

## School Environment and Parental Socio-Economic Status as Contributing Factors Endangering Occupational Choice of Secondary School Learners in Enugu State, Nigeria (Psychological Implications)

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### Abstract

School environment and parental socio-economic status are important educational requirements for bringing up a well-developed learner. However, over the years they have been swept under the carpet instead of giving it the required attention needed. At the forefront of this burning issue is the harsh reality of surviving in the society through one's chosen occupation hence this study sought to investigate school environment and parental socio-economic status as contributors endangering occupational choice of secondary school students in Enugu State. Two null hypotheses guided the study. The study was conducted in Enugu State using correlational research design with a sample of 300 respondents, composed using purposive sampling method. Researcher structured questionnaire face validated by three experts from Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation in Enugu State University of Science and Technology was used to elicit the desired response. Reliability coefficient was 0.81 determined using Cronbach Alpha. Method of data analysis was Person Product Moment Correlation. The result amongst others revealed that school environment and parental socio-economic status are strong contributors endangering occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu State. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents and schools should live up to their expectation in the life of a secondary school learner in order to help him/her make the right occupational choice.

**Keywords:** school environment, parental socio-economic status, occupational choice, learners

### Introduction

Education is an instrument for effecting national development as well as potentials and capacity building. It is central in conservation of human heritage (environment, economic, social and cultural) with the ultimate aim, of bringing the best in each individual for personal and societal benefit. This is because education is an investment against poverty. As a continuous process, education leads to re-enactment of experiences as well as revision/non revision of experiences in an individual which enables him/her to develop capacities to control the environment as well as fulfilment of possibilities (Lawrence, 2012). The forces of environment begin to influence the growth and development of an individual right from the womb. Thus, education process occurs in an individual's physical, social, cultural and psychological environment as well as requisite for independence, survival, career choice and life skills needed to manipulate the environment positively. Education whether formal and informal is aimed at helping a learner navigate life in a creative, thought provoking and thoughtful way in order to fulfil his/her life potential as well as contribute to societal development. Therefore, in order to achieve these educational objectives, proper and adequate

school environment is a necessary stimulus for fruitful learning, social change and transformation. This is because if all is well with educational institutions, all will be well with the nation. Therefore the general conditions of the schools are great concern to the state because the child spends most of his/her time in school thus the school exerts different influence on the learner through curricula, teaching techniques and relationship which ends up shaping the personality of the learner.

Occupational life offers a learner the opportunity to develop a social identity, increase self-esteem and develop talent which will be the centre of his/her adult life. Occupation is indispensable aspect of life with the ability to influence, define and complete one's life. Hence, occupational choice should be made more carefully and meticulously. This is because occupational choice answers the questions of "*Who I am?*", "*What do I want?*", "*What do I need?*", "*Which job is attractive?*", "*How can my job satisfy me?*", "*What can I offer the world through my occupation?*" From a comprehensive exploration of possible occupational identities to a deeper in-depth exploration of one's characteristics (Porfeh & Lee, 2012). Occupational choice of a learner is usually affected by the individual him/herself, family, peers, ideology, social groups and school amongst others.

According to Mick Zais (2011), school environment is the extent to which school settings promote students safety, health, fairness and adequacy of disciplinary procedures supported by school. It also includes physical plant, academic environment, functional curriculum, mental and physical health support and services. Therefore, as a learner spends most of his/her life in school, the school environment is responsible for inculcating great value in him/her. School environment according to Mbachu and Ebiere (2020), is the place and setting where learning occur including social, psychological, physical setting, interpersonal and instructional characteristics which influences students' performance. Nwabueze (2012) opined that school environment includes general infrastructure, class size, and quality of teachers, teaching-learning process (quality of teaching), funding and overall administration. It is a place where learners may work together and support each other using variety of tools and information resources in pursuing learning goals and problem solving activities. Therefore school environment is the matrix that nurtures or inhibits learner growth hence should be encouraged with positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, self-motivation, conducive learning environment and functional curriculum. Thus if the school environment is conducive and functional for learning activities to take place, the skills learnt from it will be able to help a student develop survival skills for navigation outside school. However, when there is a disconnect between school environment and reality, it may lead to conflict of interest on the right occupational choice, value and survival skills of a learner in the society. Thus, the learner graduates out of secondary school with grandiose and confusion. Therefore, in order for the school environment to aid student in the choice of appropriate occupation for survival, there is need to make the secondary school curriculum functional.

