

School Related Challenges Affecting Career Decision-Making of Grade 12 Learners in Township Secondary Schools in Gauteng South Africa

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Abstract: The COVID -19 pandemic has highlighted various social, economic, psychological, financial, and physical challenges that learners encounter in South Africa. Learners continue to face challenges of ineffective and inaccurate career decisions when in secondary schools. This predicament makes them choose wrong careers leading to low level functioning in the later world of work. These challenges have continued to receive much attention in the media and in various policy documents. Learners continue to face challenges of ineffective and inaccurate career decisions when in secondary schools. The authors of this paper argue that one of the core functions of any education system is to prepare learners to become functional citizens who are self-sufficient in their chosen and preferred careers. We argue that one way to ensure learners' success and contribution to society is by providing them with adequate and effective career counselling. It is against this background that this study explored the school-related challenges affecting career decision-making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa. The Krumboltz Social Learning Theory of Career Development (SLTCD) served as the theoretical framework for this study. Within the interpretivist research paradigm, a qualitative multiple case study research design was adopted. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used to select 23 Grade 12 learners from six township secondary schools in Gauteng East District. Semi-structured online interviews were used to collect data and was analysed thematically. The findings indicate that schools lack the infrastructure required to provide learners with proper career guidance and education. The lack of access to career information services and incorrect subject combinations meant that learners were unable to choose appropriate career paths post Grade 12. We recommend that the Department of Basic Education prioritise the training and up skilling of designated educators to become specialised career counsellors in township secondary schools.

Keywords: School Related Challenges, Career Decision-Making, Grade 12 Learners, Township Secondary Schools

1. Introduction

Career decision-making is a process that describes or explains the decisions a person makes while deciding on a career. Additionally, it assists in identifying various elements that influence a person's career decision-making and helps them comprehend how these factors affect their career selections and choices. Making

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career decisions is a developmental process that takes into account a person's purpose both before and after retirement. Attention is given to career decision-making as a lifetime process that necessitates personal fortitude and focus (Rabie et al., 2021). According to Naidoo et al (2019), choosing a career has a huge impact on a person's life. As a result, a person's career is a key factor in determining their daily activities, standard of living, and social relationships.

As a result, choosing a career is one of the most important decisions a person will ever make. The majority of people have an affinity for or interest in particular professions or fields of work. Such desires and inclinations are created early in life and are a result of one's genetic make-up, socioeconomic level, and educational background. There are social factors that influence individuals and groups of persons as they make decisions about their careers. These factors which alter an individual's early ambitions and dreams in a positive or negative way (Naidoo et al., 2019) include aspect like labour market limits and competitive admittance to schools and various academic programs.

The Covid –19 pandemics has exacerbated the growing generational divide and made many young people feel that they are getting the short end of the stick (Maree, 2022). The nature of labour is changing all around the world. The facilitation of career counselling in schools is still being impacted by this change, which calls for new and unconventional methods (Jackel-Viser et al., 2021) of empowering learners to be incorporated into career counselling programmes. The priority in low- and middle-income nations is to guarantee that all inhabitants have access to employment and that appropriate standards of living are provided, including enough nourishment, housing, education, and healthcare (Bourke et al., 2021). This does not appear to be the case, however, as some nations, notably South Africa, have been unable to satisfy these minimum standards as a result of significant economic and societal issues (Pillay, 2021). To overcome the current obstacles that keep many South Africans from attaining the above-mentioned basic standard of living, factors including quality education, well-resourced schools, and career information services are required. Many young black South African learners were denied access to counselling and guidance on the choice of careers and the necessary preparations to make such decisions in secondary school because of the social structure and educational system that prevailed during the apartheid era (Pillay, 2021).

Many black South African learners are still left without any help or support from the educational system when it comes to choosing subjects for the last stage of secondary school. Additionally, some parents are ill-equipped to adequately counsel their children on their future options because they, too, had not received enough education in the past due to their poor awareness of the current curriculum and accessible disciplines at the school (Albien, 2018). These are ongoing challenges that many young people in South Africa are currently facing. Furthermore, it is critical to remember that high school learners are still in their adolescent developmental stage. The primary task of cultivating their sense of identity starts to take shape at this point. Additionally, this is the time when the young person starts to consider the roles and alternatives available to them in the world of work and decides which vocations best fit who they are. Therefore, it is crucial that young people have access to high-quality education and career services (Ajayi et al, 2022).

Significant differences in the calibre and availability of career information services in South Africa are highlighted by Stead and Watson (2017). The politics, economy, and prevailing social conditions in South

Africa have significantly changed the character and format of career development. Therefore, it is imperative that emphasis be focused on bridging these gaps by providing the essential data and resources on career-related subjects (Rudman, 2021). While the Life Orientation curriculum exposes South African teenagers to some of this vocation -related knowledge, there may not be much overlap between the program's content and the actual career and income-generating alternatives available to them during this moment of modernization (Modiba & Sefotho, 2019).

