

IMPACT OF CAREER COUNSELLING AWARENESS AND OCCUPATIONAL GOALS AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN BOKKOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

MANGAI, A. M¹; PROF. MOMOH, G. O. ² & PROF. NANRAM, B. L.³

Department of Educational Foundations,

Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Plateau State Nigeria

Email: mangaiamos982@gmail.com¹; momohgg@yahoo.com²; & nanram2020@gmail.com³

Phone: 08086369203¹; 09020653155²; & 08037007427³

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of career guidance counselling on awareness and occupational goals among Junior Secondary School III (JSS III) students in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study adopted a true experimental pretest-posttest control group design. A total of 100 JSS III students were randomly selected from one public junior secondary school: assigned experimental and control groups. The experimental group received an eight-week structured career awareness counselling programme, while the control group was exposed to non-career-related guidance. Two validated instruments: the Career Awareness Questionnaire (CAQ) and the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS) were used for data collection. Descriptive and Inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed a significant improvement in career awareness and occupational aspirations among students in the experimental group compared to the control group. Gender differences were not statistically significant, but students' parental educational background significantly influenced the outcomes. The study concluded that career guidance counselling plays a crucial role in shaping students' career decisions and aspirations, especially in underserved rural areas like Bokkos. Based on the findings, it was recommended that career counselling be integrated into the junior secondary school curriculum and that professional counsellors be employed to support students' career development.

Keywords: *Career Guidance Counselling, Career Awareness, Occupational Aspirations, Junior Secondary School, Counselling Intervention, Career Development.*

Introduction

Career choice is one of the most critical decisions in the life of a secondary school student. The choice made at this stage can either shape a future filled with success and satisfaction or lead to a life marked by dissatisfaction and regret. A wrong career decision can negatively affect an individual's academic path, professional journey, and overall well-being. As such, the importance of proper career awareness and guidance for students cannot be overstated, especially for those in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS), who are at a crucial developmental stage.

Johnson (2022) asserted that a career is one's chosen line of work, encompassing the education, training, and experience needed to grow in a profession. It includes all forms of paid and unpaid work, as well as activities that shape one's role in education, family, and community. The United States Department of Education (2016) reported that nearly 60% of new jobs created between 2020 and 2030 will not require traditional academic degrees but will demand hands-on

skills and technical training. This underscores the need for early career awareness among students, so they can identify practical opportunities beyond conventional academic paths.

Experience has shown that many secondary school students in areas like Bokokos make career decisions without fully exploring available options or evaluating their personal interests, abilities, and values. Rather than making informed choices, students often follow societal trends or peer influences, which can lead to poor subject selections and career mismatches. Okobiah and Okorodudu (2016) noted that career development spans through a person's life and is shaped by decisions, transactions, and adjustments in education, work, and personal roles. Therefore, early guidance is essential.

Career awareness counselling is a comprehensive and developmental process designed to assist individuals in making informed educational and occupational choices (United States Department of Education, 2016). It enhances self-knowledge, occupational exploration, and career planning. Through such counselling, students learn to understand the relationship between their interests and the demands of various professions. Ukpelisho, et al. (2018) emphasized that the most important factor influencing career aspirations is the quality of information students receive through career counselling.

The adolescent stage is when students begin to develop a sense of identity and independence. At this stage, most students especially in public schools in areas like Bokokos are not exposed to adequate career guidance and may be misdirected in their career paths. This lack of counselling leads to underutilization of talents and a mismatch between abilities and occupational roles. Early exposure to diverse career opportunities helps students prepare for transition into higher education and the labor market. The final year of JSS is particularly crucial, as students make subject choices that determine future career trajectories.

