

## Full Length Research Paper

# Career interest of young people in Zambia

J. Anitha Menon<sup>\*1</sup>, Tapa Nkumbula<sup>2</sup>, Lee-Ann Singh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Head of Psychology Department, University of Zambia, P.O.Box 32379, Lusaka, Zambia

<sup>2</sup>Programme Manager, University of Zambia HIV and AIDS Response Programme

<sup>3</sup>Chief Executive Officer, Image Promotions

### Abstract

National Career Expo 2011 was held in Lusaka, Zambia with an objective of exposing High School students from grade 10-12 to possible career options and allowing participants to interact with potential employers and or institutes of higher learning. In doing so it was expected that they would be able to make an informed choice about their career. This paper explores the career choice of young people in Zambia who attended the career expo. Totally 3900 participants registered for the event but only 1890 completed the career interest profile. The results indicated that young people in Zambia have varied career interests and providing them with information and helping them think closely about their skills, interests and achievement is useful in identifying career choice. Gender difference in career interest was also found.

**Keywords:** Career interest, young people, Zambia.

## INTRODUCTION

Career development has been researched for a very long time; Super et al (1976) describe career development as a life long process beginning at birth. According to this description, many individuals would seem to influence the career development of a person. Although many people, including family, view career choice as a natural aspect of the life, for an adolescent it is a major decision in establishing career path that may open up or close opportunities. It is an important turning point involves making career choice while in secondary school.

Research studies have suggested that adolescent career choice is influenced by many factors, including life context, personal aptitudes, and educational attainment (Bandura et al. 2001). It has also been found that even young children, as young as five years, can have career dream (Seligman et al. 1988). There seems to be sex stereotyping in career choice of school children, especially girls, when asked about career choice, girls seem to select traditional female career (teacher, nurse etc.) while boys tend to choose a more varied occupations (Looft, 1971).

According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), children's career choice intentions change from a fantasy stage to more realistic options as they grow up (Hartung et al., 2005). By adolescence, therefore, one can expect that they would explore various career options and develop career choice intentions consistent with one's own abilities, values, and interests (Kracke, 2002).

There also seems to be a relationship between the career interest of adolescents and the later career choice (Low et al. 2005). The study by Falck et al. (2010) showed the stability of career aspirations from adolescence to adulthood. In their study, students who stated entrepreneurial intentions at age 16 were shown to have a significantly higher probability of being an entrepreneur at age 33 compared to those who did not indicate any entrepreneurial intentions. In another study Schmitt-Rodermund (2007) showed a relationship between entrepreneurial interests at the age of 13 years and entrepreneurial activities 20 years later.

Therefore making an informed career choice becomes important to adolescents. The 2011 National Careers Expo was held in Lusaka over a two day period from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of November at the Mulungushi International Convention Centre, Lusaka, Zambia. The Career Expo was Organised by Image promotions in collaboration with Junior Achievement Zambia and

---

\*Corresponding Author E-mail:  
anithamenon667@hotmail.com

**Table 1.** Presentations and Exhibitions at the Career Exp 2011

<b>Presentations</b>	<b>Exhibitions</b>
Accounting	ACCA
Agriculture	Bank of Zambia
Architecture	Barclays Bank
Auditing / Finance	Barefeet Theatre
Careers within NGO field	CAMFED
Communication Skills	CAVENDISH University
Cosmetology	CHAMP
CV Preparation	DMI St Eugene College
Film Production & Acting	Guardian Motors
Financial Education	University of Zambia HIV and AIDS Response Unit and University of Zambia clinic
Forensic Law	Ministry of Education
How to Choose a Career	National Institution for Public Administration
Human Resources	Punzila- overseas education counsellors
Interview Skills	Wildlife Environment and Conservation Society of Zambia (WECSZ)
Law	
Life Skills	
Marketing	
Medicine	
Motor Industry	
Performing Arts	
Swedish Education & Scholarships	
Tourism	
Zambia Army	

Ministry of Education, Zambia. The objective of the Career Expo was to expose High School students from grade 10-12 to possible career options and allow participants to interact with potential employers and or institutes of higher learning. In doing so it was expected that they would be able to make an informed choice about their career. This paper explores the career choice of young people in Zambia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This was a cross sectional study with an objective of finding out about the career interest of young people in secondary schools in Lusaka.

### **Participants**

Students in grades 10, 11 and 12 in the secondary schools in Lusaka and students from tertiary institutions were invited to take part in the career expo. Totally 3900 participants registered for the event at the location but only 1890 completed the career interest profile.

### **Procedure**

The invitation to the schools was sent out through the Ministry of Education. Permission was obtained from the

Ministry of Education and at the career expo all the students were invited to take part in the study, the purpose of the study was explained and a consent or assent was obtained from the students. Peer educators specially trained in the administration of the career interest profile administered the career interest profile to the consenting students. The career interest profile is a self report but the peer educators were available for any clarification required. After completing the questionnaire, the peer educators assisted the students to interpret their career interest profile based on their skills, interests and strengths indicated in their answers. The students were then encouraged to attend the various presentations on different careers, exhibitions and keynote addresses (Table 1). Finally, the students also filled in an evaluation form to indicate if they found the career expo useful in making a career choice and what aspect did they find most useful.

