SELF-ESTEEM AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE MODERATING IMPACT OF AGE AND GENDER

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Abstract:

This study investigated the moderating impact of age and gender on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population included 16,473 Senior Secondary two (SS 2) students from public secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. The sample size comprised 378 senior secondary school students. The students were sampled using a multistage sampling procedure. A questionnaire was used to gather data in this study. Expert judgment was used to determine the instrument's face validity, while factor analysis using the Principal Component Analysis method was used to determine the content and construct validity. Cronbach's alpha reliability index was used to determine the internal consistency of the items in the instrument. Self-Esteem Rating Scale = 0.71, and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale = 0.82 are the reliability coefficients found. The hypotheses were tested and answered using regression statistics of F-ratio at 0.05 level of significance, while the research questions were answered using Pearson's coefficient of determination. The findings of the study revealed that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students; that there is no significant moderating impact of age and gender in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. The study recommended that more studies should be carried out to explore the reason why no significant relationship was found between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

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1. Introduction

In Nigeria, secondary school is in a significant period of transition. It runs for six years three years each in two phases namely Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). In SSS I the students are exposed to all the subjects and in SSS II, career decision is made (Akpochafo, 2020). At this level, students are streamed into classes according to their career choice. During this period, important decisions are taken for life and the students are expected to gain an occupational identity.

One of the most important life decisions that students are bound to make is a career decision. In fact, it competes with the choice of a spouse. This is because a single career decision can affect the entire life of an individual. From the choice of subjects at the senior secondary level, the courses they enroll for in tertiary institutions, and the job they settle for after graduation to the status they attain in society, individuals are bound to live with the career they settle for their entire lives. Even the kind of people they settle with for marriage is affected by their choice or career.

According to Akpochafo (2020), career decision is a process that secondary school students must undergo. It entails choosing from different occupations, training institutions, and taking a job and these pose a lot of problems and difficulties to students. Akpochafo further decried that many students find it difficult due to the obstacles that they may encounter. Numerous researches show that students all over the world grapple to make decisions in respect of their future careers (Guan, et al., 2015).

Career decision-making difficulties is a term used to describe the challenges encountered by individuals before, during, or after making career decisions. They can also be defined as the difficulties encountered by individuals while making career-related decisions. They refer to all problems and challenges that need to be addressed prior to, during, or after the decision-making process. According to Kırdök and Harman (2018) citing Gati, et al., identified some taxonomies of career decision-making difficulties, which include lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. The factors described in this taxonomy may cause individuals to encounter difficulties before and during decision-making (Öztemel, 2013).

The researcher observed that most secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District seem to be experiencing career-making difficulties. This observation was made during the practicum exercise the researcher undertook in one of the secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. The researcher observed that most of the students were having problems choosing the right career during career counselling with him as a student counsellor. Some of the students were choosing careers based on their parents' suggestions, which were not in line with their personal interests and abilities. Others were choosing careers similar to the ones chosen by their best friends.

The implication of career-decision making difficulties on the life of students is enormous. The problem could result in an increase in school drop-out, failure in examination, examination malpractices, and a host of other problems, which in the end may truncate the primary purpose of education, especially at the secondary level. Even when they are admitted into tertiary institutions, they end up having low grades, thus, wasting precious time and resources and in most cases resulting in frustration.

It can also affect the economic and social status, lifestyle, and well-being of the students. Many of these students may find it difficult to advance in their career decision-making status later in life. The growing number of occupations, jobs, and career pathways can lead many of students to feel challenged and overwhelmed by this important decision. According to Anghel and Gati (2019), career decision-making difficulties are associated with feelings such as depression, anxiety, and stress. When these difficulties are not properly handled, they might lead students to take inappropriate decisions.

Several reasons have been considered to influence career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. These factors may be internal to the students such as inherited traits like self-efficacy, interest, sex, personality traits, and locus of control. Others may be external like the environment in which the students live, such as peer influence, type of school, location, and parental expectations. The focus of this study is on how self-esteem may influence career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of their value as a person and reflects questions of feelings. It relates to how a person generally or most typically feels about him- or herself. It is generally considered stable and akin to a personality trait. It is related to the degree of liking or disliking oneself. Individuals with high self-esteem feel good about themselves whereas those with low self-esteem feel bad about themselves.

