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CONTENT	
Panacea to Women Marginalization in the Developing Countries: Nigeria Adebowale, Titilola Adedoyin	1 – 7
Problems and Prospects of Provision of Physical Education in Selected Inclusive Schools in Lugari District, Kenya Kidiga Gidarity Mugiluri	9 – 23
Quality Control in Higher Education for National Development Aduloju, M.O, Obinne, A. D. E & Falola, E. O.	25 – 36
Academic Freedom and Higher Education Reforms in Nigeria Andy Afinotan	37 – 49
Implementation of E-Examination In National Open University of Nigeria, Abeokuta Study Centre: Solution to Gender Inequality and Students' Academic Performance. Aina, Kehinde Olunike, Olusegun Paul Adeyinka & Adeyemi, G. A.	51 – 56
Factors Hindering Retention of Basic School Teachers on Border Areas as Perceived by Educational Stakeholders in Katsina State, Nigeria Bello, M.B., Daramola, C.O., Amali, I.O.O. And Yusuf, A.	57 – 64
Evolving Appropriate Strategies for Promoting and Strengthening Democracy in the Nigerian Polity M. N. Egenti	65 – 72
Career Interest Survey Of Secondary School Students In Niger-Delta Region Of Nigeria John O. Ekore	73 – 81
Accounting Teachers' Perception of the Factors Influencing Performance of Students in Accounting Courses in Universities in South-Western Nigeria. Ezeani Nneka Salome & Ezemoyih Chuks Marcel	83 – 97
Bridging the Gap Between Graduate Employability and Higher Education in Nigeria Fadokun James Banji & Akinkuowo Folajogun Oluwasimbo	99 – 112
Capacity Building Needs of Technical and Vocational Education Lecturers of Nigerian Universities in Information and Communication Technology for Effective Job Performance Victor I. Igbiniedion & Samson O. Chukwuedo	113 – 122
Creating A Synergy Between University Curriculum and Labour Market in Nigeria Igwe R. O. & Uzoka, Ngozi E.	123 – 133
Effect of Divorce on Students' Academic Performance in Nigerian Primary Schools. Kehinde Aina	135 – 142

Facilitating Effective Teaching and Learning in Adult Education Adedokun, Mary Olufunke	143 – 151
Adult Education: A Tool For Rural Transformation in Nigeria. Stella Ebum Omiunu & Francis E.O. Omoruyi	153 – 161
Perception of Quality Control Mechanisms and Sustainable Development Among Lecturers in Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria Osim, Rosemary O; Uchendu, C. C; Ekpiken, W. E & Epoke, E. J.	163 – 172
Impact of Public Private Partnership on Infrastructural Development in Public Higher Education in Nigeria Sakpere, Oyovwevotu Randy	173 – 184
Redressing Gender Inequality in Nigerian Educational System through Office Technology and Management Programme Igbinedion, V. I. & Ojeaga, I. J.	185 – 194
Teachers' Perception of Appraisal System and their Performance in Secondary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria C. P. Enueme & S. A. Sule & J. A. Adetoro	195 – 200
Students' Personnel Services and Students' Academic Achievement in Tertiary Institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Udida, L. A.	201 – 210
Self-Reported Symptoms of Adult ADHD among the General Population in Nigeria Aide S. Okhakhume & Adedayo A. Oluwafemi	211 – 232

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CAREER INTEREST SURVEY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGER-DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the career interests of secondary school students in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. The survey research utilised qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. A total of 860 (male-49.1%, female-50.9%) respondents attending private schools in Warri and Port-Harcourt participated in the study. Both descriptive and inferential methods were used for data analysis. Male students were found to be more interested in studying engineering related courses while the females showed greater interest in Health Sciences. Further analyses however, showed no significant difference based on gender in terms of pursuing a career interest. Most of the participants indicated course preference based on potential for financial benefits. It implies that career guidance and policy formulation need to consider interest as a factor in result-oriented planning and intervention towards the educational development of the Niger-Delta.

Keywords: Niger-Delta, students, career interest.