Moreover, gender roles and parental influence also play a significant role in shaping students' career aspirations. Al-Baharani (2019) explained that gender is not just a biological construct but a social factor that influences choices and behaviors. In many Nigerian communities, including Bokokos, cultural stereotypes associate certain careers with specific genders e.g., engineering and politics for males; nursing and teaching for females. This gender bias can limit students' aspirations, especially among girls. Similarly, parents' expectations, educational backgrounds, and involvement significantly influence the direction of a child's career path. Educated parents often provide more resources, motivation, and guidance to support their children's goals, while less educated parents may offer limited direction, inadvertently affecting their children's career development.

In addition, a growing gap exists between the Nigerian education system and the realities of the 21st century labour market. Many students lack adequate information about the qualifications, working conditions, and growth prospects of various careers. This gap often results in students being ill-prepared for the transition from school to work. Career awareness counselling helps to close this gap by introducing students to the realities of the job market and helping them align their aspirations with achievable goals.

Occupational aspirations defined as the dreams, preferences, and expectations about one's future work are shaped by an individual's self-concept, interests, and goals. These aspirations are best nurtured when students are given the opportunity to explore various fields with guidance. Schools in Bokokos can play a vital role in this by providing timely, relevant, and accessible career information. Career awareness counselling is not only necessary but urgent for students in JSSs in Bokokos. It fosters informed decision-making, helps students match their potential with real-world opportunities, and supports long-term success and national development. When students receive

proper guidance early in life, they are more likely to make career choices that lead to personal fulfillment and societal contribution.

Statement of the Problem

Choosing a career is a significant and often difficult decision that shapes an individual's future. For many JSS III students in Bokkos, Plateau State, this decision is made more complex by limited career awareness, socio-economic constraints, and a lack of professional guidance. Several factors contribute to this problem. Government policies often prioritize certain disciplines over others, leading students to pursue careers based on perceived societal value rather than personal interests or abilities. Interactions with students and feedback from teachers and principals reveal a disturbing trend: most JSS students lack access to structured career counselling. With the overwhelming number of subject options and limited career exposure, many students experience anxiety and confusion when making academic and occupational decisions.

Many schools in Bokkos lack adequate professional counsellors to provide this guidance. As a result, students often make uninformed choices, leading to school dropout, unemployment, frustration, and in extreme cases, social vices like theft or early marriage. Also, parental influence sometimes has caused conflict with students' aspirations, creating confusion and pressure. Financial limitations further hinder students from pursuing careers aligned with their passions, particularly among those from less privileged backgrounds.

Career awareness counselling has been shown to play a critical role in helping students align their skills, interests, and personality traits with appropriate occupational paths. Given the importance of early career guidance, this study examined the Impact of Career Guidance Counselling Awareness and Occupational Goals among Junior Secondary School Students in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The aim was to highlight the need for professional intervention to support students in making informed, realistic, and fulfilling career choices.

Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to examine the impact of career guidance counselling on awareness and occupational goals among junior secondary school students in Bokkos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study specifically sought to:

1. Determine career aspirations of JSS III students in Bokkos in experimental and control groups after exposure of the experimental group to treatment.
2. Examine effects of career counselling on occupational aspirations of JSS III students in Bokkos.
3. Find out if the level of career awareness of JSS III students vary in Bokkos with gender after treatment.

Methods

This study adopted a true experimental research design, specifically the pretest-posttest control group design. Participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group, which received career awareness counselling, or a control group, which did not receive the treatment but was exposed to unrelated topics. This design enabled the researcher to assess the impact of career awareness counselling on students' understanding of career options and their occupational aspirations.

The study population comprised 1,216 JSSIII students from 25 public junior secondary schools in Bokkos Plateau State during the 2024/2025 academic session. From this population, a simple random sampling technique was used to select one school and 100 students. These students

were evenly split into experimental and control groups, with a near-equal gender distribution of 47 males and 53 females.

Two instruments were used for data collection: the Career Awareness Questionnaire (CAQ) and the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS). The CAQ (was self-developed by the author after going through several related literature) consisted of 15 items measuring students' awareness of career options. The OAS (was self-developed by the author after going through several related literature) had 25 items assessing students' occupational aspirations. Both instruments went through content validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling, Psychology, and Educational Measurement, while construct validity was established through factor analysis. The reliability of both tools was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha method, with pilot testing conducted in a school not included in the main study.

