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A Critical Evaluation of Parental and Peer Influence on Students' Career Path

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Abstract:

The influence of parents and peers on a student's career path is widely recognized by researchers and educators. Parents play a vital role in shaping their children's aspirations, while peers serve as important sources of support and influence during the decision-making process. This study showcases the role of parents and peer groups on students' career paths, which would aid in the removal of obstacles that would lead to career mismatch and ultimately lead to graduates who are unable to make meaningful contributions to society through a mismatched career. The critical evaluation aims to examine the impact of parental and peer influence on students' career paths, analyzing both positive and negative aspects and considering potential challenges and limitations.

Keywords: Student, peer, parents, career, influences

1. Introduction

The study explores the influence of parental and peer influence on students' career paths while taking into consideration the challenges that students face in regard to seeking a career path that suits both their abilities and interests. Parents' role in influencing their children's career path can yield either positive or negative outcomes depending on the relationship between parents and child. The role of parents should be restricted to guidance while taking into consideration the desire and ability of their children as compelling them into a career path that suits the parents' own desire may result in forcing their children into career(s) that they are not interested in, thus, leading into frustration. While providing guidance, parents should not underestimate their children's innate ability to choose a profession for themselves and further ensure synergy between both their opinions and the opinions of their friends to ensure that their children are not swayed into the wrong career path. The study recommends that parents also seek support from other sources, such as career counsellors, mentors, and experts in different sectors, to ensure their children have professional guidance.

2. Parental and Peer Influence on Students' Career Path

The choice of career is an important step that aids in developing graduates who are competent in making meaningful contributions to society and the world at large. However, several factors have had a major influence on students' career paths. Borchet (2000) noted factors such as the personality of students, parental and peer pressure influence, benefits associated with embarking on a particular career path and their surrounding environment as factors that influence a student's decision on a career. Among these factors, parental and peer influences have a more significant impact on students' career paths.

The role of parents in influencing their children's career path can yield either positive or negative outcomes depending on the relationship that exists between parents and their children. Parents wield the most significant influence when it comes to shaping gender roles, socialization, imparting social skills, nurturing character development, and instilling a sense of responsibility. The expectations and encouragement of parents also have a significant impact on how their children develop as individuals and how they make educational and career choices (Kamore & Tiego, 2015). Children are impacted by the work values, attitudes, and behaviours of their families; hence, parents are often the main source of their children's work values and attitudes (Gavarella & Omodei, 2011). Most of this is unintentionally assimilated as youngsters and teenagers, which eventually influences their career path. Children really start to connect with their parent's profession as early as age five (Harley & Prior, 2004). Despite the benefits that are associated with the role of parents in guiding the career choice of their children, there have been complaints from teenagers and students of parents pressuring their children into a career path that is of no interest to them (Alika, 2010). These parents ensure that the hopes and aspirations they were not able to attain are shouldered by their children without taking into consideration their abilities and interests. While the influence of parents on the career path of their children is immense, the impact of peer groups cannot be underestimated.

Peer groups represent a social connection, and when not properly put in check, they can have a major influence on the career path of their mates, bearing in mind the role of competition and admiration among friends. However, Wentzel (2011) noted that having friends who are intellectually and socially resourceful may directly and favourably affect students' academic attainment. He asserts that peers may have less of an impact on teenagers' choice of profession than parents do, which indicates that parents should ensure that they provide proper guidance to their children to prevent them from being negatively swayed into a mismatched career.

3. The Influence of Parents on the Career Path of Their Children

The influence of parents on the career path of their children is enormous. Their influence extends beyond academic decisions and decisions that pertain to the career path their children ought to follow. This should not come as a surprise, considering the magnitude of their influence on the development of their children's beliefs, job ambitions, and decision-making processes. For children, parents often serve as first role models. Student perceptions of various occupations and what they regard as potential career alternatives might be influenced by a parent's professional choice, work ethic, and degree of job satisfaction. A student's perception of what makes a successful and rewarding profession might be influenced by the expectations and ideals of their parents. More so, the values from society, families, and cultures might affect the professions parents urge their children to pursue. Parents can provide emotional support and advice during a period of career choice, helping their children navigate challenges and seize opportunities (Tziner, 2012).

