

## SCHOOL DETERMINANTS AND CAREER AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MERU-SOUTH SUB-COUNTY, THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

### Authors

Mbaka Ellyjoy Kainyu<sup>(1)</sup>; Mwanzia Ruth Mutunge<sup>(2)</sup>; Murungi James Mwenda<sup>(3)</sup>

Main author email: [kainyuellyjoy@gmail.com](mailto:kainyuellyjoy@gmail.com)

(1.2.3) Chuka University, Kenya.

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of school determinants on career awareness among students in public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County. Career awareness is a sign of one's level of democracy and personal freedom in determining their professional development. Uncertainty drives students towards making wrong career choices and, as a result, feel frustrated at a job they had never wished for. Despite the schools having career teachers and Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) providing career guidance, students portray unawareness on career matters. A descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. A sample size of 368 respondents comprising of 12 deans of studies, 12 guidance and counselling teachers, 12 form three and 12 form four parents' representatives, 8 principals and 312 form three and four students participated in the study. The study established that school determinants had an influence on the student's career awareness, especially on career information. The subjects' combination, school career days, and the status of the school (National, Extra-County and County) were found to have a great influence on career awareness. The schools, however, did not embark on serious career education, and the teachers failed to guide the students on careers or offer career alternatives. The schools should set mentorship days and career weeks to sensitise students on emerging issues in the career world and options available in accordance with their academic performance and achievement.

**Key terms:** Career, Career Awareness, Career options, School determinants, structural functionalism, Public Secondary Schools.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Career refers to a profession or line of work that a student aspires to become and prepare for training. Professional career has been changing rapidly with the growth of technology, and individuals have turned out to become more awake on the need to focus on career development with the appearance of data technology, the emergence of the post-historic period and job competition (Gati et al., 2019). Students appreciate the world they live in and adopt the best practices regarding careers (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Career awareness is working towards developing a complete understanding of possible career fields and opportunities, factors that can influence a job outlook, personal strengths and preferences, and the level of training needed to be successful. According to (Okolie et al., 2020), career awareness helps students develop their professional paths in an educational setting by giving them the support they need and assisting them to recognise their physical, cognitive and mental features. According to Okolie et al. (2020), identifying each student's unique interests and strengths is the most challenging and complex task educators and organisational leaders must complete to help students find the right vocations. School determinants refer to teachers, non-teaching staff, the surrounding community, structures and other facilities in the school. All schools must care about the well-being and academic progress of all learners, and each classroom must be equipped to provide a caring environment. Schools are social institutions that should give learners the tools they need to move easily into adulthood and the workforce. The impact of career knowledge on a person lasts a lifetime and affects their personality, demeanour and outlook in addition to serving as a predictor and determiner of their future income and type of job (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Career awareness can, therefore, change the fate of an individual, and it is extremely difficult for every student to make a decision regarding their career; hence, the study of school determinants of career awareness among the students in public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County.

According to a study by Koech (2016), secondary students find it challenging to decide on their career awareness because it affects the type of work they want to pursue in the future. Students find it daunting to learn about career subjects, courses of study, and the resulting career path to pursue. They struggle to determine which career they want to major in by balancing their passions with their academic performance abilities. According to Brown (2019), selecting a career entails assessing one's aptitudes and competencies required for success in a certain field, in addition to the professional standards that will be met by the several accessible vocational options. According to Brown, a student's life goals and aspirations for their career will ultimately determine who they are and what they will do with their careers. A multifaceted approach to this matter could be very important because parents, teachers, society, and the government all realise the necessity of adequate career knowledge in secondary schools.

All students in Kenya are expected to make difficult decisions as a result of the important yet challenging responsibility of developing their career awareness (Njeru, 2016; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). In order to prepare for the workforce, secondary school students find it difficult to relate their subject selections to future careers based on their abilities, cluster subjects, and academic accomplishments (Njeru, 2016; Mudulia et al., 2017). This has led to students enrolling in courses that are not related to their job goals. Oduor (2019) asserts that graduates find employment in fields that are neither consistent with their professional qualifications nor consistent with their career goals. The result is a high rate of staff turnover, high absenteeism rate, and employee discontent with their positions, as well as a lack of excitement, subpar work quality, and a negative mindset towards their jobs. This has an impact on employee productivity, which may cause friction between an employee and their employer (Bonenberger, 2017). The school