Self-esteem is an important variable that affects various aspects of life, including occupation and job performance. In other words, those with a high perception of self-esteem had a high tendency to aim for actions and proficiency, resulting in improved career decision-making self-efficacy. It can positively contribute to higher efficacy in decision-making because people with higher self-esteem have more positive attitudes and value themselves more and thus tend to prioritize their interests. For example, Lin, et al. (2015) stated that individuals with high self-esteem were more likely to participate in social groups, regardless of whether their acceptance was guaranteed. This characteristic thus enables people with high self-esteem to be more confident when making decisions. Supporting this view, Chartrand et al. (as cited in Lin et al., 2015) found that people with high self-esteem have a greater ability to make decisions. In the current study, the researcher will attempt to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties. Based on the previous studies, the present study anticipated that students with high self-esteem would have lower career decision-making difficulties than those with low self-esteem.

Apart from the influence of self-esteem on career decision-making difficulties, the gender and age of the students could act as moderators in the overall relationship. Some authors believe that there are no gender differences while others stated that there are. For instance, Tagay (2015) revealed that males' level of difficulty was lower than that of females in all grades.

Another variable of interest in this study is age. Will the older students face more difficulties than the younger ones? Researchers have revealed that age-related data are crucial since the construct is useful in providing an index for the development of career interventions. There appear to be inconclusive results about age and career decision-making difficulties. For example, the findings of Akpochafo (2021) revealed that age did not affect decision-making difficulties. The findings of Bacanli (2012) showed that age is a crucial variable that has a significant impact on career decision-making difficulties.

2. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level:

1) There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District
2) There is no significant moderating impact of gender in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District
3) There is no significant moderating impact of age in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the theory of taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making, propounded by Gati et al (1996). The taxonomy was developed based on Decision Theory. The theory postulates that career decision-making involves three aspects which are the options available, the evaluation of all options and the decision to be made. However, this taxonomy depends on the construct of the ideal career decision-maker (Vaiopoulou, et al., 2019). The ideal career decision-maker in this instance is a student who is aware, willing, and capable of making the right decision, and any deviation from this is regarded as a potential problem (Gati & Saka, 2001).

Gati et al. (1996) developed the taxonomy of career-decision making difficulties in an effort to expand previous theoretical and empirical research. This taxonomy was created to highlight how complex the decision-making process can be. Gati and associates (1996) created a model of the ideal career decision-maker based on the Decision Theory (Gati, et al., 1996). A person who can make a decision based on an acceptable approach

and that is in line with their capabilities and preferences have been defined as having awareness of the need for career decision-making (Gati & Soka, 2001).

The classification system that Gati and colleagues (1996) proposed is hierarchical. Within the structure, broad groupings of career difficulties are separated into categories and then subcategories based on finer distinctions (Tien, 2001). Based on a sample of Israeli young adults and American university students, they developed the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making by categorizing difficulties according to those experienced before beginning the process, and those experienced during the process. The idea behind the proposed taxonomy is to identify potential difficulties that arise before and during the decision-making process. The 10 categories that follow the three broad clusters into which these potential issues are grouped are separated into three subgroups (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). The categories are not independent of one another, and therefore, individuals may experience difficulties in more than one category. The three clusters comprise (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information. Each of the clusters classifies different types of difficulties that may arise either prior to entering the decision-making process or once an individual is engaged in the decision-making process itself (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). Three problem types that could occur before choosing a professional decision are included in the first cluster, Lack of Readiness. The first of these three categories is a lack of drive to make career decisions, the second is general indecision about all types of judgments, and the third is dysfunctional beliefs, which may include unreasonable expectations and ideas about making career decisions (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016).

Both the second and third clusters categorize difficulties that may arise while an individual is engaged in the decision-making process. T he second cluster, Lack of Information, consists of four different categories which include (4) lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the career decision-making process, (5) lack of information about the self, (6) lack of information about the various potential occupations or majors, and (7) lack of information about the ways of obtaining additional information (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). The third major cluster includes three categories, involving Inconsistent Information, due to (8) unreliable information, (9) internal conflict, and (10) external conflicts (Willner, et al., 2015).

The validity of the taxonomy has been empirically tested and supported using the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, et al., 2000; Kelly & Lee, 2002; Tien, 2001). Various studies have demonstrated that career decision-making difficulties are associated with multiple facets of career characteristics and outcomes (Gati, et al., 2010; Kleiman et al., 2004). The taxonomy and CDDQ have been tested and validated in Eastern and Western cultures, such as White, African, Hispanic, and Asian American (Sovet, et al., 2015; Willner, et al., 2015; Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). Additionally, they have been utilized and validated for various age groups (DiFabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Levin, & Gati, 2014).