The assumption is that many learners in South African township schools lack adequate information about career opportunities, so their decisions are heavily influenced by what they believe to be the ideal profession, the subjects they choose for Grade 10 in secondary school, and other factors that may have school-related influences. Additionally, South Africa has very little literature on the subject of research on learners' career decisions, particularly those from township schools. As a result, the aim of this study was to investigate how the challenges with school were affecting the career choices of Grade 12¹ learners at township secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Krumboltz Social Learning Theory of Career Development (SLTCD) served as the theoretical framework for this study, which seeks to describe individual behaviour in relation to the social environment and the manner in which they acquire knowledge, and behave within a particular social environment (Brown, 2011). The career development increases learners' perception of the career choices to be made and the preparation that sustains these choices. Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory of career decision-making is regarded as a crucial development for career decision-making theory as it initiated the idea of career decision-making and founded a conceptual framework for comprehending individual career decision making at various periods in their life (Savickas, 1999).

Therefore, Krumboltz adopted a social learning method that concentrated on the four main factors that influence people's career decisions (Patton & McMahon, 2014). These influences include; individual characteristics, environmental circumstances, the connection between skills and professional tasks, and career learning experiences. The social learning theory of career decision-making further highlighted the relationship between a person's ideas and environment, how these affects how people approach learning new abilities, and how this eventually affects people's goals and behaviours. For instance, a learner may aspire to become a medical doctor, however, the lack of financial support or inadequate career guidance and career information may affect the learner's choice of career. Consequently, we see the goals of this framework as broad concepts that are most appropriate for examining the challenges that learners in Grade 12 face when choosing their careers.

As previously mentioned, Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory of career decision-making is a helpful framework for comprehending how people choose careers and demonstrates how this knowledge can be applied to assist people in coming up with career alternatives and making sensible career decisions in a

¹ Grade 12 learners are those individuals who are at the final stage of their Secondary School education, this is classified at level four on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as described by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Act 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995).

variety of situations (Watts, 1996). Consequently, the social learning theory of career decision making provided the lens through which to view the school-related challenges affecting career decision making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa. The literature reviewed for this study is presented in the next section.

3. Literature Review

Many of the challenges previously experienced by school children and university students have been made more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic and its damaging and disruptive effects on children's physical, emotional, and instinctual welfare in general (Maree, 2022). The pandemic has had significant short-term negative psycho-educational and psychosocial consequences and may potentially endanger the long and medium-term futures of many learners. Some of the school related challenges affecting Grade 12 learners in township schools are discussed below.

3.1 Career Information Services in Schools

Career information is the information that is used to plan and manage one's own professional career. Planning a professional strategy is aided by career information. Additionally, it is the information about the working environment, such as educational, occupational, and psychosocial data, that can be helpful in the process of career decision making (Sultana, 2017).

Learners must be well-informed about the options available as well as the ways in which the workplace is changing in order for them to be prepared for the labour market and the world of work. Furthermore, they require education and training to make connections between their identities and ideal occupations. When career education is successful, it will be able to effectively support a person's transition from secondary school to college or from school to the workplace (Gutentag & Shimoni, 2022). Learners frequently need to be given constructive and helpful knowledge regarding the career options that are accessible through vocational exams and career counselling (Sultana, 2017).

In today's knowledge-based economy, where there is a greater need for people with the appropriate skills in the appropriate occupations, choosing a career is extremely important (Gutentag & Shimoni, 2022; Modiba & Sefotho, 2019). However, there is a significant mismatch between the skills that the economy needs and those that are accessible on the labour market in South Africa (Singh, 2016). Mathibedi (2016) claims that one of the numerous causes of the skills gap in the nation is the lack of access to career information during the decision-making process. Despite the poor employment prospects in their chosen fields, the majority of young people continue to select careers without the appropriate information (Nong, 2016). According to studies, the majority of South African youth do not access career information (Modiba, 2017; Meilhone, 2016). When it comes to organising, thinking about, and giving young people information about careers and the labour market, the nation has a history of disintegration (Singh, 2016). Most people's career decision-making is likely to be difficult due to a lack of career information in this area (Amani, 2013; Sultana, 2017).

There is still a clear paucity of knowledge available to learners in many rural parts of South Africa (Sathekge, 2014). Teachers who lack the necessary training are frequently employed in these remote schools to teach the life orientation (LO) subject, which includes career information (Gama, 2015). In an

effort to address the difficulties brought on by the apartheid educational system, LO was incorporated into the South African curriculum in 1997. (Weiten et al., 2016; Miles, 2015). The fundamental goal of the course is to help the learner become more aware of themselves and their environments. LO comprises behaviours that demonstrate good citizenship, lead healthy, productive lives, engage in social activities, engage in physical activity, and make career decisions that aim to prepare learners for a successful life in circumstances that are rapidly changing (Amani, 2013, 2016; Francis, 2014). LO teachers also give learners career counselling in an effort to assist them in making career decisions (Modiba & Sefotho, 2019; Carelse, 2017; Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). However, it has been discovered that the majority of learners, especially those from rural areas, still finish Grade 12 with little knowledge of careers (van der Kuil, 2018). In essence, the lack of adequate professional knowledge and assistance causes the majority of these learners to feel anxious and confused while making career decisions (Pesch, 2014; Okpokodu, 2012). In the end, many of these students' confidence in their ability to make wise career decisions is impacted by lack of career information (Francis, 2014).

