

Career Aspirations of Bachelor of Education (Early Grade) Students

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Abstract: - The study was carried out to find out the careers aspired for by B. Ed. (Early Grade) students. Employing descriptive survey design, 397 Early Grade students were purposively sampled for the study. A self-made questionnaire was used to collect the data. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test. The study revealed that most students had moderate 259 (65.2%) knowledge of careers in Early Grade. Most of them 165 (41.6%) aspired to teach in preschools after completing the programme. Significant difference was found between the career aspirations of West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and Diploma in Education certificate holders pursuing the programme but no difference was found in terms of gender. An implication drawn was that most of the students should be employed to teach in preschools on completion of the programme since that is their aspired career.

Keywords: career, aspirations, bachelor, education, early grade

I. INTRODUCTION

Career decision is very important in life. It affects the psychological, emotional and social dimensions of a person's life. Because of the importance of career choice in people's lives, career guidance is an important focus of Guidance and Counselling. Career has been defined by various authors. Greenhaus (1987) cited in Pattanayak (2008) defined career as pattern of work-related experiences and activities over the period of a person's work life. To Pattanayak (2008), career is moving upward in one's chosen path of work. Cascio (2008) on the other hand, saw career in two perspectives, first in the objective perspective and second in the subjective perspective. In objective perspective, career is a sequence of positions occupied by a person during the course of a lifetime. Subjective wise, career consists of a sense of where a person is heading to in his or her work life. Career can therefore be understood from both perspectives.

With respect to how a person makes career decision in life, a number of theories (career development theories) have been propounded to explain that phenomenon. Career development is the process by which a person's career identity is formed from childhood through a lifetime. A theory, on the other hand, is a way of assembling and putting together in a systematic way, what is known about something (Shertzer & Stone, 1977). Career development theories therefore are systematically laid down body of knowledge that explains career development. Basically, career development theories are divided into two namely psychological and non-psychological theories. The psychological theories attribute

career choice to factors inherent or internal to the individual while the non-psychological theories attribute it to external factors.

Ginzberg and associates (1951) and Holland (1959) developed theories of career development based on personality. To Ginzberg and associates (1951), a person moves through three principal stages of career development. These stages are fantasy period which is characterized by arbitrary choice, tentative stage which is characterized by a person's realization of performing well in a particular career and realistic stage where the person gives clear consideration to factors that influence career choice. Holland (1959), however, discussed six personality types and the careers they are likely to choose. A realistic person takes activities involving motor skills and avoids those of intellectual nature. The intellectual person chooses careers in laboratory, research and mathematics. The social person likes social related careers and hence chooses careers in education and religion. Conventional person prefers careers in clerical and library where rules of work exist. An enterprising person prefers sales, leadership and supervisory positions while an artistic person prefers careers like music and art. Super (1953) also developed a theory of career development based on self-concept. To him individuals navigate through five distinct stages in their quest to develop careers in life. They move through growth stage from birth to 14 years, exploration stage from age 15-24 and establishment stage from 25-45 years. The rest are maintenance stage (45-65 years) and decline stage (65+). Roe (1956) extended the argument of career development by postulating that career development is dependent on child rearing practices and hence people oriented persons tend to choose careers in service, business contract, organization, culture and entertainment while thing oriented persons are found in sciences, technology and outdoor jobs.

Early Grade education (Early Childhood education) is an important level of education. Though the specific period of its span is debatable (Swiniarski, Breitborde & Murphy, 1999), it can be concluded that it is a type of education for children from age four (4) to eight (8) (University of Education, Winneba, 2018). Early Grade education forms the foundation of education of the child and hence the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child depends to a large extent on it (Evans & Gruba, 2000). Because of the importance of Early Grade education in Ghana as testified by the minister of education in a report on Ghanaweb (2018), a number of institutions run teacher education programme called Bachelor

