To Establish Aspects that Influence Career Choices Made among Secondary School Pupils in Senior Secondary Schools in Selected Schools in Ndola District

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ABSTRACT

Career choices play a crucial role in shaping the future of young individuals. They determine their educational and professional paths, which in turn, influence their socioeconomic status, personal fulfilment, and overall well-being. By making informed decisions about their careers, senior pupils can better prepare themselves for the challenges they will face in the job market. A descriptive survey combining both the quantitative and qualitative methods was used. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22) and qualitative data was analysed thematically by employing Microsoft Word to reveal recurring themes from the data. A chi- square design was used for testing relationships between categorical variables. The target population involved teachers, and grade twelve (12) pupils in government selected senior secondary schools of Ndola District with a sample size of 272 participants. Simple random sampling was used in the study to select pupils while purposive sampling was biased toward teachers and parents. Participants were asked which of the following factors influenced their career choice and the study established that 28(14%) said future job market demand, 60(30%) said peer influence, 76(38%) said parental expectations and 36(18%) said academic interest. The study highlights that parental expectations and peer influence are the predominant factors influencing career choices among the participants. Future job market demand and academic interest were cited by fewer individuals but still played a role in shaping career decisions for a portion of the respondents.

The study established that the p=value was less than the agreed significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The interpretation of the results was that there was a positive relationship between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils. The results from the Chi-square T-test indicated that there was a correlation between the two variables and this was because the statistical significance level which was set at $p<0.05$ was less than that of the agreed significance level. This implied that the confidence level was higher than the significance level meaning the correlation between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils' was high. This showed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there were factors that influenced career choices among pupils. Pupils were asked how much influence do the teachers have on their career choices and the study revealed that 66(33%) said they are strongly influenced, 45(23%) said they are moderate influenced, 37(19%) said they are slightly influenced and 52(26%) said they are not influenced. The majority of students (strongly influenced + moderately influenced + slightly influenced) amount to 75%, indicating that a substantial number of pupils do perceive some level of influence from their teachers regarding career choices. The study recommended that there must be collaboration between parents, teachers and schools' authorities for the support of pupils in career choice

decisions as a friendly relation between home and school is compulsory for making conducive environment regarding career choice decisions of pupils.

Keywords: Career choices, influence, Simple random sampling, Quantitative data and Chi-square T-test

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the career choices of senior secondary pupils are influenced by a myriad of factors including socio-economic background, cultural context, and educational opportunities (Chukwu, at al., 2022). In many developed countries, access to comprehensive career counselling and exposure to a wide range of career options are standard, enabling students to make informed choices. According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), students in countries with robust career guidance programs tend to have clearer career aspirations and are better prepared for the workforce (OECD, 2019). Conversely, in developing countries, limited resources and lack of career counselling services can restrict students' career choices, often leading them to follow traditional or familiar career paths without fully exploring their own interests and potentials (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (UNESCO, 2020).

A study done by Kuyela at al (2023), established that regular school attendance has been described as the prerequisite for acquiring the skills and knowledge required for academic success. It enables a child to learn new information that will help him develop the desired skills and potential. But it may be difficult for a child to achieve these if he is continuously absent from school. School absenteeism is defined as excused or unexcused absences from school by a child (Reid, 2005).

Technological advancements and the globalization of the labour market have also played a significant role in shaping the career aspirations of senior secondary pupils. The rise of digital economies and the demand for tech-savvy professionals have created new career opportunities that were previously non-existent. For instance, the proliferation of information technology and digital media has introduced careers in software development, data analysis, and digital marketing, which are highly sought after by today's youth (World Economic Forum, 2021).

According to Kuyela et al (2023), revealed that the rapid development of information, communication, and technologies (ICT), internet technologies, and Web-based applications have initiated an unparalleled transformation in universities all over the world. Electronic learning (e-learning) is changing the way teaching and learning are taking place on university campuses (Kuyela et al, 2023). Though the upscale of e-learning in developing countries especially in Africa is slow compared to their Western counterparts, the last decade has witnessed some concerted efforts on the part of university administrators to implement e-learning strategies to catch up with their counterparts in developed countries.

