

Research Article

Adult Immigrants' Perceptions of Career and Vocational Education and Factors Influencing Their Decision to Peruse a Vocational Programme of Study

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Abstract: This study was conducted with 400 students and 8 secondary school counsellors to find out factors that affect decision making of adult immigrant students from secondary schools with regard to their career and vocational study choices in Akershus county of Norway. Three sets of questionnaires were employed to gather the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. The study revealed that the adult learners were satisfied to make individual decisions based on their personal evaluations of interests, abilities and capabilities more than any other factors such as school counsellors, teachers and parents. While the choices of vocational study of these adult learners was based on school counsellors' influence and other socioeconomic factors, academic program choices was based on self- motivation and interest. The study recommends the involvement of all stakeholders by the school counsellors to improve the implementation of career and vocational guidance programs for adults in all secondary schools.

Keywords: Adult immigrants, Factors; Student; Career choice; Guidance; Counselling.

Introduction

Vocational education plays an important role in socioeconomic development indicating that there is no more room for unskilled labour (Feller, 1996, 24; Mulder, 2012). This sentiment permeates the newspapers, magazines and professional journals of many countries. From 1917 to 1963 in USA, the basic elements of federal vocational-technical education remained intact, although various legislative efforts saw its influence wax and wane. But following two world wars and tremendous technological advancement, a second legislative effort put vocational education back into the spotlight. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 focused on funding for teacher training, new buildings, and services to people. In the years that followed there was a vast expansion of programs and facilities aimed at improving the technical skills of students across the nation. Enrolment in vocational education programs soared.

Since the Vocational Education Act of 1963, several legislative acts and reform efforts have taken place, some designed to positively impact the breadth and depth of influence which vocational education takes in the development of a quality workforce, and others which resulted in a de-emphasis of vocational education in deference to a more academic focus.

State initiatives also directly impact the scope and influence of career and vocational education.

The emphasis within many of these articles is the prominent role of education in workforce preparation. This according to research is the growing need for a workforce with the skills required to interact productively with the evolving economic structure.

The Norwegian situation

Before the 1970s, the Norwegian high school was not widely

attended by immigrants. In the early 1980's, however, children of the working class began to attend high school in increasing numbers. Many adults apply for upper secondary education and Norway as many other OECD countries is preparing students for this labour market trend (OECD, 2015).

Statistics from SSB shows that approximately 90 per cent of adult applicants aim at achieving certificate or vocational qualifications. About 64 per cent of the registered adults were offered educational programmes and 19 per cent had documentation of competence assessment (SSB, 2015a). Adult immigrant students choose different programmes but most students especially from lower income group choose vocational study programme and few choose academic programme (SSB, 2015a). Even though majority of adult immigrant students choose vocational study programs Helland and Støren (2006), have analyzed immigrants' chances of obtaining an apprenticeship place in Norway (Helland et al. 2006), and concluded that the probability of immigrants getting apprenticeship place is less compared to their non-immigrant counterparts (OECD 2012: 184).

It is reported that children, of lower socioeconomic status, were destined for work, not college, and the classical curriculum was deemed inappropriate for them. Thus began the differentiation of curriculum into two distinct categories: an academic program of study, and a vocational program of study. Not everyone agreed with such differentiation, and that debate still rages today. The vocational program of study was intended to provide students with the education and training needed to prepare for an occupation or career requiring less than a baccalaureate degree.

The implementation of a policy of equality between academic education and vocational education programs by the Norwegian government started since the 1950's, until 1974

when a new school law was passed to integrate the two in many secondary schools. The 1970's registered many improvements of vocational education in Norway, resembling the American high school model. However, there was a gradual shift with more emphasis on field training in practice. According to Markussen et al (2011: 258), there are systematic differences between general studies education and vocational programs. The completion rate of these groups differ, and young people from lower secondary with higher marks systematically choose a general study program while those with low marks choose vocational study programs (Markussen et al, 2011).

While state initiatives and legislative efforts may influence the emphasis placed on vocational education programs and set a tone for the importance of a vocational education in high schools, many other factors may also contribute to the perceptions of vocational education. One such factor may be the image of vocational education in general.

