

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN CAREER CHOICE

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Abstract

Career choice can be considered a major life decision. Social influence is defined as a change in the individual's thinking, attitudes, experiences, or behaviour as a consequence of the interaction with another individual or group. Individuals can be influenced by both persons perceived as similar, desirable, or expert in a field, and by personal traits or personality traits. The purpose of this study is to identify the role of social influence (e.g. the influence of parents, teachers, friends, or specialists such as psychologists or counsellors) in the career choice of 12-grade students. The findings obtained after applying the questionnaire will be discussed, too.

Key words: career choice, social influence, the role of specialists

Introduction

One of the events that play a very important role within the self-knowledge process is the moment of career choice, either perceived as a shock (confrontation between reality and ideal), or easily accepted by the individual. Such endeavour is complex and influenced by a multitude of factors (Bandura et al., 2001). As for adolescents, they are vulnerable to external influences such as their colleagues, the media, culture, and mostly their parents and family. According to previous American studies, (McDaniel and Hummel, 1984) adolescents go through three phases in their career development process: awareness (before age 11), exploration (ages 11 to 17), and preparation (age 17 to young adulthood). Other authors (e.g. Miller, 1984) analyse the strong connection between family and career and the effect of parents as role models in their children's career choice.

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Career exploration is defined by the extent to which an individual researches and takes into account possible careers to follow. Navin (2009) has suggested that exploring career options before committing to a career increases future career success and satisfaction. Studies in the field of career choice have explored various dimensions with an impact upon this process, such as social performance (Greening and Turban, 2000), social influence (Kilduff, 1992), and gender and economic reasons (Ge, Kankanhalli, Huang, & Sha, 2013). There are also studies that identify and assess the importance of both self and social variables in the career choice (Kanfer et al., 2001).

In the field of career choice and development, several theories were issued to explain the way in which individuals choose their occupation. They include the following: Holland's theory of personality; Roe's theory of needs; Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour; theories of career development by Ginzberg and Super (Spencer and Harris-Bowlsbey, 2012). From a general perspective, career decision is the result of a combination of both personal factors (related to the individual) and situational factors (originating in the social context).

Personal (individual) factors include mental and cognitive processes that dictate career choice and that comprise attitude, self-concept, self-efficacy, and knowledge. On the other hand, social factors may affect people's decisions concerning career choice. An illustrative example in this sense is provided by the social influences in a person's life. Furthermore, the reasons for career choice are also determined by personal and social-oriented factors. Ajzen (2006) highlights that a person is more likely to behave in a certain way (to choose a career) if the significant others help him/her make a certain choice. Social pressure may be exerted by family, teachers, friends, or society overall. For instance, parents influence significantly their children's career choice. In certain cases, children inherit fathers' occupations (e.g. farmers). In other cases, children choose an occupation in agreement with parental values and expectation and with the social class to which they pertain.

On the other hand, educational opportunities definitely influence career choice. For instance, upon analysing cases of children who dropped out of school, their occupational choices are limited to manual labour, unregulated labour, or unskilled or low-skilled occupations. Family, parents, and guardians (Taylor, Harris, & Taylor, 2004) play a significant role in the occupational aspirations and career development of their children. Without parental support or approval, students or young adults are often doubtful when it comes to following or even exploring various possibilities for their career.

Whereas scientific literature clarifies the importance of family and the media in determining a child's career choice, to what extent is the work of specialists (school counsellors or psychologists) perceived as influential in the student's career choice? Unfortunately, most people make bad decisions for their careers from a variety of reasons such as lack of information, ignorance, peer pressure, wrong modelling; they even decide for a career based on its prestige, without benefiting from career counselling or guidance (Ndambuki & Mutie, 1999).

The purpose is to investigate the opinions of 12-grade students concerning perceived social influence in choosing their own career. Social influence concerns the following: the influence of parents, teachers, friends, specialists, the media, and the demands of labour market.

Methodology

Participants

The study included 70 12-grade students from a technical high-school; 33 females and 37 males, aged 18-20 (35 participants aged 18, 28 aged 19, and 7 aged 20). Of the 70 students, 32 are rural and 38 urban.

Measurement instrument

The instrument used as basis was the *Career Influence Inventory*, developed by Fisher and Stafford (1999); based on it, we developed a 25-item scale. After statistical calculations on the validity of the instrument, we eliminated 3 items (22 remained – see Annex 1). Items assess 6 types of career influence (parents – items 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 15, 20, teachers – items 1, 6, 12, 13, 14, friends – items 8 and 11, media – item 19, specialists such as psychologists or counsellors – item 16; and labour market demands – item 17). Five items are related to self-control (3, 5, 18, 21, 22). Respondents expressed their agreement (4=strongly agree) or disagreement (1=strongly disagree) on a four-point Likert scale. Items 11 and 21 are inversely coded. Cronbach' Alpha coefficient of internal validity was 0.78.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.783	22

Procedure

After briefing them on the purpose of the study and getting their permission through informed consent, they completed the questionnaire voluntarily and individually.

