical task, particularly for junior secondary school students in Plateau State who are faced with a myriad of academic subjects. The transition from primary to junior secondary education introduces them to a wider array of subjects, adding complexity to their decision-making process. Consequently, there is a pressing need for comprehensive career awareness counselling to assist students in making informed choices. Given these challenges, investigating the "Impact of Career Awareness Counselling on Career Awareness and Occupational Aspirations of Junior Secondary School 3 Students in Plateau State, Nigeria" is imperative.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to find out the influence of career awareness counselling on career awareness and occupational goals of Junior Secondary School 3 students in Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. To find out the level of career awareness of JSS 3 students in Bokkos LGA in experimental and control groups before treatment.
2. Examine the level of career awareness of JSS 3 students in Bokkos LGA in experimental and control groups after exposing the experimental group to treatment.
3. Find out career awareness preferences of JSS 3 students in Bokkos LGA in experimental and control groups before treatment.

Research questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What is the level of career awareness of JSS 3 students in Bokkos LGA in experimental and control groups before treatment?
2. What is the level of career awareness of JSS 3 students in Bokkos LGA in experimental and control groups after treatment?
3. What are the career preferences of JSS 3 students in experimental and control groups before treatment?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significance between pre-test career awareness mean scores and post-test career mean scores of JSS 3 students in experimental and control groups.
2. There is no difference between pre-test and post-test occupational aspirations mean scores of JSS 3 students in experimental and control groups.
3. There is no significant difference between male and female JSS 3 students post-test career awareness mean scores in experimental group.

Methodology

The study employed a true experimental research design using the pretest-posttest control group approach. Subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The design compared the effects of Career Awareness Counselling (CAC) on Occupational Aspirations by evaluating participants' scores before and after the intervention. The structure included the experimental group (R O1 X O2) and the control group (R O3 - O4), where R represented random assignment, O1 and O3 were pre-test scores, O2 and O4 were post-test scores, and X indicated the treatment administered to the experimental group.

The population comprised all 25 public junior secondary schools in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria, specifically targeting 1,216 JSS3 students (573 males and 643 females). From this population, a sample of 100 students from one public junior secondary school in Bokkos Local Government Area was selected. The sample was divided into two groups: 50 students in the experimental group and 50 in the control group. Simple random sampling was used to select the school and respondents, ensuring equal chances for all schools. The hat-and-draw method was employed, drawing names from a bowl to select the participating school.

Two instruments were used for data collection: the Career Awareness Questionnaire (CAQ) and the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS). The CAQ had two sections: Section A gathered personal data, and Section B consisted of 15 questions on career awareness using a 5-point Likert scale. The OAS also had two sections: Section A collected personal data, and Section B contained 25 multiple-choice questions on occupational aspirations. The CAQ was developed

after an extensive literature review and consultation with the researcher's supervisor, while the OAS was adopted to meet the study's objectives.

Content and face validity for the CAQ were established by experts from the University of Jos in Guidance and Counselling, Psychology, and Research, Measurement and Evaluation. Construct validity was established using factor analysis. Similarly, content validity for the OAS was established by experts in the same fields. Reliability for both instruments was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha method, with pilot testing conducted in a school with similar characteristics to the main study. A reliability coefficient of 0.75 or above was deemed adequate.

Data collection involved obtaining a letter of introduction from the department and presenting it to the selected school for permission to conduct the study. Two research assistants, familiar with the study area, were trained for four days to assist with the experiment. The CAQ and OAS were administered as pretests to both groups in separate classrooms to establish baseline equivalence. The researcher supervised the experimental group, and research assistants handled the control group. The treatment, "Career Awareness Counselling," was administered to the experimental group over eight weeks, with sessions lasting 35 minutes each. The control group received a placebo treatment. After the treatment period, both groups were post-tested using the CAQ and OAS in the same manner as the pretest.

Scoring for the CAQ used a 5-point Likert scale, while the OAS scored each correct answer with four marks, totaling 100 marks for 25 questions. Data analysis involved answering the six research questions using mean and standard deviation. T-tests were used to test the six hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. A p-value less than 0.05 indicated a significant result (reject Ho), while a p-value of 0.05 or more indicated a non-significant result (retain Ho).