Introduction

Defining a career option is probably one of the most important choices young people as students have to make in life. Building a future career begin with selecting a course to study in the university when not advancing a vocational skill option. Under the Nigerian educational system, students are required to choose a course of study before applying to a university or other tertiary institution of choice. This is followed by the student passing the required courses in WAEC at credit level and meeting the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board/ University Tertiary Examination (JAMB/UTME) cut off mark required by the chosen tertiary institution. With the introduction of post JAMB screening by individual institution in recent times, a successful student is required to also pass the written or oral test organised by the individual university before he/she is considered eligible to begin studies in a chosen academic course. When a prospective

student fails to pass at any of these stages, he/she is then made to wait a year and try again or to change course. Sometimes, the candidate tries for a less competitive and attractive course.

The investigation of career interest of secondary school students is important, especially in the Niger-Delta region where youth restiveness has been a common experience. Anti-social activities by a significant number of youth in the region have raised issues that border on career planning and development. When productively engaged, young people are less available for antisocial activities. They are able to follow and adjust in a vocational and career path. According to Salami (1999), many youths in Nigeria go into unsuitable careers due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers or as a result of the prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate vocational guidance and career counseling.

Consequently, many of them experience dissonance due to mismatch. Often times, some young adults do not find fulfillment in the career path they chart. They find the chosen career unable to satisfy their value needs. When this occur, they can constitute problem to themselves by dropping out of school, or develop negative attitude toward their job and employers when eventually hired (Issa & Nwalo, 2004). They are usually unable to contribute meaningfully to the organization, society and ultimately become liability to the nation.

A survey carried out by the U. S. National Career Development Association (2000) reported that 69% of working adults stated that if they had a second chance to choose their career again, they would get more information about available options than they had previously. This implies that despite efforts, not enough information and career education is available to individuals in their career decisions as adolescents

The Niger-Delta region of Nigeria is where oil and gas exploration takes place. Although the oil sector is responsible for about 60% of the nation's revenue, the oil producing areas are associated with underdevelopment, environmental hazards such as oil spillage, acid rains, air pollution and soil poisoning. The areas also lag behind in quality education and security. More than anything else, the level of violence occasioned by youth restiveness has reached a crisis stage. Despite the presence of major multinational companies in the petroleum industry operating in the region, the education of indigenous people to enable them work in the companies has been a source of concern. The major petroleum companies operating in the area do offer scholarship opportunities to some children of indigenes undergoing certain courses in universities. This has not been known to reduce the level of violence and other antisocial behaviours that are common among Niger-Delta young adults. Therefore, it has become important to increasingly emphasise career interest and plan for adolescents in the area as a way of promoting a culture of career

adjustment which would largely reduce incidences of school dropout, petroleum pipeline vandalism and kidnapping for ransom among others. While volumes of literature on adolescents' career interest exist, there is rarely any that specifically considered secondary school students in the Niger-Delta. This raises salient questions: Which are the courses that interest adolescents in secondary schools in the Niger-Delta? What are the factors that may influence their choice of academic courses for future career development? Will male students differ from their female counterparts in career interests? Presently, there is not much documentation on the career needs and aspirations of secondary students from the region, who are expected to play key roles in form of gaining employment in the companies exploring and exploiting oil and gas resources in their area. This necessitated the study that seeks to investigate the career interests of students (private schools) in the Niger-Delta region while also examining the possible role that gender plays in career interest among adolescents.

Literature Review

Several studies have found that Latino students are generally interested in science, but would not be interested in pursuing a career in it (Fowler, 1992; Maholmes, 2001; Sorge, Newson, & Hagerty, 2000). This was also found to be the general consensus of all students. A 1989 study involving survey data from 3,460 high school chemistry students showed that overall, these students had a positive attitude towards science and the importance of science in society (Menis, 1989). However, they were less positive about science in school and science careers. In contrast, surveys by the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (1995, 2001) found that high school students of minority ethnic background showed positive attitude toward science. The import of the findings is that mixed assumptions exist about minorities. Based on the assumption, it is possible that secondary school students in Niger-Delta will also report career interest in science based courses.