determinants of career awareness among students and their effects on their future jobs in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya, were researched and documented.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers convey to learners their expectations and attitudes throughout their class engagement. Students' perceptions of their academic abilities and how they see themselves with regard to the school may significantly be influenced by their teachers. Consequently, instructors may produce a self-fulfilling prophecy (Chen, 2017). One's choice of career is significantly influenced by their education. In a study done in Southeast Asia by Ahmed et al. (2017), gender distinction in the learning experiences of students begins in preschool and persists throughout their academic lives. According to research by Cook and Maree (2016), career dispatch programs in schools were underutilised in disadvantaged communities. A journal article by Maree et al. (2016) titled "Career Guidance in the Twenty-first Century" South African Institutions of Higher Education at crossroads' found that several learners passed Grade twelve while not having received career awareness at teaching establishments.

Mudhovozi (2015) found that misconceptions about sex roles are present among boys and girls in secondary schools in Nigeria due to their desire for conventional occupations. The school environment thus influences awareness of students' self-perceptions, ability and consequently career alternatives. According to Olanrewaju et al. (2022), some teachers urge students to enrol in courses that match their established aptitudes and talents. In secondary schools where more emphasis is laid on academic achievement, unique students' talents may not be realised, hence the need to evaluate the school determinants that influence career awareness among students in public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County.

In Kenya, some of the careers are easy to obtain jobs, and students take that into consideration. Students who understand the dynamics of the job market and are counselled adequately tend to choose technical courses, and this impacts their career awareness. Teachers are seen as important players in the career paths that students ultimately take (Gurian, 2010). According to a study by Koech (2016), schools are social settings that support gender-conforming behaviours, interests, and jobs. These constructs, as well as informational topics, teaching quality, student engagement in class activities, school procedures and rules, and student learning resources, were found to have an impact on learners' understanding of their jobs. Schools, therefore, have a significant impact on students' career awareness. The knowledge of job fields, study programs, and the ensuing career path to take is typically terrifying to students (Koech, 2016). Students, therefore, have difficulties when attempting to combine their preferences with their academic performance while making professional options as a result of their ignorance.

Secondary school education in Kenya has traditionally been seen as the clear step into adulthood and job readiness as learners start to grow independent of their parents and discover their defined independence (Heto et al., 2020). While in class, students usually come to terms with who they are, what they excel at, and what they could do after graduation. They recognise and assess their talents, skills, and prowess. They are said to have the inclination to look for an area to belong to; besides, they have been known to rely on peer approval and acceptance for selections. The need for direction-finding in creating concrete and comprehensive career awareness couldn't be overemphasised in secondary schools in Kenya; thus, the

researcher investigated the influence of school determinants in career awareness among students in public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County.

This study was guided by the Structural functionalism theory developed by Durkheim, as cited by Brown (2013). According to this theory, society is a well-functioning system whose majority of participants share a set of fundamental principles. The idea contends that interdependence among societal components imposes structure on institutional behaviour and that of its constituents. Institutions, teams, and roles form a cohesive whole. According to the hypothesis, which serves as the study's model, society works because shared morals and standards foster widespread social cohesion. Schools are essential in this process since they impart moral values to youngsters, preparing them to become productive members of society as adults. A strong society requires a stable social environment, and a stable social environment necessitates sufficient socialisation and social integration. Institutions throughout society serve crucial roles in promoting societal stability. In contrast to quick social change, which jeopardises social order, slow change in society is preferable. The first step in the conventional and recognisable decision-making process is establishing goals and objectives, which is followed by feedback and assessment to guide future decisions. The fact that various society institutions are geared towards the stability of the learner career-wise, they are all willing to work together to ensure there is stability.

According to structural-functional theory, education is beneficial since it serves society's and its sectors' integrative needs. Through career awareness of society and its sectors, this function promotes a student's sense of belonging (Cheung & Hue, 2017). Education must be a structural component of society so that it may perform an integrative function. The upkeep of societal functioning depends critically on students' career understanding (Kuah-Pearce & Fong, 2010). According to David (2014), through career awareness, education empowers people and consequently individualises and dissolves social ties in society and its sectors, allowing learners to feel a part of society. Student's personal growth may be significantly impacted by their awareness of their career options. Students are socialised at schools; hence, the school determinants that influence career awareness were researched and documented.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey study design was used by the researcher to explore the school determinants of career awareness among students in public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County. The description, recording, analysis, and reporting of current or past situations are the primary focuses of descriptive survey research, according to Kothari (2004). The study regarded descriptive survey research because it describes data and analyses the connection between social variables and secondary school students' career awareness. Due to the fact that no variables were altered during data collection and reporting, the study complies with the requirements of the descriptive survey research design.

