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Career guidance and counselling: A bridge in reducing skills-job mismatches in Uganda?

'Did you know and purposely choose the career you are in? or did your parents decide for you?'

Executive Summary

Career guidance is key in developing relevant skills in students and pursuing the qualifications required in the job market. A significant number of young people would currently be gainfully employed had they received correct career guidance. Although the Ugandan government has made efforts to invest in career guidance and counselling through the Ministry of Education and Sports, evidenced in this brief shows there are still glaring gaps. These are in the form of lack of trained counsellors by most schools, inadequate capacity building in the provision of career guidance, poor funding, inadequate training manuals, lack of career information resulting from a disconnect between the learning institutions and industry and high student counsellor ratio. Given these challenges, this brief recommends building the capacity of teachers to deliver career guidance and counselling to students, employment of trained counsellors in schools, and a more deliberate engagement of private sector professionals and parents in the provision of career guidance and counselling.

Introduction

Career guidance is essential in guiding learners to choose skills and pursue the qualifications considered suitable in the job market search. The primary purpose of career guidance is to ensure that students have a greater awareness of the world into which they are graduating and how they can fully participate in the workforce given their acquired skills (MoES, 2004). It enables learners to integrate life skills such as adaptability, flexibility, tolerance, creativity, and problem-solving skills in their future careers. In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports established a policy in 1968 to streamline career guidance and counselling in schools (MOES, 2004). This required all schools to have dedicated time to spend on career guidance and have a full-time school counsellor. In addition, a career guidance handbook was developed in 2011 to provide basic classifications of careers to help students better understand career options, their requirements, and possible employment opportunities.

One of the most persistent criticisms of the education system in Uganda today is that it does not guide students for the job market's challenges, which has contributed to the unemployment challenge and the skills-jobs mismatches. Otwine et al. (2018) noted that quality of career guidance and counselling is wanting, a situation which is exacerbated by over-concentration on core curricula

activities. The evidence further shows that about 30 percent of the institutionally qualified graduates in Uganda cannot find jobs due to a lack of skills and qualifications (ILO 2017). Worse still, the school to work transition is a long and challenging process for young people (SWTS 2015). This is blamed on the lack of career guidance to assist learners in making career decisions that will facilitate their successful transition to the world of work. The government of Uganda has invested in career guidance and counselling at all levels of education¹. However, there are still glaring gaps in the form of inadequately trained counsellors, inadequate capacity building, poor funding, inadequate training manuals, lack of career information and a high student counsellor ratio. These hinder the provision of effective career guidance and counselling in schools, and it is still not appreciated as a bridge in reducing employment gaps as discussed in this brief.

This brief is an excerpt of a country case study for Uganda on **"Strengthening Education and Learning Systems to deliver a 4IR-Ready Workforce"** conducted by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in collaboration with the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET), Ghana. The study was based on

¹ Through infrastructure development, human resource capacity building, publication and distribution of career guidance materials.

both quantitative and qualitative research methods involving desk reviews of development literature and official documents as well as secondary data analysis backed by a purposive primary survey conducted between February to March 2020 in secondary and tertiary (BTVEs and Universities), formal and informal businesses, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, and development partners in the education sector.

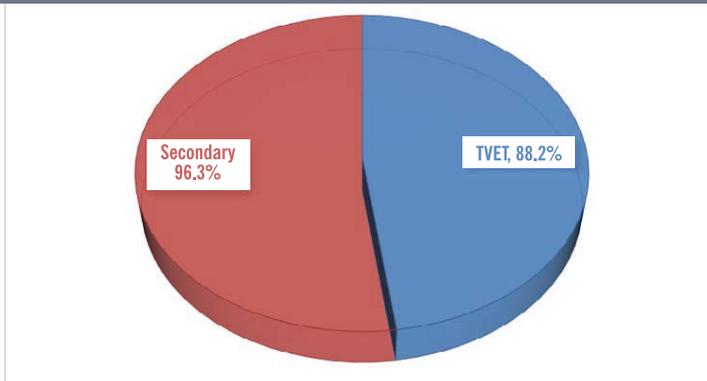
Key findings

Despite career guidance being embedded in the training systems, a lack of structures and capacity to implement school career guidance programmes has affected its quality. Over 88 percent and 96 percent of stakeholders interviewed in secondary and tertiary institutions indicated that career guidance is embedded in the training systems (Figure 1). However, the lack of structures and capacity to implement career guidance programmes in schools affects its quality. In addition, despite its relevancy, career guidance is not streamlined in many institutional programmes. Worse still, there are inadequately trained career teachers to implement it, which leaves the quality of career guidance wanting. More so, career guidance has been side-lined by over-concentration on core curricula activities intended to help students score triple ‘A’s or ‘Distinctions’, which continuously churns out graduates that cannot compete favourably in the job market.