of Education (Early Grade) to train teachers and personnel for Early Grade schools (Kindergarten and lower primary). A number of careers exist in Early Grade education. In the outline of careers in Early Grade by Erstad (2018), seven (7) careers were identified. These were preschool teacher, teacher assistant, childcare center director and childcare worker. The rest are special education teacher, English language teacher and nanny. In a write up titled “what can I do with my degree in Early Childhood studies” by Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (2018), the following careers in Early Grade were enumerated. They included early year’s teacher, education consultant, family support worker, health play specialist, learning mentor, special educational needs teacher, social worker, teaching assistant, speech and language therapist and counsellor. Careers relating to registered Early Childhood educator (RECE), early literacy or home care consultants, early intervention specialist and manager of early learning centres were also noted as careers in Early Grade education (Ryerson University, 2019).

The question then is, of the various career fields in Early Grade education, which one(s) do the B. Ed. (Early Grade) students aspire to pursue in life? What are the students’ knowledge base of careers in Early Grade education, and do the male and female students in Early Grade education prefer the same careers or otherwise? These questions are pertinent and hence the study was set off to find answers to them. The problem of study therefore was what are the career aspirations of B.Ed. (Early Grade) students? In a previous study, Akyina (2019) found that, interest in teaching and relating to children was the main factor influencing most students’ choice of B. Ed. (Early Grade) programme. However, the career aspirations of the respondents were not ascertained. Finding them and hence this study was thought significant because the findings will first, help counsellors to guide Early Grade students to choose right careers by providing them with the necessary career information on their preferred careers. Second, the findings will guide the government and stakeholders of Early Grade education in Ghana to open employment avenues based on the career aspirations of the students to absorb the graduates from the programme. Third, knowledge of the careers the students intend to pursue will help in offering them the necessary academic counselling so that they can meet the academic performance requirements of that career and fourth, the findings will add to literature on career choices of B. Ed. (Early Grade) students.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of knowledge of B. Ed. (Early Grade) students on careers in Early Grade?
2. Which of the careers in Early Grade do students prefer most to pursue?
3. Is there any significant difference in their career aspirations by gender?
4. Is there any significant difference in their career aspirations by level of education?

II. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was utilized to carry out the study. The study population was the B. Ed. (Early Grade) students of College of Agriculture Education (CAGRIC) at Asante Mampong, Ghana. This population was purposively selected by the researcher for two main reasons. First, it was easy to get access to them because they were in the researcher’s institution of work. Second, as counsellor of the students, I wanted to know their career aspirations to help direct the course of career counselling to be offered to them. The total population of the B.Ed. (Early Grade) students was 421 consisting of 107 and 314 level 100 and 200 students respectively. All the students were purposively sampled for the study because of their small size and ease of reaching them.

A self-made questionnaire consisting of four sections was used to gather data for the study. Section A required respondents to indicate with a tick in a box, their demographic information namely gender and level of education. In section B, the respondents were to list eight careers in Early Grade education they knew. Section C required each respondent to state one particular career he/she aspired to pursue after completing the Early Grade programme. The questionnaire was self-administered to the respondents after an interaction with them where the purpose of the study was explained to them. The respondents were given 30 minutes to respond to the items. After the 30 minutes period, 397 of them returned it for analysis indicating a return rate of 94% different from a previous study which had a return rate of 95% (Akyina, 2019). The responses were cross checked, coded and entered into SPSS version 20 for analysis.

Demographics

The researcher was interested in two demographic variables of the respondents namely gender and level of education. In terms of gender, it was found that 87(21.9%) of the respondents were males while 310 (78.1%) of them were females. This was different from the distribution in the previous study (Akyina 2019). However, the distribution of the sampled population still points to the finding that Early Grade education is a high preserve for females (Sumsion, 2000). Table 1 below shows the gender distribution of the respondents.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Factors	Freq.	Percent.
Male	87	21.9
Female	310	78.1
Total	397	100

(Field data, 2019)

In terms of the level of education of the respondents, Table 2 shows the distribution. It can be seen that 358 (90.2%) respondents were Senior High School (SHS) graduates holding West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate

(WASSCE). Thirty nine (39) representing 9.8% of the respondents were Diploma in Education holders. The distribution shows that a large proportion of the respondents (SHS graduates) had no formal work experience and therefore will require a lot of career information in making realistic career choice. The Diploma in Education holders however, were professional teachers who were upgrading their level of education to Bachelor's Degree.

