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The Personal Career Planning Needs of Secondary School Learners in Botswana

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ABSTRACT Because no previous study in Botswana has so far focused on the personal career planning needs of secondary school learners, a survey was undertaken to determine what the needs of learners were in this regard. The survey brought to light that these learners indeed had a number of personal concerns regarding their choice of career and also regarding the school guidance programme that in theory should have supported them to make sensible choices. Much still needs to be done to meet the learning outcomes for career guidance as stipulated by the senior secondary school career guidance curriculum guidelines for senior secondary schools of the Botswana Ministry of Education (1998). Notable matters of concern are issues related to consultations with the school guidance counsellor, availability of technological resources for job search, preparation for interviews, knowledge of job-seeking skills, available careers and the need to expose learners to the world of work through job-shadowing and career field-trips/excursions. All of this has to be done in order to achieve Botswana's 2016 vision of providing information to particularly learners in senior public secondary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Herr et al (2004) recently reiterated the adage that learners should come to terms with who they are, what kinds of commitment they are willing to make, their values, interests, skills

and aptitudes, and how competent or confident they feel before making career choices and evaluating the post-secondary school training options linked to a possible career (Feldman 2003). Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, preferences and goals provides an evaluative foundation for such choices. Zunker (2006), King and Cartwright (2003) concur with Feldman: accurate self-knowledge increases one's chances of finding congruence with a work environment. The Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of Guidance and Counselling in Botswana's Education System (Botswana Ministry of Education 1996) acknowledges the need for learners to know themselves; the career guidance programme should therefore help learners develop the skills that would enhance their career awareness, career exploration and decision-making.

In practice, however, learners experience two problems with this requirement that they should know themselves before making career choices. The first is that they are expected to make these choices when their personalities have not yet been fully formed and when they have had only minimal experience in making major decisions. The second is that the assessment of learners' needs has so far been done by other parties, and not by the learners themselves.

While it has been widely acknowledged that an accurate assessment of the needs of learners' as the service recipients of the career guidance programme needs is crucial (Euvrard 1996, Hiebert et al 2001), career guidance counsellors have so far neglected to obtain the personal views of the learners thereby making them partners in career programme development (Alao 1998, Dalzell 2005). Using the results of learners' needs assessment is not a common practice in the development of programmes (Euvrard 1996, Witko et al 2005). Most existing programmes are based on input from parents, teachers, counsellors or college learners' retrospective reports regarding their secondary school experiences (Gibbons et al 2006). The decision-making power about the learners' future career development usually rests with adults, that is, administrators, teachers and school counsellors (Hiebert et al. 2001).

What is required, Hiebert et al. (2001) found, is a learner-centred career guidance model. They discovered that issues chosen by the learners themselves led to a marked increase in learner activities, thereby enhancing the learners' psychological and social health. Learner involvement encourages interest in, commitment to and ownership of the programme.

In Botswana, an assessment on the career planning needs of senior public secondary school learners has also not been done up to now. This is in line with the general practice of not conducting learner-centred career needs assessment studies.

A few studies have been done, though none focusing of the personal needs assessment type that Hiebert et al. suggest should be done. Alao (1998) did a feasibility study on the Establishment of Career Resource Centres in Botswana in which he included an assessment of the level of satisfaction of senior public secondary school learners with the career activities provided in their schools. However, the study focused on learners throughout the formal public education system in Botswana, and was not specifically aimed at determining the career planning needs of senior secondary school learners. Maokaneng (2005) in turn conducted a study on the Career World from the Perspectives of Learners of the Maun Senior Secondary School in Botswana but this study was limited to the learners' perceptions of what a career was and only evaluated the career needs of the learners to a very small extent. Mmusinyane's (2006) study on the role of the school in facilitating students' career decision-making skills with reference to Junior Secondary Schools in the Letlhakane area targeted junior secondary school learners. Other studies, such as those of Montsi et al. (2000) and Mokgolodi (2005) focused on evaluating the school guidance and counselling programme as a whole.

This article is devoted to reporting on a study of the type advocated by Hiebert et al, in other words where the career planning needs of senior public secondary schools in Botswana – as

reported by the learners themselves – were determined. To reach this aim, the remainder of the article has been structured as follows. After a brief outline of the conceptual-theoretical framework on which the empirical research was based, an exposition is given of the empirical research design. This is followed by a list of key findings with a brief discussion thereof. The article concludes with some recommendations.