Data collection involved administering a pretest to both groups, followed by an eight-week intervention for the experimental group. This group received weekly sessions on career awareness, occupational aspirations, and career decision-making strategies, while the control group was taught topics unrelated to career development. At the end of the treatment period, both groups were given a posttest using the same instruments.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as: means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages to answer the research questions. Inferential statistics, including independent sample t-tests and ANOVA, were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 confidence level of significance. This methodology allowed the researcher to evaluate the effect of career awareness counselling on students' knowledge of career options and their future aspirations.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the career aspirations of JSS III students in the experimental and control groups after treatment of experimental groups?

Table 1: Post-test Career Aspirations of JSS III Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

Career Aspiration	Experimental		Control	
	F	%	F	%
Medical Sciences	5	20	12	48
Education	4	16	1	4
Art Courses	1	4	1	4
Social Sciences	3	12	8	32
Technology	12	48	3	12
Total	25	100	25	100

Table 1 presents the career aspirations of JSS III students in the experimental and control groups after treatment. As many as 12 out of the 25 students in the experimental group chose Technology as career aspirations, but 4 chose education, 2 chose Art courses, and 2 chose social sciences, while only 5 out of the 25 students went for medical sciences. For the control group, 12 students chose medical sciences as career aspiration, followed by social sciences and the least was education and art courses. This implies that majority of the students in the experimental group choose technology as the career aspiration, and the least was art education after treatment. The most preferred in the control group was medical sciences and the least was education and art courses at the posttest.

Research Question 2: What are the pre-test and post-test occupational aspiration mean scores of JSS III students in the experimental and control groups?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Occupational Aspiration Mean Scores of JSS III Students' in the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pre-test			Post-test		Mean Gain	Mean Difference
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	25	45.20	16.32	93.52	14.33	48.32	33.08
Control	25	41.16	12.77	56.40	13.09	15.24	

Table 2 shows the pre-test and post-test occupational aspiration mean scores of JSS 3 students in the experimental and control groups. The experimental group had an occupational aspiration mean score of 45.20 with a standard deviation of 16.32 in the pre-test, an occupational aspiration mean score of 93.52 with a standard deviation of 14.33 in the post-test, and a mean gain of 48.32. This means that there was an increase in the occupational aspiration means score of students after treatment.

The control group had a mean score of 41.16 with a standard deviation of 12.77 in the pre-test and a mean score of 56.40 with a standard deviation of 13.09 at the post-test, with a mean gain of 15.24. It implies that students in the experimental group had a higher occupational aspiration mean score (93.52) after treatment using career counselling as against those in the control group (56.40) who were not given treatment, with a mean difference of 33.08. This indicates that career counseling does increase students' occupational aspiration in junior secondary schools in Bokokos LGA more than conventional method.

Research Question 3: To what extent does career awareness level of JSS III students in experimental group vary with gender after treatment?

Table 3: Occupational Aspirations Mean Scores of Students in the Experimental Group based on Gender after Treatment

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference
Male	12	90.58	19.18	5.65
Female	13	96.23	7.56	

Table 3 reveals the result on the extent to which occupational aspirations mean scores of JSS III students in the experimental group vary with gender after treatment. Male students had a mean score of 90.558 and standard deviation of 19.18, while, females had a mean score of 96.23 and standard deviation of 7.56 with a mean difference of 5.65. This implies that the occupation aspiration of female students is slightly higher than that of males after treatment using career awareness counselling.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between male and female JSS III students post-test career awareness mean scores in experimental group.