The research on minorities and career interest in chemistry by Peterson-Beeton (2007) was based on the theories of social constructivism and world view. Social constructivism states that knowledge is actively constructed by each individual and that this process is socially mediated (Tobin & Tippins, 1993). This means that every person creates his or her own personal reality. This reality is influenced by the life experiences of each person. Tobin and Tippins further described meaning as socially mediated, noting "the recognition that knowledge has both individual and social components that cannot be meaningfully separated, which enable people to construct science learning environment where multiple ways of knowing are sought and valued" (p.6). Different cultural groups can have different ways of knowing due to their collective backgrounds and beliefs.

According to Peterson-Beeton on the other hand, 'world view theory' explains the how and why of things, and why things continue as they do, as quoted in Corbern (1991, p. 19). Specifically, the development of a world view is driven by the need to relate to the outside world. By the time children get to school they already have a clear idea about what is real, what is meaningful, and what is acceptable. Years of schooling add to the world view and "in turn, a world view provides a foundation upon which cognitive frameworks are built during the learning process" (Corbern, 1991, p. 19). Peterson-Beeton reported that Solomon (1987) extended the view to science education by noting that social influences, which are crucial to world view theory are important in science education, and if the students are not reached in an everyday context, science cannot be well appreciated and learnt.

The theories can as well provide the framework for the investigation of Niger-Delta secondary school students' career interest. It can be posited that their experience of oil and gas operations in the area may influence career interest along the path of choosing

courses with direct relevance to the petroleum industry.

Several factors may be responsible for influencing the career preferences of students. Bojuwoye & Imouokhome (1984) conducted studies on gender roles in occupation decisions. Findings showed that male and females considered their decisions to take professions such as law, engineering, pharmacy, medicine, lecturing, and administrative secretary as a result of their early socialization on sex-role stereotyping. The study in addition found that poor self-efficacy on the part of female workers made them to take decisions to go into occupations. It showed great need for career guidance and counseling to help the female identify and develop talents as well as plan life goals which are commensurate to the male counterparts. Singer (1974) also investigated gender difference and similarity in job preference factors in Colorado State University undergraduates. The findings indicated that the strong differences in their preferences was not due to sex stereotyped, but in general both sexes preferred occupations that will offer them the opportunity to study so that they can achieve something tangible in the future. In addition, they all wanted jobs in which the workers would exhibit friendly co-existence. The finding however did not specifically identify career interest. Besides, it investigated adults who were already on a career path and not at the decision level.

Sax (1994) examined students' initial interest in science based careers, factors influencing career choice during college, and how these factors differ between men and women. Men who abandon career aspirations appear to be driven by financial concerns whereas women who decide not to pursue science-based career appear more concerned with the social good of their career choice. Ferry (2006) asserts that adolescent occupational choice is influenced by many factors. They include life context, personal aptitudes, and educational attainment. He contends further that whether college-bound or work-bound, meeting the

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challenge of this developmental milestone is critical in adolescents' lives. In the Niger –Delta, there has been no documented evidence of a career interest assessment to guide adolescents in secondary schools on career decisions.

According to Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001), each individual undertaking the process is influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment. Students all over the world are usually faced with the task of taking career decision. The choice of careers, subjects, and courses of study in schools and of subsequent paths to follow, are always difficult problems facing prospective undergraduates. Often, choosing the right subject combination leading to the right profession can make the difference between enjoying and detesting the career in future. Dedicating oneself to career choice that are unattainable may lead to frustration.

Following from the above review, this study assumes that secondary school students in the Niger- Delta will choose their courses based on the potential for their career to fit in the oil and gas industry. This is with a view to gaining future employment in the petroleum industry in their locality.

Method

Design

A survey research design was adopted and the sampling techniques used were snowballing and the purposive sampling techniques.

Participants

The study comprised of 860 senior secondary school students in their penultimate and final years (SS2 and SS3 students) from private schools in Warri (n=612) and Port-Harcourt (n= 248). Four hundred and twenty two (422) of the participants were males (49.1%), while four hundred and thirty six (436) of

the participants were females (50.9%). The mean age of the participants was 16.03years (SD=1.54).

