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# CAREER ASPIRATIONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AWARENESS OF CONTEMPORARY HIGH PROFILE CAREERS

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## Abstract

Many students are fond of naming the seemingly common and popular careers such as medicine, engineering and law as their future ambitions. The aim of this study is to determine the level of awareness of the relatively new and contemporary careers which offer bounteous prospects in the modern globalised world by Nigerian adolescents. It is a descriptive study in form of a survey in which questionnaires were used to collect data from a randomly selected sample of senior secondary school students in Ogun State. Appropriate research questions and null hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level. Findings revealed that participants have low level of awareness of contemporary careers. This trend was the same among male and female, rural and urban students. Therefore, it was recommended that career education focusing on contemporary careers should be organized for students from time to time in order to raise their level of career awareness and create ample career opportunities for them in the modern globalised world

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**Keywords:** career aspiration, contemporary careers, gender, rural/urban, Nigeria

## Background to the Study

The imperative of careers in human life cannot be over emphasized. At a certain stage in human development, the need to have a career becomes so apparent that individuals cannot

but begin to plan, explore, choose and begin to seek ways of how to develop on a chosen profession or explore other opportunities that come one's way in order to have a fulfilling career and live a life full of joy and satisfaction. A career is totality of time and effort devoted to the pursuance of work in order to live a meaningful life. It includes all the periods spent planning, acquiring education and training qualifying one for an occupation, the period of entrance into, the effort made to ensure progression including acquisition of further training, change of job and development all through a working life. Career is so important that it tends to define human personality and determine the quality of life that individuals live. However, life is dynamic and the reality of globalization stares us in the face. Gone are the days when we talk of careers and the thought of notable professions such as medicine, law, engineering, military, policing, business and piloting quickly comes to mind. These professions have enjoyed great popularity as a result of the great potentials they had, to transform individuals' lives and change their social status and economic fortunes within a relatively short period of time. Hence, when school pupils are asked to name their future ambitions, majority tend to say medicine, engineering and the likes. Apart from the expansions that have happen to these professions leading to the development of equally lucrative and vibrant professions as offshoots of the popular professions, several new, high profile and lucrative professions offering promises of fulfilling careers to the young ones have evolved across the globe. Surprisingly however, majority of our school pupils still indicate the traditional professions (medicine, law, engineering and so on) as their future ambitions. This suggests that they may not be aware of the new professions springing up across the world and which offer equally great career opportunities to the young ones. Hence, this study explores the level of awareness level of contemporary high profile careers by Senior Secondary School students in Ogun State, Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Career awareness among Nigerian Students**

Career awareness is important among students in order to realize the nation's dreams as an emerging economy. One of the major problems facing Nigerian Secondary School students is the task of making an appropriate and realistic occupational choice (Anasi, 2010). This then implies that it behooves on the Nigerian educationists and counselors to ensure that proper steps and measures are taken in order for the students to make the right choices occupationally. Choosing an appropriate career is one of the most difficult or serious

decisions which a students have to make especially in the face of newly emerging careers (Denga, 2001). One of the most pressing problems confronting young people today involves choosing an appropriate occupation, preparing for it, liking it, and keeping it (Ozohu-Sulayman, 2006). Some variations in career preferences of male and female students owing to socialization patterns and gender stereo-type have been observed and this trend is said to pose some threat to students' ability to maximize their potentials in the contemporary world (Griffin &Hammis, 2003). Career choice and decision making in rural and urban centres remains a worrisome problem among Nigerian male and female students across the country as many students still rely on chance and luck elements when it comes to choosing a career because many of them are not aware of new opportunities (Ofem&Ajayi, 2008). The decision is further fueled by the fact that the emerging new jobs are continually being created in the economy, such that the former traditional advice from parents and elders were often made in most cases in complete ignorance of these new professions and their requirements. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2001) stated that owing to the continuous emergence of new career opportunities in the world, when students leave the Junior Secondary School to the Senior Secondary level, such students need complete career counselling to enable them have a smooth transition to a specialized field of work, which shall eventually lead them to a desired occupational choice.

**New career opportunities:** Several new jobs and career opportunities keep on to emerge in the fast changing world and some of the most prominent and highly promising ones are considered in below;

#### *Information Technology (IT)*

The three primary census job classifications for Information Technology employees are: (a) computer systems analysts and scientists, (b) computer programmers, and (c) operations and systems researchers (Demirr, 2002). Computer engineers work with the hardware and software aspects of systems design and development and often work in teams that design new computing devices or computer related equipment. Software engineers design and develop both packaged and systems software. While database administrators work with database management systems software, reorganize and restructure data and are responsible for maintaining the efficiency of databases and system security (Yushau, 2006; Yildir&Tsong, 2001; Zakaria, 2006).