The results from Kuyela et al (2023), showed that e-learning offers a tremendous opportunity by the means of electronic and students can learn at their own pace and the results can be better than the traditional method of teaching. Findings from this study are similar to the findings of (Manya et al., 2018) who concluded that traditional learning is expensive and takes a long time, and the results can vary. One key aspect of e-learning is that it offers an alternative that is faster, cheaper, and potentially better than the traditional way of teaching.

A study done by Oderinde and Adesina, 2024), revealed that students face significant pressure from their families and communities to pursue careers perceived as prestigious or economically stable, such as medicine, law, or engineering. This pressure often stems from a desire to escape poverty and secure financial stability, which is a prominent concern in many African countries where unemployment rates are high and economic opportunities are limited. Research conducted by Wambugu and Mbugua (2018) in Kenya found that parental influence played a pivotal role in shaping career aspirations, often overriding the personal interests and passions of the students.

The quality and availability of career guidance and counselling services in African secondary schools significantly affect students' career choices. Many schools in the region lack adequate resources and trained

personnel to provide effective career guidance, leaving students to rely on informal sources of advice such as family and friends. According to a study by Olamide and Olawaiye (2013) in Nigeria, the absence of professional career counselling contributes to a gap in students' understanding of the variety of career options available and the pathways to achieve them, often resulting in misinformed or limited career choices.

In Zambia, career choices among senior secondary pupils are influenced by a range of socio-economic and educational factors. One significant influence is the limited exposure to diverse career paths due to the country's educational system, which traditionally emphasizes academic subjects over vocational training (Munyati, 2017). The curriculum is often more theoretical, with less emphasis on practical skills, which constrains students' understanding of available career opportunities.

In Ndola District, senior secondary pupils' career choices are significantly influenced by the socio-economic environment and the availability of local resources (Malinda, 2022). A study by Mwamba (2021) found that many students are drawn to careers that promise financial stability and job security, reflecting the economic challenges faced by many families in the region. Pupils often prefer careers in fields such as engineering, medicine, and teaching, which are perceived as stable and reputable. Additionally, local industries, primarily focused on mining and manufacturing, shape students' career aspirations by offering direct employment opportunities and vocational training programs that align with these sectors (Phiri, 2020).

Educational institutions in Ndola District also play a crucial role in shaping pupils' career choices through career guidance programs and partnerships with local businesses. According to Kalaba (2019), schools have started to incorporate career counselling sessions and workshops to help students understand the diverse career paths available to them. However, the effectiveness of these programs is often limited by inadequate resources and a lack of trained counsellors. Despite these challenges, initiatives such as career fairs and internship opportunities have shown promise in exposing students to a broader range of career options and equipping them with the necessary skills to pursue their chosen paths (Chanda, 2018).

Statement of the problem

Career choices play a crucial role in shaping pupils' educational paths, professional futures, socioeconomic status, and overall well-being (Sinkombo, 2016). Effective career guidance programs are essential for helping pupils explore various career options, identify their strengths and interests, and understand the educational or training requirements for their chosen professions (Chanda, 2018). However, in Ndola District, many senior pupils struggle to make informed career choices due to limited access to career guidance programs, inadequate information about diverse opportunities, and a lack of practical exposure (Elizabeth, 2019). Social and cultural influences, such as family expectations and gender stereotypes, further complicate the decision-making process, creating significant challenges for pupils (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Borchert (2012) highlights that a key problem lies in the adoption of career guidance techniques without a proper understanding of pupils' perspectives and the factors influencing their decisions. This mismatch between pupils' needs and the support provided by schools, parents, and society contributes to a knowledge gap in career planning. Ndhlovu (2020) adds that understanding pupils' viewpoints can help integrate their perspectives more effectively into educational programs. This study, therefore, aims to establish aspects that influence career choices made among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools in Ndola District, with the goal of generating valuable insights to bridge the gap between theory and practice in career guidance.

Objective

The study sought to meet this objective:

i. To establish aspects that influence career choices made among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study carried out in Kenya reflected that when adolescents require information on topics such as career planning, they consult their parents (Edwards and Quinter, 2011). In a study conducted to investigate the influence of family background on the academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria, it was found that supportive parents are important for their children's career decision-making and the success of their careers (Barker, 2010). Bollu-steve and Sanni (2013) established that Nigerian parents influenced students' performance and eventually career choices. Despite the differences in the purpose of these studies, the researchers acknowledged the importance of parental support on their children's education and career choices.