Instrument

A survey instrument was developed to facilitate data collection from participating students. The instrument included both structured (or closed) questions with pre-determined responses and some open-ended questions to give respondents the opportunity to elaborate on their views and motives. The research instrument consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions related to demographic variables (age, sex, state of origin, city of family residence). The second part of the instrument contained questions related to students' career interests and reason for choosing a course.

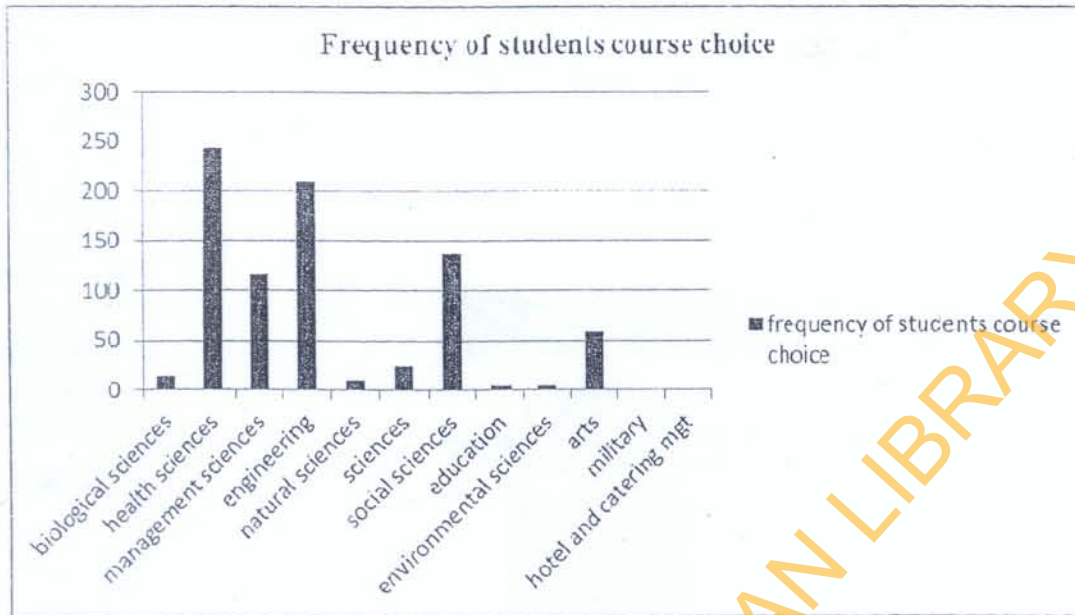
Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process took three weeks. Research assistants were recruited from Port-Harcourt, and Warri. They were instructed on the proper methods of data collection and given the survey instrument which they distributed conveniently among SS2 and SS3 students in private secondary schools. With the assistance of career masters in the respective schools, the participants were gathered in separate classrooms and clear information, instruction and guidance were given to them as an orientation. The average time used in responding to the survey instrument was 20 minutes. Descriptive statistics was used as the statistical instrument to analyze the data.