Functional curriculum is the curriculum designed to teach learners skills which would allow them to function as competent and accepted adults. It a curriculum with entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitude. These occupational skills relate to problem solving, human relations, decision making, effective communication, technical competence, mental ability and creativity. Furthermore, a curriculum is said to be functional according to Mbachu and Ebiere (2013), if it enables learners to acquire skills that can be used as well as cope in the world of work. Moreover, a functional curriculum should be a curriculum for human development that prepares students for career/vocation. Thus it should be activity based, meet learner's interest and ability, gainful engagement and prepare students to exhibit their skills. These skills are mostly exhibited after graduation from secondary school as well as future career choice to higher education and entrepreneurial skills. Therefore, occupational path and choice of a learner can be made easier if the present secondary school curriculum is able to prepare a

learner with adequate curiosity, creative thinking and mental preparation for life personal and societal productivity. The level of occupational choice may also be developed depending on socio-economic status of parent.

Parents are one of the most important and influential elements in the life of a learner. This is because they have the power and ability to shape and develop their children who will be creative and interested in learning through positive involvement in the learning process and educational activities. Meanwhile parents who are not seriously involved in their children's educational process may be considered capable of repressing and destroying the level of motivation and ability of their children through neglect and indifference (Al-Matakla, 2014). Thus, socio-economic status of parents refers to the condition in the family that are related to social and economic factors of the family (Goni & Bello, 2016). It is the overall social and economic positions a parent attains in the society. Parental socio-economic status can be determined by combination of parents' educational status, occupation, income level and number of siblings amongst others. With the rise in educational fields, the wealth and wishes of parents appear to play a more dominant role in a child's education. Parents with high level of education are likely to engage in intellectually stimulating activities with their children more than less educated parents vice versa. This is because they have insight on the value of education and its capacity to make an individual independent, creative, though provoking and insightful. Furthermore, a parent who is a high income earner is more likely also to engage his/her children on the right nutrition, provide conducive atmosphere for learning as well as provision of necessary resources for learning. This is because a child's capacity to succeed in school and outside school depends on how successful the child is managed at home by his/her parents because the home is where the child learns the skills, attitude and behaviours which would help them develop into productive and successful learners. However not every child comes from homes that could provide them with the requisite educational resources necessary for academic success and future career crafting. Therefore a parent's socioeconomic status play an important role in providing educational resources which creates impart on educational outcome of students (Vellymalay, 2012). Thus learners have the ability to replicate educational, occupational and societal status of their parents.

Occupation is defined as the whole of activities in which people serve humanity after their educational process and as a result earn income in order to continue with living (Naiboglu & Ozdemir, 2022). A career is defined as sequence of work experiences that evolve over time in an individual's life (Akkermans & Heijden, 2019). It is subjective, dynamic over time, unique to and individual, complex and in parallel with life stages. In contemporary times, occupational choice has moved from occupational degree which would lead to an occupation towards a broader issues on career throughout lifespan with a complex behaviour that includes factors such as abilities, interest, needs, psychology, status, gender and socio-economic status. Moreover the type of occupational choice students make in modern times are not restricted to the kind of occupation they choose originally but to which type of organization to join, type of employment, form of employment and the continuity of same employment. Hence, occupational choice refers to a student's proactive behaviours aimed at optimizing career outcome through personal career fit (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). It entails a learner constantly reflecting and being mindful about career aspirations and motivations while making choices that can impact both short and long term success (Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Thus the perspective on occupational choice recognizes that individual need and demand are dynamic hence affects one's career at any given time. This is because occupational choice is a key psychological behaviour aimed at safe guarding sustainability of one's career over time through reflective skills of rapidly changing society. In order for a career to be sustained, an individual must be intentional in career potential through opportunities encountered, choices made and other learning cycles. In other words through occupational choice, an individual weighs up

carefully the pros and cons of career choices, strive for fulfilment of present career needs without compromising future ones and protects as well as fosters sustainability of their present career (Akkermans & Tims, 2017).

