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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' Satisfaction with Teachers' Support in Subject Selection: Evidence from Magu District, Tanzania

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Author's Contributions

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ABSTRACT

This study explored whether students' were satisfied with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools in Magu district. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data was used, with a convergent parallel design. The study involved the population of 1992 which included 1969 students, 23 head of schools. Moreover, the sample size of the study included 101 respondents comprising of 95 students, and 6 school heads. Simple random sampling was used to sample students and purposive sampling was employed to sample head of schools. Data collection instruments used included a student questionnaire and an interview for heads of schools. The results revealed that students were not satisfied by support provided by teachers especially in provision of clear information about the available subjects, information about subject pre requisites for higher education, how teachers link subject content to careers, selecting subjects according to interests and learning styles as well as information subject combination according to Education and Training Policy. The study recommended that teachers' expertise should be enhanced through ongoing professional development and establishing structured support systems like academic counseling programs and career clubs. Again, educational policies should provide a system through which students should be provided with a foundation of understanding regarding subject selection starting from primary education.

Keywords: Students' satisfaction; learning environment; educational journey; subject selection

INTRODUCTION

Subject selection is a crucial process in a student's educational journey as it plays a significant role in shaping their future career paths. The subjects chosen during secondary school can impact the opportunities available to individuals as they progress in their careers and it can have long-term implications on their future studies, career responsibilities, and job satisfaction. Moreover, choices start from primary school and continues to the secondary school. Students need to

have a dream, then study hard then choose the training, finally career. Thus, for students to have all these, they need teachers' support through guidance, formation of career clubs and orientations (Olatunde, 2015). Ultimately, these initial choices mark the beginning of a student's journey towards establishing their place in the professional world. However, the task of subject selection often brings a sense of pressure and confusion for many students. They may feel as though they are expected to plan out their entire future at an

age when they are just beginning to discover who they are, what they enjoy, and what they excel at (Sota & Agi, 2020).

In England and Wales, students aged 11-14 study a variety of subjects, such as music, math, science, and English. They then enter the GCSE process, where they choose 4 to 5 subjects and decide whether to pursue higher education or leave school (Hailat et al., 2022). In Germany, students select two or three major subjects with five lessons per week, a decision that is crucial for their career development (Dallinger et al., 2018). In Nordic countries such as Finland, Estonia, and Sweden, compulsory subjects include natural sciences, social studies, and arts education, with additional subjects like technology, language, and practical training (Hansen et al., 2019). According to Björk-Åman et al. (2021), students have the opportunity to choose subjects of interest early on in their education, allowing them to shape their career paths and personal development. Parents play a key role in guiding students' decisions on subject selections for grade 11, emphasizing the importance of timely and data-driven career advice (Choudhury, 2020).

In African countries, students' choices of subject specialization are influenced by factors such as interest, attitude, impression, and the nature of the subjects (Tsikati, 2019). Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students towards making informed choices by providing a curriculum that equips them with competitive skills. In Nigeria, the senior school education phase is a key component of the contemporary 6-3-3-4 educational system (Akintade, 2012). Teachers are required to support students in making better subject choices during this phase. Research in Kenya by Wambui et al. (2016) has shown a positive relationship between teachers' support and students' subject choices (Republic of Kenya, 2012). However, students may struggle to make optimal decisions due to a lack of relevant career information. Internal factors such as locus of control, self-assessment of ability, gender, and interest in available disciplines also play a significant role in influencing subject choices (Ikiugu et al., 2021). In Tanzania, the involvement of teachers and parents is essential in guiding students' subject selection and readiness for career choices. Interest in a subject serves as the primary motivating factor for learning, and educators are anticipated to address sustainability issues through collaborative methods (Ngussa & Rehema 2019). Students in Form III ought to select subjects aligned with their aptitudes and interests,

informed by the learning experiences gained in Form I and II, as completing secondary school represents a foundational step toward future employment opportunities (Ntawigaya 2021).

Moreover, students have the option to select optional subjects in their third year, including science, business, agricultural science, technical studies, and home economics. Students may not always independently decide on optional classes (Ndalichako & Komba, 2014). In Magu district, Form III students struggle with subject selection this has an impact on their academic performance and future job prospects (Vaghela & Matimbwa, 2019; Paschal & Mkulu, 2020). Therefore, this study seeks to explore students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools in Magu District, Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Bruner's Theory of Instruction, developed in 1967, which focuses on how people acquire knowledge and skills. The theory highlights the role of instruction in developing capabilities and emphasizes the importance of early experiences in shaping future achievements. It suggests that young minds learn through observation and reflection on their environment, and that instruction plays a key role in shaping attitudes, interests, and values. Instructors at all levels must expose learners to a variety of skills and knowledge to adapt to the constantly evolving demands of society.

