

Neuroticism and Career Aspirations among Secondary School Students in Bomet Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: There is a general absence of data on personality traits and how they influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Bomet Sub County, Kenya. This study sought to examine relationship between Neuroticism and career aspirations among secondary school students in Bomet Sub- County, Kenya. Correlational survey was used in executing the study. The study population comprised of 2500 form four students and 53 principals in 53 secondary day schools. The sample size comprised 355 students selected from simple random sampling technique. Neuroticism scale on the Big five personality trait questionnaire and career aspiration questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data while qualitative data was analyzed by thematic framework. Both descriptive and inferential data analysis methods including frequencies, percentages, Pearson correlation and regression were used to analyze quantitative. The study revealed a statistically significant ($n= 52$; $r = -.395$; $p < 0.05$) negative relationship between neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career aspiration among students. This study recommends that teacher counselors should use appropriate therapy techniques to guide students regarding the career aspirations they seek to pursue.

Keywords: Adolescents, Neuroticism, Career aspirations, Big Five Personality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Giving students the tools and knowledge to realistically plan for their futures is a primary goal of education. Although young people have high ambitions, expecting to be well educated and have professional careers, many do not develop coherent plans for achieving their goals (Ackerman and Margaret 2013).

During adolescence, aspirations are especially important because they allow teenagers to evaluate the degree to which various choices help or hinder their chances of attaining desired goals (Tindi and Silsil, 2008). In adolescence, career preparation is an important precursor for successful career development across the life span and is closely related to adolescence adjustment and well-being (Skorikov, 2013). According to Andersson (2011), aspirations refer to an individual's expressed career related goals or intentions and also include motivational components which are not present in mere interests. The career aspirations of adolescents have been viewed as significant determinants of both short term educational and long term career choices. They have also been regarded as important career motivational variables which are predictive of latter career attainment levels (Patton and Creed 2011).

In many African countries, the situation is different mainly due to lack of government policy and commitment (Tindi and Silsil, 2013). Most third world countries see career guidance provided in a haphazard way and is a fringe benefit instead of being directly linked with students learning (Arnold 2010). Schools through streaming practices stereotype the

participation of girls and boys in secondary school technology subjects. Female education in science and Technology in Africa (FEMSA, 2012) study found out that certain subjects such as home science was considered as meant for girls while certain subjects such as woodwork and metalwork was meant for boys.

In Kenyan communities, formal career focus in schools started in Kenya in the 1960s. In 1962, the Ministry of Labor in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) came up with an offer of vocational guidance which was termed 'Career Guidance' administered by a career master appointed by the school head teacher. The career master, however, had no professional training. In 1967, the first career unit was created under the Ministry of Education and staffed with a team of professionally qualified officers at the headquarters and a few in-service teachers. This momentum was kicked off by the Ominde Report in 1964 and sustained by Gachathi Report in 1976. The two reports encouraged the provision of educational and vocational guidance to help the youth develop decision making skills that would enhance their transition from the school into the world of work (Ashton 2012).

A. Statement of the problem:

Before making their career choices, students are often provided with a list of careers from which they are supposed to make choices (FEMSA, 2012). However, most of the students lack adequate information regarding various careers hence ending up in wrong careers. When people enter the wrong professions, the society loses because they do not offer good services, and their talent and drive are not fully exploited. Time and money are wasted when a person spends years studying a degree, diploma or certificate course in a field they have no or little interest. While decision making in career choice and ambition may be attributed to various factors, personality trait of the student has been largely ignored by many scholars, which is why, there is lack of conclusive empirical study on how different personality factors influence career ambition and decision making among the students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Neuroticism describes the tendency to experience negative emotion and related processes in response to perceived threat and punishment; these include anxiety, depression, anger, self-consciousness, and emotional lability (Chartrand et al., 2012). The Big Five trait most commonly reported to be associated with career decidedness is Neuroticism. For instance, Meyer & Weiner (2013) compared three different career aspirations scales and found Neuroticism to be the trait most strongly connected to career aspirations. A more advanced path analysis by Chartrand, Rose et al. and a mediation model from Shafer (2010) including Big Five traits both confirmed Neuroticism as the strongest and only direct predictor of affective elements of career aspirations. In addition, results further emphasize the divergent paths to affective versus informational components of career aspirations, which is "suggestive of the conceptual distinction between career aspirations [i.e., point in time] and career aspirations (Chartrand et al., 2012). Neuroticism was specifically linked with problem-solving deficits as summarized in earlier reviewed anxiety research. At the other end of the scale, several studies (Jin, Watkins, & Yuen, 2014) reported that being aspired was inversely related to Neuroticism, as would be expected from the previous findings for a positive association with decided individuals.

