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Original Research Article

Congruence between Career Interest, Gender, and Personality among Students in Secondary Schools in Mbarara City, Southwestern Uganda

Otwine Anne[1,2*], Tweheyo Milton[3], Matagi Leonsio[1]

[1]Department of Mental Health and Community Psychology, School of Psychology, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University
[2]Department of Public Health and Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Bishop Stuart University
[3]Department of Human Resource, Anglican Diocese of Ankole, Province of the Church of Uganda

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Abstract: This paper is based on findings from a study conducted among secondary school students found in Mbarara City Southwestern Uganda. Our aim is to document information about gender and career interest differences, and congruence between students' personality and career interest during career development (15-25 years). We employed cross-sectional study design using CDM survey tool to collect data among 161 senior six students who consented to completion. Results revealed gender differences in career interest for crafts, social, and arts. Again, we established congruence between personality and career interest for arts and office practice unlike scientific, crafts, social, and business because students who selected them for first choice did not select them for second choice. These findings provide useful information to inform policy review and the need to scale up career guidance and counselling services in schools, families, and employment sectors towards achievement of human capital development in Uganda by 2030.

Keywords: Career interest, personality, gender, self-concept, students, Secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to capture and document students' perceptions of personality and environment fit and its influence on their career interest aspirations during their secondary school education cycle. This information is crucial because most students end their education cycle without awareness about their personality fit between what is learned in the classroom and its connect to career interest. Students may spend time in the socndary school system and eventually make career choices that are not consistent with their personalities thus consequently affecting their career development. Person-Environment Fit Theory by John Holland of 1959 stipulates that when individuals achieve a good fit between their personality and environment, it boosts their career interest by the quality of career choices, completion of school in time, and satisfaction in future jobs (Deen, 2016**).** There are six personality traits related to individual career interests and work environments namely, realistic (R), investigative (I), artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E), and conventional (C) which influence the individual's choice of occupation, school subjects, work values, skills, and job interests (Holland, 2017).

It is worth noting that during secondary school educational cycle, students get limited exposure to information regarding the discovery of personal career interests needed to help them make appropriate career choices due to limited time, mentors, and the nature of the school system. This assertion is supported by studies carried out in Uganda where students' career choices are not supported by career interventions like career assessment (Kabunga, 2020), and limited exposure to update career information (Otwine *et al*., 2023; Otwine *et al*., 2022). Additionally, Mann, (2018), and McKenzie and Bennett, (2022) observed that individual career interest depend on factors that are either intrinsic, or extrinsic which are socioeconomic including gender, work experience, and family background. This is acerbated by limitations in funding and government release of funds to schools. For instance, in Uganda, according to the ministerial policy statement for ministry of education and sports 23/24, there is suboptimal budget performance on career guidance and counselling in

***Corresponding Author:** Otwine Anne
Department of Mental Health and Community Psychology, School of Psychology, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University

schools was at 22.68%; while gender mainstreaming was estimated at 67% (Clerk to Parliament, 2023) . Despite this situation, the government of Uganda is committed to SDGs by 2030 with special reference to human capital development strategy aimed at increasing the proportion of labour force transitioning into decent employment from 34.534.5 percent to 55 percent, and the ratio of Science and Technology graduates to Arts graduates from 2:5 to 3:5 (Republic of Uganda, 2020). It should be noted that without adequate support to the youth both in school and out of school to appreciate their self-concept for personality, gender, and career interests, their career development may remain impaired.

