PREDICTIVE ROLES OF SELF-ESTEEM, SCHOOL TYPE AND TRUANCY ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI NORTH, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the predictive role of self-esteem, school type, and truancy on career decision-making among 624 secondary school students (306 males, 318 females) in Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria. Participants, aged 13-18 years (M = 15.50, SD = 1.23), were drawn from five secondary schools (two public and three private): Government Boys College, Imo Girls Secondary School, Premier International School, Madonna Model Secondary School, and Noble-Star Academy. Three hypotheses were postulated and tested using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), School Truancy Questionnaire (STQ), and Career Decision Making Scale (CDMS). Multiple regression analysis revealed that self-esteem strongly and positively predicted career decision-making, while school type weakly and positively predicted career decision-making. Truancy, weakly and negatively predicted career decision-making. The findings suggest that comprehensive career development programs and interventions incorporating self-esteem enhancement, career exploration, and education on regular school attendance can help students make informed career decisions. The study recommends among other things that educators and counsellors design and implement such programs and interventions to promote self-esteem and career development among secondary school students.

Keywords: Career Decision-Making, Owerri-North, School Type, Secondary, Students, Self-Esteem, Truancy.

INTRODUCTION

Career decision-making is a dynamic process that involves several stages, from understanding one's desires and needs to selecting a career path. It is a process people go through when searching for career alternatives, comparing them, and making a choice (Gati & Levin, 2019; Kennedy, 2024). The process requires individuals to gather information about themselves, explore career options, and evaluate the fit between their characteristics and potential career paths. Career decision-making among secondary school students is a critical aspect of their future success and well-being. In Nigeria, particularly in Owerri North, Imo State, understanding the various factors that influence the career decision-making process is essential for educators, policymakers, and parents.

Self-esteem, which is an overall sense of self-worth, confidence, and value, plays a crucial role in career decision-making. According to Pignault, Rastoder, and Houssemand (2023), individuals with high self-esteem tend to have more confidence in their ability to make informed career decisions. When individuals have a positive self-image, they are more likely to take risks, explore different career options, and make decisions that align with their values and interests. The school environment can also impact students' self-esteem and career decision-making. The type of school students attends whether public or private can potentially impact their career decision-making process. Different school types may provide varying levels of career guidance and support, influencing students' career choices (Kim & Lee, 2022). For instance, private schools may offer more resources and career counselling services, giving their students an edge in career decision-making. Research has shown that students from different types of schools may have varying levels of access to career resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities (Akpochafo, 2021). The school environment and support systems can also influence students' motivation to attend classes regularly. Truancy, or school absenteeism, is another significant factor that can impact career decision-making. As described by Kennedy (2023) and Mbagwu (2021), truancy refers to skipping classes or being absent from school without consent. Students who engage in truancy may miss out on essential career guidance and counselling programs, leading to poorly informed career choices. Research has shown that truancy is associated with various negative outcomes, including poor academic achievement, limited career opportunities, and career dissatisfaction (Henry & Huizinga, 2020).

This study aims to investigate the predictive roles of self-esteem, school type, and truancy on career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Career decision making is a critical aspect of secondary school students' lives, as it determines their future academic and professional pursuits. However, many students in Nigeria, particularly in Owerri North, Imo State, face challenges in making informed career decisions. Many schools lack trained career counsellors, and students often rely on parents or peers for career advice (Kennedy, 2024; Okafor & Akpochafo, 2022). This can lead to poorly informed career choices, which can have long-term consequences for students' academic and professional success. The predictive roles of self-esteem, school type, and truancy on career decision making among secondary school students in Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria, are not well understood. Reviewed studies are mainly foreign works which may not address the challenges of career decision-making in our local context, Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria. This study will attempt to close the existing gap between foreign and local knowledge in this area.