Globally, Jin, Watkins & Yuen (2014) conducted a survey provided with Chinese graduate students in order to ascertain whether Neuroticism influenced career aspiration among graduate students. The survey revealed that 70% of the graduates who participated in the survey were in agreement that Neuroticism played a similar role in the career commitment of Chinese graduate students. While Neuroticism was directly connected to career-decidedness through an inverse relationship, self-efficacy (e.g., beliefs about career decision-making ability) was also shown to have an influence in mediating the relationship with career commitment.

Even more, Wang, Jome, Haase and Bruch (2014) showed how Neuroticism had an even greater impact for African Americans than for White students. Very recent findings by Kelly & Pulver (2016) further signified that negative career thoughts and feelings may influence the connection Neuroticism has with informational components of career aspirations. "Whether the anxiety associated with indecision results from, or is a cause of, career aspirations is an open question that continues to receive attention in the literature" (Watkins & Yuen, 2014). Neuroticism was also found to be critical in differentiating types of career aspirations (Kelly & Pulver, 2016). In an attempt to address previous limitations, Kelly & Pulver conducted a predictive validity study exclusively with undecided students and used norms to interpret the resulting

types. Of course, high neuroticism was indicative of the neurotic indecisive information seeker, who also showed elevated career choice anxiety, indecisiveness, need for career information and self-knowledge and lower than normal extraversion.

In Africa several studies have been conducted on career aspiration among secondary students. For instance (Salami, 2013) carried a research on career choice among Nigerian youths. He found out that many youths make wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or as a result of prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate guidance and career counseling. (Garrahy, 2014) noted that schools are social institutions that reinforce gender-appropriate behavior, interests and occupations. Such constructs including curricular subjects, quality of teaching, student participation in school activities, school practices and policies and learning materials for the student were found to impact on career choice among learners

Abdullah, Amla and Khairul Anwar (2011) carried a study in Ghana public high school students to investigate the relationships between career decision-making constructs in terms of its three dimensions and the Big Five factors. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 230 high school students. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship between the two sets of variables. Results indicated significant relationships between the Big Five factors and career decision-making constructs. Neuroticism was found to be negatively related with career decidedness; conscientiousness, extraversion, openness and agreeableness are positively and significantly correlated with career decidedness. The reviewed study above focused on career decision-making and not career aspiration. Therefore, the current study focused on personality traits and career aspiration,

Another study was conducted by Efobil and Nwokolo (2011) on relationship between Neuroticism and tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents in Awka, Nigeria. The design for the study was correlational survey. The sample for the study was 1000 senior secondary students selected through simple random and disproportionate stratified random sampling techniques. Three research questions guided the study. Two questionnaires termed 'Modified Neuroticism Questionnaire' (MNQ) and 'Adolescents Tendency to Bullying Questionnaire' (ATBQ) were used for data collection. Mean and Pearson r coefficients were used for analyses of data. Correlation analysis results showed that self-consciousness had a mean of 16.92; and emotional student had a mean of 15.74; while depression and anger had means of 11.14 and 7.52 respectively. Only two of the four Neuroticism styles were above the acceptance point of 12.50. The study revealed that there is a moderate positive relationship between Neuroticism and adolescents' tendency to bullying behavior

Moraa (2013) conducted a research on factors influencing career aspirations among girls in public secondary schools in Nyamira North District, Nyamira County.. The study adopted a survey research design and purposively targeting girls in form 4 due to their presumed vantage in accessing career information. Out of the 1251 girls enrolled in form 4 in the 25 public secondary schools (4 single girls and 21 mixed), a sample of 125 was selected by simple random sampling to form the study group on whose findings generalizations was made. In addition, career teachers, one from each school, were recruited for participation as informants. The study used questionnaire and interview guide, which were refined to enhance validity and reliability, as the data collection tools.

