



## ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CAREER DECISION MAKING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: AN INTERVENTION STUDY

### Social Science

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### ABSTRACT

A mark of adolescence is the identification of one's career choice. This implies the process of exploration of career opportunities and interests, during which one can perceive barriers such as lack of self and career information and the experience of anxiety about career choices. A before and after without control intervention study was undertaken with a sample of 37 high school students of 13 to 15 years of age. The intervention was aimed at promoting students' awareness of career related interests, values and opportunities and to develop their confidence in the career decision making process. The Career Factors Inventory (Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill and Boggs, 1990) and a feedback questionnaire designed for the study were used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Findings showed that the intervention was successful in reducing students' career choice anxiety.

### KEYWORDS

Adolescence, Career decision making, Intervention, High school students

### INTRODUCTION

Career decision making is a process that explains the factors that contribute to the selection of a career and the choices implicit in it. Theories on career decision making have identified internal (psychological) factors and external (demographic, environmental) factors [1] that contribute to this process.

Among such theories are Bandura's theory of self – efficacy (1977) which posits that self – efficacy is obtained through four sources of enactive mastery and vicarious learning experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal [2] [3]. Extending this theory in the career context, Hackett and Betz (1981) developed the theory of career self – efficacy which is the belief in one's ability to perform career behaviors relating to career choice and adjustment [2].

Super's theory of career development (1957, 1980) identified stages of vocational development, occurring concurrently with life span development. In this theory, the period of exploration occurs during adolescence, wherein individuals engage in spontaneous exploration of career choices. This results in developing tentative choices and requires one to engage in systematic exploration to obtain unbiased perceptions of career choices [4]. In his broader theoretical framework he introduced the concept of work values which is an organization, arranged hierarchically, of needs, values and goals, applied to one's work [5].

Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments (1959) describes six personality and work environment types of Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional (RIASEC). The degree of congruence between one's personality type and work environment type influences job satisfaction [6].

The present study was conducted for adolescents in the age group of 13 to 15 years with the rationale that during this age, individuals are in exploration stage of vocational development and this period is considered crucial as it occurs during identity development, during which an important task is identifying one's career choice. The need for the study presented itself in providing adolescent students with an introduction to systematic exploration of career choices and opportunities, to enable them to experience greater clarity and confidence in career planning and decision making.

### Method of Investigation

#### Sample

An original sample of 45 students of a class of standard IX was designated. Due to absenteeism during the session and pre and post intervention testing, a sample of 37 students was used for analysis. There were 16 males and 21 females. The age range was 13 to 15 years and the mean age was 13.95 years.

#### Measures

**1. Career Factors Inventory (CFI):** The CFI (Chartrand, Robbins,

Morrill and Boggs, 1990) measures the antecedents of career indecision. It consists of 4 subscales; Need for Career Information (6 items), Need for Self- Knowledge (4 items), Career Choice Anxiety (6 items) and Generalized Indecisiveness (5 items). The inventory is scaled on 5 point Likert scale with different end points for different items.

**2. Feedback Questionnaire:** A feedback questionnaire with 10 items was developed for the study, to obtain information about the effectiveness of the intervention on the basis of the extent to which participants perceived that the intervention program helped in experiencing openness to career opportunities, confidence in the career decision making process, clarity about the process and optimism about one's career process and planning. The response format had three categories of responses for each item: Very much, Somewhat and Not at all.

#### Procedure

A before and after without control research design was used with a one week period as the interval between pre and post intervention testing. The intervention was carried out over 3 sessions for a period of 3 days, with 1 session on each day.

The 3 sessions ranged from 50 to 75 minutes. The content of the 3 sessions was developed to address the objectives of enhancing students' awareness of their career related interests, values and opportunities and to enhance their confidence in the career decision making process. Students were introduced to the concepts of Super's work values and Holland's personality typology through interactive and reflective activities. Through these concepts, students explored their career related values and interests which enabled them to identify career opportunities and obtain a greater understanding of their career choices. Students' self - efficacy beliefs about their career were assessed through activities that addressed the sources of self- efficacy beliefs. Students explored self - efficacious thoughts and ways to improve decision making to enhance their confidence in the career decision- making process.

In a feedback session post intervention testing with the CFI and the feedback questionnaire was done.

Paired sample t - tests were conducted for each of the scales of the CFI to measure the effectiveness of the intervention and the feedback questionnaire was assessed through percentage analysis.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Paired Sample t - test for significance of mean differences between pre and post intervention scores on Need for Career Information, Need for Self – Knowledge, Career Choice Anxiety and Generalized Indecisiveness scales of the CFI**

CFI scales	Pre intervention			Post intervention			t
	M	SD	N	M	SD	n	
Need for Career Information	25.648	3.787	37	24.621	5.443	37	1.432NS

Need for Self – Knowledge	17.405	2.702	37	17.243	3.378	37	0.299NS
Career Choice Anxiety	17.027	5.795	37	15.540	6.021	37	2.072*
Generalized Indecisiveness	14.297	4.208	37	13.594	4.734	37	0.960NS

NS- Not significant

\*Significant at the 0.05 level ( $p=0.045$ )

Table 1 shows the paired sample  $t$ -test results for the four scales of the CFI. No significant mean differences were obtained for Need for Career Information, Self – Knowledge and Generalized Indecisiveness while for the scale of Career Choice Anxiety, there was a significant mean difference ( $t=2.072$ ,  $p=0.045$ ).