Statement of the Problem

It is difficult to fill up skilled labour in Norway and that vocational jobs top the list.

Secondary school vocational programs can begin to address that issue before students find themselves in a college environment with no clear understanding of the connection between the job market and their individual preparation.

Enrolment in secondary school vocational programs appears to be a mixed picture throughout the country's counties, districts and municipalities. While some career and vocational programs enrolment are on the increase others are decreasing. Reasons behind these differences are not clear, and understanding the factors that influence a student's decision to attend or enrol a career and vocational study program, become of great importance.

Aim and relevance of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the factors that influence secondary school students' decision to attend a career and a vocational study programme. Results of this investigation can serve to further the understanding of vocational programme administrators and staff in the studied facility and provide a clear indication of the initiatives upon which to focus their attention in order to maximize enrolment potential.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has high school counsellor's influenced your decision to enrol, or not to enrol, in a vocational study programme?
2. To what extent has your school teacher influenced your decision to enrol, or not to enrol, in a vocational programme?
3. To what extent have your parents influence your decision to enrol, or not to enrol, in a vocational programme?
4. To what extent did your personal decision influence you to enrol, or not to enrol, in a vocational programme?

Literature Review

This literature focuses on the enrolment trends and influencing

factors of secondary school students' decision to attend a career and vocational study programmes, and examines immediate external reasons such as parents and relatives, school counsellors, teachers, self/ personal reasons and school related factors such as distance to school, friends and extracurricular activities. Other reasons such as socioeconomic status, parental income and parental educational levels may influence students' enrolment or not enrolment.

Remote external factors identified by Lam (1982) are not dealt with in this literature review because it is argued that they constitute barriers that influence a student's decision to not enrol in vocational education. However, for the purpose of this study factors that positively influence students decision to enrol in career or vocational study programme are those that are examined. In view of this Jackson (2002), identified other factors such as attitudes, image, perceptions, motivation etc. which he called intrapersonal reasons that positively influence a student's decision to enrol in their career and vocational study program (OECD, 2015).

Intrapersonal reasons – attitudes, perceptions and image

Westaby, (2005) suggests that personal attitudes and perceptions about decisions are shaped by many factors. Messages that are sent to the public through the media and by the government about careers and vocations affect the attitudes and perceptions of students in profound ways on their decision to enrol in particular career or vocational study programme (McLelland, 1993). According to Dennis McLelland (1993), "vocational education has been, and still is, a victim of bad press." (p. 62). He believes that most people do not understand that State legislative initiatives can certainly affect enrolment as financial resources directly impact the expansion, or reduction, of vocational study programs. Cohen and Besharov (2002), argued that vocational study programs have an image problem, which is due both to the college-for-all myth and to the perception that it is poor quality education for the worst students." (p 14). This means that, vocational program educators must attend to the issues of both the perception of the quality of education in vocational study programs, and the belief that students must choose either academic line or vocational program study in colleges.

Historically, there is a general believe that vocational education, is often seen as a *dumping ground* for underachieving students, and believes the media contributes to creating that perception. Research has it that this negative image was reinforced by secondary school teachers who believed that students who attend a career or vocational study are not accepted by their peers (O'Neill, 1985). It is argued that negative attitudes toward vocational study programmes have negative impact on students' enrolment (Rossetti, 1989c).

Beyond attitudes, perceptions and the image of career and vocational study programs, Lam (1982) also includes a student's motivation, career maturity and value systems among his intrapersonal reasons. The notion of career maturity was introduced by Super (1955). "Super defined career maturity as the repertoire of behaviours that help identify, choose, plan, and execute career goals, being at an average

level in career development for one's age." (Rossetti, 1991, p. 1). The problem in career maturity arises when students are asked to make a career choice too soon, before they have the maturity to make a sound decision. Herr (1979) believes that students are unable to make that choice until they are seniors in high school, well after the typical 10th grader's decision regarding enrolment in a secondary. Four recommendations are made by Rossetti (1989c) regarding career and vocational decision making of secondary school students that:

- 1) students should be exposed to career guidance and the vocational offerings available;
- 2) school counsellors need to take responsibility for assisting students in career decision-making with the support of parents;
- 3) personnel need to be increased in high schools to offer more guidance and counselling to students; and 4) visits of area career and vocational centres should be made regularly with the students.