Brendan *et al*., (2015) in their study observed that disorganised career choices among students does not only stop on their self-concept, but also to other factors associated with limited exposure to productive and jobs environments needed to assist them discover their gender roles, personality, and career interests. Kazi, (2018) in his study established a strong relationship between students' career interest and career choice. Therefore, in this study, we try to capture information about how students' career choices may be influenced by perception of their personalities, gender and career interest. Findings captured in this study are crucial for guiding policy review, and practice to support students during career guidance and counselling aimed at increasing their self-concept for gender, personality, and career interest needed to make appropriate career choices and achieve positive career transition both in school and employment aimed at achieving SDG 8.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), students career patterns may not necessarily reflect their personality and career interests. In a study by Mann, (2018) it is stipulated that children's career interests revolve among few occupations, shaped by gender, and social background. Whereas the job market is undergoing change, students' career choices may still be tied to traditional careers despite the narrowing employment space. Studying students' perceptions of personality, gender, and career interest my provide useful information needed enhance their educational well-being and facilitate them to make informed career choices. This information however may not be limited to students, teachers, and school administrators but also other stakeholders in education and employment so that they may create conducive environment for building capacity for the country's robust human capital development. In this study, we agree with findings from previous scholars who established that achieving a clear career interest identity is an important goal in career counselling process which career advisors may consider during career guidance and counselling services delivery (Hartina & Tharbe, 2016; Holland, 2017). It may be appreciated that the higher the students' career self-concept of career interest, personality and gender, the greater the likelihood that students may make career choices that match their work environment and work-life anticipation (Rahim *et al*., 2021; O'Shea, 2012).

Literature shows that personality and environment fit if achieved may influence students' ability to make positive career choices, completion of school on time, and finding satisfaction in future jobs (Deen, 2016)**.** Furthermore, it is established that products of personality and environment fit are career maturity and career identity (Hartina & Tharbe, 2016; Rahim *et al*., 2021). On the other hand, gender variations among students was sited among the factors influencing students career choices (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Tuyizere, 2017). Furthermore, students career choices for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) increased with improved career sensitisation using both media and non-media models (Wyss et.al., 2012). Uganda is implementing compulsory science policy in lower secondary with a hope of building capacity for science innovations however, studies show that this policy is challenged by other factors such as poor teaching facilities for STEM, low qualifications and personnel among science teachers, and poor attitude, and grades among students (Milliam & Dominic, 2022; Otwine *et al*., 2022). Therefore, this study is timely because it may document information about students' perceptions of personality and environment fit, gender, and career interest and how they may affect their career transition. The findings may further assist educators, employers, students, and parents to join hands and plan for career guidance and counselling services to address human capital development needs in LIMCs.

Statement of the Problem

We find information about congruence between career interest, gender, and personality among students in LMICs limited. Could this be attributed to poor record keeping culture among stakeholders in education, low usage, and coverage of technology in schools, poorly equipped career counsellors, and inadequate policy implementation in schools. Literature show that there exists a culture of poor attitude among students to career guidance and counselling in schools and post education institutions where career counselling is not prioritised (Kizza *et al*., 2019; Otwine *et al.*, 2022). Literature further shows that schools face both structural and functional challenges that negatively influence output of career guidance and counselling services in schools like limited sources of information on occupations, access to assessment tools, skills to administer and provide feedback, poor implementation of career guidance and counselling services in schools, and lack of alignment of career guidance services to SDGs (Kabunga, 2020; Mann, 2018; Otwine *et al*., 2023). Unless we assess students' self-concept for gender, personality and career interest patterns it may be hard to achieve the anticipated human capital development plans in Uganda by 2030. Continued misalignment between gender, personality, and career interest among students may continue to manifest in terms of low career transition thus slowing

down the achievement of SDG 4 and 8 aimed at increased access to quality education and lifelong learning and finding meaningful employment in the general population.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, our goal is to document the congruence between gender, personality, and career interest among students in secondary school level which coincides with exploration stage of career self-concept development. The information gathered may be used to highlight gaps in career guidance and counselling in schools, organisations, and national human capital planning strategies to address the mismatch between courses of study and the careers individuals may settle for in their work life.

Objectives of the Study

1. Assess students' perceptions of career interest areas.
2. Investigate the relationship between gender and career interest among students.
3. Assess the congruence between students' career interests and personality.

Research question

1. What are the students' perceptions of career interests' areas?

Hypotheses

1. Gender and career interest among students are strongly related.
2. There is significant congruence between students' career interest and personality.

METHODS

In this section, we present the data collection process from which results were obtained.