3.2 Learner Subject Choices in Grade 10

The subjects that learners select for the last year of secondary school are crucial for an advancement and transition that is at least somewhat meaningful (Naidoo et al., 2019). It is crucial that learners are kept aware of their environments from a young age and grade, and given the opportunity to select the proper or appropriate subjects before making a career option.

When choosing their subjects for Grades 10 through 12, learners in Grade 9 face a crucial career milestone (Streicher, 2021). The learners simultaneously gain self-knowledge and start to form their self-concept and sense of identity as they learn about the changing nature of the workplace and the many career options open to them. The supply of sufficient information, career assessments and testing, career counselling, career guidance, and curricular interventions are just a few of the key elements of successful career education. Having access to these crucial components would eventually enable the learners to make choices that are consistent with their values and future goals (Mojapelo, 2016).

Every South African learner in Grade 9 is in a crucial year of their secondary education. They should begin considering potential careers in Grade 9. The options available to them at their school starting in Grade 10 will also influence their decision. After choosing subject in Grade 10, learners should have a clear idea of the career they want to follow when they complete Grade 12 (DBE, 2015). The kind of career path that learners pursue after they complete high school may depend on the subject, they choose in Grade 9. In other words, learners' risk being denied admission to specific higher or further education programmes if they do not choose the right combination of subjects. Therefore, learners should think about their post-school options before selecting this crucial subject. According to the Department of Basic Education (2015) the subjects that learners choose when they enter Grade 10 must be related to the field of study in which they are interested in pursuing a future career. They will also need to perform at a specific level in a number of subjects because each direction or field of study has its own set of entry requirements. For instance, several qualifications call for strong performance in mathematics. To ensure that learners start working very hard in all of their disciplines at the start of the year, each course of study will require learners to succeed at a certain level. It is essential that the learner selects subjects that are suitable for the

career path they want to take and that they make an effort to keep their options open because their goals could change over time (DBE, 2015).

3.3 Career Guidance and Counselling in Schools

Decisions about one's career might have broad, long-lasting effects that are not always clear-cut (Kanyane, 2020). In most cases, the situation in which career selections are made is complicated, many people need assistance in considering alternatives and balancing the drawbacks of various options (Kanyane, 2020). Career guidance has been severely underfunded in South Africa's educational system, especially in schools located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods without access to adequate resources (Albien, 2018). It is now more crucial than ever that all South African secondary school learners have access to career counselling (Pillay, 2021). Adolescents frequently turn to career counselling and evaluation to help them make educated career decisions, typically beginning with the subject choices they must choose in Grade 9 in order to attend secondary school (Maree, 2020). Nonetheless, in South Africa, access to career counselling and assessment is not set up in a way that is advantageous to all residents; instead, it is mainly provided through private practise, which limits it to people who can afford these kinds of services. This is primarily owing to South Africa's history, which saw the country's grand plan of apartheid impede career growth for several population groups (Albien, 2018). This is recognised as a legacy of apartheid that has to be addressed by the career counselling profession in South Africa, along with a number of other problems that are still prevalent throughout this stage of South Africa's development (Rudman, 2021).

A variety of procedures are included in career counselling in order to help people make educated decisions and transitions regarding their professional, educational, and personal growth (Rabie, 2021). The purpose of guidance and counselling services is to help every student at educational institutions to benefit most from their education and reach their full potential (Naidoo et al., 2019; Modiba, 2017). Additionally, it fosters self-assurance and positive attitudes, provides fulfilment, and fosters a desire for lifelong learning (Maree, 2020). Countries require residents who can utilise their skills to the fullest and choose careers that will keep them engaged and productive (Pillay, 2020; Maree, 2020).

Career guidance is intended to help learners know themselves and is designed to provide specialised assistance with educational, vocational, emotional, and personal social decisions in a complex and contemporary world, whereas subject selection heavily influences the choices that learners have to make regarding careers from high schools (Kanyane, 2020). It evaluates their eligibility for various professions and educational prospects, investigates options they may not have previously considered, and engages in responsible career decision-making (Sultana, 2017; Nhlapo, 2013). In Nigeria, career counselling helped young people choose the appropriate path in a variety of subject areas (Omoni, 2013). In Malawi, career counselling was implemented in the hopes that it would assist students in reducing their personal confusion (Maluwa-Banda, 1998). According to Chireshe (2012), career counselling sessions are now taught in schools in nations like Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Few students, however, are prepared to choose the combination of classes that will best prepare them for success after leaving secondary schools (Chireshe, 2012).