Immediate external reasons - the influence of others

Though the extent of influence of parents is uncertain, research shows that parents play a role in the decisions made by high school students regarding their course selection. The question of a parent's influence is often given consideration. Some research has indicated that parents do indeed have influence with their children regarding their career decision-making, and can affect their child's decision regarding pursuance of a vocational study program. In a study of the attitudes and perceptions held by parents toward vocational education, Gilbertson (1995) found that parents of students enrolled in vocational education courses had a significantly more positive attitude toward vocational education than parents of students who were not enrolled in vocational courses. Additionally, reporting on successful students in vocational study programmes, Jackson (2002) in his study found that "all of these successful students had a parent or parents who supported their child's decision to enrol in a career and technical program." (p. 2). Herr (1987) found that parents have less influence than they believe, and parents and students disagree on the amount of influence.

When it comes to research on school counsellors conflicting results have been reported by Reynolds (1976) and Beukes (1986) who concluded that counsellors and guidance programs had little or no influence on student's decisions to enrol in vocational study programme. Research with regard to a teacher's influence has reported mixed results. Some have found that a teacher's affect upon students does not influence their enrolment in vocational study programmes, (Dube, 1987; Beukes, 1986) while others discovered that students indeed seek the advice of their teachers before enrolling (Herr, 1987; Rossetti, 1989a).

Immediate external reasons – school factors

Lam (1982) identifies school factors among the reasons students may not elect to attend a career or vocational program. These school factors include items such as the distance one must travel to the school and being away from the home school and friends. Rossetti (1991) found that being away from the home school and friends was a significant

factor that negatively impacted enrolment in career programmes. Friendship at school creates a bond that is keeping some students from enrolling (Rossetti, 1991). The author recommends promoting vocational study centres as a socially friendly place with the opportunity to meet new people, and to sponsor social events to ease the transition. Jacobs' (1975) West Virginia research found that travel to another school was a prominent factor in dissuading students from enrolling in a vocational study program. Scalon's (1984) study supported Jacobs' findings and concluded that busing and distance were discouraging factors for many students.

Theoretical Framework

Career development theory underpins this study, and it is important for school counsellors, parents and teachers to be familiar with career development theories. There are two types of this theory, structural and developmental theories. The structural theory postulates that an individual's choice of career and vocation depended on accurate knowledge of himself, knowledge of job specification and the ability to make a proper connection between the two. It means that to be able to make a decision about a career or a vocation an individual needs a clear understanding of himself, his aptitudes, abilities interests and ambitions. He must also know his limitations, meaning that he also needs resources to be able to make a career choice. This theory was first developed by Parson (1905/1989), who said that individuals and job traits can be matched, and that close matches are positively correlated with job success and satisfaction. Thus when an individual understands himself he weighs the advantages and disadvantages as well as opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work, and with a true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of acts an individual is able to make a decision on his or her career and vocation.

Holland suggested that people make choices of career based on personality traits. People therefore find jobs compatible with their personalities. Such people are realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Holland, 1959; 1985; 1996; 1997). Holland suggests that the closer the match of personality to job, the greater the satisfaction. These theories are related to developmental theories postulated by Super. Self-concept is an underlying factor in Donald Super (1957) theory of career development. Super recognized the changes that people go through as they mature. According to Super career patterns are determined by socioeconomic factors, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and the opportunities to which persons are exposed (Super, 1957). People seek vocational and career satisfaction from the work they do. Through this work roles, they can express themselves and develop their self-concepts. Career maturity, where vocational self-concept develops and grows peoples' experiences and awareness become broader and decision making towards jobs much easier. One should not also forget the fact about socioeconomic theory where people's choices are explained by culture, family background, social and economic conditions and other factors which may be outside the individual's control. This way of understanding

career development may suggest that many people follow the path with least resistance to job market in their career development by simply falling into whatever work opportunities happen to come their way. Spierings and Meerman (2011) found that apprentices and adult job seekers always use their first jobs as a stepping-stone for the rest of the career, especially in times of crisis to come into the job market.