The Target population was 7330 respondents from public secondary schools in Meru South Sub County comprising of 39 principals, 39 Dean of studies, 39 Guidance and Counselling teachers, 78 form three and four parents' representatives, and 7,135 form three and four students. The 39 Public secondary schools in Meru South Sub-County were clustered into National, Extra-county and County schools categories, and 12 schools were randomly selected from the clusters, forming 30 per cent of the targeted population. Table 1 shows the Sample matrix.

**Table 1: Sample Matrix**

School	Population	Sample	Sampling Method
GCTs	39	12	Simple random
DOS	39	12	Cluster random
PR	78	24	Cluster random
Principals	39	8	Cluster random
Students	7,135	312	Cluster random
Total	7,330	368	

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Response Rate

The questionnaires and interviews used to gather the data for this study were given to teachers of guidance and counselling, the dean of studies, students in forms three and four, principals, and parents' representatives in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. A total of 336 questionnaires and 32 interviews were administered, making a total of 368 responses. Table 2 displays the response rate.

**Table 2: Response Rate**

Category	Questionnaires		Interviews	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Number of respondents	325	96.7	28	87.5
Number Un-responded	11	3.3	4	12.5
Number targeted	336	100	32	100

According to the findings in Table 2, a total of 336 questionnaires were issued, and 325 replies were obtained. For the purpose of this study, a response rate of 96.7 per cent was sufficient. Due to the research instruments being self-administered by the researcher, a high response rate was attained. The results further indicate 28 respondents from the interviews, forming 87.5 per cent of the targeted respondents. Fincham (2008) noted that a response rate of over 80 per cent is satisfactory for descriptive data analysis.

### School Determinants on Career Awareness among Students

The respondents were asked to express their thoughts on the effect of school-related factors on their career decisions. The findings obtained were presented on a five-point Likert scale where Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The results were then presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: School Determinants and Career Awareness**

Statement	Respondent	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
The subject combination in the school is one of the key determinants of the career awareness by students.	Students	3.6	3.3	7.5	22	63.6
	Teachers	10	10	0	20	65

The school career days have influenced the student's career awareness	Students	7.5	3.4	2.7	66	20.4
	Teachers	10	15	0	15	60
The status of the school (National, Extra-County and County) has influenced the student's career awareness.	Students	6.6	10.5	10.2	60	12.2
	Teachers	5	10	0	75	10
The school invests in career education to ensure students are informed about careers and are able of making good career decisions.	Students	53.7	15.2	2.8	15.4	12.8
	Teachers	10	65	0	15	10
The school organises for motivational speakers who guide the students on career awareness and career paths.	Students	4.9	53.6	10.2	28.4	3
	Teachers	50	15	0	20	15
The teachers advise and offer career awareness to students and various career alternatives.	Students	58	7.1	6.7	21.4	6.8
	Teachers	55	25	0	5	15

Table 3 shows majority of respondents (63.6%) and (65%) of the students and teachers, respectively, firmly agree that subject combinations in school are important factors that influence student's career awareness. These results were consistent with Greig's (2018) research on why Queensland senior school students preferred geography, which found that they did so because it was relevant to their potential future careers. The findings are further supported by Wachira (2018), who established that students chose the geography subject because they aspired to become pilots and meteorologists in future.

Data obtained further reveals that 66.0 per cent of the students agree with the statement that school career days influence student's career awareness. Data in Table 3 postulates that 60 per cent of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement. The results are supported by Kutlu and Bedel (2021), who opined that career days were successful in reducing student's unreasonable views about their career choices and indecisions. The findings are further braced by Gilbertson et al. (2022), who found that student's participation in career activities in school gave them the necessary awareness, knowledge and skills required in the world of work. According to Gilbertson et al. (2022), career days provide occupational orientation to students who become aware of their career requirements and match their interests and abilities.

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of the students (60.0%) and teachers (75%) agreed with the assertion that a student's career awareness was influenced by the status of the school (National, Extra-County, and County). The results contrast with Nyangweso et al. (2019), which established that career awareness depended primarily on individual students regardless of the category of secondary school they attended. Mbiti (2016) noted that the best students from across the nation were admitted to the most prestigious government secondary schools in Kenya; however, there was little evidence of positive effects on the career awareness outcomes for the students who attended those schools because academic reputations designated the selection of students rather than their capacity to choose careers. According to Beckers (2019), aesthetic factors were viewed as less important and had no impact on career awareness.