The theory was relevant to this study as it explains how teachers should connect the literal meaning of the curriculum to real-life applications to enhance its relevance to learners. The theory of instruction underscores the significance of evidence-based strategies to improve student learning, emphasizing clear objectives, logical sequencing, and engaging teaching methods. By integrating information concerning subject pre requisites for higher education and how teachers link subject content to careers, this theory supports the development of subject selection according to interests and learning styles. Through exposure to successful professionals, provision of career-related information, and encouragement, teachers influence students' subject selections, facilitating informed decisions, academic success, and personal development.

Empirical Literature Review

This section presents reviewed literature that showed students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools and finally provided research gaps concerning the topic. Ali and Ullah (2021) conducted a study on the role of teachers in career guidance for secondary school students in Pakistan. The study included 3,247 high school students from the Swat district, with a sample size of 346 students. The study found that teachers are crucial in guiding students' career paths by serving as role models, identifying aspirations and abilities, helping integrate aspirations and potentials, aiding in subject selection, offering career guidance, identifying potential careers, and providing information on career requirements. The study suggested that teachers capacity for providing career guidance at the secondary level be developed and the inclusion of career guidance subjects at the secondary level may be provided.

Jackson (2020) conducted a study to determine the factors influencing career choices among secondary school students in Kenya. The research involved 300 form three and form four students, 150 teachers, and 90 parents. Data from students and parents were collected through questionnaires. The study revealed that teachers play a significant role in shaping students' career decisions. Students rely on teachers' advice as they perceive them to have expertise in various career paths and trust their guidance. It is crucial for young students to receive ongoing guidance in selecting subjects, as many may choose subjects without considering their aptitude or interest, leading to frustration later on.

In Tanzania, Ndalichako and Komba (2014) studied concerning students' subject choice in secondary schools in relation to students' ability and interests or force curriculum. The study employed qualitative methodology using multiple case study design. The study involved the sample size of 18 secondary schools which were purposively selected. Group discussion, observation and documentary review were used to collect data. The findings show that the majority of students in secondary schools preferred arts subjects because of the challenges they experienced in learning science. The reasons for students preference of particular subject included the inspiration from significant others, commitment and support provided by subject teachers, availability of teachers and relevance of subject to their daily life experiences. The study recommended that government should create a

conducive learning environment especially for community schools that will allow students to select subjects on the basis of their ability and interests. The study did not provide specific information on whether students were satisfied by support provided by teachers hence this study.

METHADODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools in Magu district. The convergent parallel design allowed for data collection from students, teachers, and school heads simultaneously, offering a thorough analysis of the subject. The study involved the population of 1992 which included 1969 students, and 23 head of schools. Moreover, the sample size of the study included 101 respondents comprising of 95 students, and 6 school heads. Percentage method used to determine the sample size. Simple random sampling was used to sample students and purposive sampling was employed to sample head of schools. Data collection instruments included questionnaires which was used was used to collect data from students and interview guide was used to head of schools. However, quantitative data was statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics with the assistance of the SPSS version 20 statistical software for social sciences. The data was conveyed using tables, frequency and percentage. Qualitative data was subjected to theme analysis by identifying recurring patterns and categorizing responses into key themes to provide a deeper understanding of the research findings. After conducting pilot study, the obtained reliability coefficient was 0.6. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed, with approvals obtained from relevant authorities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher sought to students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in selecting subjects. Information was gathered from both heads of schools and students, revealing varying opinions by students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools. The findings are presented in Table 1. The third statement inquiries about the regular communication between teachers and students regarding subject options. Only 3.1% strongly agree, while 10.9% agree. However, a significant 40.6%

disagree and 25% strongly disagree. This suggests a lack of effective communication, leading to confusion among students when making choices. Therefore, there is a clear need for improved communication methods within educational institutions. In response to the fourth statement regarding the creation of a supportive environment for students to express their subject preferences, only 3.1% strongly agreed and 6.2% agreed. Conversely, 42.2% disagreed, and 37.5% strongly disagreed. These results indicate that teachers are not effectively fostering an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their preferences, which is essential for academic engagement and personal investment in learning pathways. Additionally, Head of School C stated:

“When students excel academically, teachers often push them to pursue science subjects without considering their individual needs. This pressure stems from the competitive nature of schools, where good results are prioritized above all else. Consequently, students are compelled to choose subjects based on the

school's interests rather than their own” (Interview C, July 2024).