Method

Since survey data is the most common method of gathering information in the social sciences, and can identify attitudes and perceptions of respondents, it was an ideal method of data collection for this study. Additionally, surveys are: cost effective, particularly when dealing with large populations; easy to administer; a familiar format to most people; less biased; easy to analyse; and less intrusive.

Participants

The participants in this study were 400 immigrant students studying in the eight high schools in the Akershus county and eight secondary school counsellors. There were 260 females and 140 males aged between 16-35+ years of age and in the final year of high school and lower secondary. They are all immigrants and from countries in the South.

Instruments and data collection

The data for this study was collected between 2016-2017 academic year. A survey was designed to gather information from a group of currently enrolled minority students in the eight high schools and lower secondary schools that send students to the Akershus municipality colleges and technical institutions. The survey contained three sets of questionnaire forming three different sections and were facilitated and administered by the counsellor of each school.

Section I was a questionnaire based on students' background information providing Table 1 for further design of questions. Section II gathered information on the people who may have influenced a student's decision regarding enrolling, or not enrolling in a particular career in an institution. Section III focused on an array of other factors. These questions were particularly focused on their perceptions of the type and purpose of the Career of their choice. Questionnaire III consisted of items adapted from the literature focusing on school counsellors, teachers, parents and self- decisions, and factors contributing to the choices of their career and vocational study programmes. The last item investigated participants' perceptions of their careers and vocational study programmes and their attitudes towards the chosen careers.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used to display the results. A t test was conducted to determine if there was statistical significance by using a p value of < .05. The analysis of all the factors' influence was first to report the average response rate on the 4-point Likert scale, calculated as a simple mean by totalling the

scores and dividing by the total number of respondents to that question.

Results

Table 1: students' Background Information

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female =260	65.0%
	Male =140	35.0%
Age group	15-19 =100	25.0 %
	20-24 =125	31.25 %
	25-29=75	18.75%
	30-34 =50	12.5%
	35+ =50	12.5%
Work experience	Some work experience 150	37.5%
	No work experience 250	62.5%

When the 400 students were asked to rate factors that affected their choice of career the analysis showed that many students considered themselves for influencing the choice of their career (M=7.2) and school counsellor (M=6.1) as affecting their decision to choose a career more than parental issues (M=5.6). However, in comparing the mean scores of those who enrolled and those who did not enrol in vocational study programme who chose vocational study programmes or technical subjects school counsellors had an overall higher mean (M=6.7) on the perceived effect of other factors on their choice of career (M=4.5). The mean differences were statistically significant (p=.00). However, there were no significant differences between the two groups on their rating of decision made personally and that of school counsellors affecting their decision to enrol or not to enrol in vocational subjects. (See Tables 2 and 3)

Table 2: Factors that affect choice of career or vocation

	N	Mean	SD
Self	400	7.30	6.16
School counsellors	400	6.14	1.30
Parents	400	5.63	1.75
Teachers	400	3.70	1.63
Total	400		

Table 3: Group Statistics of factors affecting choice of vocational study programme

Vocational study programme or technical subjects	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
School	44	6.7143	.56061	.13234
counsellors others	24	4.4545	1.75292	.54853

It was realised that most of the students who scored on self decisions as a factor of their career choice are academically good students. So, a further analysis was done with regard to these particular students to explain the nature of self or personal decisions to choose a career. It was revealed that many of the students were of the perception that school counsellors could not help them, because the students knew what they wanted to be in the future themselves. The students did not also find school counsellors and teachers to be helpful in their situation.

An overview of the data in Table 3 on the students vocational and career choices suggest that teachers do little to influence their career, however teachers were much more preoccupied with academic instructions.

Based on the above teachers mean percentage score on three items of Teachers role was calculated and the results showed that teachers were doing more of academic teaching practices and less of student career guidance (See Table 4 below).