## **Measure**

### **Career interest survey**

The Career Interest survey is based on items from Guidance Division Survey, Oklahoma Department of Career Education (2005) and Strong Interest Inventory; the items were adapted for use with Zambian school children and pre tested. The career interest survey acts

**Table 2.** Gender differences in Career Interest

Career Interest	Male		Female		P value	Total
	n	%	n	%		
Social	267	33%	514	48%	<0.05	781
Scientific	177	22%	146	14%	<0.05	323
Business	42	5%	51	5%	1	93
Creative	30	4%	62	6%	0.05	92
Tourism/Hospitality	53	6%	89	8%	0.08	142
ICT	65	8%	28	3%	<0.05	93
Technical	71	9%	24	2%	<0.05	95
Services/Sports	99	12%	127	12%	1	226
	267		1071			1890

as a guide that explores likely fields of career interest of an individual based on their skills, interests and strength in subjects offered in school. The answers to the career interest survey are clustered to give a career profile that includes five broad areas of interest: Social, Scientific, Business, Creative, Tourism and Hospitality, ICT, Technical and Service and Sports. Each of these fields offered a number of different career option, for example in the Social field of interest career options included but are not limited to education, ministry and social work, while the science field included medicine, engineering and research. The career interest survey allowed participants to identify their top three desirable areas of career interest.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of the participants

Totally 3900 participants from secondary schools, universities, colleges and other tertiary institutes registered for the event at the location but only 1890 completed the questionnaires. Most of the participants from the secondary schools that attended the event were in grade 11. The grade 12 pupils represented the lowest attendance, with only 2% of the participants of the Expo being grade 12 pupils. The low attendance of grade 12 pupils could be attributed Expo being conducted during the Grade 12 final examinations. Age of participants ranged from 10 to 29 years of age, the mean was 16.8 years, of these 56% were females and 44% males. Participants came from diverse backgrounds and homes, with the largest proportion coming from lower economic background. Economic background was assessed using the area of residency, number of people living in the house and whether or not the parents or guardians were employed. The majority (72.1%) of the participants indicated that at least one of their parents or guardians were employed (either formally or self employed).

### Career interest

Approximately 41% of the participants who took part in the career profiling exercise area of interest lay within social field, or had a combination of social and one or more of the other fields, making it the most popular area of interest. This was followed by the Scientific (17%), Service and Sports (13%), Tourism and Hospitality (8%) and the Business, Creative, ICT and Technical fields being the least popular (all approximately 5%). The second most popular fields of career interest lay in the scientific field (20%) with a combination of one or more of the other fields. Followed by the Tourism and Hospitality (18% including combinations) and the Social field (17%).

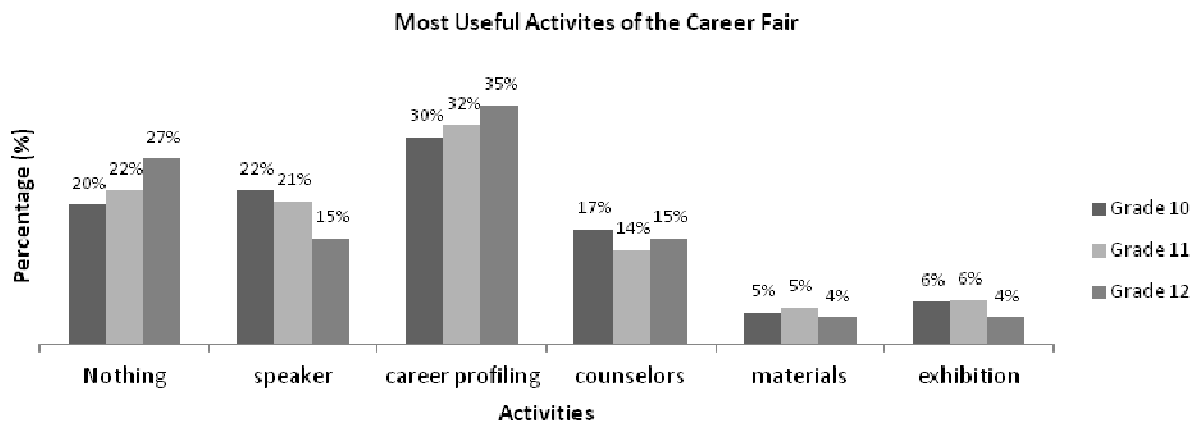
The third most popular field of career interest was in the Service and Sports field (22%) followed by the Tourism and Hospitality field (14%) and Business (11%).