Muchiri (2012) carried out a study in Nakuru County on the impacts of Neuroticism on children's schooling. The study used pre-set questionnaires to collect data which was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis. Moreover, it examined the different ways in which Neuroticism styles impact on children's behaviour, which, in turn, influences the predictive effects on their academic achievement. The findings of the study revealed significant Bartlett's test at ($\chi^2 (378) = 3043.364, p < .001$). The study concluded that the gap between children's character and school environments should be bridged bringing together the key elements of children's lives, in order to form a more-informed approach toward their learning and career aspirations.

According to Oyamo and Amoth, (2014), studies in Kenya show that rural students tend to seek help from parents more than urban students and that parents more than teachers play a major role in the career choice of students. Generally, career decidedness is influenced by parents, friends, and counselors; however variations occur from one population to the other. Investigating and better understanding the myriad factors that contribute to career decidedness is a topic of recurring interest in higher education. Some studies suggest that the factors that anchor career preferences include parental support (Wims, 2014), gender and socio-economic status (Mathombela, 2013). However, these findings have not given us a clear picture of the Kenyan context. Despite the available literature to the researchers' knowledge, none has been able to give a

comprehensive picture on the relationship between Neuroticism and career aspiration among secondary students in Bomet sub- county, Kenya hence creating a gap to be filled.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Purpose of the Study

This paper investigated the effect of neuroticism on career aspirations of secondary school students in Bomet Sub-County, Kenya.

B. Research Hypothesis:

The study tested the null hypothesis that:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Neuroticism and career aspirations among secondary school students in Bomet Sub- County, Kenya.

The study population comprised of 2500 form four students and 53 principals in 53 secondary day schools from where 355 students were selected by simple random sampling technique while 10 principals were selected purposively. Neuroticism scale in the Big five personality trait questionnaire and career aspiration questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Both descriptive and inferential data analysis methods including frequencies, percentages, Pearson correlation and regression were used to analyze quantitative and test the hypothesis.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

On the participants, the study found a return rate of 94.1% (334) from the students' respondents with male students represented by 54.6%, while female were 45.4%. Further, 78.4% (262) of the students who participated in the study were admitted at form one, while the least, 3.6% (12) were admitted in form four where 71.5% were day school students, while 22.5% were boarding school. All the 10 selected principals participated in the study.

The study found that significant number of the respondents at 32.6% with neurotic personality indicated that it was slightly true of them that they hoped to become a leader in their career field. Another 34.69% of the students with neurotic character indicated that it was slightly true of them that they would be satisfied just doing their job in a career they were interested in, meaning that these group of students were indecisive about their career and career ambitions. Kelly and Pulver (2013) also reported that high neuroticism was indicative of the neurotic indecisive information seeker. It was slightly true of these students that they hoped to move up through any organization or business they worked in, as indicated by 34.62% of the respondents that showed neurotic personality. Only 7.69% of the respondents indicated that moving up through promotion in an organization was their career ambition and it was very true of them. This shows that neurotic persons were always reserved and would not want to involve other parties to influence their career decisions. They were also indecisive. Similarly, Garrahy (2014) also shared these views when he documented that neurotic students have elevated career choice anxiety, indecisiveness, need for career information and self-knowledge, lower than normal extraversion.

It was also moderately true and slightly true at 32.69% and 23.08% respectively that neurotic students that once they finished the basic level of education needed for a particular job, they saw no need to continue with their education, indicating how limited they were in their career ambition and objectives. It was also moderately true as indicated by 21.14% that neurotic characters were not after leadership status in their career, while 32.69% indicated that the statement was slightly true about them. Significant number of the respondents at 21(40.38%) also indicated that it was slightly true about these students that they planned on developing as an expert in their career field. From these findings, it can be deduced that students with neurotic personality were not concerned much about their career ambition and development and were not keen on walking on their career path owing to their character as being anxious, fear, moodiness, worry, envy, frustration and jealousy. Similarly, Abdullah, Amla and Khairul Anwar (2011) found that neuroticism was found to be negatively related with career decidedness; conscientiousness, extraversion, openness and agreeableness are positively and significantly correlated with career decidedness.

During the interview sessions with the school principals, it was found that students with neurotic personality sub-types were more likely to be depressed and moody and this could discourage their judgmental and decision making. One of the principals had to say;

Neurotic students are less likely to come up with good career choice because of their attitude about life, given that they are always moody, anxious, jealous and envious. They are often self-conscious and shy, and they may have trouble controlling urges and delaying gratification [School Principal 6].