Purpose of the Study

The study specifically aims to:

i. Determine the predictive role of self-esteem on career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri -North, Imo State.
ii. Ascertain the predictive role of school type on career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri -North, Imo State.
iii. Examine the predictive role of truancy on career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri -North, Imo State.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationships between self-esteem, school type, truancy, and career decision-making. SCCT, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), emphasizes the role of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors in shaping career development. This theory posits that individuals' career choices and decisions are influenced by their: Self-efficacy beliefs, the confidence in their ability to perform tasks and make career choices; Outcome expectations, the beliefs about the consequences of their actions; and Learning experiences, the interactions with their environment that shape their self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Relating it to the current study, Self-esteem can influence self-efficacy beliefs; with high self-esteem individuals more likely to have confidence in their ability to make career choices. School type can impact learning experiences, with different school environments providing varying levels of support, resources, and opportunities for career exploration. Truancy can negatively impact learning experiences, reducing opportunities for career exploration and development, and potentially leading to lower self-efficacy and outcome expectations. By applying SCCT, researchers and the public can understand how self-esteem, school type, and truancy influence career decision-making through their impact on these cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors.

Empirical Review

Research has consistently shown that self-esteem plays a significant role in career decision-making. A study by Wang and Li (2020) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making among 500 college students in China. Using survey-based design and structural equation modeling (SEM), the study found that self-esteem positively predicted career decision-making, with career self-efficacy mediating the relationship. Social support moderated the relationship between self-esteem and career self-efficacy.

The impact of school type on career decision-making has been explored in several studies. Example is a comparative study by Kim and Lee (2022) which examined the career decision-making abilities of 400 high school students from public and private schools in South Korea. Using a survey-based design and ANOVA, the study found that private school students had better career decision-making abilities, with career guidance and support playing a significant role in the relationship between school type and career decision-making.

Truancy has been linked to negative outcomes, including lower academic achievement and self-esteem. A longitudinal study by Henry and Huizinga (2020) investigated the relationship between truancy and career decision-making among 1,000 high school students in the United States. Using regression analysis, the study found that truancy negatively predicted career decision-making, with truant students having lower career aspirations and expectations.

Hypotheses

1. Self-Esteem will significantly predict career decision-making of Secondary School Students in Owerri- North, Imo State.
2. School Type will significantly predict career decision-making of Secondary School Students in Owerri- North, Imo State.
3. School Truancy will significantly predict career decision-making of Secondary School Students in Owerri- North, Imo State.

METHOD

Participants

The study involved 624 secondary school students (306 males, 318 females) in Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria. The participants were drawn from five secondary schools, comprising two public, and three private schools. The schools included: Government Boys College (100 males), Imo Girls Secondary School (110 females), Madonna Model Secondary School (90 males, 70 females), Premier International School (60 males, 70 females), and Noble-Star Academy (56 males, 68 females) respectively. The discrepancy in the number of selected participants from different schools is due to variations in school demographics and size, students' interest and availability and selection inclusive criteria. The participants' ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, with a mean age of 15.50 years and standard deviation of 1.23.

Instruments

Three validated and reliable instruments measuring major variables of this study were used to collect primary data. They include Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), School Truancy Questionnaire (STQ) and Career Decision Making Scale (CDMS). Socio-demographic variable- School Type (public and private) was collected as categorized in the instruments.

The RSES is a widely used, 10-item self-report measure developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 to assess global self-esteem, with a focus on overall feelings of self-worth and acceptance. It assesses both positive and negative feelings about oneself, with 5 positively worded statements (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") and 5 negatively worded statements (e.g., "At times, I think I am no good at all"). Respondents rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Items are scored from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Positively worded items are scored from "strongly agree" (4) to "strongly disagree" (1), while negatively worded items are reverse scored. (R) Denotes reverse-scored items (1=4, 2=3, 3=2, 4=1). To get the overall score, scores for all 10 items after reverse-scoring the relevant items are added up. The total score ranges from 10 to 40. Scores 30-40 represent High self-esteem, 20-29 is Moderate self-esteem and 10-19 represents Low self-esteem. The RSES has demonstrated good reliability and validity across various populations with internal consistency: High Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .77 to .88. Test-retest reliability: Strong stability over time, with correlations typically exceeding .80. To ascertain the reliability and validity of the scale for the current population, the current researcher conducted a pilot study with recruited 70 secondary school students (35 males, 35 females) from Flourish international school in Owerri North. The RSES was administered to the participants whose ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, and the data were analyzed using SPSS version 21. Cronbach's alpha for the RSES was 0.85, indicating good internal consistency reliability. The item-total correlations ranged from 0.40 to 0.70, suggesting that each item contributed to the overall scale.

