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Differences among Age, Gender and School Factors in Ghanaian Senior Secondary School Students' Aspirations for Entrepreneurial Careers

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Abstract

Research has shown that demographic and contextual factors such as age, gender, among others have influence on secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurship careers. Again, it has been noted that entrepreneurial potential should be identified and evaluated at secondary school level so that teachers and counsellors will be more successful in augmenting entrepreneurial propensity at the stage of development in which individual career options are still open. This study therefore determined whether differences in age, gender and school factors influenced Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. The descriptive research design was adopted for this study. A total of 2,000 students were selected from Forms 3 and 4 for the study. Five research questions were set to guide the study whilst multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample. A questionnaire titled "Self-Knowledge, Family Influence and Career Knowledge Level on Aspirations for Entrepreneurial Careers" was used to obtain relevant data which were analysed using descriptive statistics. The conclusion of the study was that there were differences with respect to age, gender, course of study and school type in students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers, while there was none regarding form/class level. Among the counselling implications are that counsellors must take into consideration personal and contextual variables of students during career counselling, especially in entrepreneurship, and also people in lower age groups must be encouraged to take up entrepreneurship, and thereafter business start-up activity. It was recommended that entrepreneurship education should be incorporated in the secondary school curriculum in Ghana, and entrepreneurial careers in particular, must not be stereotyped.

Introduction

Secondary school students come out of school with high hopes of pursuing careers they aspire for, but no sooner do they leave school than they realise that such careers are non-existent or non-available. According to Roberts (2006), rapid changes in the labour market have caused increased uncertainty and instability in people's careers. The increases in access to higher education have also expanded ambitions that people have, and this in turn has led to changes in the employment patterns of people as well as their expectations and their capabilities (Wood, 2000).

Although many people view career choice as a natural aspect of life, for an adolescent it is a major decision in establishing a career path that may open up or close opportunities. An important turning point involves making career choice while in secondary school (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara & Pastorelli, 2001). Career decision making in secondary school provides students with the competencies they need to advance in their careers because when professional school counselors provide career guidance to their students, they influence the future by helping clarify developmental decisions that often last a lifetime (Erford, 2003). At the senior secondary school the student is within the mid- to late-adolescent stage of life. At the cross road of life typified by a period of turmoil resulting in a transition from childhood, the key characteristics of this stage of development, the search for identity, according to Erikson (1963), is a critical period of development.

Literature review

Worldwide, 78 million young people were unemployed in 2010 whilst unemployment in the 15-24 age group was 12.6%, 2.6 times the adult rate of unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2010a), young people between the ages of 15 and 24 account for some 18% of the global population or nearly 1.2 billion people, and 87% of them live in developing countries. Hence a large proportion of them face challenges related to limited access to resources, healthcare, education and employment and economic opportunities.

Onyejiaku (2001) posited that the senior secondary school has three

broad goals related to career choices:

- 1) continuing to aid the student in the development of his self-concept
- 2) expanding opportunities for him to explore and learn about the world of work, and
- 3) classifying the relationship between the academic world and the working world

The senior secondary school system in Ghana is geared towards the provision of further education to eligible junior secondary school students. The objective is to equip students with skills and knowledge either for direct entry into the world of work, or for further education (Report of the President's Committee on Review of Educational Reforms in Ghana, 2002).

Entrepreneurship is the nexus of enterprising individuals and lucrative opportunities, initiating the recognition, evaluation and exploitation of the opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), and resulting in the creation of a new venture (Godsey & Sebor, 2010). For developing economies, entrepreneurship works like an engine for economic growth, job creation and social adjustment. It has been proposed that graduates widen their career scope by investigating entrepreneurship as a possible basis for a career. Entrepreneurship would help these new graduates develop their own career and expand the job market (Norasmah & Salmah, 2009).

Gasse (1985) noted that entrepreneurial potential should be identified and evaluated at secondary school level, suggesting that educators will be more successful in augmenting entrepreneurial propensity at that stage of development in which individual career options are still open. Filion (1994) emphasised that adolescence is the ideal stage to acquire basic knowledge about entrepreneurship and foster a positive attitude about new venture creation. The development of entrepreneurial interest in high school students can foster an understanding of entrepreneurial interest as a concept and a career.