Results

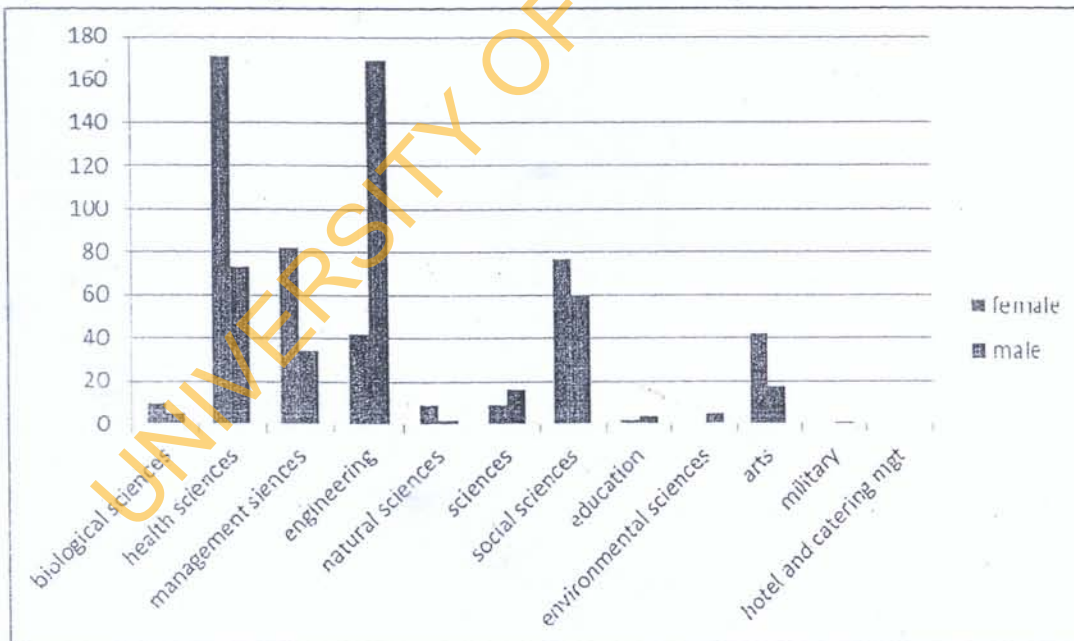
Participants' responses yielded data that were coded and entered into the SPSS software programme for analysis. All participants completed and returned their questionnaires. The data was subjected to descriptive statistics using frequency distribution, tables and percentages. The results from the analyses are shown in tables below:

Fig 1: Bar chart showing career interest preferences of all students



From the table above, it can be inferred that greater percentage of students in the Niger-Delta region show interest in health sciences followed by engineering and social sciences in that order.

Fig 2: Bar Chart showing differences in career interest based on gender



The table above shows male career interest peaking on engineering while the females show highest interest in health sciences.

Table 1: Summary table showing frequency of students who want to study outside Nigeria

Willing to study outside Nigeria	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Yes	666	80.8
No	158	19.2
Total	860	100

The table above shows that 80.8% of the participants in this study prefer to school outside Nigeria if given the opportunity.

Table 2: Summary of t-test comparing males and females on career interest

	Gender	N	x	SD	t	df	P
Career interest	Male	419	4.41	4.41	1.48	854	Ns
	Female	437	4.17	2.69			

Table1 shows that no significant difference exists between the career interest of males and females in the Niger-Delta region. While the males showed peak interest in Engineering, the females peaked in Health Sciences. They reported no significant mean difference ($x = 4.41$ and $x = 4.17$). This is also shown on the Bar chart above.

Table 3: Summary Table Showing Reasons for Career Choice

S/N.	Reasons for the Career Choice	Frequency	Proportion of Respondents (%)
1.	Financial Benefit	166	19.3
2.	Interest	704	81.8
3.	Prestige of the profession	66	7.6
4	Parental / Family influence	12	1.4

Discussion

In trying to gain insight to the career plan of secondary school students, some factors were found in the present study to play important role in influencing students' career choices. The courses they found appealing and willing to undertake were identified by both male and female participants.

The results showed that 244 students representing 29.4% made their choices in Health Sciences (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, Nutrition, Health Education, Physiotherapy, Veterinary Medicine, Radiotherapy and Physical

education), 211 students representing 25.4% preferred Engineering (Mechanical, Electrical,

Marine, Civil, Petro –Chemical, Chemical, Petroleum, Aeronautical, Environment and Safety, Agricultural, and Computer Engineering) as their course of study after secondary school, 137 students representing 16.5% preferred Social sciences/ Humanities as their course of study, 116 students representing 13.98% showed interest in Management Sciences, 59 students representing 7.1% preferred Arts, 25 students representing 3.0% choose Science, 15 students representing 1.8% liked

Biological sciences, 5 students representing 0.6% showed interest in Environmental sciences as their course of study, 11 students representing 1.3% preferred Natural science, 6 students representing 0.7% preferred Education, 1 student representing 0.1% preferred Military and 0 students representing 0% showed interest in Hotel and Catering management as their preferred course of study.