2. Theoretical perspective

Parents are the primary educators of their children. However, when they grow beyond a certain age, usually after their fifth or sixth year, their education is entrusted to a societal relationship known as the school, an institution for the purpose of professionally guiding, equipping and enabling children from the age of admission to around their 18th year to be able to cope with the challenges of adult life. Parents entrust this task to the school because it has become too specialised and onerous for parents as untrained educators to provide the necessary guidance to their children. In most cases, schools form part of a professional pedagogical structure, and are the workplace of professional educators. This explains why in the conceptual outline above attention was given to prescriptions and stipulations of the Botswana state and Department of Education, and reference was made to professional guidance counsellors and their role in preparing the students in their care for the challenges of later adult life. These challenges include, firstly, that the teachers and particularly the guidance counsellors should understand the characteristics of adolescence and also the crises that adolescents experience in that stage of their life (Wright 2003: 129 et seq.). Secondly, guidance counsellors should have a professional understanding of career planning and guidance as forms of pedagogy that would equip the adolescents in their care for adult life. Thirdly, they should also have a similar professional understanding of the place and expected role their workplace, in this particular case, the senior public secondary school, in the context of the entire education system in which they work.

As the problem statement above implies not much attention has so far been given to an assessment of the personal needs of the students. This was a hiatus that had to be filled through an assessment study because of the centrality of the needs of the students, not only for their current school careers but also for their future as responsible, productive and well-equipped citizens of the state of Botswana.

The empirical investigation was based on the above conceptual-theoretical framework.

3. Empirical investigation

3.1 Research design

A quantitative ex post facto research design was used.

3.2 Study population

Four senior public secondary schools in Gaborone were selected on the basis of accessibility (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). All of them were government schools, which put them in a comparable category as almost all the learners were from working class families. The learners were predominantly Setswana-speaking. From the 3 000 Form 5 learners in the schools a random sample of 331 learners were drawn. The 100% return rate of questionnaires can be attributed to the fact that the questionnaires were filled in during the guidance and counselling lesson.

3.3 Data gathering instrument

A self-constructed questionnaire consisting of 79 four-point Likert-type scale items was used to collect the quantitative data. The items were not only based on the information flowing from the conceptual-theoretical framework outlined above but also on the Spanish career education questionnaire developed by Gonzales (1997) and the comprehensive career needs

questionnaire developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002a, 2002b) (with permission of the authors) The formulation of items was changed to suit the Botswana situation.

The questionnaire was designed to extract information about 10 aspects central to assessing learners' career planning needs. Items were bundled to form sub-scales based on these aspects, namely importance of career planning, post-secondary plans, help required in making career plans, availability and use of career exploration resources/services, level of optimism regarding future career plans, self-assessment information needs, educational/occupational information needs, current occupational preferences, participation in career development/planning, and knowledge of job-finding/seeking/getting/keeping skills.

3.4 Data processing

SAS, SPSS and statistical computer programmes were used to process the data. The following statistical processes were performed: means, standard deviations, simple frequencies and percentage scores for the responses; a t-test to determine if there were any differences in the needs of the learners according to gender, and an investigation of the practical significance of the differences in the respondents' needs according to gender by means of effect sizes. Cohen's D-value was used to calculate this practical significance (see Dalzell 2005:146 and Van Vuuren 2007:202 for a discussion of the formula): small effect: $d < 0.2$; medium effect: $d = 0.2 - 0.8$, and large effect: $d = 0.8$.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Permission to do the study in the schools was procured from the Botswana Department of Education, the principals of all the schools involved, and from the participants' parents.

3.6 Trustworthiness considerations

Face or internal validity for the interview schedule was obtained by keeping all the items in the questionnaire focused on two aspects: the participants' needs with respect to career guidance in their schools, and the basic tenets flowing from the conceptual-theoretical framework that had been developed. Convergent validity (Cohen et al 2011) was procured by comparing the results of this investigation with results previously recorded in other studies. Reliability or internal consistency was acquired by having the results of the data analysis checked by another expert in the field of career guidance (Merriam 2009).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The importance of career planning

Of the respondents 98.8% valued career planning. This finding is consistent with that of Witko et al (2005) who indicated that career planning gains importance during late adolescence and early adulthood. Maokaneng (2005) also found that learners felt that Form 5 was the best time for one to make a career choice.