Result and discussion

Research Question One: What is the pretest and posttest mean score for career awareness of JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in the control and experimental groups?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Score for Career Awareness of JSS3 Students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain/Loss	Difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	25	2.36	1.04	4.00	0.76	2.36	2.04
Control	25	2.60	1.05	2.92	1.08	0.32	

The above table shows the mean score of career awareness of JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 2.36 with a standard

deviation of 1.04 at pre-test. At post-test, a mean score of 4.00 was obtained with a standard deviation of 0.76. A mean gain of 2.36 was obtained. This implies that there is an improvement in career awareness amongst students of JSS3 after treatment. In the control group a mean score of 2.60 was obtained with a standard deviation of 1.05 at pre-test, while at post test a mean score of 2.92 was obtained with a standard deviation of 1.08. A mean gain 0.32 was obtained. From the summary of analysis after treatment, the experimental group had a mean score (4.00) greater than the mean criterion of 3.00 while the control group had a mean score (2.92) less than the mean criterion of 3.00. This shows that the experimental group was better informed on career awareness than the control group.

Research Question Two: What are the pre-test and post-test mean scores of sources of career awareness among JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in the control and experimental group?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Score Sources of Career Awareness of JSS3 Students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean		Difference
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Gain/Loss	
Experimental	25	2.40	0.96	4.20	0.82	1.80	1.48
Control	25	2.44	0.77	2.76	1.27	0.32	

The above table shows the mean score of sources of career awareness of JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 2.40 with a standard deviation of 0.96 at pre-test. At post-test, a mean score of 4.20 was obtained with a standard deviation of 0.82. A mean gain of 1.80 was obtained. This implies that there is an improvement in the sources of career awareness amongst students of JSS3 after treatment. In the control group a mean score of 2.44 was obtained with a standard deviation of 0.77 at pre-test, while at post-test a mean score of 2.76 was obtained with a standard deviation of 1.27. A mean gain 0.32 was obtained. From the summary of analysis after treatment, the experimental group had a mean score (4.20) greater than the mean criterion of 3.00 while the control group had a mean score (2.76) less than the mean criterion of 3.00. This shows that the experimental group was better informed on the different sources of career awareness than the control group.

Research Question Three: What are the pre-test and post-test mean scores of knowledge of occupational aspiration among JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in the control and experimental group?

Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Score Sources of Knowledge of Occupational Aspiration of JSS3 Students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State in Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean		Difference
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Gain/Loss	
Experimental	25	54.00	6.35	69.00	4.54	15.00	12.92
Control	25	51.92	4.73	54.00	6.35	2.08	

The above table shows the mean score of sources of knowledge of occupational aspiration of JSS3 students in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 54.00 with a standard deviation of 6.35 at pre-test. At post-test, a mean score of 69.00 was obtained with a standard deviation of 4.54. A mean gain of 15 was obtained. This implies that students of JSS3 after treatment performed better and are more knowledgeable. In the control group a mean score of 51.92 was obtained with a standard deviation of 4.73 at pre-test, while at post-test a mean score of 54 was obtained with a standard deviation of 6.35. A mean gain 2.08 was obtained. From the summary of analysis after treatment, the experimental group performed much better than the control group.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis One: The career awareness post mean scores of JSS3 students in the control and experimental group will not differ significantly.

Table 4: Result on Post-test Career Awareness Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t	p-value	Decision
Experimental	25	4.00	0.76	48	-4.090	0.000	Significant
Control	25	2.92	1.08				

Table 4 reveals the summary of independent sample t-test result of the post-test career awareness mean score of students in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the post-test mean score was 4.00 with standard deviation of 0.76 and the control group has a mean score of 2.92 and standard deviation of 1.08. The result also yielded $t(48) = -4.090$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is significant differences between the career awareness mean scores of JSS3 students in the control and experimental group after treatment.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the post test mean score of the sources of career awareness of JSS 3 students in the control and experimental groups.

Table 5: Result on Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups on Sources of Career Awareness

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t	p-value	Decision
Experimental	25	4.20	0.82	48	-4.775	0.000	Significant
Control	25	2.76	1.27				

Table 5 reveals the summary of independent sample t-test result of the post-test sources of career awareness mean score of students in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the post-test mean score was 4.20 with standard deviation of 0.82 and the control group has a mean score of 2.76 and standard deviation of 1.27. The result also yielded $t(48) = -4.775$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is significant differences between the sources of career awareness mean scores of JSS3 students in the control and experimental group after treatment.