Table 2. Level of Education of Respondents

Factors	Freq.	Percent.
SHS (WASSCE)	358	90.2
Diploma in Education	39	9.8
Total	397	100

(Field data, 2019)

III. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the level of knowledge of B. Ed. (Early Grade) students on careers in Early Grade?

Knowledge of careers one can pursue after completing an academic programme is very important. It ignites interest and gives a sense of direction in pursuing the programme. The researcher therefore sought to find out the level of knowledge of the respondents on careers in Early Grade education. The respondents were therefore asked to state eight careers they knew in Early Grade. A classification scheme was devised by the researcher to classify and assess the respondents' level of knowledge of careers in Early Grade. Respondents who were able to state 5-8 careers in early grade were said to have high knowledge of the careers. Those who were able to state 3-4 careers were said to have moderate knowledge while those who were able to state 1-2 were said to have low knowledge of careers in Early Grade. Table 3 shows the results of the responses.

Table 3. Respondents Level of Knowledge of Careers in Early Grade

Knowledge of Careers in Early Grade	Freq.	Percent	Rating
5-8 Careers	30	7.6	High
3-4 Careers	259	65.2	Moderate
1-2 Careers	108	27.2	Low
Total	397	100	

(Field data, 2019)

Results from Table 3 indicate that majority of the students had moderate 259 (65.2%) knowledge of careers in Early Grade. Those with low knowledge of careers in Early Grade were 108 (27.2%). Just 30 (7.6%) of the respondents demonstrated high knowledge of careers in early grade by been able to state 5-8 careers in Early Grade.

Research Question 2: Which of the careers in Early Grade do students prefer most to pursue?

The job prospect of students is one of the important factors students will consider before enrolling in an academic programme. And for that matter, the researcher wanted to find out the career preferences of the Early Grade students. After running the simple frequencies, one hundred and sixty students (41.6%) indicated that they would like to be *teachers at the pre-school level*. The choice of teaching was followed by *Co-ordinator for Early Grade programmes* with 75 respondents, representing 18.9%. The Early Grade careers that were stated by some respondents but received the least choices were *Nanny* one student (0.2%), *Teach special needs children* four students (1.0%). It is interesting to find out that more Early Grade students wanted to be pre-school teachers but not teachers of special children. Again, the fact that over 40% of the students chose *teaching at the pre-school level* partly re-echoes the dependence of students on only government jobs with little to no initiative of starting their own.

Table 4. Preferred Careers of Early Grade Students

Careers	Freq.	Percent.
1. Child life specialist	65	16.4
2. Co-ordinator for Early Grade programmes	75	18.9
3. Manager of a day care centre	25	6.3
4. Nanny	1	0.2
5. Social worker	9	2.3
6. Family counsellor	6	1.5
7. Teach special needs children	4	1.0
8. Teacher at a pre-school	165	41.6
9. Work as a researcher on children	47	11.8
Total	397	100

(Field data, 2019)

Research Question 3: Is there any difference in the preference of Early Grade careers based on gender?

Between males and females, the researcher was curious to find out whether there was any difference in the choice of their careers. After running the independent samples t-test, the results indicated that there was no statistical significant difference between males and females in terms of their preferences of Early Grade careers. The t-test statistical procedure indicated that $t(396) = 0.586$, $p = 0.56$, 2-tailed. By implication, males and females were more likely to choose the same or similar careers in the Early Grade field.

Table 5. Group difference on Early Grade career preference based on gender

Factors	(t)	p - value
Gender	0.586	0.559

Research Question 4: Is there any difference in the preference of Early Grade careers based on students' highest level of education?