3.4 Learners' Personality and Career Interests

Personality type is a mental classification of different kinds of people, occasionally characterised by the latter showing a minor categorization of the features of the person (Edwards & Quinter, 2011). Career interest is a person's preference for particular job duties and work environments. Having a clear understanding of one's career interests enables one to make better informed and logical career decisions. Many secondary school learners believe that due of their personality traits and career interests that they display among their friends while they are in school, they are destined to succeed in whatever they choose in the future (Harry, 2017). Additionally, secondary school learners may believe that given their personality, they might compete for employment opportunities in any organisation once they graduated from high school. Even still, secondary school learners, like many young adults, worry about the future, especially after they graduate. People differ in their work aspirations; some want to earn a lot of money, while others want to do anything, they can to help their neighbourhood become a safe and healthy society (Kirby & Dempster, 2018).

In an age where individual personality and interest are crucial to a career decision, particularly at a young age, the conventional approach to career decision-making entails a full awareness of the world of work (Morizot, 2017). Unquestionably, comprehending the current workplace is necessary to make a career selection in this day and age, which justifies the core idea that a person's personality and employment should match their interests. Knowledge about one's personality, hobbies, and the working world is thought to produce trustworthy career judgments (Baglama & Uzunboylu, 2017). However, due to numerous changes occurring in the workplace, individual perceptions of a profession and career development in the modern age have evolved. Despite the fact that each person's career inspirations and motives may be similar, each person's personality and interests when it comes to choosing a vocation usually vary (Morizot, 2017).

The choice of a career may be significantly influenced by a person's personality and interests. According to Albien (2018), personality is a crucial concept that affects career decisions greatly. Additionally, learners should develop an active personality type to identify their job potentials early in life and avoid delaying possibilities until it is too late to take action. To form the right opinion about their career prospects, people should have a deeper awareness of their personalities (Albien, 2018). A study on personality types and interests in Kenya came to the conclusion that personality types and interests are a factor that affects many learners' career decisions, however a study of a similar nature conducted in South Africa indicated that financial factors affect learners' career decisions (Abrahams et al., 2015). Similar findings were made by Kazi and Akhlaq (2017), who found that learners' enthusiasm in a subject will gradually lead to better test scores and, ultimately, a decision to pursue a career in that field. Individual choice and personality have a role in how they decide on a career (Kemboi et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have been done on the factors influencing learners' career choices, but none of them take into account the challenges with schooling that Grade 12 learners face while choosing their post-secondary career pathways (Rabie et al., 2021; Maree, 2020; Sultana, 2017). In addition, the majority of the examined studies are mostly quantitative in nature, failing to thoroughly explore the difficulties faced by students as they relate to their academic experiences, which affects how they choose their careers. In

order to close this gap in our understanding of the challenges affecting Grade 12 learners in their academic lives, this study was conducted.

4. Methods

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that intends to comprehend and characterise a phenomenon's fundamental elements. The methodology examines human experience in daily life while putting aside the researchers' prior notions about the phenomenon (Bliss, 2016). We employed a phenomenological research approach for this study because it allowed us to analyze the day-to-day experiences of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in relation to the challenges they encountered when choosing a career (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Furthermore, phenomenological research design aims to learn more about how people interpret their experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

720 Grade 12 learners from the Gauteng East district, Gauteng, South Africa, made up the population. Due to population-specific examining challenges encountered by Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools during their career decision-making process, the participants were chosen using convenience and purposive sample techniques. Six township secondary schools in Gauteng East district, South Africa, produced the participants with 23 learners in Grade 12 chosen as the sample size for this study.

4.1 The Present Study

In this study, we examined the school-related challenges affecting the career decision-making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in Gauteng South Africa.

4.2 Research Question

The question that guided this study was:

What are the school-related challenges affecting the career decision-making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in Gauteng South Africa?

4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured online interviews were used to obtain data from 23 learners in six township secondary schools. The method was used because it gives the interviewer and the interviewee a balanced amount of power (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This method was appropriate for the study because it fit the social exclusion policy intended to stop the spread of Covid 19. An interview guide was utilized to direct the interview, and this strategy also allows for questioning and clarification during the interviews. The interviews were conducted online using WhatsApp or Zoom, whichever was more convenient for the participant, and each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded with the interviewee's permission. The interviews were done in English and employed open-ended questions related to challenges encountered by grade 12 learners when making career decisions.

4.4 Procedure for Data Collection

To reiterate, data was collected in six township secondary schools. The University of the Witwatersrand ethics committee and Gauteng Department of Education gave us approval to conduct this study. The researchers further sought the consent of principals from the six selected township secondary schools to access the schools. Participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that all information identifying them would be kept confidential. These learners gave their informed consent and assent for their interview responses to be used in this study. The interviews were conducted online using WhatsApp or Zoom, whichever was more convenient for the participant, and each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using a thematic approach. With the help of this method, data was coded, classified, and explained to show the challenges that learners in Grade 12 faced when choosing a career. The field notes and transcriptions of the audio recordings served as the basis for the analysis, which was guided by the research question. To maintain participant confidentiality, responses were represented by pseudonyms, such as participant 1, participant 2 and so on. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to confirm the transcriptions in order to ensure the validity and reliability of this study.