### *Internet Commerce*

A Cisco Systems, Inc. study suggests nearly 2.5 million people made a living directly from the Internet in 1999, which is up 36% from 1988 according to the report by the Center for Research in Electronic Commerce (CREC) at the University of Texas at Austin (Yushau, 2006). The Internet commerce group, which included on-line retailing, business-to-business and to consumer groups, grew by 26%, to 725,000 people. Further, according to the CREC study, groups that sell digital content, such as music transmitted over the Web increased revenues by more than one-third and gross margins were increased by 25%. The companies that sell physical goods, such as books mailed by Amazon.com, increased by nearly 40% and gross margins by almost 42% (Yi &Yujong, 2004). The following careers are also reported by Anas, (2010); Elegbeleye and Griffin &Hammiss (2003) and to be making great waves and they offer great potentials to youth in the contemporary world;

### *Social worker*

Social or community service is a much-talked-about career, attracting students from all branches of study. Because it requires no specific eligibility criteria and is not a closed door option, many join this profession, which is more of a passion than profession.

### *Environmentalist*

The emergence of an empathic and concerned youth has made the profession of environmentalist a viable option. The need to save the Earth from destruction has been felt very strongly recently pushing up the need and demand for environmentalists. It is a profession that requires people from all backgrounds be it doctors, engineers, scientists or journalists. The field and scope is vast and it is one profession that can be pursued along with another. The passion to safeguard our environment is the only eligibility criteria.

### *Restaurateur/ hotelier*

Those with a love for food and a bent towards entrepreneurship with a difference can consider becoming a restaurateur or hotelier. Broadly falling under the hospitality industry, these groups of people want to serve, be known, and also reap substantial benefits. And the emerging trend of eating out and vacationing provide significant incentive.

### *Science and Technology*

The fastest emerging careers today relate to fields like forensic science, health care, homeland security, case management, life care planning, geriatric care management, genetics, and cyber security. These fields are now gaining popularity and proving to be the fastest emerging new economy careers as compared to several years ago. Until recently, in the United States, the automobile and related industries accounted for a major part of employment opportunities. However, employment avenues in these fields have declined as a result of increased automation.

### *Medical Prospects*

Nursing informatics is an upcoming career that involves skills in nursing, computer science and information technology. New medical imaging techniques have given rise to radiological specialties and improvements in data management have led to geographic information systems.

### **Statement of Problem**

The reality of the contemporary time shows that not all school pupils can end up becoming medical doctors, lawyers and engineers no matter how great they fantasize, but there are equally high profile and lucrative professions which offer great hopes of fulfilling careers to the young ones. However, the extent to which school pupils are aware of these careers may determine their ability to explore such opportunities. Hence this study investigates awareness level of contemporary high profile careers by senior secondary school students in Ogun state, Nigeria. It also investigates gender and rural/urban differences in career awareness of secondary school students.

### **Research Question**

What is the level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers by secondary school students in Ogun state, Nigeria?

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level.

HO1: There is no significant difference between the expected and observed frequencies of students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers.

HO2: There is no significant difference between male and female students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers.

HO3: There is no significant difference between rural and urban students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers.

## **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study have some implications for career counseling in secondary schools. Based on the findings of this study, it is essential that career counseling should focus more on the creation of adequate awareness of contemporary high profile careers so that students may have ample opportunities to explore and pursue careers that may be highly rewarding in the contemporary world. Moreover, the findings of this study are expected to stimulate further researches on the upsurge of new high profile careers with a view to expanding the frontier of knowledge in that regard. It is hoped that the present study would serve as useful reference resource to future researchers on the subject.

## **Methodology**

This study made use of the descriptive research design involving a survey of students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers. None of the variables studied was manipulated to cause a change in the other. Instead, an objective description of the phenomenon as it currently exists using questionnaires as the research instrument. Students currently attending public senior secondary schools in Ogun state, Nigeria constituted the target population. A sample of 480 respondents (average age = 16.87years) was randomly selected from ten secondary schools across the state using simple random sampling technique in form of balloting.

## **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire developed by the researchers and titled "New Career Questionnaire" (NCQ). It has two sections, one requesting

for demographic data such as name of school, town/village, gender, class and age while the other contains a list of ten new careers and respondents are simply requested to rate their level of awareness of the careers using a 4 Likert Scale Format. The content of the NCQ was developed based on the available literature on new careers and this was done to ensure its content and construct validity. Besides, the NCQ was trial tested twice in three weeks on a set of ten senior secondary school students selected outside the study area before the real study. Using Pearson correlation to correlate the two set of scores, a co-efficient of 0.91 was observed as index of reliability.