Table 4. Mean Percentage of Items in teachers role

Teacher support in classroom	Average percentage
Academic instruction	40.11%
Social support	28.50%
Career counselling	17.60%

Table 4 shows that teachers were scoring more in academic instruction on the average (40.11%) than social support and counselling services (28.50 and 17.60 respectively).

The question also addressed students' self motivation of career choice using a 6-point Likert scale. An analysis was done to enable statistical inferences. Mean scores of the responses to nine items concerning careers and alternatives were rank ordered so as to give a vivid overview of what students preferred most and what they least liked. Two groups of items were produced in this regard, items with positive effect and items with negative effect (Table 4).

The results revealed that students had positive effect of choosing academic and vocational careers (5.92 and 5.42) respectively. Where as unemployment and job seeking was no option, students were positive to enrol in practical workplace training, apprenticeship as well as enrolling in any school at all as long as there is the possibility of getting job. On the contrary, students option of job seeking courses had negative effect with mean score of M 3.61. Most students who have chosen academic career were students between 16-19 year age group.

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Responses on the Careers

Career	Rank	Mean	SD	Effect
Academic career.	1	5.92	1.15	Positive
Vocational career.	2	5.42	1.14	"
Practical workplace training	3	5.33	1.35	"
Apprenticeship.	4	5.21	1.37	"
Learning for any type of job Alternative or options	5	5.07	1.39	"
Unemployment and job seeking	6	4.48	2.59	Negative
Training for self-help skills.	7	4.45	2.52	"
Social support.	8	4.15	2.58	"
Job seeking courses.	9	3.61	1.74	"

Discussion

This study examines the relationship between a student's decision regarding career enrolment in an institution and the factors that influence that decision. Identifying the factors that contribute to a student's decision-making process with regard to enrolment in an institution within a particular program will assist institutions in fashioning strategies to market their programs in a manner that will enhance enrolment.

The results of the study showed that the adult learners were satisfied to make individual decisions based on their personal evaluations of interests, abilities and capabilities more than any other factors such as school counsellors teachers and parents. These students who have made individual decisions regardless of other factors have also chosen academic career and fall within the young age group. The students in this category felt that they knew what they wanted and were motivated to study hard to choose their career of interest. Most of these students have decided to choose academic and professional careers and were from parents with high academic standards. It is believed that these students might have been indirectly influenced by their parents in one way or the other. This finding is consistent with the theoretical premise of Oladele (2000), Holland (1959) who said that a choice of career reflects an individual's personality, and that a group of people or a family of a particular career and vocation have similar personality as well as histories of personal developmental characteristics that are common. Students' motivation to study for career of their choice are strongly supported by Gardner and Lambert's (1972) finding that learners who desire to become like people in a group or family do well and are most successful in their career.

On the other hand, students who have decided to choose vocational study programmes including practical workplace

training and apprenticeship have well been influenced by high school counsellors. These students were often in the office of the school counsellor for career and vocational information and guidance. Most of the students in this category are students of lower socioeconomic status and whose parents do not have high education either. The students seemed to be fed up with school academic work and appeared destined for work, not college. This is not surprising because these students are above 25 years and have family commitment and economic responsibility, and would not like to spend many more years in school. For some adult immigrants difficulties going through many years of schooling while still having the responsibility of being parents would prefer to be trained on jobs in order to tackle their current challenges. These adult students perceive vocational study program where they would have the opportunity to enter the job market. Most of the immigrants in this group have never been to school in their home country, they are therefore struggling to grasp the Norwegian language that can facilitate communication at work other than learning a profession. These perceived double disadvantage of not having the prerequisite qualification for jobs and language barrier play a crucial role in the decision making of careers.

One could argue in view of this that the secondary school classical curriculum was deemed inappropriate for them. Thus, the vocational program of study was intended to provide students with the education and training needed to prepare for an occupation or career requiring less than a baccalaureate degree. One could argue here that the choices of these students are influenced by their life situations mostly explained by culture, family background, social and economic conditions. This findings is consistent with The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Dawis, 2002, 2005) which view career choice as a process of developmental adjustment. These students chose career that satisfies their present needs where flexibility is critical to their success.

