



## Societal Values and Occupational Choice of In-School Adolescents With and Without Disabilities Innigeria

### KEYWORDS

Disabilities, Special education, Exceptionality, Societal Values, Occupational choice, In-school adolescents.

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**ABSTRACT** Choosing an appropriate occupation is one of the most difficult or serious decisions which an individual with and without disabilities makes. An individual's decision to go for a particular occupation may depend on objective and subjective factors or critical contacts. This study, which adopted a descriptive survey design, investigated the relationship between societal values and occupational choice of in-school adolescents with and without disabilities in Cross River State, Nigeria. It was theorized that societal values will not significantly influence vocational choice based on gender. A 20-item structured questionnaire was developed, validated (reliability coefficient = .70) and used for data collection from a sample of 200 male and female in-school adolescents. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test to determine if gender is an intervening variable on the influence of societal values on occupational choice of in-school adolescents at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the prestige accorded to certain occupations by the society and the attractive conditions of service of the occupation influenced the choice of the in-school adolescents. Hypothesis tested, however, revealed that there was no significant difference in the male and female in-school adolescents on the influence of societal values on occupational choice. It was, therefore, recommended that for students with and without disabilities to make a realistic occupational choice, school counselors and special educators should start from the junior secondary classes to provide occupational information through career explorations, excursions and career assignments to sensitize and broaden the occupational horizon of the in-school adolescents with and without disabilities.

### INTRODUCTION

Growth in children is often felt through the physical, biological, cognitive, and emotional changes they experience. These changes are more remarkable during adolescence. Feldman (2004), described adolescence as a time of considerable biological changes which occur as adolescents attain sexual and physical maturity. Ezeh (2005) opined that adolescence is a period in which an individual gradually moves from childhood to adulthood. They equally begin to seek and develop interpersonal relationships outside the home and peer approval and acceptance become more important to them. Ambron in Ezeh (2005), described adolescence as a period of discovering one's real self, defining personality, values and finding one's occupation and social directions. Vocational choice also needs to be made at this stage.

Omeje (2007) described occupation as a group of similar jobs, positions or functions performed by a person. It is also work activities carried out on a regular basis by an individual not only to keep busy but to earn a living. Udoh and Sanni (2012) posited that occupation is a way of life. It determines one's social status, income, choice of friends, mental and physical health.

Myriads of occupations abound for people to fit into. The national standard classification of occupation by the Federal Ministry of Labour grouped the various occupations into professional, technical and related workers, administrative, executive and managerial workers, clerical and sales workers, farmers, fishermen, hunters, miners, quarrymen and related workers, among others. Similarly, the United States of America's Department of Labour grouped occupa-

tions as white-collar workers, which include professional and technical managers, officials, proprietors, clerical and sales; blue-collar workers which include craftsmen and labourers, among others; service workers including private household workers and farm workers - farmers and farm managers, farm labourers and fore-men. These grouping simply that a choice has to be made.

Choosing an appropriate occupation according to Deng (2001) is one of the most difficult or serious decisions which an individual makes. Kinanee, (2004) opines that, for youths, choosing a realistic and appropriate occupation, preparing, liking and keeping it is the most complex problem confronting them. The situation was different in the old traditional system in Nigeria when an individual has to take up an occupation trusted on him or her by the father and mother. Boys were encouraged to take to their fathers' occupation while girls took to their mothers' occupation. These occupational stereotypes are so pervasive in our society that they are even learned by children as young as three years old (Stockard and McGee, 1990). It has been contended by Ferrom (1991) that some post-primary school students choose occupations on the basis of prestige, utility, proficiency, interest and social reasons.

In a report of a study on impact of caste related social norms on occupational choice in India using two caste groups - Jat and Bania, Singh (2012) stated that males from both communities living at same place with the same social status and educational levels and exposed to same opportunities are active in different occupations and show difference in their taste towards various occupations.

One of the most important considerations for any occupational choice is generally economic in nature and the main purpose of entering into an occupation is to earn an income. Therefore, the returns from an occupation are the major motivation to enter into it. In addition to economic factors, people are also influenced by non-economic factors, such as social norms and non-monetary benefits of an occupation. The social norms in terms of the great respect accorded to some occupations or the dislike of other occupations expressed by the society may influence the occupational choice directly by providing positive or negative utility for entering into an occupation. Thus social norms also lead to some non-monetary benefits. In a study of some determinants of occupational preferences among Nigerian secondary school students, Eyo (2011) found that boys preferred engineering, medicine and agriculture while girls preferred nursing and teaching.

Certain theories have been propounded regarding occupational choices. For example, Super (1969), in his theory, posited that occupational choice and development are essentially processes of developing and implementing a person's self-concept which are products of complex interactions among physical and mental growth, personal experiences, environmental characteristics and stimulation. Super (1969) went further to propose a life-stage developmental framework of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance (or management), and disengagement. In each stage, one has to successfully manage the occupational development tasks that are socially expected of persons in the given chronological age range.