Dekel and Sharoni (2012) noted a clear connection between a child's receptiveness to parental advice regarding career choices and two key factors: the quality of the parent-child relationship and the degree of support the child feels from their parents. Usually, children and students who are treated in a way that acknowledges the significance of their perspectives tend to be more open to their parents' career suggestions, possibly leading them to opt for professions that align with their parents' preferences (Tziner, 2012). The preference of parents should not outweigh the ability and interest of their child, which could be a reason why some students are less driven when their parents put them under the stress of embarking on a career path that is not of interest to them. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) noted that when teenagers perceive their parents as imposing their own career aspirations on them rather than collaboratively assisting the child in career preparation, it can be construed as a lack of alignment with the child's goals.

While parental guidance is crucial, adolescents should also have the freedom to pursue their own interests and passions. A balanced strategy that promotes transparent interaction and understanding enables parents to provide helpful advice while still honouring their child's uniqueness and goals. The degree of parental participation in a child's life whether it is good or not—can have an effect on the career choices the child makes in the future.

Dietrich and Kracke (2009) carried out a study to note the effectiveness of parental engagement in their children's career choices. The study was carried out on 359 German residents between the ages of 15 and 18. The result indicated that the majority of students had parental support for their chosen careers. The authors opined that the influence resulted in excessive pressure being put on kids, often due to much meddling from parents. Although what parents have to say is significant and has previously been shown to be very persuasive and beneficial, too much of any one item may lead the child to completely disconnect from the alternatives for career exploration.

4. Peer Group Influence on Career Path

Peer groups refer to groups of individuals that share similar characteristics with one another. These groups have an immense influence on the behaviour, beliefs, and life trajectory of their peers. The career decisions of students are heavily influenced by their peers. Walaba and Kiboss (2013) noted that peer interactions have an impact on students' career decisions. In the process of conversation, students exchange career-related information. Yi-Hui (2006) found in his research in China that students' contact with peers of different passions, races, and cultures has the capacity to encourage thought, expertise, and beliefs, which could result in new ways of approaching the world and ultimately aid in redefining themselves. The negative challenge posed by peer influence regarding the choice of career path is the lack of in-depth knowledge on the career they seek to pursue while not considering their unique talent or skills. Kiuru (2008) noted that peer groups have a significant influence on the career path of their friends. More so, the academic orientation characteristics of the peer groups to which they belong may possibly have a long-term influence on certain teenagers' occupational trajectories.

While peer pressure may have some degree of negative implication on the choice of career of students, when the influence of peers is channeled in the right way and properly monitored through peer mentoring and counselling activities, it could help relieve the career choice challenges faced by students. Kimiti and Mwova (2012) discovered that peers in Kenya had a number of influences on students, including peer counselling, peer contact, peer guidance, and peer connections. Peer counselling is a method of connecting, reacting, and supporting that aims to explore emotions, ideas, and concerns in the pursuit of a clear understanding (Odirile, 2012). Peer counselling in schools is a phenomenon that was developed to assist students in schools with their concerns. The major objective of peer counselling is to help students understand the value of education and how to respect one another (Bett, 2013). Peer mentoring/counselling is a fallback for students who lack competent career counselling and instructor supervision. According to Njeri (2013), students seek advice, knowledge, and mentoring on employment-related matters from their peers who have had comparable experiences, particularly when other appropriate channels, such as school career assistance, are not operating as intended.

Koeh et al. (2016) highlighted the role that peer mentoring plays in influencing students' career choices. However, it was shown to have no effect on medical students' career decisions in the United Arab Emirates (Ausman et al.,

2013). Kiuru (2008) noted that peers who are closely connected are more likely to follow similar educational paths because they are more willing to take advice from themselves while taking into consideration their similarities.