### Procedure

The researchers along with four research assistants visited the schools to administer and retrieve the questionnaires. Necessary permissions were obtained from the school authorities and respondents' consents were freely given as none of them was forced to participate in the study. On the average administration of the instruments lasted 20 minutes (including the time spent on briefing and clarifications).

### Results:

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square and t-test. The results are presented in summary tables. To answer the research question raised, simple percentage analysis was used while the postulated null hypotheses were tested using t-test.

**Table 1: Level of Awareness of Contemporary High Profile Careers by Students**

**Test Item: This career has a lot of prospect in the contemporary world;**

S/N	NEW CAREERS	YES (%)	NO (%)	Awareness Level
1	Computer operator and programmers	278 (57.92)	202 (42.18)	High
2	Computer operations and systems researchers	59 (12.29)	421 (87.71)	Low
3	Computer systems analysts and scientists	61 (12.71)	419 (87.29)	Low

4	Forensic science	82 (17.18)	398 (82.92)	Low
5	Nursing informatics	173 (36.04)	307 (63.96)	Low
6	Restaurateur	293 (61.04)	187 (38.96)	High
7	Environmentalist	153 (31.87)	327 (68.13)	Low
8	Artificial intelligence technician	433 (90.21)	47 (8.79)	Low
9	Relocation counselor	132 (27.5)	348 (72.5)	Low
10	Event manager	148 (30.83)	332 (69.17)	Low

Table 1 showed that majority of the respondents have low awareness level regarding the prospect of Computer operations and systems researchers, Computer systems analysts and scientists, Forensic science, Nursing informatics, Restaurateur, Environmentalist, Artificial intelligence technician, Relocation counselor and Event manager. In all these cases, the percentage of those who indicated that they know the prospects of each of these careers is less than 50% meaning that many of them have little or no awareness about the prospects of such careers in contemporary world. However, the table showed that students' level of awareness of Computer operator and programmers, as well as Restaurateur was high.

**Table 2: t-test of gender difference in students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers**

Group	N	MEAN	SD	Df	T	P
Male	240	13.26	4.35	478	1.392	.710
Female	240	12.86	4.57			

Table 2 revealed no significant difference in level of awareness of high profile careers by male and female students ( $t = 1.392$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the postulated null hypothesis is retained. This means that students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers is



not gender sensitive. Male and female students have the same level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers.

**Table 3: t-test of rural/urban difference in students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers**

Group	N	MEAN	SD	Df	T	P
Students in Rural schools	264	12.57	4.27	478	1.597	.930
Students in Urban schools	216	13.41	4.38			

Table 3 revealed no significant difference in level of awareness of high profile careers by students in rural and urban schools ( $t = 1.597$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the postulated null hypothesis is retained. This means that students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers is not sensitive to school location. Students in rural and urban schools have the same level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of this study showed that there is a low level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers among senior secondary school students in Nigeria. The implication of this is that students do not have adequate access to modern career education and counselling services which could expose them to upcoming careers and expand their potentialities in the contemporary world. This finding corroborates Ofem&Ajayi (2008) who observed that many young ones are not aware of the current high profile careers. It also buttresses the notion that in the globalised world new careers are emerging and only those who can see this trend and seize the opportunities could excel in the modern world (Griffin &Hamis, 2003, Ozohu-Sulayman, 2006).

The finding on the first null hypothesis which showed that students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers is not gender sensitive implies that both male and female students are not aware that new career opportunities abound in the modern world. They still hold tight to the commonly known careers and this may limit their opportunities in

the modern world. This finding lends credence to Denga (2001) who reported problem of career indecision among Nigerian youth especially male and female students.

The finding on the second null hypothesis which showed that students' level of awareness of contemporary high profile careers is common to those in the rural and urban areas. This finding is surprising because it was thought that those in the urban areas would have greater awareness of contemporary high profile careers because they have greater access to modern communication facilities such as DSTV and internet facilities where they could have viewed some of these careers. However, the fact that this result showed that students in rural and urban areas are not aware of contemporary high profile careers suggests that even students in urban areas are too pleasure driven that they simply enjoy the pleasure in what they view instead of learning from it. The present finding agrees with Denga (2001) and Anasi (2010) who observed that Nigerian youth need carefully packaged career education.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that students need career education and counselling services that would expose them to modern career opportunities. This becomes more imperative considering the reality of the current high rate of unemployment among Nigerian youth. Breaking new grounds may be all that is needed to reduce the problem of unemployment. Therefore, schools should organize periodic career education and strengthen their counselling services so that students can be exposed to the various emerging and highly promising careers in the modern world.

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