Design, Location, Population, and Sample

We used cross-sectional survey to collect quantitative data from students in selected secondary schools in Mbarara city, Southwestern Uganda, Ankole Sub-region. Mbarara City is in Southwestern Uganda, approximately168 miles (270 kilometers) southwest of Kampala by road. Mbarara City central business district is located at 00 36 48S, 30 39 30E (Latitude: -0.6132; Longitude: 30.6582). Mbarara city is bordered by districts of Kiruhura, Isingiro, Mbarara and Rwampala, and it is the major center of education and business in the region. Mbarara city is home to major senior secondary schools that attract students nationwide, and they contribute a significant number of students to tertiary education.

The target population were students in upper secondary school level which are commonly refered to as advanced level in Uganda's education sysyem (A' Level). We selected this group of students because they are at career developmental stage where they advance their career interests by making choices for subject combinationa that lead them to desired courses of study at tertiary education level to prepare them for their career life. According to Careers New Zealand, (2012) citing Doanld Super it is documented that individuals go through five stages of career self concept development namely growth (0-14 years), exploration (15-25 years), establishment (25-44 years), maintanence (45-64 years), and old age (64+). This study focused on exploration stage career self-concept because it coincides with the time students are at secondary school level in which they are prepared for the world of work).

A total of 400 students were recriuted into the study from 4 popular secondary schools in Mbarara City. However, the sample size was reached using inclusion and exclusion criteria whereby only students in senior six class below or above 18 years, registered to sit national examinations by the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB), and willing to consent were considered. Only 161 students who met this criterion completed the study. The research team settled for this number of participants because they could provide information representative enough for generalisation of data.

Data Collection Tool

We collected data using Career Decision Making System Revised (CDM) Level 2 Survey Hand Scored Edition (O' Shea, 2012). The CDM survey is among career interest inventories based on Hollands personality and environmental fit theory that examines different personality subtypes (Vernon & Osborn, 2000). We selected this tool because it measures individual's broad career self-concept for career choice, school subjects, work values, abilities, and career interest. The section of CDM that measured students' career interest consisted of career interest inventory (120-items). The test is administered in 45 minutes, it is hand scored, and easy to interpret. Its reliability score was α=0.90 after pretest in similar secondary schools outside the study. This tool was again considered appropriate because it could measure students career interest for gender and personality sub-types.

Ethical Considerations

We purchased the data collection tool from the publisher and presented it to Makerere University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. After this clearance, we further submitted the tool together with the proposal to Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST SS 473). Only participants who consented were recruited into this study. There were neither monetary nor material incentives given to the participants. We made multiple copies of CDM which we distributed to individual participants to self-administer and score. We only considered complete test copies for cleaning, coding, and analysis. We collected the data with the help of two research assistants who were pretrained to administer and interpret the CDM. For purposes of confidentiality, we kept all complete and

incomplete copies of the CDM under lock and key, while participants were given codes to protect their identity.

Data Management and Analysis

Raw data gathered from the field by the research team was centrally managed, under the supervision of the PI to ensure proper handling of data and confidentiality. We first interpreted test scores received from the participants using CDM interpretive folder. The interpretive folder categorises career interests into career interest areas that match the five main personality subtypes namely realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC) suggested by Holland (2017) and O' Shea (interpretive folder, 2012).

We exported cleaned data into SPSS Version 23.0 for analysis. Research question 1 was analysed using descriptive statistics for frequencies and percentages, while hypothesis 1and 2 were analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC). High percentages were an indicator that a student had good self-concept for career interest for respective career areas, while p>.05 revealed a significant relationship between the variables of gender, personality, and career interest.

RESULTS

Results revealed that most respondents were males (n=89, 55.3%) than girls (n=72, 44.3%). Their average age was 18.5 years thus fitting into the exploratory stage of career self-concept development (15-25 years) which fits our target population for this study. Further results are presented below.

Research question one aimed at investigating students' perceptions of their career interests. The results gathered show how individual students perceive career interests. Career interest areas are organized into fourteen clusters (CDM). Results are captured to show the responses from the highest to the lowest ranked career interest clusters. Results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: students' career interest areas

S/N	Career interest area	Percentage n=161(100)
1	Math-Science	31(19.3)
2	Medical-dental	29(18)
3	Data analysis	25(15.5)
4	Management	24(14.9)
5	Social Service	17(10.6)
6	Clerical	8(5.0)
7	Technical	7(4.3)
8	Skilled trades	6(3.7)
9	legal	5(3.1)
10	Personal service	3(1.9)
11	Art	2(1.2)
12	entertainment	2(1.2)
13	Literary	1(0.6)
14	Customer service	1(0.6)

According to results in Table one, the most career interests' students identified with are math science, medical dental, data analysis, management, and social service. This result reveals that participants in this study had self-concept of their career interests although it is skewed.