Taylor (2011) observed that parental involvement in career related issues of their children is one of a series of factors that lead young people to engage in more intense and effective information seeking activities. This is from the fact that career conversations between a parent and a child play a huge role as they shape joint goals and shared meaning and regulate action in the children as they make decisions in their careers. Parents are seen to be most commonly consulted as influential sources of career information and advisors among children.

On the other hand, a study in Tanzania by Muyoi (2019) indicated that parents influence children's career choices both intentionally and inadvertently. This is from the fact that by the time children move to adolescence, they begin seriously considering their futures, often looking to their parents either as role models or for career advice. A parent's approach to this can either inspire teenagers to explore a diverse set of potential occupations or to stick to a path they think their parents will approve of. As such, it is not surprising that people are the third or fourth generations of their families to work in the same profession. As such, they have an insider glimpse of their parent's occupations, making it easier for them to break into the industry.

In Nigeria, Akinjide and Sehinde (2011) found that teachers play a major role in influencing learners towards attaining career choice preparedness. Moreover, Georgiana (2015) added that teachers need to carry the responsibility of guiding learners towards career choice preparedness. According to Knefelkamp and Slepitza (1976), a teacher educator might find it advantageous to require students to engage in the investigation of alternative vocations that still have a teaching component, such as coaching, tutoring, administrating, or counselling. In South Africa, Abe and Chikoko (2020) discovered that educators may help students make decisions that reflect students' values and experiences by understanding students' perspectives on career decision-making.

According to Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2021), students had a significant need to acquire parental approval, and regardless of whether this approval was obtained early or later, prioritising family responsibilities and commitments was the main focus for all participants. Allowing students to negotiate or even override their parents' preferences in choosing a career path may exacerbate the already difficult career decision-making process of young people, particularly if their parents are adamant about maintaining their heritage cultural practices (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Similarly, Kumar (2016) discovered that parents have a considerable influence on their children's choices of a profession. The impact of a father's influence on a student's decision about a profession choice was found to be greater than that of the mother.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design because the research questions could best be answered through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The paradigm had both objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative) characteristics. The research question regarding the influence career choices made among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools was subjective because it was based on personal opinions, feelings, or experiences of the pupils.

Population and Sampling

To select the number of pupils to participate in the study, the researcher established the total number of pupils in the selected schools which was found to be 2473 pupils. Therefore, the following formula by Cochran, (1963) was used to come up with the sample size for pupils.

The formula: $n = \dfrac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$

Whereas:　　　　N= Target population

n=Total sample size

e = Desired margin error

N=2473, desired margin error (0.05)

$n = 2473/1+2473(0.05)^2 =$ **344 Pupils**

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative sampling methods to gather data, with 240 pupils selected using a simple random sampling technique from eight schools, ensuring that each school contributed 30 pupils. This sample size was chosen based on the central limit theorem, which supports that samples of 30 or more participants tend to yield a normal distribution of population characteristics, enhancing the reliability of the data. For the qualitative aspect, 32 career guidance teachers were selected, with four teachers chosen from each school, providing insights into the professional perspective. The total sample size of 272 participants was determined considering resource and time constraints, which restricted the researcher from collecting data from a larger sample. Purposive sampling was biased towards teachers while simple random sampling was applied to pupils

Data Collection Methods

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments to gather comprehensive insights into the factors influencing career choices among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools in Ndola District.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20, which allowed for both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to be applied. Descriptive statistics, particularly measures of central tendency such as the mean and median, were used to summarize and present general patterns in the data. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis; aspects which influence career choices made among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools by using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

In this study, 32 teachers, and 240 pupils were sampled. A total of 25 interview guides representing (78%) for teachers were fully completed and 200 questionnaires for pupils representing (83%) were returned respectively.

Age of respondents

Table 1: Pupils Age

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
15-17 Years	76	38
18-20 Years	80	40
21 Years and above	44	22
Total	**200**	**100%**

Age in some research plays a vital role in determining the outcome or influencing the findings. Table 2 above shows the distribution of respondents by age. The results show that out of the 200 pupils, 76(38%) were aged between 15-17 years, 80(40%) were aged between 18-20 years and 44(22%) were 21 years and above.

