ASSESSMENT OF CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the need for awareness of career opportunities among secondary school students in the present democratic dispensation with a view to preparing you to have a career focus to avoid falling prey to desperate politicians. Requirements for choice of career, factors in career choice and sources of information were also discussed. Different ways in which career counselling could be used to assist youth in making appropriate career choices were also highlighted, and recommendations were proposed. The paper concludes that there is every need to prepare the youths for healthy living before entering into stable and satisfying careers instead of being misused and abused in the hands of unscrupulous politicians.

Introduction

Education worldwide is recognised as an undisputable and indispensable force for the transformation of society. Each society, therefore, desires that its citizens are knowledgeable. Such citizens possess appropriate occupational skills and develop acceptable attitudes that can make them useful to themselves, as well as their society. These expectations, therefore, place a tremendous responsibility on the school, which serves as a sorting agency for learners. The education system, perhaps more than any other social institution, places people in various positions in society; it is responsible for sorting out who occupies what position and on what criteria. This explains why the school guidance counsellor, for example, counsels individual learners and attempts to categorise them into such groups as scholastic or vocational and those who may drop out of the system entirely. In most cases, the way the sorting exercise is done affects an individual at the school level and consequently determines what becomes of the person at the social level.

Unfortunately, the individual who does not know himself will refuse to be sorted out by the school into the group that he fits most. Sometimes, the influence may come from the parents who themselves are ignorant about the potential and capabilities of their children, thereby causing irreparable damage to the future prospects of the children. Sometimes, society also influences the individual in the choice of a career. More often than not, school learners end up in blind spot after leaving school. Some may discover rather late that, despite having spent over six years in school, they have nothing to offer to their parents and to society. They consequently become a burden to their parents and a nuisance to society. The result, of course, is a disastrous individual. For most people, it involves a lifelong process of working through and choosing from employment opportunities available to them. Super (1990) has asserted that high school (or secondary school) students are at the exploratory stage of their career development and are thus involved in crystallising and specifying occupational preference while making preliminary decisions about career choices. Indeed, one of the developmental tasks of adolescents in secondary school is to explore and plan for their post-secondary school career options. There is, therefore, the need for secondary school learners to be guided appropriately, so that they can be made aware of the available career prospects under the democratic dispensation, so as to guard against their being used as tools for political wars and destruction.

Influencing Factors in Career Choice

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions individuals have to make in determining their plans. This decision is important because it affects them throughout their lives. In making career choices, individuals are influenced by many factors. Baca (2010) opined that the career choice behaviour of individuals is shaped partly by environmental factors, including gender roles, the economy, parents, other role models and the social norm. Aihie and

Ohanaka (2010) stated that studies have shown that the majority of students were greatly influenced by their interest, aptitudes, family members, employment opportunities and accessibility to school offering courses. While Musa (2014) opined that many Nigerian youths go into unsuitable careers due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers or as a result of the prestige attached to the jobs without adequate career counselling and vocational guidance. Consequently, many end up in careers that are not suitable for them and in jobs that do not give them fulfilment. Such individuals are unable to contribute meaningfully to society, making the years spent in training and education wasteful.

Oneijaku (1987 in Agbo 2008) explains the factors influencing career choice as having a psychological or biological basis and stemming from the social, economic or political conditions an individual finds himself. According to him, occupational choice may also be by accident or chance. Denga (2015) classified the factors that influence the career choice of the individual as external and internal pressures.

He further explains that external pressures are extrinsic factors, which influence career decisions among students such as parents, teachers, other role models, higher Salaries, environmental pressure, chance, mass media and social influence. While the Internal pressures are those intrinsic factors that motivate an individual to enter an occupational field. They include interests, ability or educational qualifications, altruistic reasons, value systems and physique or gender.

It should be noted, however, that in most cases, some of these factors do not have a permanent influence on the individual's career choice because of the progressive nature of career preferences. An individual may make a series of career decisions as he is exposed to several alternatives during his career development. Generally, the factors that may influence an individual's career or occupational preferences at any point in time are varied in nature. There is, however, some form of interaction among the factors, and some modify others.