4.2 Post-secondary plans

Just over fifty percent of the respondents (57%) indicated that they had some idea of what they would be doing while 25.6% of the respondents expressed uncertainty about what they would be doing. Put differently, a cumulative percentage of 98.5% of the respondents indicated that they were concerned about what they would be doing in future.

4.3 Help required in making career plans

Respondents indicated a need for help between choosing two or more occupational options of 70.7% (32.2% *very well* and 38.5% *well*). This finding ties in with views expressed in the literature. According to Feldman (2003), incidents of career indecision are to be expected, particularly during this period when the respondents are going through the process of career exploration and trying to sift through the range of occupations available to them. The need for information about post-secondary options was highlighted by more than fifty percent of the respondents.

4.4 Availability of career services/resources and whether they were used or not

The finding regarding the use of career audio / visual tapes is not surprising, considering that a study by Alao (1998) reported only 16.9% of the learners expressed satisfaction with the use of the tapes as a career exploration resource.

The respondents made use of school libraries (79%) as resources that were *highly available* to them. The school guidance counsellor was also reported to have been *highly available* by 43.2% of the respondents, *available* by 36.8%, *somewhat available* by 15.8% and *not available* to 4.2% of the respondents.

Of the respondents 65.2% actually utilised the services of the school guidance counsellor. This finding is consistent with those reported by previous studies (Alexitch et al. 2004; Bardick et al. 2004, Maokaneng 2005, Mokgolodi 2005, O'Donnell and Logan 2007).

Written career guidance/education materials were easily accessible to 39.9% of the respondents, and available to 34.7%. A high percentage of respondents (82.4%) indicated that they had used written materials during career planning.

Only 33.8% of the respondents found the Career Fair *highly available* and 36% found it *available*. Alao (1998) and Maokaneng (2005) similarly reported low satisfaction levels with the Career Fair.

The majority of the respondents reported low levels of availability of the internet as a career resource material while 55.1% indicated that they had not used the internet at all. Alao (1998), Hartung (2005) and Mokgolodi (2005) indicated that none of the senior public secondary schools in Botswana used computer resource materials for career guidance.

Respondents recorded 66.9% lack of availability of job-shadowing. This finding is supported by Alao (1998) who found that 66.3% of the learners in his study reported that their schools did not organise job-shadowing for them.

The respondents reported high accessibility levels of their parents during career planning. Consistent with literature (Bardick et al. 2005, Otto 2000, Wahl and Blackhurst 2000) 86.9% of the respondents reported having approached their parents for career advice. Felsman and Blustein (1999) and Kracke (2002) acknowledge the important role played by peers in the career development of adolescents, particularly in a time that they become independent from their parents.

Visits to tertiary institutions recorded 26.3% (for *highly available* and *available*). Most of the respondents (74%) furthermore indicated that they had not made the effort to visit tertiary institutions as part of their career exploration. School talks by various representatives from the world of work recorded above average ratings (69%) in terms of availability. A percentage of 57.4% was recorded for actual usage of career talks. Similar findings were reported by Alao (1998) with 53.7% of the learners in his study indicating that they found career talks useful.

A cumulative percentage of 76.7% of the respondents rated various school subjects as at least available in terms of their relevance to career planning. 55.6% of the respondents reported having used the resource. The cumulative percentage of 42.3% for *highly available* and *available* seems to imply that schools did not organise career field-trips /excursions for learners. This inference is supported by the fact that 49.3% of the respondents reported some degree of availability regarding discussions with workers in different jobs.

4.5 Level of optimism regarding future career plans

On average 83.6% of the learners were at least moderately optimistic about attaining their future career plans (average of cumulative percentages of 84.3% for *very likely* and *likely* regarding certainty about finding the occupations the respondents loved, 89.1% for certainty about getting the necessary training/education, and 77.3% for finding work/getting a job in the envisaged occupation).

4.6 Self-assessment information needs

A very high percentage of the respondents (91.9%) seemed to know their personalities with certainty. All the respondents indicated to varying degrees that they knew their good and bad habits. A cumulative percentage (83.1%) of the respondents also reported good knowledge of their interests and personal taste in different activities. Another indicator of good development in terms of self-assessment was that slightly over 71.2% of the respondents indicated that they knew their talents and abilities very well.

On the other hand, 33.2% of the respondents indicated that they did not possess good knowledge of the work that would match their abilities; 5.7% indicated complete ignorance of such.