Findings

Statistical calculations were performed using SPSS 20. To determine the extent to which a dimension was influential, the total means for four dimensions and the medians were calculated. According with the results illustrated in the Table 1, 60% of the students reported the influence of parents, but not of friends in their career choice; 50% perceived teachers' influence, while the other half reported no influence from teachers. Concerning self-control in career choice, 60% reported that they had the control and that they made career choices in full awareness.

Table 1. *Statistical indicators of four dimensions of the questionnaire*

Questionnaire dimension	Influence of parents		Influence of teachers		Influence of friends		Self-control	
Median	20		15.5		7		15	
Agree/ Strongly agree-	≥ 20	42	≥ 15.5	35	≥ 7	28	≥ 15	42
Disagree/ Strongly disagree	< 20	28	< 15.5	35	< 7	42	< 15	28

The correlations between the four dimensions featured in Table 1 are the following: parental influence correlates positively with teachers' influence (0.464) and with self-control (0.655), while teachers' influence correlates positively with friends' influence (0.579) and perceived self-control (0.532).

Correlations

		Influence of parents	Influence of teachers	Influence of friends	Self-control
Influence of parents	Pearson Correlation	1	.464**	-.129	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.286	.000
	N	70	70	70	69
Influence of teachers	Pearson Correlation	.464**	1	.579**	.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	70	70	70	69
Influence of friends	Pearson Correlation	-.129	.579**	1	-.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.286	.000	.000	.812
	N	70	70	70	69
Self-control	Pearson Correlation	.655**	.532**	-.029	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.812	
	N	69	69	69	69

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As for media, labour market demands, and the influence of specialists, the results were used as they were generated by the working instrument. According with the results illustrated in the Table 2, half of the students agree with the influence of the media in their choice of a career. The influence of the labour market demands is obvious in the decision of Romanian students concerning their future career (70% agreed with this type of influence). The amazing finding of this study is the fact that all 70 students reported being 100% influenced by the specialists they consulted (school counsellors and psychologists).

Table 2. *The frequencies of students responses, differentiated on three categories of influences*

Questionnaire dimension	Influence of the media	Influence of labour market demands	Influence of specialists (counsellors and psychologists)
Agree	35	35	35
Strongly agree	-	14	35
Disagree	28	21	-
Strongly disagree	7	-	-

Discussions and conclusions

The aforementioned findings indicate that the perceived sources of influence in career choice were labour market demands, specialists who provided counselling, parents, but also perceived self-control considering this major life decision. Half of them reported an influence of their teachers and the media in their career choice, while only 40% consider that friends may be a source of influence in this matter.

Though the study was conducted on a small number of participants, it may represent a starting point for more elaborate studies. The novelties of this study are represented by the design of a new measurement scale for social influence in the field of career choice, based on the items within the questionnaire elaborated by Fisher and Stafford (1999) and the identification of the labour market demands among factors influencing the students' career choice. Alongside parents, teachers, friends, specialists, and the media, these market demands are also to be considered among social influence factors. The role of specialists (counsellors, psychologists, etc.) is highly significant in terms of guiding the student towards a career; they are the genuine "ice breakers" and they highlight any opportunity; they provide information and they constitute stimuli in the use of strategies through which students – and other categories – can increase their sense of

power and self-efficacy. Specialists also represent teachers, from whom students may learn various skills (such as problem solving, finding a job, reducing stress, etc.) and mentors, because they provide feedback and they monitor an activity when required.

In addition, the findings of this study may serve as a resource for counsellors, educators, and other people working with young persons who strive to find the best career option or who look for professional reconversion. Students always need counselling or at least good advice for the huge step represented by career choice.

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Annex 1. Questionnaire of social influence in career choice

Item	1 = strongly disagree	2= disagree	3= agree	4= strongly agree
1. My teachers made me feel that I could succeed in school.				
2. My parents/guardians made me feel that I could succeed in school				
3. I feel confident about my ability to do well in school.				
4. My parents/guardians believed that I could succeed in school.				
5. During high school, I was aware of the strategies needed to be academically successful.				
6. My teachers were interested in me, not just in how I did in school.				
7. My parents encouraged me to do my best in school.				
8. My friends encouraged me to do my best in school.				
9. My parents expect me to keep trying when faced with obstacles.				
10. My parents are interested in my career plans.				
11. My friends are not interested in my career plans.				
12. My teachers encouraged me to do my best in school.				
13. My teachers influenced my career plans.				
14. My teachers expect me to go to university				
15. My parents expect me to go to university				
16. School specialists provided me with career advice.				
17. I chose my career based on labour market demands.				
18. My career is not the one I really want.				
19. The media influenced my career choice.				
20. Parents made me choose the same career as them.				
21. I have not made up my mind on the career.				
22. I know exactly my future career based on my abilities.				