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Closs et al. (2022) opine that learning surroundings, including adequate lighting and comfortable furniture, were essential components of the physical learning environment, suggesting that the category of the student's school had no bearing on career awareness among public secondary school pupils.

Data captured in Table 3 further shows that 53.7 per cent of the students strongly disagreed that schools embarked on serious career education for their students to ensure the students were fully aware of careers and that students were able to make decisions. The majority of the teachers (65%) disagreed with the statement. Data in Table 3 further demonstrates that 10 per cent of teachers and 12.8% of students strongly agreed with the statement. The findings resonate with Cook and Maree's (2016) findings that showed schools in underprivileged communities with career dispatch programme were under-utilising their power. A journal titled 'Career Counselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by Maree et al. (2016): South African Institutions of Higher Education at crossroads' found that several learners passed grade twelve while not having received career awareness in schools. The findings are contrasted by Kutlu and Bedel (2021), who alluded that career days were effective in reducing the unfounded beliefs of career awareness and career indecisions among the students.

Data in Table 3 shows that students (53.6%) disagreed with the statement that the school organises motivational speakers who guide them on career awareness and career paths. The teachers (50%) also disagreed strongly with the statement. A further 28.4 per cent of the students agreed with the statement, while 15 per cent of the teachers strongly agreed. The finding disagreed with a study by Achieng (2018), which revealed that the invitation of motivational speakers by career and computer teachers is the most effective strategy in influencing students' career awareness and choice of computer studies. Data captured in Table 3 further indicates that teachers in the schools did not guide nor advise the students on careers or offer alternatives to the students, as was revealed by the majority of the respondents (58% of students and 55% of the teachers) who strongly disagreed. The findings contrast with Olanrewaju et al. (2022), who indicated that some teachers encourage students to take subjects that match the aptitudes and talents they establish. In secondary schools where more emphasis is laid on academic achievement, unique students' talents may not be realised. This implies that motivational speakers have little influence on the career awareness and career decisiveness of the students.

Interviews were carried out with parents and principals to further explore school determinants affecting career awareness among students. From the excerpts;

## Excerpt 1

Researcher: What are the school determinants that influence career awareness among students in public secondary schools?

Respondent 3: *Nature of the school and type of students learners interact with, availability of mentors and teachers of career guidance*

Respondent 19: *Teachers keep students informed on careers they can pursue by guiding students on subject selection and career alternatives*

Respondent 9: *Exposure opportunities the school offers to the students and the type of professionals students interact with as they are sensitised to careers.*

Respondent 16: *Guidance from teachers and other career counsellors, as well as motivational speakers on career awareness and alternatives available.*

Respondent 2: *Little sensitisation or failure to seek services of professionals who can talk to students about careers like the universities, colleges and other institutions.*

From the interview results in excerpt 1, it is evident that school determinants influence students' career awareness, where schools offer an interaction ground for the students and teachers, peers, and other educationists to keep the students informed on available career alternatives and career qualifications. In addition, schools organise for mentors and motivational speakers to guide the students on appropriate career paths. According to a study by Koech (2016), schools are social settings that support gender-conforming behaviour, interests, and vocations. These constructs have an impact on learners' career awareness, along with themes covered in the school curriculum, instructional effectiveness, student engagement in class activities, school procedures and policies, and student learning materials. Schools, therefore, have a significant impact on student's career awareness. The knowledge about work fields, study programs, and the ensuing career path to take is typically terrifying to students (Koech, 2016). Students encounter difficulties due to ignorance when attempting to align their preferences with their academic achievement while choosing their careers.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** The purpose of this study was to establish the school determinants of career awareness among students in public secondary schools. The study established that subject combination, school career days, and the status of the school (National, Extra-County and County) had significant effects on career awareness among the students. However, most schools did not embark on serious career education, and teachers failed to guide the students on career awareness or offer career alternatives to the students.

**Recommendations:** Based on the conclusions of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations; The Ministry of Education should revise the policies concerning guidance and counselling and have a provision for career departments in schools. This will ensure that all the students and parents are sensitised on emerging trends in the career world upon enrolment in secondary schools to enable the students to set their career goals and focus on achieving them. The schools set mentorship days and career days where students can learn about the emerging trends in the career world, given the options available and qualifications as per their academic performance and achievement. This will help the students to identify the careers they qualify for and other options available for them.

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