This suggests that teachers do not offer guidance to students in choosing subjects, instead, they impose subjects chosen by the teachers. This can result in poor performance as some students may lack interest in those subjects. According to Hwang and Kisida (2021), teacher specialization can reduce teaching effectiveness, especially when teaching students who are more likely to struggle in school. The assessment of whether teachers assist students in accessing relevant information on potential career pathways related to their chosen subjects reveals consistent trends. Only 3.1% strongly agree, with an additional 3.1% agreeing, while 41.2% disagree and 37.5% strongly disagree. This indicates a significant gap in providing students with essential career-related information. The findings highlight significant areas for improvement, including teacher training, effective communication, personalized guidance, and fostering student expression. These enhancements aim to enhance academic experience and better prepare students for future careers.

Table 1. Students' satisfaction with strategies used by teachers to support them in subject selection (n=95).

S/N	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	Teachers provide information about subject prerequisites for higher education	4(4.2)	7(7.4)	2(2.1)	52(54.7)	30(31.6)
2	Students are satisfied with how teachers link subject content to careers	1(1.1)	5(5.3)	9(9.5)	34(35.8)	46(48.4)
3	Teachers guide us to select subjects according to interests and learning styles	3(3.2)	21(21.1)	18(18.9)	39(41.1)	14(14.7)
4	Teachers provide information subject combination according to Education and Training Policy	6(6.3)	5(5.3)	4(4.2)	33(34.7)	47(49.5)

Source: Field Data (2024)

Key: SA - Strongly Agree, A - Agree, N - Neutral, D - Disagree, SD - Strongly Disagree

The low agreement rates on the statements suggest that teachers may be failing to effectively communicate options, guide based on strengths, support student expression, and provide career information. These gaps can hinder students' decision-making, motivation, and engagement in learning. Professional development is crucial to improve teachers' communication skills, support strategies, and awareness of students' academic and professional interests. Identifying and addressing these issues can empower students to make more informed decisions, leading to improved academic performance and career readiness. Teachers can

play a crucial role in motivating students to choose subjects aligned with their future goals by educating them about various career paths and their prerequisites. This encouragement from teachers can inspire students to tackle challenging subjects with enthusiasm, fostering a drive for excellence and self-improvement.

Albalawi and Nadeem (2020) highlighted the prevalence of poor communication between teachers and students, attributing it to students' underperformance in educational programs. They emphasized the importance of effective communication in enhancing student engagement

and suggested that professional development for teachers in communication strategies could help motivate students to learn. Addressing these communication gaps can empower students, improve academic performance, and enhance career readiness.

Table 1 displays students' responses regarding students' satisfaction with strategies used by teachers to support them in subject selection. The first statement assesses teachers' provision of information about subject pre requisites for higher education. A significant number, 54.7%, disagreed, with 31.6% strongly disagreeing. This indicates a notable lack of perceived support, in contrast to only 4.2% who strongly agreed and 7.4% who agreed. These findings suggest that students largely feel unsupported and that teachers may hinder students from making well-informed decisions about their education. This highlights the need for improvement in teacher engagement and strategies to support students during this crucial decision-making period.

The statement delves into students' satisfaction into with how teachers link subject content to careers. A concerning 48.4% strongly disagreed, while only 1.1% strongly agreed and 5.3% agreed. This indicates a significant lack of confidence in teachers' subject expertise. Such perceptions may lead to distrust in teachers' information, highlighting the need for professional development in subject knowledge and communication skills. The interview with the head of school also supports the need for improvement in information sharing regarding subject selection.

"Teacher expertise plays a crucial role in selecting subjects for secondary school students. However, the challenge lies in the implementation. When a teacher effectively applies their knowledge and teaching methods, students naturally become more interested in the subject" (Interview D, July 2024).

Teachers who possess a deep understanding of their subjects can greatly influence students' choices during subject selection. By demonstrating expertise and employing engaging teaching techniques, teachers can ignite students' interest and involvement in particular subjects. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize teacher training and development to improve student performance. Proficient teachers not only deliver information effectively but also inspire and encourage students, ultimately making subjects

more attractive and understandable. Educational policies should prioritize ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure they have the latest pedagogical strategies and subject matter expertise. This will create a more engaging and enriching learning environment for students. According to Ali and Ullah (2021), teachers are crucial in providing career guidance in secondary schools. They serve as role models, identify students' aspirations and abilities, assist in subject selection, and offer career guidance. Teachers should be flexible in guiding students to choose subjects that are relevant to the current job market, helping them make informed decisions.