Identifying the factors that influence career choice and decision among secondary school learners will therefore give the school guidance counsellor and significant others in the life of these students an insight to what motivates the career selection of adolescents and better accomplish the mission of helping students achieve their educational as well as career goals.

Requirements for the Choice of Career

The streets of Nigeria today are flooded with uncountable and uncontrollable idle young men and women who are found engaged in all sorts of social ills, such as prostitution, drug abuse, arson, armed robbery, cultism, political thuggery, etc. the first step towards arresting this negative trend is for the youth to become aware of himself, know who he is, what he can do and what career opportunities are available. Only then can he aspire to greater achievement and success in life.

More so, career choice among Nigerian youth may be seen as haphazard because of lack of adequate knowledge about existing careers. Youth are generally deficient in in-depth knowledge about career awareness information for them to make realistic and appropriate choices. As a result of this, many remain like "reeds blown by the wind" and fall easily into the hands of anyone who comes by to tantalise them with anything that may earn them a living. In a democratic dispensation as we have presently, they are easily enticed to work as political thugs despite their educational attainment. This is because most Nigerians do not know themselves, nor do they have adequate information about the jobs they choose. The consequence is that most youths today engage in occupations not based on rational choice, but based on what the wind of fate has brought their way or on the "Godfather" they have, especially in a democratic dispensation where appointments and employment opportunities exist only to those who know people at the helm of affairs. It falls on us as educators to rescue. The youth from these painful and costly blunders arise from a false perception of oneself and a lack of awareness on the part of the youth about the vocational information needed for appropriate career choice.

Studies on vocational choice in Nigeria have revealed that Nigerians prefer occupations in the professional classes. For example, Olayinka (2001 in Ken and Nicholas 2004) established that most the preferred jobs among Nigerian youth and the reasons for such preferences were in order of descending magnitude. Medicine (17.9%), Engineering (16.7%). Nursing (10.4%) Accountancy (8.9), Business Administration (6.3%), and Teaching (5.2%). The reasons they gave for their choice included high salary, better conditions of service, humanitarian interest. Today if a similar study is conducted, the response would be probably different as many may prefer politics in order to arrive overnight. Career choice to a large extent is dependent on many factors such as self-awareness, career awareness information, interest and ability among others, and these are explained below.

1. Individual Characteristics/Self Awareness

Individual children are endowed with potentials that may lay hidden. It is important for each child to address the following questions if he is to understand himself.

a. Who am I?
b. How do I feel?
c. What do you like to do?
d. Am I like other people in any way?
e. Am I different?

Answers to the above questions will enable individuals to understand their feelings, behaviour, interests and abilities and match these with the kind of jobs they would like to-do after leaving school...

On the future career, one needs to answer the following questions:

- What type of work do I hope to do after leaving school?
- What can I do well?

- What personal qualities will make me successful in the job I want to take up after leaving school?

Answers to the above questions may partly be provided by the individual himself, while the school counselor will provide other answers. Through individual Analysis Service (Appraisal), vital information about individuals may be collected, analyzed and used in helping the individuals understand themselves and become more capable of making rational decisions, achieving self-direction, maintaining social relationship and becoming self-actualized persons instead of individuals blindly following the path of a father or uncle that has become successful in business or politics.

Certain jobs require certain characteristics, such as intelligence, skillfulness, patience, carefulness, diligence, perseverance, endurance, open-mindedness, truthfulness, deduction, hard work, good interpersonal social relationships, oratory, objectivity, scholarship, etc. It is, therefore, important that individuals match their talents against job requirements so as to make appropriate career choices. Thus, when advertisements are made, requirements for the jobs are usually stated. Candidates are interviewed based on the criteria so stated and may also be selected based on their performance at the interview.

2. Job Characteristics

Each career is unique; jobs usually carried out in such settings have their own characteristics. Thus, occupational information becomes the essential aspect of choosing a career. Occupational information refers to facts about jobs that may enable an individual to decide whether or not he is capable of taking up the job. No one can choose what he or she knows nothing about. A person may stumble into a suitable occupation by sheer luck. But "Luck" is no longer a reliable factor in the Nigerian labour market in the face of high unemployment among youth. Information considered relevant about jobs may relate to the nature of work or activities usually carried out or work demand. In fact, where the work is done, job security, working conditions,' opportunities for career advancement, general contentment and job satisfaction, academic and professional requirements, financial benefits in terms of salary, allowance, etc. By the time the students get information, he or she will be better placed to know clearly which job he or she think they can do successfully.