### Gender differences in career interest

The fields of interest that were predominantly selected by females included the creative ( $p < 0.05$ ), tourism/hospitality ( $p < 0.08$ ) and the social ( $p < 0.05$ ) fields, though only the former was significant. Areas of interest that were predominantly chosen by males included scientific ( $p < 0.05$ ), ITC ( $p < 0.05$ ) and technical ( $p < 0.05$ ) fields. (Table 2)

### Career Expo Evaluation

At least 80% of the secondary school pupils reported that they found the careers expo useful and indicated that it had assisted them in assessing their career options. The participants reported the most useful activity at the Expo was the career profiling. Over 30% (of the secondary school pupils felt this was the most useful activity. This was followed by the speakers (21%), counsellors (14%), exhibitions (6%) and materials (5%). (Figure 1)



**Figure 1.** Activities found useful at Career Expo

All the participants reported they felt the Expo has helped them reassess and understand their career options and choices.

## DISCUSSION

In his address at the Career Expo, the Honorable Minister of Education, Dr. John Phiri, described the event the fourth and largest career expo was officiated by him. In his address Dr. Phiri encouraged the participants to take full advantage of the life changing event and fully participate, interact and seek guidance from the professionals in the various fields of study available to allow them to make informed career choices. With at least 80% of the participants indicated finding the Career Fair useful, it can be concluded that the career fair met some of the objectives it set.

Research studies from long back have consistently suggested that young people can be assisted to make career choice through guidance and counseling services. For example, Graff et al (1972) specified that career counseling would help in achieving 7 major goals: becoming aware of majors offered, becoming aware of career opportunities and requirements, interpreting and evaluating aptitude and interest measures, discussing the relationship of personal and social factors in career choice, discussing philosophy of life and values and the implications for career choices and, establishing educational and career goals consistent with abilities, interests and personality. A large number of students from schools in Lusaka attended the career expo, more than a third of them were interested in career in a social field, almost one fifth of them were interested in a scientific career, ICT and technical fields were the least popular career interest. Interestingly more than one fifth of the participants indicated an interest in service and sports fields. The results also indicated a gender difference in the career interest of male and female participants.

Career interest of female participants included the Creative careers, Tourism/hospitality and the Social, though only the former was significant, while that of males were predominantly Scientific, Computer and Technical. This finding is in line with that found by other studies that suggest that there is a gender difference in career interest (Loft, 1997). Astin and Myint (1971) found that it was expressed interest and aptitude that differentiated career choice among girls and there seemed to be a relationship between early interest and career choice later on.

Evaluation of the different aspects of the career expo indicated that participants from grade 10 to 12 indicated the career profiling as the most useful activity as this was an activity that was designed and directly targeted the high school students. The least useful activities were considered by secondary school pupils were the materials and exhibitions. This could possibly be because some of the materials and exhibitions were showcasing their individual institutions and were not directly targeting the secondary school pupils, in terms of providing relevant information that would assist the participants make informative career choices.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that young people in Zambia have varied career interests and providing them with information and helping them think closely about their skills, interests and achievement is useful in identifying career choice. To make events such as career expo more successful and useful to participants and other stakeholders it would be useful to collect preliminary information from participants concerning career interests and include these in the exhibitions and presentations. This information could additionally be provided to partners, stakeholders, speakers and exhibitors to allow them to tailor make their

materials/presentations to suit the participants. It would also be important to promote career guidance and counseling in schools.

## LIMITATION

The major limitation of this study was it this was a cross sectional study. Carrying out a pre- post intervention study would have been more useful in finding out the effectiveness of the intervention of a career expo in assisting students to make career related decisions.

## REFERENCES

- Ajzen I (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211.
- Astin HS, Myint T (1971). Career Development of Young Women during the Post-High School Years. *J. Counselling Psychol.*, 18:369-393
- Bandura A, Barbaranelli C, Caprara GV, Pastorelli C (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development*, 72, 187-206
- Falck O, Heblich S, Luedemann E (2010). Identity and entrepreneurship: Do school peers shape entrepreneurial intentions? *Small Business Economics*. Advance online publication.
- Graff RW, Danish S, Astin B (1972). Reaction to Three Kinds of Vocational-Educational Counselling. *J. Counselling Psychol.*, 19: 224-228
- Hartung PJ, Porfeli EJ, Vondracek FW (2005). Child vocational development: A review and reconsideration. *J. Vocational Behavior*, 66, 385-419
- Kracke B (2002). The role of personality, parents and peers in adolescents career exploration. *J. Adolescence*, 25, 19-30.
- Looft WR (1971). Sex differences in the expression of vocational aspirations by elementary school children. *Developmental Psychology*, 5(2), 366.
- Low KSD, Yoon M, Roberts BW, Rounds J (2005). The stability of vocational interests from early adolescence to middle adulthood: A quantitative review of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 713-737.
- Schmitt-Rodermund E (2007). The long way to entrepreneurship: Personality, parenting, early interests, and competencies as precursors of entrepreneurial activity among the "Termites". In R. M. Lerner & R. K. Silbereisen (Eds.), *Approaches to positive youth development* (pp. 205-224). London, England: Sage.
- Seligman L, Weinstock L, Owings N (1988). The role of family dynamics in career development of 5-year-olds. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 22, 222-230.
- Super DE, Savickas ML, Super CM (1996). The life-span approach to careers. In D. Brown, L. Brooks, & Associates (Eds.) *Career choice and development* (pp. 121-178). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.