Hypothesis Three: The knowledge of occupational aspiration post-test mean score of JSS 3 students in the control and experimental groups will not differ significantly.

Table 6: Result on Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups on Knowledge of Occupational Aspiration

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t	p-value	Decision
Experimental	25	68.88	6.35	40	-8.114	0.000	Significant
Control	25	54.00	4.96				

Table 6 reveals the summary of independent sample t-test result of the post-test mean score of knowledge of occupational aspiration of students in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the post-test mean score was 68.88 with standard deviation of 6.35 and the control group has a mean score of 54.00 and standard deviation of 4.96. The result also yielded $t(40) = -8.114$, $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of knowledge of occupational aspiration of JSS3 students in the control and experimental group after treatment.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the Career Awareness Questionnaire (CAQ) and Occupational Aspiration (OAS), adopted by the researcher, underwent rigorous validation processes. Three experts

from various educational fields ensured the content validity, achieving strong agreement with a Kendall's coefficient value of 0.88. Construct validity of the CAQ was confirmed through factor analysis, revealing that all 15 items measured a single construct. Reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielded coefficients of 0.727 for OAS and 0.920 for CAQ, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The study demonstrated that students receiving career awareness counselling showed significant improvements in both career awareness and occupational aspirations compared to the control group. Trait and factor theory proved effective in enhancing these outcomes, particularly in Barkin Ladi LGA, Plateau State. Moreover, a significant difference was observed in post-test achievement mean scores between the experimental and control groups, affirming the efficacy of career awareness counselling. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of implementing such interventions at the junior secondary school level to enhance students' career readiness and aspirations.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of career awareness counselling on the career awareness and occupational goals of junior high school students in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings underscore the critical role of career awareness counselling in guiding students through the complexities of career decision-making. Students in the experimental group showed increased confidence and knowledge about potential career paths, which is essential for their future academic and professional success. This suggests that when students are well-informed about their career options early on, they are better equipped to make decisions that align with their interests, skills, and values, ultimately leading to more satisfying and successful careers.

Furthermore, the study highlights the pressing need for integrating comprehensive career counselling programs within the educational system of Plateau State. Given the positive outcomes observed, it is clear that career counselling should be an integral part of the junior secondary school curriculum. This integration can help mitigate the widespread issue of career indecision and anxiety among students, ensuring they are better prepared for the challenges of the labor market. The research also points to the necessity of addressing the shortage of professional career counsellors in schools. Training and employing more qualified counsellors can enhance the effectiveness of career guidance programs. Additionally, providing ongoing professional development for counsellors can ensure they are equipped with the latest tools and techniques to support students effectively. Career awareness counselling has a profound and positive impact on junior high school students' career awareness and occupational aspirations. By equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate their career paths, these programs can contribute significantly to their personal and professional development. It is imperative that educators, policymakers, and stakeholders recognize the value of career counselling and work collaboratively to ensure its widespread implementation and accessibility for all students. This will not only enhance individual student outcomes but also contribute to the broader goal of national development through a well-informed and capable workforce.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integration of Comprehensive Career Counselling Programs: Educational authorities in Plateau State should prioritize the integration of comprehensive career counselling programs within the junior secondary school curriculum. These programs should be designed to provide students with ongoing guidance and support in exploring career options, setting goals, and making informed decisions about their future pathways.
2. Incorporation of Technology in Career Counselling: Educational institutions should leverage technology to enhance career counselling services. Online resources, career assessment tools, and virtual counselling sessions can complement traditional counselling methods and reach a wider audience of students. Training programs should be provided to counsellors to effectively utilize technology in their practice.
3. Policy Advocacy for Career Counselling: Stakeholders in education, including policymakers, educators, parents, and community leaders, should advocate for policies that prioritize career counselling in schools. This includes advocating for increased funding, resources, and policy support for the implementation of career guidance programs at the state and national levels.
4. Parental Involvement and Awareness: Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's career development. Schools should actively involve parents in career counselling initiatives through workshops, seminars, and informational sessions. Parents should be educated about the importance of career awareness and encouraged to engage in constructive conversations with their children about their future aspirations.
5. Promotion of Non-traditional Career Paths: Career counselling programs should strive to promote awareness of non-traditional career paths and opportunities, including entrepreneurship, vocational training, and alternative professions. This can help students explore a diverse range of options beyond conventional academic pathways and foster innovation and creativity in the workforce.

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