4. Methods

This study is a survey, it adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 16,473 Senior Secondary two (SS 2) students in public secondary schools in the nine Local Government Areas of Delta North Senatorial District. The sample size comprised 378 students. A multistage sampling method was used in the selection of students. In the first stage, the researcher selected schools in each of the nine local government areas of Delta North Senatorial District using a simple random sampling technique. The researcher wrote the names of all the schools in each of the nine Local Government Areas on a piece of paper, folded them, and packed them in a basket. He shuffled the basket, picked three pieces of paper, and revealed what was written on them. The schools picked through this process were selected. This was done until three schools in each of the nine Local Government Areas were selected (making a total of 27 schools) from the nine Local Government Areas in Delta North Senatorial District.

In the second stage, the researcher selected a total of 14 students from each school. This was done using a convenience sampling technique. In this case, students who were available, free, and willing to participate in the study were selected for the study. A total of seven male students and seven female students were selected. In the process of selecting the students on the basis of their gender, the researcher used a stratified sampling technique to group the students into male and female students. On the whole, a total of 189 male and 189 female students were selected for the study.

The instrument that was used to collect data in this study is a questionnaire, which included Self-Esteem Rating Scale (SERS) and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale (CDMDRS). The SERS was adapted from Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, developed by Rosenberg (1965). It is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. However, a total of nine items were retained after being subjected to factor analysis. The scale is believed to be unidimensional, with an original reliability index of 0.86. All items are answered using a 4-point scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The CDMDRS was adopted from the Career Decision-making Difficulties Scale (CDDQ), developed by Gati et al (1996). It contains 44 items structured on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 4 for strongly agree. It was reduced to 25 items after factor analysis. The reason for the reduction of items may be connected to the fact that the instrument was developed in a foreign country. Hence, when administered to Nigerian respondents, some items did not align well with the local culture. Most of the items were not well understood by the students, which resulted in their weakness in relation to other items on the scale. The test-retest reliabilities reported by Gati et al. (1996) were 0.67, 0.74, 0.72, and 0.80 for the three main categories and the whole instrument.

The face validity of the instrument was estimated through experts' judgement while the content and construct validities were estimated through factor analysis of the Principal Component Analysis method. In estimating the face validity of the instrument, a copy of the questionnaire was given to the three experts for the purpose of correction.

After the face validity, 50 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 50 students from Delta Central Senatorial District, and the data obtained were subjected to factor analysis. The Principal Component Analysis was used to estimate the content validity of the instrument. It yielded the following total cumulative percentages: Self-Esteem Rating Scale = 71.79%; and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale = 53.13%. The construct validity was estimated using rotated component loadings matrixes of the varimax orthogonal method. The values obtained ranged from 0.57 and 0.89 for Self-Esteem Rating Scale; and 0.53 and 0.86 for Career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale. Some of the items were removed after being subjected to factor analysis. For instance, Self-Esteem Rating Scale had a total of 10 items but was reduced to nine items; while career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale had a total of 44 items but was reduced to 25 items. To obtain the internal consistency of the items in the instrument, Cronbach's alpha reliability index was used. The reliability coefficient obtained is as follows: Self-Esteem Rating Scale = 0.71, P<0.05; and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Rating Scale = 0.82, P<0.05.

Prior to the administration of the instrument, the researchers obtained permission from the principal of the various schools after explaining the purpose of the visit. They recruited the assistance of three research assistants to assist him in administering the questionnaire. The questionnaire was, therefore, administered by the researcher and three research assistants. The questionnaire was retrieved immediately. This was to ensure that all or almost all copies of questionnaires were retrieved. It also afforded the researcher opportunity to explain where necessary aspects of the questionnaire were not understood by the respondents.

The data were analysed using regression statistics of F-ratio at 0.05 level of significance. The data were analysed with a computer system through a statistical package. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used for the analysis.

5. Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

Model	SS	df	MS	F	P
Regression	6.900	1	6.900		
Residual	14241.749	376	37.877	.182	.670[b]
Total	14248.648	377			
α = 0.05					
a. Dependent Variable: Career Decision-Making Difficulties					
b. Predictors (Constant): Self-Esteem					

Table 1 displays the regression data used to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District. The result is $F(1, 377) = 0.182$, with a p-value greater than the significance level of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant moderating impact of gender in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on the moderating impact of gender
in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties
among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	58.251	3.264		17.845	.000
	Self-Esteem	.153	.102	.083	1.497	.135
	Gender	2.312	.829	.155	2.789	.006
a. Dependent Variable: Career Decision-Making Difficulties						

Table 2 displays the results of a regression statistic that was used to determine the moderating impact of gender in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District. Self-esteem had a beta weight of 0.083, t = 1.497, whereas gender had a beta weight of 0.155, t = 2.789, according to the findings. However, only self-esteem was shown to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis was accepted, showing that gender had no significant moderating impact on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant moderating impact of age in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

Table 3 displays the results of a regression statistic that was used to determine the moderating impact of age on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District. Self-esteem had a beta weight of 0.028, t = 0.510, whereas age had a beta weight of 0.018, t = 0.339, according to the findings. However, none of the predictors (self-esteem and age) was shown to be significant at an alpha level of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis was accepted, showing that age had no significant moderating impact on the relationship

between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis on the moderating impact of age
in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties
among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	62.765	4.576		13.717	.000
	Self-Esteem	.051	.099	.028	.510	.610
	Age	.498	1.468	.018	.339	.735
a. Dependent Variable: Career Decision-Making Difficulties						

6. Discussion

The first finding showed that no significant relationship exists between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. This finding suggests that the level of self-esteem may not exert any form of influence on career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. This could be attributed to several reasons. First is that students these days prefer to opt for the career their friends find interesting. This makes it easy for them not to take the decision themselves. Secondly, most of the students believe that the availability of courses and their performance in UTME and Post-UTME are major determinants of their careers. Hence, prefer not to indulge in any career decision-making. This means that no matter the level of self-esteem, the level at which students have difficulties in their career decision-making may be unchanged.

The above finding is at variance with the finding of Lin, et al. (2015), who studied the role of self-esteem in career uncertainty: a self-determination perspective. Among other findings, the authors found that students with high self-esteem had lower career uncertainty because they chose a major for self-concordant reasons and had a strong motivation to learn, both of which contribute to lower career uncertainty. The finding also disagrees with the result of Marcionetti (2014), which showed that self-esteem is a significant predictor of career indecision. Again, the finding is at variance with the finding of Mahadi, et al. (2015), which suggests a significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making.

The second finding revealed that there is no moderating impact of gender in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District. This finding suggests that gender has no role to play when it comes to the possible influence of self-esteem on career decision-making difficulties. The reason for this finding may be because of the fact that major determinants of career among Nigerian students are often external to them. These may include available courses, UTME and Post-UTME results vis-a-vis cut-off points for

each course, and the university quota system. As a result of these determinants, it does not matter the gender of the students, it may have no influence on how self-esteem could result in career decision-making difficulties among the students.

The above finding corroborates the result of Akpochafo (2020), which suggests that there was no gender difference in all the difficulty levels of career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Nigeria. The finding, however, disagrees with Murniarti and Siahaan (2019), whose finding revealed that male students had more problems in making their career choices, especially with regard to lack of information which showed in their work that more than half of the males did not receive enough information about the types of occupation they are to go in for.

The third finding revealed that no significant moderating impact of age exists in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District. This finding implies that age cannot moderate the possible influence of self-esteem, if any, on career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. The possible reason why this finding emanated may be because all the students under investigation were from similar age groups. Out of a total of 378 students studied, only 17 and 3 are above the ages of 20 years and within the ages of 10-15 respectively. The remaining 358 (95%) are between the ages of 16 and 20. This result could be the reason why no moderating impact was found on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties. As self-esteem did not correlate with career decision-making difficulties among almost all the students, their age range notwithstanding.

The above finding is consistent with Akpochafo (2021), who carried out a study to investigate the impact of age and type of school career decision-making difficulties among a group of students. Among other findings, she found no significant differences in terms of age in career decision-making difficulties. This means that even if she has tested the impact of self-esteem on the career decision-making difficulties of students, whatever her result would be, it would probably not be influenced by the age of the students. The finding also corroborates the finding of Migunde, et al. (2015), which revealed that age was not significantly predictive of career indecision.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that self-esteem had no significant relationship with career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students. Gender and age appear not to moderate the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties.

Based on the above finding, the researchers recommended the following:

1) That more studies should be carried out to explore the reason why no significant relationship was found between self-esteem and career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District

2) That efforts at addressing the career decision-making difficulties of students should focus on both male and female students without favouring only one gender

3) That efforts at addressing the career decision-making difficulties of students should focus on students of all age groups

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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