Most of the respondents (76.5%) reported good knowledge of what was important to them in work. This finding is consistent with research by Ginzberg et al. (as quoted by Sharf 2006:176) who maintain that at ages 15 and 16 adolescents start to develop values and to understand what is important to them in work.

4.7 Educational/occupational information needs

More than half of the respondents (63.3%) displayed fairly good knowledge of the educational opportunities open to them after senior secondary school. Of the respondents 65.1% reported good knowledge of the education required for them to achieve their future career plans. This finding is surprising, given that a high percentage of the respondents (82%) earlier reported that they would find information about post-secondary institutions helpful.

Knowledge of the occupations and jobs that the respondents found interesting scored 80.6%. Comparatively low levels of knowledge of the occupations and jobs the respondents were best suited for were recorded (67.4%).

Respondents reported 66% good knowledge of the educational requirements for the tertiary education courses they would pursue after completing senior secondary school. The respondents furthermore displayed fairly good knowledge of the possibilities in tertiary education open to them (63.6%). They indicated low levels of knowledge (44.7% for *very well* and *well*) of the influence of technological changes on the job market.

Knowledge of present and future employment patterns scored a low cumulative percentage of 27.7% (for *very well* and *well*). The respondents also displayed relatively little knowledge (33.5% for *very well* and *well*) of the means to cope with unemployment, which highlights a need for equipping the respondents with self-employment as a career option (Botswana

Ministry of Education 1998). Knowledge of different recruitment and advisory agencies, knowledge of formal and informal career lives and the technical and financial assistance for young entrepreneurs (Botswana Ministry of Education 1998) also scored low.

Bhusumane (2004) contends that over the years unemployment has become increasingly high in Botswana, making it imperative to equip learners with the skills to counteract the trend.

4.8 Current occupational preferences

Results indicated respondents' lack of knowledge about the salary structures of their jobs of interest (36.7% and 30.7% for *not very well* and *not at all*) and the chances of progressing/advancing or being promoted (35.9% and 22.8% for *not very well* and *not at all*). 47.9% of the respondents reported little or no knowledge of the human resource needs of the country in the future. The respondents showed that they were equipped with the knowledge of the work/tasks performed in their envisaged careers and the education or training required. This is evidenced by the small percentages (5.3% and 3.8% respectively) who said they were totally ignorant of such knowledge.

The results reveal that more has to be done with regard to assisting learners to research possible careers, 47.7% of the respondents were not sure of the knowledge that they had, with 10.4% being unsure about the working conditions of the jobs that interested them.

4.9 Participation in career development/planning

Of the respondents (59.2%) reported that they had satisfactorily found out about as many careers as possible. Individual consultations with the school career guidance counsellor scored 31.3% (for *very well* and *well*), thereby supporting previous studies (Alexitch et al. 2004, Bardick et al. 2004) which maintain that only a small percentage of learners seek career guidance from school counsellors.

Over sixty percent of the respondents (61.5%) said that they had to a great extent found out about the tasks performed in their occupations of interest. This finding is surprising, when one takes into account the results for the item "working conditions" (in the previous section) where the respondents indicated poor knowledge (47.7%) of the working conditions of their preferred occupations. 77.4% was scored for attempts to discover strengths and weaknesses throughout the various subjects taken by the respondents.

Almost seventy percent of the respondents (67.2%) reported that they had discussed their career plans with people who knew them well. A majority (74.5%) of the respondents made attempts to discover their personal tastes throughout their school career.

Just below eighty percent of the respondents (76.6%) had made a correlation between their school results and their envisaged career plans. The respondents had not made much effort to investigate their attributes through participation in extra-curricular activities, as evidenced by the low cumulative percentage of 45.1% scored for *very well* and *well* for this part.

Of the respondents 63.1% had made an effort to consider their interests/aptitudes in their choices concerning their careers, and 63.5% had done well to consider the occupations which took into account as much as possible their personal tastes, aptitudes and qualities. Consistent with this finding, literature (Brown 2007) indicates that adolescents acquire information about specific occupations through exploration; they integrate this information with their interests and capabilities.

The majority of the respondents (74.6%) had made the effort to identify the obstacles that might hinder them from reaching their career goals. This is important when one takes into account the stiff competition for places at tertiary level and for sponsorship opportunities in Botswana (Bhusumane 2004).