The third statement addresses the issue of teachers' guidance to students to select subjects according to interests and learning styles. A small proportion of students agreed with this statement, indicating a more positive perception compared to previous statements. However, a significant percentage (41.1%) disagreed, with 14.7% strongly disagreeing. This suggests that the majority of students do not feel they are receiving individualized advice, which can impact their subject choices and overall satisfaction with their academic experience. This highlights the need for more personalized academic counseling.

This suggests a need for educational interventions to improve teachers' capacity to understand and support students' diverse academic interests and talents. Additionally, an interview with the head of school A revealed that:

"Many teachers lack competence in their profession and do not put in the necessary effort. Some teachers focus solely on teaching and neglect other aspects of their work, indicating a lack of interest and dedication" (Interview A, July 2024).

Many teachers lack competence and dedication, focusing only on teaching and neglecting other professional responsibilities. This behavior indicates disinterest in their work and can harm students' learning experiences. To address this issue, measures should be implemented to improve teacher accountability, offer incentives for professional development, and promote a culture of dedication and passion in the teaching profession. Jackson (2020) emphasized that teachers play a significant role in influencing students' career choices. Students often rely on the advice of their teachers, trusting in their knowledge of various career paths and their

ability to guide them. According to the theory of instruction, students learn from the examples and roles present in their environment. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to offer guidance to students to enhance their decision-making when selecting subjects.

The fourth statement addresses teachers' provision of information on subject combination according to Education and Training Policy. The survey results show that only 6.3% and 5.3% of students fully understand the requirements, while 49.5% and 34.7% are unclear. This lack of clarity can lead to students choosing subjects that do not align with their skills and career goals. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to improve communication concerning the subject combination as per students' progress in their subject interests.

The results reveal a discrepancy between general expectations about subjects' selection and actual student subject selection. Educational institutions should focus on teacher training and enhancing communication to help students make informed choices. Research suggests that teacher content knowledge does not directly affect student achievement, highlighting the need for personalized student engagement and guidance in educational decision-making. The study reveals significant gaps on how teachers support students in choosing subjects. Students feel there is a lack of effective guidance, including information on strengths and interests, and supportive environments for students to express their preferences.

Student responses indicated a lack of satisfaction and confidence in their teachers' guidance and subject knowledge. Students mentioned not receiving personal advice or clear explanations of subject requirements. This gap between student's general expectations on how teachers should guide students and student experiences highlights the need for significant improvements in teacher training, communication strategies, and individual student support.

The study's findings have important implications for the educational school heads, especially regarding the students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in public secondary schools. Students feel that the current support from educators is inadequate, leading to dissatisfaction with the guidance provided. This gap could negatively impact students' academic performance, motivation,

and future career opportunities. Urgent intervention is needed to address this issue.

To address these deficiencies, targeted professional development programs should be implemented to enhance teachers' subject-matter knowledge, communication strategies, and ability to offer personalized guidance. By providing teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to support students effectively, schools can establish a more supportive learning environment where students are empowered and well-informed in their academic decisions.

The study emphasizes the need for a supportive and student-centered educational environment. Pressure to achieve good results, as noted in interviews with school leaders, can lead to decisions that prioritize the school's interests over students. This undermines students' autonomy in making educational choices and may push them into subjects they are not suited for or interested in.

Educational policies should prioritize a balance between academic achievement and student well-being, ensuring that students' interests and strengths drive the subject selection process. This student-centered approach is expected to improve academic performance, increase student engagement, and enhance overall educational experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed shortcomings concerning students' satisfaction with support provided by teachers in subject selection in secondary schools. Teachers do not provide clear information about subject pre requisites for higher education. Teachers don't link subject content to careers. Teachers do not provide clear guidance to students' subjects' selection according to interests and learning styles. Also, teachers do not provide enough information on subject combination according to Education and Training Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended investing in ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their subject-matter expertise through seminars and workshops. Teachers should offer various types of information like curriculum, academic and career. Schools should offer the importance of careers to students through establishing structured support systems like academic counseling programs and career clubs to assist them in making informed

subject selections based on their strengths and interests. Also, schools should educate parents about their children's career paths through parents meetings. Additionally, educational policies should provide a system through which students should be provided with a foundation of understanding

regarding subject selection starting from primary education and prioritize a student-centered approach that focuses on students' needs and aspirations, ensuring they are well-prepared for academic success and future career paths.

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