The University of the Witwatersrand ethics committee and Gauteng Department of Education gave us approval to conduct this study. Participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that all information identifying them would be kept confidential.

5. Results

In this study, we investigated the school-related challenges affecting Grade 12 learners' career decision-making in township secondary schools. Several themes emerged from the interviews conducted with Grade 12 learners, demonstrating that learners in township schools encounter numerous challenges that affect their career choices. These challenges are as follows: poor career guidance and counselling in schools; a lack of career information services; a mismatch between personality and career of interest; and insufficient knowledge of subject choices prior to Grade 10. Each of these will be discussed below.



The figure above depicts the themes that emerged from the data analysis, showing the percentages of participants from whose responses these themes emanated.

Theme 1: Poor career guidance and counselling in schools

It is crucial that learners have access to career counselling and guidance in addition to career information. The participant interviews revealed that many learners do not have a career chosen by the time they reach Grade 12 and lack advice or knowledge about the many career options. As a result, some learners make poor decisions and follow their peers. Having the appropriate assistance is especially important for learners who have no idea about the different career options they could take. Particularly in a time when learners have many more employment options than ever before. The twenty-three participants all acknowledged that they were unaware of the purpose of career guidance. This is supported by the participants who carried out all necessary research in order to amass the knowledge essential to pursue their chosen careers:

“No. I did not receive any career counselling. It’s not available at the school and I’ve never heard of it. If it were available, I could have tried it out and it could have probably been of great help. I don’t have an idea what it’s all about, maybe they could have guide me towards linking all my subjects to a career.” (Participant 2)

“No, I’ve never received any career counselling. I’ve always known what I wanted to study. I kind of did the research on my own with the help of my friend but I did most of the work myself.” (Participant 3).

The aforementioned excerpts show that there is a dearth of career guidance and counselling at one school, but participants at other schools clearly affirm that they have not received any career counselling. These

participants mentioned the advantages of working with a career guidance counsellor and explained how it might have helped them in making their career choice.

“I didn’t receive any career counselling at all but I think it would have been nice if it were available because it would have helped to boost my confidence while choosing my career and be able to make a more informed decision. It would have made making a career decision easier. I could have been able to get orientation about ability, capability and career decision on something that matches my personality towards a career, because there might be careers out there that I am not aware of but a career counsellor might have said your personality from what I’ve seen or from what you have said will match this career why not check it out and tell me what you think about it (Participant 23).”

“I’ve never received any career counselling and I’ve never attended any career expo. Yes, I think it could have helped a great deal because there will be someone to talk to about career and there could have been proper guidance in terms of the choices and options that I have (Participant 6).”

According to the interview excerpts, these participants' career decisions may have been positively affected by the presence of a career counsellor. These participants assert that rather than having a career counsellor help them choose a career, the counsellor may have helped them identify careers based on their personalities and advised them to explore the proposed careers. The fact that these learners have never received career counselling or attended a career fair is concerning. These participants recognize the benefits of career counselling and the possibility that they might have received the right advice on their career choice.

All the participants who took part in the interview agreed that their schools did not offer career counselling. But some of the participants were able to get information that helped them make their career decision. However, they continue to state that it would have been advantageous to have a professional on hand to assist and really meet in person, as shown by the following excerpts from the interviews:

“No. I didn’t. Isn’t it like somebody questioning you about your ability and your interest? There was nothing like that. I did an online questionnaire about career and it did help me with my decision because sometimes you get some information and you didn’t know about your stuff. I will like to have a career counselling with a person and not an online one because I sometimes doubt myself and 80% of me says yes and 20% says no, so I would appreciate it if there is someone at the school, I could talk to about my career decision (Participant 4).”

“The teaching assistant for Life orientation talked to us about career. We were able to ask questions, though it was in the classroom and not one on one, so everybody in class on that day participated so I asked her what she was doing and she said she’s an IT specialist and then I asked her more questions and she showed me what I can do at the university and I said this one seems interesting and she said she will guide me on how to apply and what to

look at and how to find specific bursary and she also did that with other learners as well. This process assisted me with what I need and I have applied to study at the university (Participant 7).”

The majority of these learners are between 17 and 18 years old, and they would have appreciated the opportunity to share their views and thoughts about their choice with someone more knowledgeable. The participants emphasised that speaking with a counsellor face-to-face rather than online would be helpful as they are unsure of whether they have chosen the right choice.

Some of the participants noted that they had no idea what they want to accomplish in the future or where they should concentrate their efforts in terms of a career choice. Through career counselling, they felt that they would be assisted to select a profession that would enable them to follow their passions and realise their life's purpose. The learners in this study had more difficulty evaluating career counselling on a personal level because of their social backgrounds. The following quotes illustrate this:

“No. I received no career counselling. It could have helped certain learners if there is anything like that; it's very rare to find learners who knows what they are doing, some learners are double minded they say let me do this or let me do that, so career counselling can help learners who are struggling with the career that they want to do but with certain learners they really know what they want to do (Participant 9).”