Bett (2013) noted that peer counselling is justified on the grounds that individuals with comparable traits and ages have a propensity to affect one another. Similar to this, Chireshe (2013) in Zimbabwe emphasized the value of peer counselling in schools by claiming that peer counselling made it simple to spread knowledge. Despite the benefits associated with student counselling, it is expected that their activities should be closely monitored by an expert academic counsellor to ensure that due benefits are derived from this activity.

5. Synergy between Parental and Peer Influence on Students' Career Path

It has been established that both parents and peers have a major influence on the career path of their children/friends, with their influences visible in student's choices, goals, and sense of identity. As such, a balance in interaction between parents and peers would aid in providing useful guidance that students need in securing a career path that suits their identity and ability. The support that students may obtain when there is harmony between parental and peer guidance could prove effective in career choice, bearing in mind that these two groups are likely to have a good knowledge of the abilities and interests of their child/friend. This harmony may increase a student's belief in a certain career route and foster a feeling of harmony between internal wants and external expectations (Miller & Cowger, 2003). A student may be introduced by peers to a new career choice, and if that option can get parental approval, it may give the student more confidence to pursue it.

In order to establish a compromise between conflicting influences, a student may have discussions with both classmates and parents. Making a decision on a career after weighing these factors will help them make a well-informed choice that takes all details into account. When peer and parental opinions clash, a student may feel uncomfortable and find it difficult to balance these conflicting forces. This conflict may prompt the student to consider their alternatives seriously, seek advice, and reach a more autonomous and sincere conclusion (Eren, 2012).

To obtain a proper synergy between parental and peer influence, there is a need to emphasize open communication, self-awareness, and the capacity to integrate multiple viewpoints to make defensible and significant professional decisions. Students who are adept at navigating these influences may strike a balance that is in line with their interests and still honour the insightful opinions of both their parents and peers.

6. Challenge of Mismatch Career Path

The choice of career represents an important yet complex challenge that students are expected to make to ensure they remain productive and employable upon graduation from college. This decision has always been hinged on several factors upon which an individual's abilities and interests should rank among the tops of these factors. However, there are several occasions that the individual's ability and interest are not taken into consideration, which could lead to students studying courses that are not of interest to them, thus, are unable to cope and might even drop out of college. On the other hand, they might persevere through the study of those courses and yet be unemployable. United Nations (2012), as cited in Ogutu et al. (2017), noted that there are over 75 million unemployed youth, and it is expected that this figure should have currently increased, which could be traceable to career mismatch.

Career mismatch in the context of this study is the situation that arises when the ability and interest of student does not suit their course of study. As such, they are left in a state of frustration. Ogutu et al. (2017) noted that the trajectory of the world is gradually shifting into a period of inadequacy of talent, which has a detrimental effect on economic growth. It is no surprise that most students seek to follow popular career paths, such as engineers, physicians, accountants, and attorneys, among other notable professions. However, there might be other career paths that would better suit the abilities of such individuals. Because of this, choosing a profession is a sensitive matter that calls for prudence and careful thought. A student's decision about a career is seen as a significant turning point in their life. As such, proper guidance should be directed towards adolescents who are on a path of self-discovery.

7. Evaluation

7.1. Positive Aspects

- **Role Modeling:** Parents often serve as role models by either working in a specific field or displaying personal characteristics that inspire their children. This can positively influence career aspirations and provide valuable insights into different professions.
- **Guidance and Support:** Supportive parents can guide their children by providing resources, information, and encouragement to explore various career options. Such support can help students make more informed decisions based on their interests, abilities, and values.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Parents, through their own networks, can provide valuable connections and networking opportunities for their children. This can facilitate internship placements, mentorships, and exposure to professional environments, enhancing students' career development.
- **Peer Influence:** Peers can have a significant impact on career decisions, as they share similar experiences and may offer alternative perspectives. Peer support can validate and strengthen career choices or introduce new possibilities that students may not have considered.
- **Motivation and Competition:** Healthy competition among peers can motivate students to pursue their career goals. Peer influence can push individuals to aim higher, work harder, and constantly improve themselves.