3. Sources of information

Information about the individual students can be obtained from various sources, such as files in the school, interviews with the students, through observation, the administration of psychological tests, e.g. the Intelligence Test, the immediate community where the child belongs, etc.

While information about career opportunities may come from Training Institutions, actual teaching about jobs, employment agencies, the counselling units after school, and the mass media (newspapers, radio and television), since information is vital in career choices. It becomes imperative that those concerned with gathering information need to be careful to ensure that the information

collected is adequate, accurate, reliable and valid. Such information must undergo scrutiny before it may bemade public for consumption.

Implications for Counselling

Counselling youth to make appropriate career choices is an integral part of the whole process of preparing adolescents for life. The secondary school coincides with that of the adolescence stage for the students and this is also the time most adolescents experience a lot of physical, mental, emotional and social changes. It is a period when adolescents like to belong to groups and hero worship. It is not surprising, therefore, that they can easily fall prey to politicians who may use them for political vices, such as thuggery, violent acts, arson, etc. However, they need to be prepared towards meaningful occupational choices, which depend on several factors, such as family background, cultural dimensions, religious affiliation, economic disposition, political consideration and social setting, which may affect the choice of one's career. At the junior secondary school level, self-perception, though very important, may be subsumed by these other factors mentioned earlier. It is, therefore, necessary that the youth are assisted in making appropriate career choices through counselling for self-awareness, psychological and emotional preparedness. In the whole process, the involvement of the following is crucial.

- **Parents**

Parents should be encouraged to identify early enough the potentials of theirchildren, so that such can be nurtured. Parents who insist that their children pursue occupations which they (parents) were unable to pursue are not realistic and helpful to their children.

- **The School in Conjunction with the Counsellor**

The school as an agency of education, has a crucial role to play in helping the children make appropriate career choices. In most cases, teachers tend to influence their students in choosing the subjects they teach, regardless of whether or not such subject combinations, when randomly combined, would lead the child to qualify for any career later in life. This is where caution must be exercised, as students may come out with excellent results but would not secure appropriate jobs. Therefore, in this direction, the introduction of Guidance and Counselling Services in schools becomes very important as a means of providing opportunities to assist the students. Emphasis on such services should be targeted at academic, vocational, personal-social, appraising the individuals, building cumulative records, placement of students, researching, resolving crises and providing opportunities for exchange of ideas among students.

4. Mass Media

This forum has the capacity to create awareness in children about opportunities in the labour market. Children may also be motivated when they become involved in programmes that they can discuss about the professions of their interests.

Conclusion

In all societies, whether developed, developing or underdeveloped, the quality of workers as well as their degree of satisfaction goes a long way to determine the worth, functioning and economic stability of that society. The social and economic instability of some countries may be traced to a lack of worker satisfaction in their jobs or frustration as a result of thwarted goals. Since occupation is a way of life, it moulds character, determines his social status and in most cases, conditions his life. Generally speaking, an appropriate choice of occupation is vital for the individual's personal stability and success in life. In view of this therefore, in the best interest of a democratic Nigeria everything must be done to ensure that the youth, especially those in secondary schools, are prepared to choose careers that will make them function optimally, savouring satisfaction from their work and contributing to the overall development of the society within which they find themselves instead of allowing themselves, to be misused and abused by unscrupulous politicians who are in dire need of political rectitude.

Recommendations

- Guidance and counselling should be introduced and made functional in all Nigerian Institutions of learning to provide appropriate Career counselling.
- There is a need to inculcate the spirit of patience and understanding in youth in general, who are rather in a hurry to reach the top in the shortest time.
- There should be effective awareness and campaign strategies to discourage politicians from encouraging, enticing and getting students involved in negative vices, which are detrimental to the youth's healthy living and entering into steady, stable careers.
- There is an urgent need to prepare the youth for effective vocational life to prevent them from indulging in vices, which are capable of causing problems for society and thereby jeopardising the democratic setting.

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