Education at secondary school level is the bedrock and foundation for higher knowledge in senior secondary level and tertiary institutions. It is an investment as well as instruments for achieving technological, scientific, cultural, social and political developments. This is why the Federal ministry of Education (2014) stipulated national policies for secondary school as an agent of national development that fosters individual development for further societal worth and development with equal opportunities for all. However, no nation can function academically, politically, culturally, socially and economically when her students learn in unconducive school environment as well as non-functional curriculum. It can be likened to a nation living without memories or brain hence the need for a functional curriculum and school environment made up of adequate facilities for teaching and learning. This is because it has the capacity to destroy the country's younger generation and future workforce. Due to economic situation in the society, some parent are either absent or less involved in the academic activities and career choice of their children. Meanwhile some encourages their children to go for careers that ate profit oriented though it might not be his/her chosen vocation. Meanwhile some parent are too busy to understand the academic skills of their children for career choice and crafting leading to wrong careers seen in the society. Moreover, career crafting and occupational choice among secondary school students has always been a matter of great concern to educational stakeholder comprising parents, educators, students and government. Though a lot of measures has been taken over the years in order to improve on the situation nevertheless, a large number of secondary school students lack the ability to careful choose and craft careers for themselves. This is because they lack adequate change in behaviour from memories of teaching and permanence expected from learning leading to lack of hard work, determination, resilience, cooperation among others which fosters individual achievement and national development (Animba, 2020). This can be seen in the level of employability and lack of entrepreneurial spirit exhibited by Nigerian graduates over the years leading to high level of unemployment in the land.

The most important part of occupational choice occurs during adolescence when they begin to clarify their careers, develop awareness of occupational interest and facts and assume career related task such as career planning and discovery (Naiboglu & Ozdemir, 2022). Therefore, the home and school is the most important social groups where these discoveries are made. Hence the importance of school environment and parental socio-economic status. However, the lack of creativity and creative thinking seen for decades in and outside school environment is because most subject are taught in abstract. Sometimes there are little or lack of correlation or relationship between some subject and learners. All students know are names without a feel of what some concept or material look like in reality. Thereby leading to disconnect between school subjects and future careers. Furthermore, economic status of parent can make or mar the occupational choice of a learner. This is because some learners make occupational choice based on the level of the family income. Thus, conducive school environment and parental socio-economic status helps a student to develop independence, hard work, resilience, creativity and creative thinking which will help in making the right occupational choice for learners in the future.

### **Psychological Implications of School Environment and Parental Socio-Economic Status on Occupational Choice of Students**

Through various literature reviewed in this study, it is imperative that school environment and parental socio-economic status be given prerogative in the process of teaching and learning amongst secondary school students in Enugu state. This is because it has the ability to distort

the process of choosing the right occupation after graduation from secondary school. Secondary school is a step closer to higher education and acquisition of occupational skills which will inherently determine the adulthood of an individual. When occupational skill of a secondary school learner is distorted due to uncondusive learning environment as well as socio-economic status of parents (low), it will lead to conflicted choice in occupation as well as unrealistic choice. This is as a result of lack of relation between what was taught in the school and non-involvement of parents as a result of economic status. When this happens, it may lead to frustration, aggression, emotional pressure and grandiose on the learner thereby affecting the ability of the learner to become productive in future.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The essence of theoretical framework in a study of this nature is to establish scientific justifications why certain phenomenon occurs as it were with possibility of empirical verification hence the theoretical framework of this study was based on Holland's theory of occupational choice (1985). Holland's theory on occupational choice is based on the assumptions that persons and environment are categorized according to six types: realistic (individuals who enjoy using tools and machines hence loves working in work settings with machines and tools), investigative (individual who enjoy learning and intellectual activities thus likes mathematical and scientific interest), artistic (individuals who loves expressing themselves in a free and unsystematic way by creating music, art and writing), social (people who are interested in helping others through teaching as well as solving others personal problems, enterprising (people who use verbal skills to sell, persuade and lead) and conventional (people who are dependable with the ability to follow rules and others in unambiguous situations). Relating it to this study, Holland's theory argues that education especially school environment should be a place where learners are able to express themselves in different skills through teaching and learning. Meanwhile, learning can be made more pleasurable when parents invest their time and income on their children. Therefore, when a secondary school learner is able to exhibit these skills, it will help him/her in making the right occupational choice after graduation. Thereby becoming a productive individual in the society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Occupational choice of a secondary school student could be a pre-requisite for other occupational problems in adulthood hence should not be treated with kid's glove because of its tendency to destroy the physiological, psychological and economic development of the learner as well as the society leading to loss of interest in school activity. The home is the first social, psychological and physical foundation of a learner hence when it becomes a threat to as a result of poverty and non-existing parenting, has the capacity to distort learners occupational choice. The Nigerian learner is faced with starvation, societal frustration, molestation, dysfunctional family system and inability to go to school, uncondusive environment and parental role abdication. Therefore, the school should serve as a safe haven for learners. Thus when the school environment lacks the ability to achieve objectives of education together with low parental socio-economic status it may lead to various degrees of depression, violence, wrong occupational choice, lack of productivity and aggression evident in the society. Hence the purpose of this study was to investigate how school environment and parental economic status contribute to occupational choice endangering secondary school learners in Enugu State.