Hypothesis 1 stated that there is a strong relationship between gender and career interest among students. Career interest areas were first condensed into personality subtypes generated from the CDM interpretive folder. Six personality subtypes are realistic (R), investigative (I), artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E), and conventional (C). Results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Gender and personality

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Crafts	male	89	15.73	9.130	.968
	female	72	13.49	9.989	1.177
Scientific	male	89	22.07	10.481	1.111
	female	72	19.57	11.916	1.404
The Arts	male	89	13.29	8.754	.928
	female	72	14.65	11.044	1.302
Social	male	89	20.39	8.836	.937
	female	72	19.88	9.424	1.111
Business	male	89	21.17	9.874	1.047
	female	72	19.86	10.379	1.223
Office Operation	male	89	20.26	9.728	1.031
	female	72	21.86	11.854	1.397

Results from Table one above revealed that there no significant variations in gender difference for gender and personality. Whereas Standard Error Mean (SE) does not show significant mean differences by gender for scientific, business, and office operations; there is SE difference for crafts, social, and arts. This student's career interest varied by gender. Therefore, that stated that career interest and gender are related is accepted.

Hypothesis two stated that there is congruence between students' career interest and personality. We generated and analysed data about the congruence between students' career interest and personality by comparing the means for first and second career interest areas selected by students and interpreted in the CDM. Levene's test of Equality of Variances was used for the T-test of Means at CI (95%). Details are captured in Table 3 below.

Table 3

variable	**F**	**Mean**	**SE**	**p-value**
Crafts/ Realistic	2.137	2.244	1.509	.146
Scientific/ investigative	2.970	2.498	1.767	.087
Arts	5.499	-1.361	1.560	.020
Social	.662	.518	1.443	.417
Business/ enterprising	.629	1.307	1.601	.429
Office operation/ conventional	5.463	-1.603	1.701	.021

Results from the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, show congruence between career interest and personality for Arts $F=5.499$, $p<.05$, and Office Operations $F=5.463$, $p<.05$. There was no significant congruence between career interest and personality for business, social, crafts, and scientific. Therefore, hypothesis two which stated that there is congruence between career interest and personality among students is partially answered. Thus, the hypothesis is not accepted.

DISCUSSION

Results from our study regarding research question 1 revealed that all the students had self-concept for personal career interest area. Implying that student's choice of careers done out of informed view related to their career interest. In a study by (Abe & Chikoko, 2020), it is established that (55.33%) of students selected careers based on their career interests, while personality represented (35.33%). Therefore, career interest plays a significant role in students career selection. Our results reveal that majority of students identified with career interest in math-science, medical- dental, data analysis, management, and social service. These may not be pure STEM subjects which may agree with (Abe & Chikoko, 2020) who concluded that other factors other than career interest influenced students' choices like family, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and career outcomes expectancy. This argument was further supported by Sheldon *et al*. (2020) and Luo *et al*. (2021) who added that career choices are further determined by intrinsic and identified motivation which accounted for self-concordance, and self-efficacy.

This line of thought may further agree with our finding where many students shied away from career areas both in STEM and non- Stem subjects like clerical, technical, skilled trades, legal, personal service, art, entertainment, literary, and customer service. This finding is also consistent with the study by (Li & Liu, 2015) who observed that peoples career interest varies by age, gender, and salary. Others factors highlighted include personal experiences, peers, and family pressure to choose some careers against others even when

someone does not have interest (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Okiror, 2015). Although in another study, it is documented that students have limited knowledge about career areas which may limit their ability to identify their career interests which career counsellors ought to pay attention to foster increased career self-concept (Blotnicky *et al*., 2018; Cook & Maree, 2016). It is noted that whereas students may have the ability to identify career interest areas, their career choices are influenced by other factors which should not be ignored by stakeholders during implementation of career guidance and counselling programs.