7.2. Negative Aspects

- Limited Exposure: Parents may unintentionally limit their children's exposure to different career options due to their own biases or lack of knowledge about various fields. This can lead students to make uninformed choices or miss out on potential career paths.
- Conflicting Goals: Parental expectations and aspirations may conflict with a student's own interests, creating pressure to pursue a career that aligns with their parents' wishes rather than their own passions. This can result in a lack of motivation or career dissatisfaction.
- Peer Pressure: While peer influence can be positive, it can also lead to conformity and influence students to make career choices solely based on what their friends are pursuing rather than considering personal aptitudes and interests.
- Unrealistic Expectations: Both parents and peers can inadvertently create unrealistic expectations about certain careers, leading students to choose pathways that may not suit their abilities, interests, or long-term goals.

8. Conclusion

The influence of parents and peers on a student's career path is undeniable, with both positive and negative consequences. While parents have the potential to provide valuable guidance, support, and networking opportunities, they may also inadvertently limit exposure or impose conflicting goals. Peers can not only serve as sources of motivation, inspiration, and alternative perspectives but can also contribute to conformity, unrealistic expectations, and pressure.

The choice of career path represents a decision that should be made with absolute objectivity while considering that a wrong decision has the potency of affecting the life trajectory of an individual; as such, it is expected that parents should play a role of guidance for their children with a focus on the desire and ability of their children. Parents should ensure that there is a harmony between their children's desires and the ability of a child, bearing in mind that their children could be swayed into a career path as a result of the glamour that is associated with those professions while not taking their ability into consideration. More so, parents should not live vicariously through their children by placing the hopes and aspirations they were unable to achieve on the shoulders of their children while not considering the interests of their children. Parental guidance may help students succeed by offering knowledge, materials, and support, but it can also sometimes provide difficulties when expectations contradict individual goals. While providing guidance, parents should not underestimate their children's innate ability to choose a profession for themselves (Jacobsen, 2009). Poulter (2006) also discovered that children constantly record their parents' actions, remarks, and attitudes on a camera that runs in their heads. They see their parents' attitudes toward work, drive for success, and beliefs in those things.

On the other hand, peers open a student's eyes to other perspectives and common experiences. Peer interactions help students discover new interests, alternative career choices, and a feeling of community within certain occupational groups. Peer influence may be problematic, too, if adhering to group opinion conflicts with one's own inclinations. The complicated nature of professional decision-making is highlighted by the dynamic interplay between parental and peer influences. Parents should take cognizance of the friends of their children to ensure that they do not get any wrong advice and ensure open communication with their children. As such, it is crucial to strike a balance between external direction and individual liberty.

Students should choose a career path that takes into account not only external advice but also their own desires and capabilities by acknowledging and appreciating the impact of parents and peers. Adopting this comprehensive viewpoint encourages personal development and equips students with the confidence to successfully follow their chosen careers, building the basis for their future success.

Finally, it is crucial that parents, educators, and policymakers recognize the potential strengths and limitations of both parental and peer influence, working together to provide a well-rounded career guidance system that encourages students to explore their unique talents and passions.

9. Recommendations

Based on the understanding of parental and peer influence on a student's career path, here are some recommendations to ensure a balanced and constructive impact on students' career decisions.

- Encourage parents, friends, and students to communicate honestly and openly. Making an atmosphere where students can freely talk to their parents and classmates about their goals, interests, and concerns will help them to make better choices.
- Parents and peers should appreciate each student's uniqueness and goals. Recognize that each individual may follow a different route that defers from the perspective of both peers and parents.
- Students should be given the freedom to choose their own careers, with parental roles limited to guidance.
- Parents could also seek support from other resources, such as career counsellors, mentors, and experts in different sectors, to ensure their children have professional guidance.

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