Similarly, the researcher wanted to find whether there was a difference in the choice of Early Grade careers based on the level of education of the respondents. With the two groups as senior high school against diploma, the independent samples t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups with the choice of careers in Early Grade. The statistic was $t(396) = 14.260$, $p = .000$, 2-tailed. With the finding, Early Grade students with senior high school certificate (WASSCE) were more likely to choose different careers from those who are diploma holders.

Table 6. Group difference on Early Grade career preference based on highest level of education

Factors	(<i>t</i>)	<i>p</i> - value
Level of education	14.260	.000

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A number of the respondents showed moderate 259 (65.2%) knowledge of careers in Early Grade as depicted in Table 3. This means that, even though they knew some careers in Early Grade education, the number was not adequate. This might probably be due to lack of career counselling in basic and senior high schools in Ghana hence most students choose an academic programme not well aware of the career fields that programme offers. They therefore need to be taken through career education for them to be abreast with a lot of careers in Early Grade. Career education can be offered to them through career conferences and conventions, fieldtrips or visits, teaching careers in formal lessons and attachments/internships among others. In this wise, the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) component of the new B. Ed. (Early Grade) curriculum could be repackaged to enable the students have experience of other careers in Early Grade apart from teaching in preschools.

There are a number of career fields in Early Grade education. However, as indicated in Table 4 above, a number of the students 165 (41.6%) indicated that they aspire to teach at the preschool upon completion of the programme. Early Grade education in Ghana has traditionally been viewed and packaged to prepare teachers to teach in preschools. The STS component supports this assertion. The STS takes students of the programme for observation and practice of teaching in preschools for the eight semester duration of the programme. This might account for a large number of the respondents aspiring to teach at preschools after the programme. The other career fields namely teaching in Special Schools, nanny, social work, family counsellor among others are not so popular in Ghana hence few choices were made in those directions. Again, teachers are of high demand at pre-schools in the country (Ghanaweb, 2018). With a lot of graduates in Ghana having high propensity to work in public schools as

teachers, the high aspiration to teach in preschools is not surprising. The choice revealed that most of the students do not aspire to go into self-employment and this phenomenon must be addressed in career guidance and counselling.

There was no significant difference found in the career aspirations of male and female students of the programme. This looks surprising because teaching at the preschool is more popular with females (Sumsion, 2000). However, other studies (Cameron, 2001; Cohen, 1992) point to growing interest of males in teaching at the Early Grade level. Further studies need to be carried out in this direction in Ghana.

There is a traditional negative attitude towards teaching profession in Ghana. Most people view teaching as a stepping stone to better careers in future. Though this view is changing today in Ghana, it might account for the significant difference in the career aspirations of the WASSCE holders and the Diploma in Education holders of the programme. The Diploma in Education holders are already teachers on study leave pursuing the programme while the WASSCE holders are yet to enter any formal employment. The Diploma holders might want to enter other career fields of Early Grade education different from their colleague WASSCE holders because of their experience of teaching already.

V. CONCLUSION

Counsellors need to be cognizant of the knowledge base of Early Grade students on their careers. Since their knowledge base is moderate, it is imperative that steps are taken by counsellors by way of career guidance and counselling to increase the knowledge base of the students on their careers. On the other hand, since the career aspiration of most of the students is teaching in preschool, pragmatic measures should be put in place to absorb them in teaching when they complete their programme of study.

General Implications and for Counselling practice

The following implications are drawn from the study for counsellors and stakeholders of Early Grade education:

1. Career education should be given to students of Early Grade programme to broaden their scope of careers in Early Grade education. In this respect, career guidance and counselling should be strengthened in schools and colleges.
2. With most of the students aspiring to teach in preschools, most of the students should be employed to teach in preschools on completion of the programme since that is their aspired career.
3. Career guidance of the students should emphasize development of entrepreneurial skills for them to venture into self-employment on completion of the programme.
4. The STS component of the Early Grade programme should be broadened to include visits to other career areas of the programme apart from teaching to

familiarize the students with other careers of the programme aside teaching.

5. Less popular careers in Early Grade should be given much prominence in the media and emphasized by career counsellors to encourage students to aspire for them.

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