“I did not receive any career counselling and I had no knowledge of career counselling. If this had been there earlier, it would have been helpful if someone was there to talk to about career. There are some of my peers who are saying next year I am going to be doing tourism, History and Geography at the same time they want to be a doctor, it is complicated. They don't really know, so if they had the privilege of a career counselling they would have known and be better (Participant 10).”

It was evident from the aforementioned quotes that some of these learners required expert advice and assistance in order to make respectable career options. When learners are in Grade 10, they are obliged to select the subjects they will study until Grade 12. If they are not advised to select the appropriate subjects that will enable them choose a successful career, they will select subjects that will restrict their career options, which will leave them with limited career options. As early as Grade 10, teachers must guide learners to choose subjects based on their Grade 9 performance in the absence of a career guidance counsellor.

Due to a lack of professional career counselling and support, learners in underprivileged communities often receive career guidance from well-meaning people who base their suggestions on their own experiences without considering the learner's interests and aptitudes. Nevertheless, some of these learners get support that helps them develop their particular talents and passions. Well-intentioned people believe they are helping, yet they lack the necessary credentials. The excerpts below illustrate this:

“Professional no, only from my sister, it was very much like conversation but very educational because she showed me other careers that are related to the subjects that I am doing besides engineering, nursing and the other normal ones. Careers that I didn't even

think of, which made me to think out of the box then she advised me to have a second and third choice in case many people choose the same course and the institutions are full then I can change into my second choice for that year while I wait for space in Radiology. If there had been someone like a career counsellor to talk to at school it would have been different because I would have been able to know earlier and prepare myself for the career. It would have reduced the level of my struggling (Participant 12).”

“No. I’m not sure if Life Orientation teacher do serve the purpose of a career counsellor, if they do then it will be that I did receive a career counselling because Life Orientation teachers that I had in the past have been there. I wouldn’t say a one-on-one session kind of thing but the class in its entirety, the teacher will give us advice, question us about what we want to do and give us advice. It was not an issue of trying to impose ideas, it was an issue of trying to talk us through and clarifying things about what we can do and what is out there for us to pursue (Participant 13).”

“No, except for my Life Orientation teacher at Grade 10 when we wanted to choose subjects. It would have been nice if there was someone to talk to about career (Participant 14).”

Participants' Life Orientation teachers clearly provided guidance and clarified matters without attempting to impose their own opinions, but there was never any one-on-one consultation. However, it is obvious that not all learners have the ability to express their ideas or request help in front of the entire class. Most learners do not have the courage to express themselves in front of other learners without being embarrassed in front of the class. Thus, these learners would need to be provided with the opportunity to consult with their teachers on an individual basis.

It is highly challenging for learners to not have access to a career counsellor since this could help them choose an appropriate career. Participants felt that if there had been a career expert present, they could have asked questions about the occupations they were interested in. Participants raised the point that learners would benefit from having a career counsellor at school. This professional counsellor would be able to advise and mentor learners as well as educate them about the various career options that they may choose from based on their subject preferences. Learning the necessary information about the numerous career options would help learners make more informed career decisions. The excerpts below demonstrate this:

“No, I didn’t. It would have made a difference if there was a career counsellor, I could have asked questions and be more informed about this career that I have chosen. Sometimes it feels like I only know the fun part but have no idea about the hardship and challenges in the profession. It would have been good to get someone to ask about the positive and the negative aspect of the career if any (Participant 15).”

“It would have been helpful and useful if there were any professional counsellor at the school which learners could talk to, I would have gotten more information from someone who is professional I might even have more information regarding different careers that

relate to the stream that I am doing before making my career decision. It would have been useful for other learners too, for them to make an informed decision regarding their career choices (Participant 16).”

“It would have helped definitely if there were someone in the school like a professional person to talk to because some learners do not have access to the internet, so they wouldn’t be able to get necessary information about their career choice. Having someone like that would help a lot of learners in choosing their career and working extra hard on their school work to know where to focus on (Participant 17).”

“No, I did not receive any career counselling while making my career decision. If there is someone like that at the school that learners can walk up to, to discuss their career, their strength and weaknesses would have made a lot of differences because learners will not struggle to decide on which career to choose based on the stream that they are doing at school (Participant 18).”

The fact that none of the participants who responded to this question had received any career counselling is quite discouraging, and raises the question of why there aren't any career counsellors in the schools. All of the learners who took part in the study claimed that because their schools lacked career counsellors, they were left to select options without any advice. The learners felt that if there had been a career counsellor, they could have gone for advice to obtain and information that could have helped them choose the right vocation.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of career counsellors in schools, particularly in those located in underprivileged communities. Many of the learners who reside in these neighbourhoods are from dysfunctional homes without parental support. Additionally, some parents who are single parents are unable to afford to pay for their children to continue their education. Therefore, these students require the help and advice of a career counsellor to discuss their options for a career path. The theme on career information services is discussed next.