Most education training institutions had inadequately trained counsellors. Although over 80 percent of teachers did discuss issues of careers with their learners and access to counsellors was found to be above 55 percent, and in both secondary and BTVE (Figure 2), these were not necessarily professional career guides. Most secondary schools were found to improvise with the use of senior women and male teachers and nurses to perform the tasks of a counsellor. These offer guidance based on the student’s strength rather than what is required in the labour market and students interests, abilities and values as they rely on their own experiences (personal opinion) while guiding students. For career guidance to be effective, learners need to have the correct information and exposure, which these teachers lack since they are not professional career guides. This leaves students ill-prepared for life after school and transition into the workforce, which worsens the country’s employment challenges.

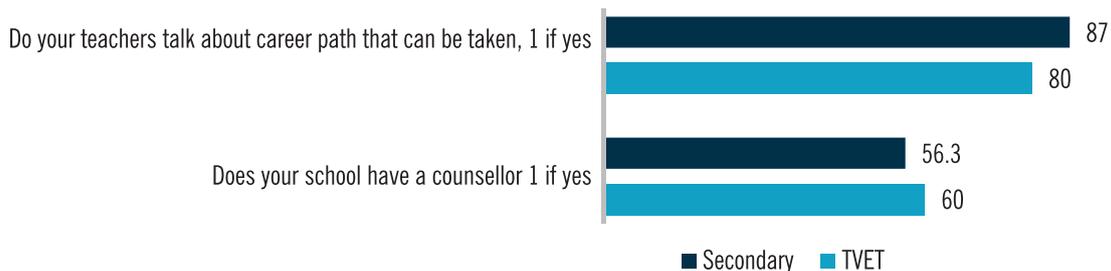
The high student counsellor ratio affects the quality of career guidance and counselling. Findings revealed that the average student-counsellor ratio is high; for instance, in lower and upper secondary schools, it was about 75:1 (Table 1). The high ratio makes it difficult for counsellors to spend significant one on one time with each student. Most guidance is thus given in large group settings on career day or career week without considering each student’s personal interests observed over a period, values, abilities, and talents. Besides, the use of senior teachers as counsellors increases their workload of teaching and interacting with students for guidance and leaves them overwhelmed, affecting the quality of their work.

Figure 1 Is career guidance embedded within the training system? %



Source: Field survey dataset, February-March, 2020

Figure 2 Access to career counsellors and career information



Field survey respondents, February-March, 2020

Table 1 Average student-counsellor ratio, %

	<5:1	5<15:1	15<35:1	35<50:1	50<75:1	>75:1	Other Specify	Total
Panel A: Secondary								
Lower Secondary	0.0	2.5	5.0	5.0	7.5	20.0	10.0	50.0
Upper Secondary	2.5	0.0	10.0	7.5	10.0	12.5	7.5	50.0
Total	2.5	2.5	15.0	12.5	17.5	32.5	17.5	100
Panel B: TVET								
Formal TVET			9.7	6.5	6.5	3.2	9.7	35.5
Non-Formal TVET			0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	6.5	9.7
Informal TVET			0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	54.8	54.8
Total			9.7	6.5	6.5	6.5	71.0	100

Source: Field survey respondents, February-March, 2020

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Uganda has clear policy frameworks and guidelines on career guidance and counselling. However, the evidence discussed in this brief reveals that the education sector generally faces many challenges that have significantly crippled the development of career guidance and counselling in schools. These are the lack of trained counsellors in most schools, inadequate capacity building geared towards providing career guidance, inferior training manuals, lack of career information, and a high student career guides/ counsellor ratio. Learners must receive career counselling in school to better prepare them to transition into the labour market and make informed career skills-job choices.

The following policy actions are recommended.

- **Build the capacity of teachers to deliver career guidance and counselling to students.** Due to a limited number of trained and qualified career counsellors in the country, short courses on career training and assessment should be given to the senior teacher who also works as counsellors to equip them with the necessary skills and information that enables them to guide students to the right career paths and provide information on the workplace environment.
- **Trained counsellors, not teacher counsellors, should be employed in schools.** There is a need to employ qualified career counsellors in schools to shape learners' perceptions of choosing a career path and direction of the future workplace environment expectations. This will help reduce the teacher's workload and provide one-on-one with learners to receive guidance based on their interests, talents, abilities, and values. This will ensure that individual students are well supported to make appropriate career decisions, which would prepare them adequately for the opportunities and challenges

associated with the world of work. However, specialised funds should be earmarked to hire trained counsellors for education institutions strategically.

- **Engage private sector professionals and parents in the provision of career guidance and counselling.** Schools should expand partnerships with professionals in the private sector to supplement the existing human resource to fill the workforce gaps in career guidance and counselling. This is because the private sector actors have the right information on the labour market and skills requirements to help learners make career decisions in the right direction.

References

ACET (forthcoming). "Strengthening Education and Learning Systems to deliver a 4IR-Ready Workforce: Uganda Case Study."

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