Savickas (2002), contributing to Super's proposition, stated that the process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. Although self-concept continues to evolve as the person encounters new experience and progresses through the developmental stages, a relatively stable self-concept should emerge in late adolescence.

In the theory of circumscription and compromise in occupational development, Gottfredson (1981) postulated that choice is a process requiring a high level of cognitive proficiency. A child's ability to synthesize and organize complex occupational information is a function of chronological age progression as well as general intelligence which are instrumental to the development of a cognitive map of occupation and conceptions of self that are used to evaluate the appropriateness of various occupational alternatives.

Occupational development is viewed as a self-creation process in which individuals with and without disabilities look for avenues to express their genetic proclivities within the boundaries of their own cultural environment. This implies that the occupational aspirations of adolescents with and without disabilities are influenced more by the public in terms of gender and social class than private aspects of their self-concept like skills and interests. It is also a process of elimination or circumscription in which a person progressively eliminates certain occupational alternatives from further consideration.

Gottfredson (1981) further proposed a four stage circumscription developmental model consisting of "orientation to size and power", where children of 3-5 years of age perceive occupations as role taken up by adults. At the "orientation to sex-roles" stage, children of 6-8 years of age evaluate an occupation's appropriateness based on one's sex and other gender appropriate alternatives are elimi-

nated. In the "orientation to social valuation" for ages 9-13 years, the emerging adolescent eliminates from further consideration occupations with low and unacceptable prestige levels or high prestige occupations beyond one's efficacy level in prestige. The fourth stage is called "orientation to the internal unique self" for ages 14 and above, in which internal and private aspects of the adolescent's self-concept, such as personality, interests, skills, and values, become prominent. The young adolescent considers occupations according to their suitability or degree of match with one's internal self.

In spite of personality traits, occupational choice entails some elements of compromise. Individuals have to accommodate their occupational preferences so that their eventual choices are achievable in the real world in response to external realities and constraints such as changes in the structure of the labour market, economic depression and family obligations. Compromise is a complex process in which compatibility with one's interest is often compromised so as to maintain a greater degree of correspondence with one's preference for prestige and sex-type which are societal values.

Schreuder, (2006) confirms that an individual's decision to go for a particular occupation may depend on objective and subjective factors or critical contact. Udoh and Sanni, (2012) reported that the occupational choice of Nigerian youths is influenced, to an appreciable extent, by what is available in the environment to which the individual is exposed. Some scholars hold the view that the society plays vital roles in the adolescent's occupational choice while others maintained that occupational choice is mainly a personality traits issue. The view of compromise in occupational choice has also been expressed. It, therefore, becomes necessary to investigate the extent to which societal values influence the occupational choice of in-school adolescents in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### Method

The study which investigated the influence of societal values on the occupational choice of in-school adolescents with and without disabilities adopted a descriptive survey design with a sample size of 200 respondents purposively selected from inclusive schools in the study area. A four point scale researcher-constructed questionnaire was the main instrument used to collect data. The study was guided by one research question which was answered using descriptive statistics with a mean score of 2.50 as the decision rule for acceptance or rejection of the items. In answering the research questions any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above is accepted on a four point rating scale while those with mean scores below 2.50 is rejected. To analyze the null Hypothesis test was used at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

The data presented in Table 1 show that two out of five items had mean scores of 2.58 and 2.89, respectively, which are above 2.5, the decision rule for acceptance in modified Likert rating scale. This is an indication that the students' occupational choices are influenced by the societal values in terms of the respect accorded to such people and the attractive salary. The standard deviation scores of the societal values influence items ranged from 0.88 to 0.98, indicating that the respondents were not very far from the mean.

**Table1:Mean and Standard Deviation scores on the influence of societal values on occupational choice of students with and without disabilities.**

S/No	Item Statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	I chose a professional course because the society respects professionals in all fields.	2.89	0.96	Agree
2.	I would have chosen a professional course but for financial constraints.	2.25	0.88	Disagree
3.	My friends went for professional occupations and I don't want to be left out.	2.02	0.91	Disagree
4.	I chose the occupation because of its attractive conditions of service to enable me meet up with my social responsibilities.	2.58	0.93	Agree
5.	I chose the occupation because it is in consonance with the needs of my community.	2.27	0.98	Disagree

N = 200

**Hypothesis Testing**

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female in-school adolescents with and without disabilities on the influence of societal values on occupational choice of students in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The hypothesis tested, as shown in Table 2, revealed that four out of five items had calculated t-values ranging from 0.12 to 0.89 which are less than the critical t-value of 1.96 (two tailed test) at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom. This indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female in-school adolescents on the influence of societal values on their occupational choice. However, there was significant difference in their choice of occupation based on the attractiveness of the conditions of service. While the hypothesis of no significance was rejected for items 1, 2, 3 and 5, it was upheld for item 4.