Almost seventy percent of the respondents (69.6%) said they had considered several options when planning their future career and studies. 59.2% indicated that they had thought about the means to overcome the obstacles at the time of choosing an occupation.

Interacting with school guidance counsellors recorded 11.7% (*very well*) and 19.6% (*well*) respectively. Discussing career plans with people who knew the respondents well scored 67.2% for *well* and *very well*. This group included the parents. According to Ferry (2003), parents are the key influencers of their adolescent children's career aspirations. Parents are often the most likely to interact with their children during the career planning process (Wahl and Blackhurst 2000).

The respondents placed high reliance on the impact of their academic performance on their future careers with a high percentage of 76.6% on *very well* and *well*. The respondents' strengths, weaknesses, personal interests/tastes, and aptitudes were rated very important with a total percentage of above 60% for *well* and *very well*.

4. 10 Knowledge of Job Finding/Seeking/Getting and Keeping Skills

Less than half of the respondents (41.1%) knew little about job seeking and 14.9% reported total ignorance in this regard. A cumulative percentage of 63.9% of the respondents reported that they possessed above average knowledge on how to write an application letter for a job. Almost forty percent (36.1%) of the respondents reported limited or no knowledge.

More than half of the respondents (58.7%) knew how to write a Curriculum Vita. Alao (1998) had previously expressed dissatisfaction with 57,9% of senior secondary learners who reported having being taught how to write CVs.

According to Alao (1998), only 52.2% of the respondents indicated that they knew how to present themselves at job interviews. Alao (1998) furthermore indicated that simulations of job-interviews were not conducted in senior public secondary schools in Botswana. The findings of the study indicate that the respondents did not know how employees hired people, with a cumulative percentage of 74.3% reporting very minimal and no knowledge at all in that regard.

Almost sixty percent of the respondents (58.5%) indicated that they possessed little or no knowledge at all about what employers expected from new employees while 55.1% reported little or no knowledge at all about the personal qualities employers considered important when hiring people. A cumulative percentage of 46.7% reported minimal and no knowledge at all in terms of what could influence the success and advancement/progress of a person in a job. This becomes even more important in view of Bhusumane's (2004) observation that young people in Botswana generally lacked the skills for job-seeking, and securing and maintaining jobs.

4.11 Practical significance of the differences in the respondents' needs according to gender

A t-test and a calculation of effect sizes were done to establish if there were any differences in the respondents' needs according to gender. All the effect sizes on gender differences fell below 0.5, meaning that no significant practical differences were found in the responses based on gender.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the report above, a number of the findings were placed in context with reference to other research that was done in Botswana. In the process, several shortcomings were highlighted for immediate attention by the Botswana education authorities to attend to. Among these is the need for a well-planned systematic career guidance programme that is focused on the following elements: career planning, the regular updating and provision of printed career education materials, assistance in identifying learners' interests and abilities, information about post-secondary institutions, career/occupational information, knowledge about the

Botswana grant/loan scheme/ sponsorship for continuing education (Botswana Ministry of Education 2008), the availability of career audio/video tapes during career guidance lessons, more effective use of visits to the Career Fair, the availability of Internet resource materials, of job-shadowing experiences, of parents as a useful resource during career planning, of visits to tertiary institutions, of school/career talks, of observations of individuals at work and discussions with workers in different fields, of educational/ occupational information, of knowledge of salary structures for different jobs, of knowledge of working conditions, of the human resource needs of the country in the future, knowledge of chances of advancement/progress/promotion, of as many careers as possible, availability of individual consultations with the school guidance counsellor, of participation in extra-curricular activities, knowledge of where to look for a job, of how to write an application for a job, of how to write a CV, of how to prepare for a job interview, of how employers hire people, of what employers expect from employees, of the personal qualities employers consider important when hiring people, of influences on the success and advancement/ progress of a person in a job and what an employee can do to keep a job.

6. CONCLUSION

Much still needs to be done to meet the learning outcomes for career guidance as stipulated by the senior secondary school career guidance curriculum guidelines for senior secondary schools (Botswana Ministry of Education 1998). Notable matters of concern are issues related to individual consultations with the school guidance counsellor, availability of technological resources for job search, preparation for interviews, and knowledge of job-seeking skills, available careers and the need to expose learners to the work world through job-shadowing and career field-trips/excursions. All of this has to be done urgently in order to achieve Botswana's 2016 vision of providing information to all learners – particularly to learners in senior public secondary schools.

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