Scholars have investigated the contributions of demographic and

contextual factors such as age, gender, among others in mobilizing entrepreneurship behaviour (Liñán, Rodríguez, & Rueda-Cantucho, 2005; Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007). Demirer and Kara (2007) carried out a study on the effects of personal background factors on students' entrepreneurial attributes and found that gender, class and school programme type had significant influence on students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. They found males to have higher aspiration levels than females; students in higher classes had higher aspirations than those in lower classes while there were differences in students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers in terms of school programme type (course of study). Ofoha (2011) identified differences in entrepreneurial careers with respect to course of study as well as in classes. In the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data, Autio (2007) found that age and gender are statistically significantly associated with high-growth aspirations, with younger individuals and men typically indicating higher growth aspirations than older individuals and women. Sahay and Rai (2005) evaluated social factors influencing the youth to undertake entrepreneurial careers and found among other factors that age, programme of study at school and religion had significant effect on respondents' aspirations. Lena and Wong (2003) also found that programme of study of students influenced positively their entrepreneurial career intentions. Crant (1996) and Koh (1998) found a positive correlation between business students' aspirations and entrepreneurial careers.

Gender plays a significant role in business performance, insofar as it influences the self-perceptions of entrepreneurs and their abilities to realise business start-ups and business growth (Anna, Chandler, Jansen & Mero, 2000). Some descriptive studies (Gatewood, Shaver, Powers & Gartner, 2002; Mahadea, 2001), which researched personal characteristics of female entrepreneurs, found more similarities than differences to male counterparts. McQuaid and Bond (2003) asserted that given similar education there would be no difference in choice of career between male students and female students, whilst Urban (2011) found that entrepreneurship as a career choice is significantly lower for females than for males.

In their study of differences in career aspirations of students based on

type of school, Dunn (2004), and Ghazali, Ghosh and Tay (1995) concluded that a positive correlation existed. Students from boys' only schools were found to be more entrepreneurially inclined than their counterparts from other schools. Allen, Elam, Langowitz and Dean (2007) found disparities in age groups with regards to aspirations for entrepreneurial careers with activity more prevalent in high age groups but less significant in lower age groups, and posited that people in lower age groups be encouraged further to take up entrepreneurship. Studies by Davidsson and Honing (2003), and Reynolds, Bygrave and Hay (2003) showed that there is considerable variation in entrepreneurial activity between different age groups.

Statement of the problem

Ghana's population of 24.6 million, according to the 2010 population and housing census, is characterised by a youthful structure. The share of the youth in the population is also reflected in a corresponding share of the youth in unemployment. About 50% of the unemployed in Ghana can be found in the 15-29 years age group, with the 15-19 years age group constituting 15.5% of the population of the country. According to Amankrah (2012), this makes Ghana's youth unemployment rate one of the highest in the world. The Ghana Employment Policy (2008) estimated that 350,000 young people from various educational levels join the labour force annually. Out of this number, only 40% enter into one form of employment or the other, which implies that 60% remain largely unemployed. A number of these unemployed youth are roaming the streets of the cities in search of jobs or selling. The African Economic Outlook 2012 report estimated unemployment rate to be 25.6% among the youth aged 15-24 in Ghana.

In a study to ascertain the hopes and aspirations of the unemployed youth in Ghana, Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2003) found that about 31% of 524,028 unemployed youth desired to set up their own enterprises but were unable to do so because they lacked capital; whilst 16% desired skills training and retraining, apprenticeship, or job attachment programmes to enter into self-employment.

Among works on entrepreneurial studies carried out in Ghana include

Ocansey (2005) who found out that gender, form/class and family influenced career aspirations of secondary school students. Owusu-Ansah (2004) also found that entrepreneurship education had a positive impact on career intentions and aspirations of tertiary education students in Ghana. This study determined whether differences in age, gender and school factors influenced Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers.

Research objectives

The main objective of the study was to determine Ghanaian senior secondary students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. Specifically, it was to determine whether there are differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of:

- a) gender
- b) age
- c) form
- d) course of study
- e) school type

Research questions

1. Are there differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of gender?
2. Are there differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of age?
3. Are there differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of form?
4. Are there differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of course of study?

5. Are there differences in Ghanaian senior secondary school students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers on the basis of school type?

Methodology

Research design

The research design used for this study was the descriptive survey. According to Nwana (1982) descriptive research is designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena. Gay (1981) sees descriptive survey as a process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the status of the subject of the study. Such a study reports the way things are.

Descriptive survey focuses on determining the status of a defined population with respect to certain variables. Descriptive research was considered to be relatively easy to conduct because data were fairly easy to obtain and interpret. This design was therefore chosen because it had the advantage of producing good amount of responses from a wide range of people.