**Table 2: t-test analysis of the influence of societal values on the occupational choice of in-school adolescents with and without disabilities based on gender.**

S/No	Item Statement	X1	SD1	X2	SD2	t-cal	t-tab	Dec
1.	I chose professional course because the society respects people who chose them.	2.84	1.00	2.91	0.09	0.57	1.96	NS
2.	I would have chosen a professional course but for financial constraints	2.27	0.97	2.27	0.80	0.63	1.96	NS
3.	My friends went for professional occupations and I don't want to be left out	2.05	0.94	2.03	0.85	0.12	1.96	NS

4.	I chose the occupation because of its attractive conditions of service to enable me meet up with my social responsibilities.	2.71	0.90	2.49	0.95	3.66	1.96	S
5.	I chose the occupation because it is in consonance with the needs of my community.	2.28	1.03	2.24	0.89	0.89	1.96	NS

Male: N = 86; Female: N = 114

NS – Not significant

S –Significant

**Discussion**

Data obtained and analyzed in the present study showed that the respondents chose professional courses because of the attractive conditions of service and the prestige accorded them. This finding is in accord with that of Ferron(1991), who contended that some post-primary school students choose occupations on the basis of prestige, utility, proficiency, interest and social reasons. Alike(2010) noted that irrespective of parental educational level and support, children choose jobs that are highly rated in the society with attractive conditions of service or prestige attached to them. Havighurst (1971) had proposed that adolescents strive to achieve economic independence and prepare for marriage and family life, all of which require financial buoyancy, may have necessitated their choice of prestigious occupations with attractive conditions of service.

The findings of the present study are in agreement with Singh(2012) who reported that the most important reasons for any occupational choice are generally both economic and non-economic in nature. Accordingly, the main purpose of a person entering into an occupation is to earn an income. Therefore, the returns from an occupation are the major motivations to enter into it. People are also often influenced by non-economic factors, such as the great respect accorded to, or the dislike of, some occupations as expressed by the society. These may influence the occupational choice directly by providing positive or negative utility for entering into such an occupation. This may form the basis for the in-school adolescent's choice of prestigious jobs with attractive conditions of service.

The fact that peer choice did not influence the choice of the respondents in the present study is a pointer that the respondents have accomplished one of the adolescent's developmental tasks according to Havighurst(1971) which is achieving new and mature relations with age mates of both sexes. It is equally indicative of the changing trend in in-school adolescent's behavior which may be attributed to their access to career counselors in the schools that strive to help people understand themselves, their environment and the world of work. Besides, through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), adolescents are more able to access information on various occupations themselves and better able to make independent choice irrespective of peer choice and community needs.

Data obtained in the present study indicate that the respondents did not choose their preferred occupations due to financial constraints. This is in agreement with Gottfred-

son (1981) who reported that occupational choice entails some element of compromise. Individuals have to accommodate their occupational preferences so that their eventual choices can be achieved in the real world in response to external realities and constraints such as changes in the structure of the labour market, economic depression and family obligations.

The t-test analysis on the influence of societal values on students' occupational choice showed that there was no significant difference in the opinions of male and female in-school adolescents with and without disabilities. This finding clearly represents the current trend whereby females are found in occupations that were formerly predominated by males irrespective of their reasons for the choice.

### Conclusion

The study has shown that societal market values of prestige and wealth have significant influence on the occupational choice of the in-school adolescents with mild disabilities and those without disabilities as evidenced in the respondents' choice of occupations that have attractive conditions of service and highly rated in the society. The result has educational implications to parents and school counselors whose major concern lies in helping in-school adolescents to choose occupations.

The knowledge gained from this study will provide necessary educational resource needed for choice - making which includes exposing the adolescents to field trips, excursions, career talks and visits to various occupational fields in order to gather first - hand and realistic information on the various jobs. If these intervention strategies are ex-

ecuted from the junior secondary II classes, their in-school adolescents will be equipped properly with every information they need about occupations to make a future realistic choice.

It is, therefore, recommended that since the societal values exert some influence on the occupational choice of in-school adolescents with mild disabilities and those without disabilities, parents, special educators and school counselors should equip them early enough with both educational resources and occupational information needed to make a realistic choice bearing the values in mind.

Furthermore, the government should make policies that will empower the relevant agencies in charge of educational planning and development to develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum of occupational education that will emphasize occupational exploration from inclusive primary school level to help students with mild disabilities and those without disabilities develop realistic vocational knowledge base that will ensure future realistic choice.

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