### **Research Question**

The following research questions guided the study

1) What is the extent to which school environment contribute to the occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu state?

2) What is the extent to which parental socio-economic status contribute to the occupational choice of secondary school students in Enugu state?

**Method of Research**

The study design was correlation survey. Nworgu (2015) noted that this type of study seeks to establish what relationship exist between two or more variable. The area of the study was Enugu State made up of six educational zones of Awgu, Enugu, Obollo, Udi, Agbani and Nsukka respectively. However, the study was delimited geographically to Education zone with a sample study of 300 student composed with purposive random sampling. Data were collected with researcher structured instrument validated by three experts from (Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation whose inputs were incorporated before the final copies were administered. Reliability test showed significant contribution between school environment, parental socio-economic status and occupational choice at 0.81. Method of data collection was face-to-face administration and collection by the researcher and two research assistants (teachers) after rating was completed by the respondent. The data was analysed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

**Results**

**Table 1. Pearson product moment correlation on contribution of school environment to occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu state**

Variable	X	SD	N	r <sub>cal</sub>	r <sub>crit</sub>
School environment	13.56	2.71			
Occupational choice	19.64	4.43	300	0.71	.082

Data in Table 1 showed the results of the first research question analysed. The values indicated a strong contribution between school environment and occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu state.

**Table 2. Pearson product moment correlation on contribution of parental socio-economic status to occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu state**

Variable	X	SD	N	r <sub>cal</sub>	r <sub>crit</sub>
Parental socio-economic status	9.75	2.30			
Occupational choice	8.68	1.63	300	0.77	.082

Data in Table 2 showed the results of the first research question analysed. The values indicated a strong contribution between parental socio-economic status and occupational choice of secondary school learners in Enugu state.

**Discussion**

The findings from Table 1 revealed that learners who are exposed to conducive school environment make right occupational choice. This is in line with the findings of Mtemeri (2017) who opined that school environment has the potential through guidance, curriculum and other school activities to affect occupational choice of learners. This study is also in tandem with the findings of Obiunu and Ebonu (2013), who exposed the importance of school environment in preparation of students for different occupations. The findings from Table 2 also revealed that socio-economic status of parents contributes to occupational choice of learners. This is in line with the study of Naiboglu and Ozdemir (2022), who posits that economic status of parents affects occupational choices of their children. The findings is also

in line with the work of Ukwueze and Obiefuna (2017), who posited that students usually choose occupation based on what their parents can afford.

### **Conclusion**

Many factors contribute to the occupational choice of learners in secondary school. Amongst them are school environment and parental socio-economic status. Exposure to conducive school environment with adequate infrastructure, functional curriculum and educational support services has the ability to expose learners to different occupation and career according to their interest, talent and ability. However, the opposite is seen in the current educational system and school environment in the state where learners learn in abstractness as well as non-existent educational support services. This has evidently affected the choices of occupation made by secondary school learner over time. Hence when the right choice is not made, it affects not only the learner but the society at large. Furthermore, parental level of socio-economic status also affects the occupational choices of their children. This is because, research has shown that learners make choices of occupation depending on the education, position, income and status of their parents in the society. Besides, parents who are elite of the society always motivates their children into towing same lane and vice versa. Therefore, it is imperative that an emergency is declared in the educational sector in order to salvage the problem of unconducive school environment as well as getting parents on board. This will help secondary school learners make right occupational choice.

### **Recommendation**

1. Government should as a matter of urgency overhaul the current secondary school curriculum to reflect the various components of education which helps in making the right occupational choice as outlined by Holland's theory of occupational choice.
2. Educational psychologist and school counsellors should give adequate attention to school counselling. This will create awareness among parents, caregivers and learners on the contribution of school environment and parental socio-economic status on occupational choices endangering secondary school learners. It will also help parents and teachers adjust to a more proactive teaching that will enhance creativity and curiosity amongst learners.
3. School counsellors should identify weak students susceptible of poor academic performance and offer appropriate counselling.
4. Parents should live up to their expectation by providing their time, advice and income to their children as well as being involved in the career planning process of their children. This will help in their professional and occupational choice.
5. It is important that secondary school learners are educate by career professionals on a wide range of occupations. This they can do by providing learners with adequate information to aid their occupational exploration in order to help them examine options available based on their skills, abilities and skills.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declares no conflict of interest.

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