Population, sample and sampling procedure

The population for the study was 758,468, comprising students in all senior secondary schools in Ghana for the 2011/2012 academic year. The target population was 56,458 students, made up of all the students in the 27 senior secondary schools from 9 selected districts, municipalities, and metropolis. The accessible population was 21,123 comprising students in Forms 3 and 4 in the selected schools.

Kerlinger (1998) explained sampling as a “means of taking any portion of a population or universe as representative of that population or universe” (p.190). The sample was 2,000 students made up of 996 students selected from Form 3 and 1,004 selected from Form 4. A multi-stage sampling approach comprising purposive sampling, stratified sampling, simple random sampling and proportionate stratified sampling methods were used to select the sample.

The stratified sampling method was used to zone the country (Ghana) into Northern, Middle and Southern zones, and also to group the

secondary schools into public and private. It was also used to group the students into course of study in each form, and into gender. Thus, this technique was used to group populations with similar characteristics in order to select a sample from the respective strata. The purposive sampling technique was used to select students in Forms 3 and 4. This was to ensure that the elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria, for example possessing certain characteristics relevant to the study, were selected (Nworgu, 2006). The proportionate stratified, and simple random sampling methods were used to select the final sample for the study. The proportionate stratified sampling is used to select corresponding numbers from various strata to ensure equal or proportional representation, whilst the simple random sampling technique gives room for equal chances of selection of sample without bias (Creswell, 2008).

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. It had a number of statements that elicited demographic information and respondents' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. The research instrument was piloted on 300 senior secondary school students selected across programmes of study in one of the districts different from those that were involved in the real study. These students had similar characteristics as those that were used in the main study, such as age, gender, programme of study, form and school type.

Psychometric properties of the instrument

Content validity was established for the instrument. Content validity involves ensuring that items on a test represent the entire range of possible items a test should cover. Siniscalco and Auriat (2005) asserted that an instrument has content validity when an agreement is obtained from a panel of judges or experts on a topic that the statements in the instrument do relate to what they are supposed to measure.

Stangor (2004) also stated that the reliability of a measuring instrument is the extent to which the instrument is free from random error, thus measuring consistency over time variables of interest. Test re-test was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Results of the two administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistic which gave a reliability coefficient of

approximately 0.80.

The instrument was scored using frequency counts and percentages, with no points assigned to items eliciting demographic information. However, cut off points were established for the item that solicited information on students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers as follows:

- a) 1-3: Low aspirations for entrepreneurial careers
- b) 4-5: Moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers
- c) 6-8: High aspirations for entrepreneurial careers
- d) 9-10: Very High aspirations for entrepreneurial careers

Results and discussion

The analyses of data gathered are presented as results of the study in Table 1, and discussed.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents Based on Aspirations for Entrepreneurial Careers

Variables	Categories	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	Total	
		No. %	No. %	No. %	No. %	No	%
Gender	Male	65 (6.3)	296(28.7)	473(45.9)	197(19.1)	1031(100)	
	Female	61 (6.3)	356(36.7)	400(41.3)	152(15.7)	969(100)	
Age	15-16yrs	6 (6.1)	35 (35.7)	46 (46.9)	11 (11.3)	98(100)	
	17-18yrs	69 (5.9)	393(33.5)	524(44.6)	188 (16)	1174(100)	
	19yrs and above	51 (7)	226 (31)	303(41.6)	148(20.4)	828(100)	
Class Level	Form 3	68 (6.8)	310(31.1)	441(44.3)	177(17.8)	996(100)	
	Form 4	58 (5.8)	339(33.8)	427(42.5)	180(17.9)	1004(100)	
Course	Gen Arts	19 (3.9)	145(30.1)	238(49.4)	80 (16.6)	482(100)	
	Business	10 (2)	137(27.7)	225(45.5)	123(24.8)	495(100)	
	Science	48(11.2)	138(32.2)	165(38.4)	78 (18.2)	429(100)	
	Visual Arts	27(10.6)	67 (26.3)	123(48.2)	38 (14.9)	255(100)	
	Home Economics	18 (6.7)	127(47.2)	91 (33.8)	33 (12.3)	269(100)	
	Agric	0 (0)	6 (54.5)	2 (18.2)	3 (27.3)	11(100)	
	Technical	4 (6.8)	32 (54.2)	22 (37.3)	1 (1.7)	59(100)	
Sch Type	Mixed	105(6.7)	463(29.5)	700(44.6)	301(19.2)	1569(100)	
	Boys only	13 (4)	138(42.9)	129(40.1)	42 (13)	322(100)	
	Girls only	8 (7.3)	53 (48.6)	33 (30.3)	15 (13.8)	109(100)	

Results in Table 1 present the distribution of students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. It was found that 670 (65.0%) of the male students as compared to 552 (57%) of the female had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. The remaining 351 (35.0%) of the male students as compared to 417 (43.0%) of the female had low or moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. The plausible reasons for this finding may be due to the fact that males generally desire to be independent, are competitive, more ready to take risks and have a high need for achievement than females.