Theme 2: A Lack of Career information services

Schools have a responsibility to offer career information services. In accordance with their results and the stream they have been in since Grade 10, this service informs learners about the numerous vocations they may choose to follow after Grade 12. The participant interviews suggested that learners were unable to make appropriate career choice due to the lack of a career information service. As several of the participants remarked, those who have the means to do so have already made up their minds about the careers they want to pursue.

“I didn’t have much information on the career that I chose and I didn’t have any role model to look up to that okay this is someone I can ask questions when I have a problem. So, I made research and I found that I don’t have to be in a field where I deal with blood so I chose to go for internal medicine (Participant 6).”

“But there is a website I got that have something like that, I answered questions about my ability, my interest, my weaknesses such stuffs and they gave me result on some careers that I can choose from and the reason was about competence, it stated that I’m interested in computer stuff (Participant 4).”

“I just did research by myself to know what the subjects that I need are and how I must perform for me to be accepted into the programme (Participant 17).”

The above extracts revealed how some of the participants showed ingenuity by visiting a website that assisted them in identifying their talents and pointed them in the direction of possible careers. However, the majority of learners lack the technological skills necessary to conduct searches. If the school offered the service, learners would have easy access to the information. Of the twenty-three participants, eighteen claimed to know nothing about their intended career. Schools must offer these career information programmes, especially to learners from underprivileged backgrounds. Learners who can use Google may be able to find the information they need on the various occupations accessible. Sometimes, depending on the career information they got, learners have found a certain career that interests them, which makes choosing a career route easier for them.

Theme 3: A Mismatch between personality and career of interest

A person must be able to match their personality and interests while choosing a career, but the outcome can be terrible if these two important factors are disregarded. A person could select the incorrect career, which would cause them to feel frustrated and unhappy in their work (Kemboi et al., 2016). Many learners do not know what career path to pursue by the time they reach Grade 12. Without taking into account a career that is not well matched with the person's personality type, some people pursue a career that their parents have chosen for them; others choose a career out of status; yet others opt to follow their friends. invigorated

The results of this study showed that participants' personalities pose a barrier since they worry about their personalities and their preferred careers. P7, P11, and P13 all stated that they are unsure whether their personality qualities are suitable with the careers they have chosen.

The following extracts from learners' interviews highlight the conundrum that some learners experience:

“The challenge is my personality and the chosen career, will I be able to talk because I feel like I am shy to talk sometimes, so I was wondering if I will be able to stand in front of people to speak, even though I like arguing (Participant 11).”

“I will say I had to first understand myself, which is a challenge because sometimes I was sceptical about certain things. In all of these, I am not sure about my chosen career and my personality, I sometimes ask myself if I will be able to manage with my personality, this seems like a big challenge to me. (Participant 13).”

What is clear from these learners' statements is that if career counselling had been offered, these learners would have been led in the appropriate direction when choosing a vocation, one that was compatible with

their personality types. To determine whether a participant's personality and the career they are considering are compatible, personality traits would have been assessed.

If a learner has not made up their mind about a career or is not certain of their future outcomes, they will face challenges. There are several challenges that learners face when choosing a career, especially those learners who have not made a decision about their career after Grade 12. When learners lack direction and guidance and are unsure whether their academic scores and personality traits would allow them to pursue a career including occupations that would be fascinating, fulfilling, and financially rewarding, it becomes difficult. As a result, learners have few options and pick the wrong career. The next theme is inadequate knowledge of subject choices prior to grade 10.

Theme 4: Insufficient Knowledge of Subject Choices Prior to Grade 10

Prior to beginning Grade 10, learners must select a stream that includes the subjects they will study until Grade 12. The study's findings showed that learners are unaware of the variety of subject options available to them in Grade 10 because they have not been given any assistance in making that decision. In addition, a lot of learners pick the wrong subjects and suffer mightily with those areas. Majority of the participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P14, P18, P21, and P22) stated that they found it challenging to understand and make the connection between their subject and their future careers because they did not receive adequate direction and guidance regarding which subjects to choose in Grade 10. Some learners are compelled to select subjects that they do not wish to take. Participants in one particular school said that, learners are graded according to their Grade 9 results, and those who performed poorly are made to take subjects that would prevent them from pursuing higher education. However, if these learners had received vocational counselling, they would not be in this unfortunate circumstance. The excerpts that follow demonstrates this:

“I did not know until Grade 10 when we wanted to choose our subjects (stream) and they did not tell us about different careers (participant 14).”

“At first, I was doing Sciences but looking at my marks, it was not that good, I realised that I cannot do Science and pass the way I will want to because I was kind of lazy then I thought let me leave now to choose another stream, then I chose the one that I am doing now which is Economics and tourism (Participant 18). “

“With the first stream that I chose, I went through a lot of things and depression and said to myself, hey I’m failing, and maybe I will fail at everything in my life. Once that happened, I said to myself that I need to find something which I’m good at, the art thing I felt I can learn it and really master it. Then I found out that I am gifted in Art, writing poetry and doing Artistic work (Participant 17).”