Need for Career Information represents an individual's need to obtain factual data and be concerned with knowledge about various occupations before making vocational commitments [7]. It is a cognitive factor in the career decision making process and is considered an informational need. This could imply that, given the interval of the intervention, participants may require a longer time period to assimilate information about their career opportunities, to experience a decrease in the need for career information. While the present study provided an introduction to career opportunities for exploration, an intervention that solely focuses on providing individuals with the ability to obtain factual and systematic information of career opportunities through group or individualized sessions may prove to be more effective in addressing this need.

A similar finding was obtained by Hung (2002) [8] in a study assessing the effectiveness of a career development course. The present study also found an increase in the standard deviation of the scores post the intervention, indicating that students may have responded to the intervention in different ways, and some may have experienced a lesser need for career information, while for others, it may have facilitated a greater need to search for career information. This dimension can also be associated with career decision-making styles which describe the ways in which individuals collect, perceive and process information during the career decision-making process, and how they approach the process [9]. Participants may express different career decision making styles such as systematic and rational decision making which can influence the need for having hands on experience with careers before making vocational commitments.

Need for Self - Knowledge refers to an individual's need for self definition and self discovery [7]. This implies the need to have greater self understanding before making a career choice [8]. Hung's (2002) study found non - significant increases in this scale after the course. In the present study there was an increase in the standard deviation of the sample after the intervention, indicating a greater dispersion in the extent to which participants experienced the need for self knowledge. The intervention addressed this need by enabling participants to identify and explore their career related interests and values as means to extend their self knowledge in the context of career planning. It is possible that other sources of self knowledge such as self - concept can add benefits as it has been expressed that individuals identify their occupational choices on the basis of compatibility with the image they have of themselves [10].

Career Choice Anxiety is the level of anxiety reported during the process of career decision making and the nervousness experienced when facing a career decision [7] [8]. It has been identified as an emotional factor because it addresses emotional reactions during the career decision-making process and in the CFI it is a decisional need. The study by Hung (2002) found a significant decrease in the Career Choice Anxiety scores post intervention. The aim of the study was to enhance the confidence of the participants in the career decision making process and this was addressed by providing the participants with an awareness of the sources of their self - efficacy beliefs in the career context through activities involving exploration into career planning resources and self efficacious thoughts and feelings. These activities, possibly combined with an increased awareness of how career values and interests influence their career choices, could have contributed to a significant decrease in the Career Choice Anxiety scores post the intervention. It has been expressed that perceived self-efficacy, a cognitive mechanism, influences career choice and development through its effect on career interests, values and goals [11].

Generalized Indecisiveness is an individual's inability to make decisions even when the appropriate conditions for it are present [7]. Indecisiveness represents a trait associated with a persistent problem in making decisions across different situations and is distinct from indecision, which is a transitory phase in the career decision making process. Indecisiveness has been found to persist even after long sessions of counseling [12] and has been addressed through therapy by identifying its personality sources [13]. This could explain the lack of difference in the scores of Generalized Indecisiveness in the intervention.

Percentage analysis of the feedback questionnaire showed that a majority of the participants (62%) experienced greater openness to learning about new career opportunities due to the intervention. A majority of the participants (57%) experienced greater confidence with career choice exploration and with handling obstacles when making career-related decisions (54%). Participants also felt they had greater clarity about their career opportunities (59%) and with approaching their career decision making process (49%). 54% felt very optimistic about exploring career opportunities and 59% felt excited about planning for their career while 54% felt somewhat optimistic about their career choices due to the intervention.

Openness, confidence, clarity and optimism are associated with affect. The Career Choice Anxiety subscale of the CFI represents an aspect of the affective dimension composed of Career Choice Anxiety and Generalized Indecisiveness [14]. It is possible that the significant decrease in Career Choice Anxiety could be associated with experiencing openness to career opportunities, confidence with career exploration and decision-making, clarity about career choices, opportunities and approaching the decision-making process and experiencing optimism with the career decision-making process.

## CONCLUSIONS

These findings show that the study was effective in addressing an affective source of career indecision and, for a majority of the participants, enabled them to experience openness, confidence, clarity and optimism regarding their career choices and decision-making process. The limitations of the study's outcomes also provide suggestions for further research. Intervention studies that provide participants with in depth and personalized knowledge about different careers on the basis of self knowledge that is geared towards identifying their aptitude, vocational self-concept, and career decision making styles, can be more effective in addressing the needs for career information and self knowledge.

Identifying and distinguishing between participants who exhibit indecision and indecisiveness can be an effective pre- requisite in addressing the affective aspect of career decision making.

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