Table 4: Result on Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental Group on Career Awareness of Male and Female Students

Gender	N	X	SD	DF	t	p-value	Decision
Male	12	61.25	6.56				
				23	.479	0.637	Insignificant
Female	13	59.85	8.11				

Table 4 reveals the summary of independent sample t-test result of the post-test career awareness mean score of male and female students in the experimental group. For male, the post-test mean score was 61.25 with standard deviation of 6.36 and the females have a mean score of 59.85 and standard deviation of 8.11. The result also yielded $t(23) = .479$, $P > .05$. Since the P-value of .637 is greater than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was retained. This implies that there is no significant differences between the career awareness mean scores of JSS III male and female students in the experimental group after treatment.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between post-test career awareness mean scores of JSS III students in experimental group based on parental educational qualification.

Table 5: Summary of ANOVA Results of Post-test Career Awareness of Students' in the Experimental Group

	Sum-of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	1587.917	3	529.306	20.281	.000	Significant
Within Groups	548.083	21	26.099			
Total	2136.000	24				

Table 5 presents the ANOVA result of the post -test career awareness mean scores of JSS III students in experimental group. The result yielded $F(3, 21) = 36.17$, $P < .05$. Since the P-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. It indicating that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test career awareness mean scores of JSS III students in experimental group. It shows that career awareness counselling do increase the career awareness of students.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study demonstrated that career guidance counselling has a significant impact on both the career awareness and occupational aspirations of JSS III students in Bokkos Local Government Area. The first major finding showed that after exposure to career counselling, students in the experimental group demonstrated a shift in their career aspirations, with a notable increase in interest toward technology-related careers. In contrast, students in the control group, who did not receive counselling, predominantly chose medical sciences, indicating a limited scope of career exploration. This supports the assertion by Ukpelisho, et al. (2018) that access to quality information through counselling expands students' knowledge and shapes more realistic occupational goals.

The second key finding revealed a substantial difference in the occupational aspiration scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group recorded a significantly higher post-test mean score (93.52) compared to the control group (56.40), reflecting a mean difference of 33.08. This highlights the effectiveness of career awareness counselling in enhancing students' aspirations and readiness to explore diverse career paths. This aligns with the United States Department of Education (2016) reported that early and informed guidance plays a vital role in students' career development.

Although, gender differences were observed in the post-test scores females slightly outperformed males in occupational aspiration the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that both male and female students benefit equally from structured career guidance. However, the ANOVA results showed a statistically significant difference in career awareness scores based on parental educational qualifications, implying that parental background influences students' receptiveness to career counselling and access to educational opportunities. The findings affirm the value of early and structured career guidance in helping students make informed, realistic, and goal-oriented career decisions, especially in underserved areas like Bokkos.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that career guidance counselling significantly improves students' awareness of career options and enhances their occupational aspirations. Students exposed to counselling showed broader and more realistic career-aspirations and demonstrated increased motivation toward meaningful career paths. The study also found that while gender did not significantly affect the outcome of the intervention, parental educational background played a role in shaping students' responses to career information. These findings highlight the urgent need to integrate structured career counselling programmes into the junior secondary school curriculum, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities where such interventions are lacking.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. *Integrate Career Guidance Counselling in Schools:* Government and educational stakeholders should ensure that career guidance counselling is a compulsory component of the junior secondary school curriculum in Plateau State and beyond.
2. *Employ Professional Counsellors:* Schools, especially in rural areas like Bokkos, should employ trained guidance counsellors who can provide ongoing support and counselling services to students.
3. *Organize Regular Career Awareness Programmes:* Schools should hold periodic seminars, workshops, and career days to expose students to a variety of career options, including vocational and non-traditional fields.
4. *Engage Parents in Career Planning:* Schools should involve parents through awareness programmes that educate them on how to support their children's career development without imposing personal biases.
5. *Support for Less Privileged Students:* Policymakers should ensure that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have equal access to career guidance resources and opportunities to explore their aspirations.
6. *Further Research:* Future studies should explore long-term effects of career guidance interventions and investigate how such programmes influence students' academic performance and post-secondary choices.

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