It was found that majority of the students identified Health sciences as preferred course to study, while Engineering was the next in line on the preference scale. This result indicates that both male and female adolescents have high career interest. The frequency distribution of the preferred courses of participants among the sexes showed that females preferred the Health sciences while the male participants preferred Engineering-related courses at about the same level of interest.

The findings showed that female students are more interested in health science related career (23.84%) compared to their males counterparts (10.96%). The present study contradicted with that of Tomlinson and Evans (1991), they found out that male college students scored significantly higher than female college students on Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory. Both female and males reported significantly high level of career interest in Health sciences and Engineering respectively. These findings are in line with the propositions of this study which suggested that career interest of both males and females from the Niger-delta region of Nigeria will tend towards prominent careers employed by oil and gas companies. These companies basically employ individuals with engineering and health sciences/ biological sciences backgrounds. This finding is supported by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001). They reported that each individual undertaking the process is influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live among others.

Betz (1994), in an earlier study found that occupational stereotype is one of the factors affecting the vocational interest of adolescents

(male and females). It is a popular view in Nigeria that occupations are designed to be appropriate for one gender and not for the other gender. The perceptions of many students that subjects such as mathematics and physics are difficult could affect one's career interest. In general, the contemporary workforce is well represented by both male and females. Likewise, female students do outnumber male students in many universities and their academic interests are not much different from their male counterparts as shown in this study. Both Engineering and Health science courses require strong science background.

From findings, male students (20.3%) showed a higher percentage of interest in engineering related courses than their female counterparts (5.0%), while female students (20.6%) showed greater interest in health science related courses than their male counterparts (8.8%).

Moreover, out of the 860 students who responded to the question on what influenced their career choice, 166 (7.8%) indicated financial benefit in terms of good salary they could gain from the job, 704 (83.0%) indicated that their choice was based solely on personal interest, 66 (7.8%) indicated prestige (High Social Status and Respect) attached to the occupation and 12 (1.4%) indicated that their parents had a strong influence on their choice.

The results showed that 666 representing 80.8% of the students said they are willing to travel outside Nigeria in order to achieve their ambition of getting a sound education while one hundred and eight students representing 19.2% did not believe in travelling out of the country (Nigeria) before they could achieve their dreams.

Finally, the results showed that no significant difference exists generally between males and females on their career interests/ preferences. This result may have been influenced by the gender distribution of the population. However, males and females were found to show the greatest career preferences in engineering and biological sciences

which are highly preferred by employers in oil and gas firms.

Implication

The results of this finding have implication for career planning and policy formulation for educational development in the Niger-Delta. It implies that career plan and educational policy would be result-oriented when the courses that have higher chance of getting indigenes employable in the petroleum industry are given attention. And the findings of this study will also be of great help to counselors in helping the students to make right choices considering their interest that can be matched with their capability.

Conclusion

Student's interest and ability play significant role in choice of career preference. A sex difference may exist in the career preference of SS2 and SS3 students in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria although a significant difference between males and females on career preference was not established. Female students showed more interest in courses belonging to the health sciences group while males preferred to study engineering courses. It can be concluded that despite the report of male and females showing similar level of career interest, the specific course areas differ. Financial incentives played the greatest role in influencing career preference among the students investigated.

It was therefore suggested that parents need to understand what interest their children in a potential course of study. Knowledge about career interest would be most helpful in encouraging children to undertake certain course as part of career planning. Such knowledge would also be helpful to career counselors who often consider a student's academic performance to guide career decisions. When they are well understood students can be properly guided in constructing career path. Similarly, education administrators need to give priorities to science-based subjects in secondary

schools in the Niger-Delta area because interest in future career is largely based on potential to work in oil and gas companies in the area as found in the present study. Nevertheless, further studies on career interest are encouraged to include public schools to broaden the scope and enhance generalization of findings. However, the present study has provided insight to a topic in an area previously not emphasized.

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