Secondary school counsellors should begin to address vocational programme issues to the students before students find themselves in a college environment with no clear understanding of the connection between the job market and their individual preparation. The findings here is influenced by the research that says that vocational education does not need to represent an either/or proposition with regard to college, but can leave the option of college open while providing secondary students with marketable skills. (Kerka, 2000).

Some students were training for self-help skills and learning basic skills but also indecisive. The inability to take any particular course of action regarding their career permeates most aspects of their lives. It was realized that these students were facing developmental and decision-making problems. For these students factors other than those identified in this study could explain their situation. This students' understanding of career development suggest that many of them follow the path of least resistance in their career development. They do that by just falling into whatever work opportunities that come their way and supports the theoretical

underpinings based on socioeconomic factors. In this regard this finding supports the research study that relates problems in career decision-making to be associated with social or psychological factors such as anxiety (Gaffner & Hazler, 2002; Salamone, 1982; Van Matre & Cooper, 1984). These students have attributed their situation to lack of employment over a long period, and for most of them they have never been exposed to the job market. This is not surprising because migrant parents find it hard to enter the labor market, and as such seek comfort in counter-productive ethnic networks that in one way or the other may have negative consequences on their children. It is argued in this research that a thorough assessment of these students to make any type of decision be made and detected social or psychological problems be seriously addressed by school counsellors or advisors.

One of the major findings of this study was that the study has raised the awareness of students and school counsellors and all others involved in the decision making process of career and vocational programmes. Being conscious of how many students enrol in what study programme is an eye-opener for schools to restructure their career and vocational programmes to meet the growing need for a workforce with the skills required to interact productively with the evolving economic structure. Awareness-raising creates new knowledge, and this result in attitudinal change. This study in support of the research findings of Holland suggests that career-seeking behaviour is an outgrowth of efforts to effect and match an individual's characteristics with those of a specific occupational field. Hence, by choosing a particular occupation an individual projects into one of his preferred life-style as a result of his view of himself and that of the world of work (Holland, 1959).

Implications

The findings support the idea that mature decision-making is not an end in itself but the process of exploring different alternatives. It is therefore, recommended that school counsellors and career service providers should support students by providing them with relevant and adequate source of career and vocational programme information to help them find out different alternatives. The study identified factors including families and possibilities of work places that offer practical work training and apprenticeship that influenced students' decision, these factors seem to play a crucial role in students' career aspirations. In this regard, school counsellors and career services providers should involve small businesses as well as parents in the implementation of career guidance programmes in the schools. It is suggested by this study that career guidance programme at the secondary schools should include the education about the world of work.

Conclusion

This study examines the factors that influence a secondary student's decision to attend a career and vocational school programme. Students were asked to rate factors that affected their choice of career or vocational programme. The discussions and ratings centred around information and

influence ranging between personal/self, school counsellors the analysis showed that many students considered themselves for influencing the choice of their career (M=7.2) and school counsellor (M=6.1) as affecting their decision to choose a career more than parental issues (M=5.6).

Career information and choice should not just be the sole responsibility of the students but school guidance and counselling coordinators and to some extent teachers. Students' choices of career should be based on many factors such as interests, abilities. It is very important to make students aware of all external factors including market trends of national and international work. These external factors should include job or career benefits, prospect and dangers attached to various careers and professions.

Most students within the academic career have been influence by self- motivation and this choice could be external and internal. Externally these students are influenced by the high educational status of their parents and as such they know how to study, pass examinations, and choose the right institutions. All the same, these students should be exposed to the knowledge of world market so as to channel their capabilities to their career choices. In this regard appropriate and adequate information should be available and given to all students who are choosing a career, as inadequate career information may tend to negatively affect students' career decisions as well as their entire life.

It is very encouraging that majority of the students were pursuing the careers of their choices as this study noted giving the impression that students know what is good for them one can not ignore the fact that parents should be well informed and involved by career guidance counsellors in the career guidance activities of the students.

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