Category of schools

Table 2: Category of schools

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Boys day	38	19
Girls day	53	27
Mixed day	60	30
Mixed boarding	49	23
Total	**200**	**100%**

Pupils were asked to state the category of a school that they belonged to. Table 3 above shows that 38(19%) belonged to boys day secondary schools, 53(27%) belonged to girls day secondary schools, 60(30%) belonged to mixed-day secondary schools and 49(23%) belonged to a mixed boarding secondary school.

Aspects which influence career choices made among secondary school pupils in senior secondary schools

Personal interests and hobbies influence your career choice

The study discovered that 10(5%) said not at all, 26(13%) said slightly, 43(22%) said moderately, 68(34%) said very much and 53(27%) said extremely. The majority of participants feel that their personal interests and hobbies have some level of influence on their career choices, with a significant portion expressing a strong connection between their passions and the paths they choose to pursue.
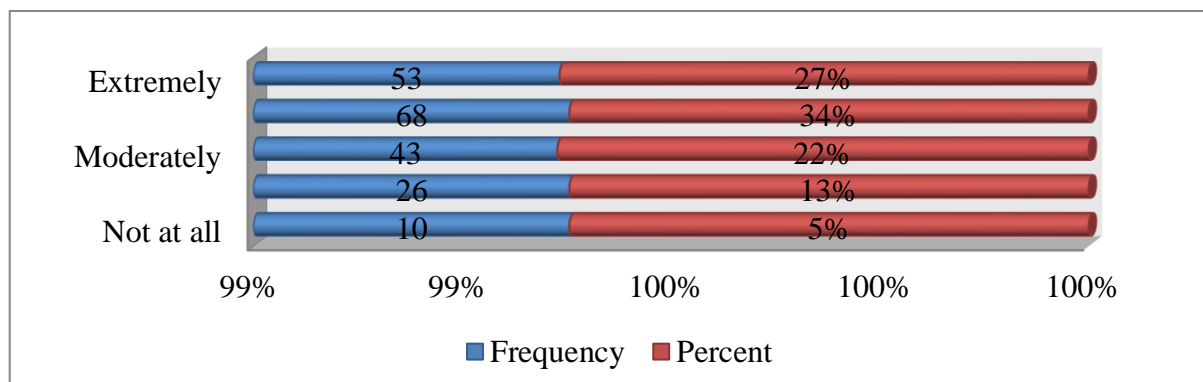
**Figure 1: Personal interests and hobbies influence your career choice**

Friends' career choices influence their decision

The study discovered that 10(5%) said not at all, 41(21%) said slightly, 33(17%) said moderately, 64(32%) said very much and 52(26%) said extremely. The study indicates a spectrum of influence, with a range from no influence to extremely high influence. The majority falls into the categories of "very much" and "extremely," suggesting that, for a significant portion of participants, friends' career choices play a noteworthy role in shaping their own career decisions.

Table 3: Friends' career choices influence their decision

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	10	5
Slightly	41	21
Moderately	33	17
Very much	64	32
Extremely	52	26
Total	**200**	**100%**