Hypothesis 1 examined the relationship between career interest and gender. Results revealed mixed differences between gender and career interest. Only crafts, social, and arts revealed variations while scientific, business, and office operations did not. Mixed results are supported by Kazi and Akhlaq, (2017), and Li and Liu, (2015). This may be further supported by findings of Mathpal and Kumar, (2022) who observed that other factors may influence career interest which should not be ignored including psychological satisfaction from school subjects, schools' and teachers' subject teaching abilities, students' families' socioeconomic status, and students' families' attitudes and support. In this regard, career guidance and counselling that helps student break gender glass ceiling is invaluable when fostering students' career development. It is equally important to invest in capacity building of career counsellors and teachers, mentors and coaches to support students to improve awareness about their career interests both in and out of school irrespective of gender (Peila-Shuster, 2018; Wu, 2018). In LMICs, it is therefore crucial that students during the stage of exploration of career self-concept are exposed to different career interest areas where they may choose careers that may favour them rather than offering them limited options.

Results from hypothesis 2 examined the congruence between carer interest and personality. Results revealed that there was limited congruence between career interest and personality. The only areas that showed consistence were arts and office operations. Implying that a student was unlikely to select careers related to their first choice. This may confirm our earlier finding that students' choices are sometimes influenced by other factors that are intrinsic or external including family and gender. There was no significant congruence for business, social, crafts, and scientific. Career guidance offered to students out to offer students realistic options that may be in line not only with what is popular but also that they may identify with to usher them into the future they foresee. The outcome of guided career choices may result fulfilling career choices that may result into increased completion rates for both males and females, easy access and retention in employment because of satisfying career choices made. Consequently, this may increase the potential of LMCs to plan for sustainable human capital development and access to satisfying employment opportunities.

Lack of congruence between career interest and personality may also be attributed to other factors associated to students' attitude, school, policy, and employment industry. Existing literature in Uganda shows that although many students may take up STEM subjects that their success is hindered by lack of sufficient science teachers, science laboratories, teaching materials, and lack of structured human capital plan (International Monetary Fund, 2020; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Republic of Uganda, 2020). In addition, it is documented that there is general apathy towards uptake of TVET and its products among students and stakeholders in education and employment sectors which discourages students from pursuing such career choices (Kizza *et al.*, 2019). This may explain why most students may take up STEM related subjects for first choice but may not choose it again due to populist attitude of certain careers. For instance, in our study, congruence between personality and career interest was detected for careers in art and office operations. However, the government of Uganda is trying to mitigate this phenomenon through revising secondary school curriculum to make it competence-based curriculum. It is believed that by the time students complete secondary school cycle they have exposure to skills that may help them relate learning to work experience and make appropriate career choices (Mabonga, 2021; Olema *et al*., 2021). This exposure may further support students to find their personality and career interest fit during their exploration stage of career self-concept development.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings revealed that students in our study during their exploration stage of career self-concept development are likely not to find their career paths due to failure to appreciate the influence of gender and personality on their career interest. Unless policies are designed to improve career counselling at all levels of education and employment industry are employed to increase students' career self-concept they may continue to struggle to find satisfying career paths. Besides, social cultural, and personal limitations due to limited exposure to various career paths ought to be prioritised to support students identify their career interests early in life thereby enhancing congruence between their personality gender, and career interest. This combination may be a good predictor of human capital development plans needed to mitigate effects of increased youth unemployment in LIMs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We advocate for capacity building of professionals who offer career counselling in schools and organisations to factor strategies in their workplans to open space for adolescents to get opportunities both in school and workplaces like school to work, and

internship placements where students can spend time to allow them to identify their career interests.

During guidance and counselling in schools, the role of gender and personality ought to be emphasised by helping students access and conduct career interest inventories to help them make appropriate career decisions.

We again encourage further studies on strategies needed to break socio-cultural issues that influence career choices among students in LIMCs.

LIMITATIONS

This paper is written based on results from a wider study which may show repeated results. Only results on one of the objectives are presented in this paper.

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