STQ is a 17-item instrument developed and validated by Mbagwu, Annorzie and Ugwu (2018) to measure truanting behaviour of secondary school students. STQ is directly scored on 3-points Likert format; 3-(often), 2- (Rarely) and 1- (not at all). Sample items of the questionnaire include 'I prefer going to play centres during school hours'; my classmates make jest of me for not answering questions in class, so I prefer not to attend classes'. STQ has been reported to have an internal consistency with a Cronbanch's Alpha Reliability Coefficient of .89 and Guttman Split-Half Coefficient of .87 (Mbagwu, *et al. 2018*). In addition to content validity, construct (discriminant) validity coefficient of .60 (Mbagwu, *et al.* 2018) was obtained by correlating STQ with TABS by Omoluabi (1997) with samples of both boys and girls from secondary school. To obtain an STQ score of an individual, the

correct point of each item is added together to have a total score. The questionnaire has a mean of 44.33 which serves as the norm and standard deviation of 7.75. The items of the questionnaire are constructed in such a way that higher scores than the norm indicate school truanting behaviour while lower scores than the norm indicate non-school truanting behaviour. In a pilot study conducted with 104 female secondary school students in Aba, Mbagwu, (2021) reported a Cronbach's Alpa Coefficient of .79. With the same pilot study of recruited 70 secondary school students (35 males, 35 females) from Flourish international school in Owerri North, the current researcher reported a Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency reliability. The item-total correlations ranged from 0.30 to 0.60, suggesting that each item contributed to the overall scale.

The CDMS is a 16-item self-report instrument developed by the current researcher to assess career decision-making among secondary school students. It is specifically designed to assess an individual's level of career decision-making readiness and confidence. The scale evaluates various aspects of career decision-making, including clarity of career goals, exploration of career options, self-awareness, and confidence in decision-making. The scale was developed through a rigorous process of item generation, refinement, and validation. The development of CDMS involved generating an initial pool of items based on a comprehensive review of literature on career decision-making. The items were refined through expert feedback and pilot testing with a sample of secondary school students. The final 16-item scale was subjected to psychometric evaluation to ensure its reliability and validity. The CDMS demonstrated strong psychometric properties in a pilot study with 70 secondary school students (35 males and 35 females) from Flourish School in Owerri North. The scale showed high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85. The CDMS also demonstrated convergent validity with related construct, such as career self-efficacy ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$). The CDMS scale is rated on a 5-point Likert Format: Strongly Agree (SA) - 5 points, to Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 point. Some items are reversely scored to ensure that higher scores consistently indicate greater career decision-making readiness and confidence. Directly Scored Items include items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16: sample item is "I am confident in my ability to make career decisions" (Higher score indicates greater career decision-making readiness and confidence). Reverse-Scored Items include items 4, 6, 8, 10, 14: sample item is "I am uncertain about my career path" (Lower score indicates greater career decision-making readiness and confidence). The total score is determined by summing the responses to all 16 items. The possible range of scores is 16 to 80, Higher scores (e.g., above 48) indicate greater career decision-making readiness and confidence. Lower scores (e.g., below 48) suggest that the individual may be struggling with career decision-making. While the CDMS can be used as a single scale, it can also be divided into subscales based on the items. Potential subscales include Career Clarity (Items 1, 4, 8, 14): Assesses the individual's clarity and certainty about their career goals and path. Career Exploration (Items 3, 6, 11): Evaluates the extent to which the individual has explored various career options and is aware of job market demands. Self-Awareness (Items 5, 13): Assesses the individual's understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and skills relevant to their career. Decision-Making Confidence (Items 2, 10, 12): Evaluates the individual's confidence in their ability to make career decisions and adapt to changes. Career Planning (Items 7, 9, 15): Assesses the individual's planning and preparation for their career, including seeking advice and considering various factors. The CDMS has demonstrated reliability and validity in assessing career decision-making among secondary school students. The scale can be used by researchers, educators, and counsellors to identify students who may need support in making informed career decisions.