Influence teachers have on career choices of pupils
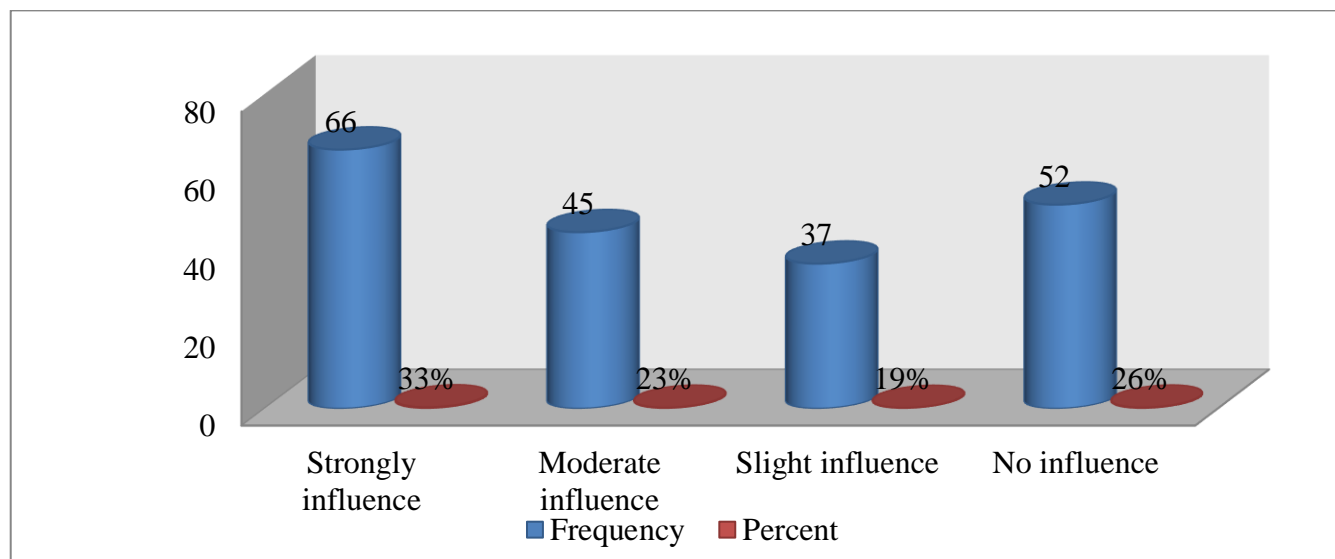
Figure 2: Influence teachers have on career choices of pupils

In the Table above, pupils were asked how much influence do the teachers have on their career choices and the study revealed that 66(33%) said they are strongly influenced, 45(23%) said they are moderate influenced, 37(19%) said they are slightly influenced and 52(26%) said they are not influenced. The majority of students (strongly influenced + moderately influenced + slightly influenced) amount to 75%, indicating that a substantial number of pupils do perceive some level of influence from their teachers regarding career choices.

Table 4: Cross tabulation on factors that influenced career choices of senior secondary school pupils

Variables	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly disagree	14	11.4	-10.4
Disagree	18	11.4	-8.4
Neutral	5	11.4	-6.4

Agree	108	11.4	25.6
Strongly agree	55	11.4	-.4
Total	**200**		

In this study, the researcher established the relationship between the factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils in Ndola District. The researcher also explored the forms of these relationships. To maximise the accuracy of the findings, the formulated plan of analysis was set at a significance level of 0.05. With this analysis, if the test statistical probability (p=value) was less than the significance level, the null hypothesis would be rejected. Conversely, if the p-value would be greater than 0.05, then the null hypothesis would be accepted. The results of the analysis were thus presented;

H_0 – There is no significant relationship between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils

H_1- There is a significant relationship between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils

Chi-Square T-test

Since the p=values was less than the agreed significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The interpretation of the results was that there was a positive relationship between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils. The results from the Chi-square T-test indicated that there was a correlation between the two variables and this was because the statistical significance level which was set at $p<0.05$ was less than that of the agreed significance level. This implied that the confidence level was higher than the significance level meaning the correlation between factors that influenced career choices and senior secondary school pupils' was high. This showed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there were factors that influenced career choices among pupils

Qualitative Results

Factors That Is Influential In Pupils' Decision-Making Process When It Comes To Choosing A Career

Teachers were asked to state the factors that is influential in pupils' decision-making process when it comes to choosing a career

T3 said that:

"We teachers play a significant role in this matter because we know what is good for our pupils after school. This is from the fact that we are experienced and have so many examples of what has worked on well for us or other people we know in our society. Thus, we influence the choices pupils have in their careers through positive guidance and suggesting various workable options."

T17 similarly identified teacher as an influencing factor

"Another teacher pointed out that, each teacher would want his or her pupils' to pursue a career of high prospects so that they can be safe in future. However, that is never the case for some of the teachers as some pupils' can bear me witness if you happen to talk to any teacher. Normally, only teacher with knowledge in careers can guide their pupils. Those without knowledge, their pupils usually do not experience any teacher influence at all. Mainly, these are parents who are uneducated in far remote areas and cannot even read or maybe, only know few common careers like teaching and nursing."

T15 had a different view:

"This teacher indicated that one of the factors that influenced pupils career choices were peers in that peers overtake the process in a variety of ways such as: the socialization process and positive relations towards education, job search and with the selection and adoption of lifestyle, appearance, even joining a social or political organization for social activities and academics."