“I also knew that since I’m interested in trading the financial market and also analysing stuff, why don’t I focus on school work that relates to accounting and stuffs for now and then study to become a financial analyst (Participant 12).”

The excerpt from above supports the earlier discussion. For learners to choose the best subjects, they must have access to professional career assistance and counselling. Many learners select the inappropriate subjects through Grade 12, where they ultimately fail. If learners have access to a career counsellor, the guidance they would receive would help them make the best subject decisions, which would then point them in the direction of a viable career.

The challenge of not knowing which subject combination to take in order to follow their planned careers was mentioned by learners as a source of dissatisfaction. It is crucial for learners to be able to select the appropriate subjects in Grade 10 when they must decide on a career so that they can align with their choice.

6. Discussion

This study investigated the school related challenges affecting career decision-making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in Gauteng South Africa. According to the findings, Grade 12 learners do not have enough access to career counselling, career information, or career guidance. In the schools where this study was conducted, the vast majority of learners concurred that they did not receive any career guidance when deciding on their careers. Additionally, the vast majority of learners are unsure of their future goals or how best to focus their efforts in terms of a career choice. Maree (2022) asserts that it is vital to facilitate both individual and group-based support while taking extra care to make sure that vulnerable learners are aware of where to go for assistance when they require it. To help learners make the best decisions for their career, Life Orientation teachers, psychologists, and school counsellors should be available to offer support, in terms of academic guidance, career counselling, and psychological support. Furthermore, constant evaluation of learners' progress and facilitation of necessary interventions has to be done as and when necessary.

According to Pillay (2020); Maila and Ross (2018), there is still a need of vocational counselling and information for learners in many rural parts of South Africa. The majority of the schools in these remote places are unable to adequately guide and educate learners as they choose their career paths. Teachers in rural schools who are in charge of Life Orientation lack the training and credentials necessary to conduct career counselling (Albien, 2018; Maree, 2020). This suggests that there is a need for career counsellors in schools who can steer learners in the proper way and give them the support they need while making career decisions. Additionally, materials that could guide learners to career information must be made available in schools. When picking a career path, having access to the appropriate information is essential since it might offer the necessary direction and information, guiding these learners to select the profession that could help them become responsible citizens.

This study also revealed that some learners lack the appropriate subject combinations, which prevents them from pursuing their intended careers. Due to this, learners with low Grade 9 results are compelled to choose particular subject combinations, which determines their fate when it comes time to select a vocation after Grade 12. This is consistent with Streicher's (2021) findings that subject selection influences a learner's future success when choosing a career. As a result, most learners with brilliant ideas are unable to pursue them because of their subject selection in Grade 10, which will reduce their chances of future success.

Individuals' personalities may influence the career path they choose to take and may even indicate whether the chosen career would bring fulfilment and happiness. Numerous studies have revealed that those who work in environments of their interests and with tasks that match their personalities are more effective, content, and successful (Lancaster et al., 1994; Etiubon et al., 2018; Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). In addition, an individual's personality characteristics influence how they choose a career. Finding a career of interests and looking for employment that fit a person's personality and beliefs are steps in the process of identifying preferences for job settings and activities. This is in line with Kemboi et al. (2016), who claim that personality type and employment choice have a substantial link. Therefore, the study suggests that career planning take into account personality type and different vocational discipline as soon as a person enrolls in secondary school.

7. Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the school related challenges affecting career decision making of grade 12 learners in township secondary school in Gauteng South Africa. This study comes to the conclusion that learners' career decisions were impacted by their lack of knowledge about the contemporary world of work. According to the study's findings, it can be said that these learners' career decisions might not have been affected had a career counsellor been present. The absence of career information services also had an influence on learners since they were unable to make informed decisions because they lacked access to resources that may have given them details on the numerous careers that were accessible. Another challenge faced by learners was the limitation of employment options due to inappropriate subject combinations. Since the majority of secondary school learners in the township lack a solid understanding of what can be accomplished with the subjects at the end of Grade 12, they cannot combine subjects in Grade 10. It was challenging for learners to determine the ideal combination of subjects that may take them in the direction of their intended goals because career counsellors were not present in township secondary schools. Consequently, we recommend that the Department of Basic Education prioritise the training and up skilling of designated educators to become specialised career counsellors in township secondary schools. Additionally, career counselling in South Africa needs to take into account the various demands of each learner in terms of their career interests and personality traits (Maree, 2020). Within this setting, dependence on assessments based on the secondary school learners' aptitude, intelligence, and personality is no longer sufficient to assist in making educated career choices (Maree, 2020). Instead, a more extensive and thorough evaluation is needed, especially in settings with limited resources, supplemented by vocational assistance and counselling (Modiba & Sefotho, 2019).

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated a modification to the data collection methodology, presented the most difficult limitation. The researchers had to switch from conducting semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews to conducting online interviews using Zoom and WhatsApp calls. Since learners choose their subject combinations in Grade 10, future research could concentrate on the factors affecting learners' career choice options in Grade 10.

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