Procedure

The study followed a systematic procedure to ensure the collection of reliable and valid data. Five secondary schools (two public and three private) were randomly selected from Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria. The researcher visited the selected schools and met with the school administrators to discuss the purpose and objectives of the study. With granted permission, the researcher then recruited participants from each school, ensuring that the sample size was representative of the population. The researcher obtained informed consent and ascent from the participants and their parents/guardians respectively. The purpose of the study, the participants' rights, and the confidentiality of their responses were stated. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the participants during school hours. With the help of two research assistants, copies of the Questionnaire were distributed to only the participants who were randomly selected for the study. The questionnaires included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), School Truancy Questionnaire (STQ), and Career Decision Making Scale (CDMS). The collected data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The study adhered to the ethical considerations of: Institutional Approval, Informed Consent/Ascent, Confidentiality, Voluntary Participation, No harm and Respect for Participants. The researcher provided small token of appreciation (a pen) to the participants, to acknowledge their time and effort. Also, career guidance and counselling sessions were provided for the students generally to help them make informed decisions about their future careers.

Design and Statistics

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. This design allowed the researcher to collect data from participants across different schools and gender at a single point in time. The study used a three-step multiple regression analysis to examine the predictive roles of self-esteem, school type, and truancy on career decision-making. The statistical analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 21, which provided a robust and reliable platform for data analysis.

RESULTS
Table 1: Correlation of Career Decision, Self-Esteem, School Type and Truancy

Variables	Career Decision	Self-esteem	School Type	Truancy
Career Decision	2	.564	.031	-.116
Self-Esteem		1	-.064	.007
School Type			1	-.087
Truancy				1

*Note: N = 624, *p < .05*

Table 1above provides insights into the relationships between Career Decision-Making (CD), Self-Esteem (SE), School Type (ST), and Truancy (T):

CD is strongly positively correlated with SE (r-=.564; p>.001); suggesting that higher self-esteem is associated with more favorable career decisions. CD has a weak positive correlation with ST (r = .031); CD is weakly negatively correlated with T (r = -.116; p>.052); suggesting that higher school truancy is associated with less favorable career decisions. SE is weakly negatively correlated with ST (r = -.06; p>.05); SE is weakly positively correlated with T (r = .007 almost no correlation). ST is weakly negatively correlated with T (r = -.087). Weak

correlations of other variables are relatively weak, indicating smaller relationships between the variables.

Table 2: Summary **of Multiple Regression Analysis with Career Decision Making as the criterion variable**

Predictors	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	
Career Decision Making				
Step 1				
Self-Esteem	.564	.569	.569	
Step2				
School type		.068	.058	
Step3				
Truancy			-.115	
R²	.318	.323	.336	
ΔR²	.318	.005	.013	
*Δ*F	290.504	4.226	12.198	
df	1, 622	1, 621	1, 620	

*Note: N = 624, *p < .05*

The results in table 2 above shows that self-esteem significantly and positively predicted career decision (β = 0.56, t = 17.043, p < 0.001). Therefore, hypothesis one is accepted. Similarly, school type significantly and positively predicted career decision (β = 0.07, t = 2.056, p < 0.05), although the relationship is weak. Therefore, hypothesis two is accepted. Finally, truancy significantly predicted career decision (β = - 0.12, t = -3.493, p < 0.01), with a weak negative relationship. Therefore, hypothesis three is accepted as well.