T10 also said that:

"Job availability is also one of the factors that influence career choices for pupils upon finishing school. I remember my brother wanted to do teaching in 2017 but my father told him to do electrical engineering because many people are building houses and it is self-employment unlike being a teaching waiting for government to be posted".

Most teacher during the interview interaction disclosed that they have very good knowledge about career choices. However, some responses were in line with those of the pupils in various focus group discussions where some parents indicated that mainly, parents who are educated and those in urban areas and are exposed to information do have very good knowledge about career choices. As such, children of such parents are to the greater advantage and usually have varieties of choices unlike those of parents with less or no knowledge about career choices.

DISCUSSIONS

Aspects Influencing Pupils Career Choice

Participants were asked which of the following factors influenced their career choice and the study established that 28(14%) said future job market demand, 60(30%) said peer influence, 76(38%) said parental expectations and 36(18%) said academic interest. The study highlights that parental expectations and peer influence are the predominant factors influencing career choices among the participants. Future job market demand and academic interest were cited by fewer individuals but still played a role in shaping career decisions for a portion of the respondents.

According to Leung (2018), parental influence plays a critical role in shaping the career development of adolescents. Parents often have expectations based on their cultural values, socioeconomic status, and personal aspirations, which can significantly affect the career paths their children choose. Leung notes that in many cultures, parents may push children toward prestigious or high-paying careers, sometimes at the expense of the child's own interests. Bandura at al., (2001) explain that adolescents are highly susceptible to social modelling. Their career aspirations are often shaped by peers with whom they identify or admire. This social cognitive theory of career development illustrates how peer approval and group identity can influence individual career decisions

Teachers play a significant role in this matter because we know what is good for our children after school. This is from the fact that we are experienced and have so many examples of what has worked on well for us or other people we know in our society. Thus, we influence the choices children have in their careers through positive guidance and suggesting various workable options. The findings of the study have also been demonstrated by other studies of the similar nature, as Nurmi (2004) reported that the career aspirations of the young adolescents are the product of the teachers' expectations. Similarly, Cannan (2008) identified teachers to be the fundamental source of guidance in the career choice decisions of the secondary schools' students. Pupils had maximum interaction with their teachers and found them to be much more helpful in their career selection issues.

Job availability is also one of the factors that influence career choices for pupils upon finishing school. I remember my brother wanted to do teaching in 2017 but my father told him to do electrical engineering because many people are building houses and it is self-employment unlike being a teaching waiting for government to be posted". Williams (2016) notes, if their parents' jobs give them great satisfaction or provide a comfortable lifestyle, children see the perks early on, and may favour these careers over others. In contrast, if

parents complain about their jobs or struggle to support the family on the income their jobs provide, children are more likely to seek more fulfilling or higher-paid roles.

The above findings are similar to those of Whiston and Keller (2004) who observed that parents serve as a major influence in their children's career development and career decision- making. Research also indicated that when students feel supported and loved by their parents, they have more confidence in their own ability to research careers and to choose a career that would be interesting and exciting. This is important because studies show that adolescents, who feel competent regarding career decision-making, tend to make more satisfying career choices later in life (Keller, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that multiple factors influence pupils' career choices, with academic performance, personal interests and hobbies, extracurricular involvement, and peer influence all playing significant roles. A majority of participants acknowledged that their academic performance and personal interests had a moderate to very strong impact on their career decisions. Furthermore, over half of the respondents were actively involved in extracurricular activities aligned with their potential careers, indicating a proactive approach to career development. Peer influence also emerged as a notable factor, with many pupils admitting that their friends' career choices strongly shaped their own decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the foregoing findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

1. The study recommends that there must be collaboration between parents, teachers and schools' authorities for the support of pupils in career choice decisions as a friendly relation between home and school is compulsory for making conducive environment regarding career choice decisions of pupils.
2. The government through the Ministry of Education must appoint trained career guidance teachers to facilitate for pupils the act of making choices among many opportunities available in career development at the level of secondary schools. These guides will help pupils in the identification of their interests and abilities, provision of information about job market and career opportunities and the appropriate career choice decisions.

Suggested for further studies

1. To examine the role of parental involvement and socio-cultural factors in shaping the career aspirations of secondary school pupils in Ndola District
2. To assess the effectiveness of existing career guidance programs in secondary schools within Ndola District

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