These findings support assertions by Anna, Chandler, Jansen and Mero (2000) that gender plays a significant role in business performance, and Urban (2011), that entrepreneurship as a career choice is significantly lower for females than for males. On the contrary, some studies (McQuaid & Bond, 2003; Gatewood, Shaver, Powers & Gartner, 2002; Mahadea, 2001) found more similarities than differences between male students and female students.

Also, more students aged 17-18 years, 712 (60.6%), had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers than those of other age groups. Also, there were more students with moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers, 393 (33.5%), in this group than in all age groups. The number of students between 15-16 years that had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers was 47 (58.2%), while that for 19 years and above was 451 (62%). The findings here could be attributed to the fact that students of the older age (approaching or in late adolescent stage) are more concerned with entering the world of work and making a career. These confirm Allen, Elam, Langowitz and Dean (2007) that disparities in age groups with regards to aspirations for entrepreneurial careers are more prevalent in high age groups. They as well concur with researchers such as Davidsson and Honing (2003), and Reynolds, Bygrave and Hay (2003) that there is considerable variation in entrepreneurial activity between different age groups.

However, there was an almost even distribution of students in both classes (Forms 3 and 4) across the different categories of aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. Whilst 618 (62.1%) students in Form 3 had

high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers, 607 (60.4%) students in Form 4 did so. The plausible reason here may be that having spent three and four years respectively in the senior secondary school, students have been exposed to issues related to the world of work. This finding, though a slight difference, is not enough to confirm studies by Demirer and Kara (2007), who found that students in higher classes had higher aspirations than those in lower classes, and Ofoha (2011), who identified differences in entrepreneurial careers with respect to classes.

The results in Table 1 again showed that most students studying business studies; 348 (70.3%), had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers, followed by those in general arts 318 (66.0%). An appreciable number of students in science, 138 (32.2%) had moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. What may account for this occurrence is that most students studying business courses view entrepreneurship as the first option in employment, and see themselves as being on the preparatory grounds. Lena and Wong (2003) found that students' programme of study influenced their entrepreneurial career intentions positively, whilst Crant (1996) and Koh (1998) also found a positive correlation between business students' aspirations and entrepreneurial careers.

It was found that more students in mixed school type; 1001 (63.8%) had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers while 463 (29.5%) had moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. More students in boys-only schools 171(53.1%) as compared to those in girls-only schools 48 (44.1%) had high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. Most of the students from girls-only schools, 53 (48.6%), had moderate aspirations for entrepreneurial careers. The reason for this finding may be due to the level of competitiveness and independence that boys usually seek; two attributes for success in an entrepreneurial endeavour. These findings confirm Dunn (2004) and Ghazali, Ghosh and Tay (1995) who, in their respective studies of differences in career aspirations of students based on type of school, concluded that a positive correlation existed. Students from boys' only schools were found to be more entrepreneurially inclined than their counterparts from other schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings and conclusion:

- a) Entrepreneurial careers in particular, must not be stereotyped. Both male and female students should be allowed to choose careers they wish to. Female students, especially, should be encouraged to aspire for entrepreneurial careers.
- b) All students, irrespective of course of study and school type, must be encouraged to aspire for entrepreneurial careers.
- c) Entrepreneurship education as a subject should be introduced in the secondary school curriculum in Ghana, or as a component of the various courses of study since students have high aspirations for entrepreneurial careers.

Counselling Implications

- a) Counsellors must take into consideration personal and contextual variables of students during career counselling, especially in entrepreneurship.
- b) Counsellors must periodically organise seminars and workshops on entrepreneurship to expose students in order to identify their specific career interests in the field of entrepreneurship, especially as it relates to their course of study.
- c) Career days could be organised to educate students on entrepreneurship careers, and also have them show their entrepreneurship prowess in their areas of interest.
- d) Counsellors must ensure that students at all levels in secondary schools are exposed to different careers in the world of work. A comprehensive career guidance programme should be instituted in the schools to take care of the career guidance needs of students in all class levels.
- e) People in lower age groups must be encouraged to take up entrepreneurship, and thereafter business start-up activity.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there were differences with respect to age, gender, course of study and school type among students' aspirations for entrepreneurial careers, while there was none regarding form/class level.

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