These sentiments were also shared by the Teacher Counselors when one of them said;

Students who score high in neuroticism are less emotionally stable and highly reactive to stress. They are less likely to be calm, even-tempered, and more likely to feel tense or rattled and are more likely to have negative emotion. All these factors are not good fodder for career ambitious students [Teacher counselor, 11]

These statements showed that neurotic personality among the students discourage positive thinking for good career aspiration and choice. This support the findings of Chartrand et al., (2012) who also found that neuroticism was specifically linked with problem-solving deficits as surmised in earlier reviewed anxiety research. Tango & Dziuban (2012) also reiterate that asocial and avoidant personality characteristics lend power to negative thoughts and/or irrational thinking (i.e., impossible agendas as terms by the authors) that give way to a fear that in turn heightens career indecision. Detailed findings are presented in Table 1

Table 1. Neuroticism and Career Aspiration

Statement	0	1	2	3	4
Hope to become a leader in my career field	9(17.3)	17(32.7)	8(15.4)	12(23.1)	6(11.5)
When I am established in my career, I would like to manage other employees	12(23.1)	20(38.5)	4(7.7)	9(17.3)	7(13.5)
I would be satisfied just doing my job in a career I am interested in	9(17.3)	18(34.6)	6(11.5)	7(13.5)	12(23.1)
I do not plan to devote energy to getting promoted in the organization or business I am working in	8(15.4)	17(32.7)	12(23.1)	9(17.3)	6(11.5)
When I am established in my career, I would like to establish others	11(21.2)	16(30.8)	14(26.9)	6(11.5)	5(9.6)
I hope to move up through any organization or business I work in	12(23.1)	18(34.6)	13(25.0)	5(9.6)	4(7.7)
Once I finish the basic level of education needed for a particular job, I see no need to continue in school	11(21.2)	17(32.7)	12(23.1)	4(7.7%)	8(15.4)
I plan on developing as an expert in my career field	10(19.2)	21(40.4)	9(17.3)	5(9.6)	7(13.5)
I think I would like to pursue graduate training in my occupational area of interest	12(23.1)	19(36.5)	9(17.3)	8(15.4)	4(7.7)
Attaining leadership status in my career is not that important to me.	13(25.0)	17(32.7)	11(21.1)	7(13.5)	4(7.7)

To establish whether there was any significant relationship between Neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career ambition and aspiration, among students, through Pearson’s Product-Moment Coefficient of correlation, the analysis revealed a less significant (n= 52; r = -.395; p < 0.05) negative relationship between neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career aspiration among students. This implies that high levels of neuroticism Personality are associated with lower levels of career aspirations among the students. Qualitative findings from school principals and teacher counselors also showed that neurotic personality relates negatively with career aspirations among the students. Correlation output is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career aspiration

		Neuroticism	Career Aspiration
Neuroticism	Pearson	1	-.395**
	Sig.		.000
	N	52	52
Career Aspiration	Pearson	-.395**	1
	Sig.	.000	
	N	52	52
**. Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Researcher's Data, 2016

Based on the findings, we rejected the null hypothesis, and the alternative hypotheses accepted. Hence, it was acceptable to conclude that there were negative association between neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career aspiration among the students. These findings were in line with the results of Salami, (2013) who carried a research on career choice among Nigerian youths. He found out that many youths make wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure and poor advice seeking behavior. Kelly and Pulver (2013) also reported that high neuroticism was indicative of the neurotic indecisive information seeker and their career information seeking was always low as compared to other personality trait such as extraversion. Moreover, Moraa (2013) also found that values like hard work, honesty and information seeking attributed to students' career aspirations.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Major conclusions drawn from the first research question were that students with neurotic personality were characterized by anxiety, fear, moodiness, worry, envy, frustration, jealousy, and loneliness. These characteristics would not encourage good decision making in career choice and aspirations. On the first hypothesis, the study nullified null hypothesis since through Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of correlation, the analysis revealed a less significant (n= 52; r = -.395; p < 0.05) negative relationship between neuroticism Personality Subtypes and career aspiration among students. This implies that high levels of neuroticism Personality are associated with lower levels of career aspirations among the students. Teacher counselor should develop proper policy and programs aimed at educating the students on the various career options available to them based on their academic abilities and social interests and personality traits. For instance, schools should establish career departments which are structured and implemented progressive throughout the students' learning process especially in secondary schools since it is after this level that they are expected to make serious career decisions.

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