Summary of Results

1. Self-esteem strongly and positively predicted career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri- North, Imo State, Nigeria.
2. School type weakly and positively predicted career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri- North, Imo State, Nigeria.
3. Truancy weakly and negatively predicted career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri- North, Imo State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the predictive roles of self-esteem, school type, and truancy on career decision-making among secondary school students in Owerri North, Imo State, Nigeria, within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

The study revealed a strong positive correlation between self-esteem and career decision-making, indicating that students with higher self-esteem tend to make more informed and confident career decisions. Self-esteem strongly and positively predicted career decision-making, highlighting the importance of self-esteem in career development. The current result is supported by other findings. A study by Abomah (2025) found a positive correlation between self-esteem and career choice among adolescents in Ghana, supporting the notion that individuals with high self-esteem tend to make more informed career decisions. Similarly, research by Pignault, Rastoder, and Houssemand (2023) found that self-esteem and self-efficacy are positively correlated with career decision-making, and psychological flourishing mediates this relationship. A study by Wang and Li (2020) in China on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making found that self-esteem positively predicted career decision-making, with career self-efficacy mediating the relationship. The current finding aligns with SCCT, which emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in career choice and development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

The study found a weak positive correlation between school type and career decision-making, indicating that students from different school types (public or private) may have slightly different career decision-making experiences. School type weakly and positively predicted career decision-making. Although the relationship is weak, the finding suggests that school type can still play a role in shaping students' career decisions. This finding is consistent with the study conducted in South Korea by Kim and Lee, (2022), the result showed that private school students had better career decision-making abilities than those in public school. This suggests that school environment and resources can influence students' career aspirations and decisions. The findings of the current study are also supported by SCCT by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), which acknowledges the role of contextual factors, such as school environment, in shaping career development.

Truancy negatively predicted career decision making with a weak correlation, indicating that students who engage in school truancy tend to have poorer career decision-making skills. The current finding is consistent with other research evidence suggesting that truancy negatively predicted career decision-making, with truant students having lower career aspirations and expectations (Henry & Huizinga, 2020). In addition, the finding is in line with SCCT by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), which suggests that individuals who lack exposure to career-related experiences and opportunities may struggle with career decision making. By attending school regularly, students can benefit from career guidance and counselling programs, which can enhance their self-efficacy beliefs and career decision-making skills.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings have several implications for theory, practice, policy and stakeholders:

- Theoretical Implications: The study's results support the SCCT framework, highlighting the importance of self-efficacy beliefs and personal agency in career development. It contributes to our understanding of the factors that influence career decision making among secondary school students, particularly in the Nigerian context.
- Practical Implications: The study's findings emphasize the need for career guidance and counselling programs in schools to support students' career development.
- Policy Implications: The study's findings inform the policymakers about the need to develop policies that can support career guidance and counselling programs in schools, particularly in secondary schools.

- Implications for Stakeholders: The study's findings can inform students about the importance of self-esteem, school attendance, and career guidance in making informed career decisions.

Limitations of the Study

- Geographical Limitation: The study was conducted in a specific region of Nigeria, Owerri North, Imo State, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries.
- Sampling Limitation: The study's sample size and demographics may not be representative of all secondary school students in Nigeria, which could impact the study's external validity.
- Limited Variables: The study focused on self-esteem, school type, and truancy as predictors of career decision making, but other variables, such as socioeconomic status, parental influence, and peer pressure, may also play a role.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Education Policy: Policymakers should develop policies that support career guidance and counselling programs in schools, particularly in secondary schools.
2. Career Guidance and Counselling Programs: Schools should implement comprehensive career guidance and counselling programs that promote self-esteem, regular school attendance, career exploration, and informed decision making.
3. Self-Esteem Enhancement: Educators and counsellors can design and implement interventions to promote self-esteem among students, which can enhance their career decision-making skills.
4. Addressing Truancy: Schools should develop strategies to address truancy, which can help students benefit from career guidance and counselling programs.
5. Teacher Training: Teachers should be trained to provide career guidance and support to students, which can help promote positive career outcomes.

Conclusion

Career decision-making is a complex process influenced by various factors, including self-esteem, school type, and truancy. This empirical review examines the predictive roles of these variables on career decision-making among secondary school students, highlighting key findings and implications for practice. The results underscore the need for interventions that promote self-esteem, provide career guidance, and address truancy in order to support students' career development. By acknowledging the role of these factors, educators and counsellors can develop targeted strategies to promote positive career outcomes for secondary school students. Future studies can expand the region and scope of studies to examine career decision-making process of secondary school students in Nigeria.

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