

***An Assessment of the Influence of Birth Order and Age on Career Preference of Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District, Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*The study assessed the influence of birth order and age on secondary school students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. Two research questions and corresponding two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of this study comprised all the 15,202 (7,068 males and 8,134 females) senior secondary school students in all the 72 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District, Nigeria. The sample size of 588 senior secondary two students (280 males and 308 females) was obtained through stratified random sampling technique, representing 15 per cent of the entire population. Instrument for data collection was adapted from Bakare's Vocational Preference Inventory. Data generated from the instrument were analysed using Chi-square statistics, which was used for testing the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that birth order has significant influence on students' career preference, while no significant influence of age on career preference was found. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend, among others, that career counsellors should design a programme of activities, targeted at various secondary school students, on birth order and career preference.*

**Keywords:** Birth, Order, age, Career, Preference

### **Introduction**

Career preference of adolescents has become an area of interest because educational planners have become aware of the dangers and frustrations suffered by some adolescents who find themselves in wrong career choice. Most students in secondary school choose career, which they regret in future. Career selection is one of the many important choices students make in determining their future plans. Such decisions might affect them throughout their lives.

Career is a chosen pursuit, a life of work or success in a profession occupied by a person throughout his/her lifetime. In other words, career is the totality of work one does in one's life time (Ipaye, 2000). Career plays a very fundamental and significant role in the life of the individual, not only because it determines the income level but because it also affects the individual's personality and concept in life. A career is the sequence of occupation in which one engages. Some persons retain or remain in the same occupation throughout their life span while others have a series of life occupations (Egbochukwu, 2013). A career could also be defined as the sum total of life experiences including paid or unpaid work, community, volunteer and family activities (Kinane, 2004). Therefore, career can be seen as a product of career preference.

Career preference may be defined as the aspect or types of work in which people show more interest and most likely pursue. It is the work people like doing or would like to do. For example, some individuals might prefer to be self-employed rather than work in public office. Egbochukwu (2013) observed that the career a person prefers is an expression of the individual's personality. According to her, the choice of career one prefers determines, to a large extent, how time will be spent, who will be chosen as friends, what attitudes and values will be adopted, where one will reside and what pattern of family living will be adopted.

Career preference is one of the most important decisions in the life of an individual. It has far-reaching implications on the individual's future in terms of lifestyle, status, income, security and job satisfaction. Although personal philosophy, achievement and self-image are important factors in career decision, the external environment is also very influential in characterising career and shaping preferences. The values that an individual holds, the successes and failures he experiences, the social class in which he has developed, and his interest, strengths and capacities are only some of the factors which would affect his preference of a career. Thus, career preference is not merely a decision of a moment but a complex and difficult process spanning years, if not a lifetime. An individual's need is one of the determining factors in career preference. Other factors include important people around him, parents, admired works, work experience and peer influence.

The current mass unemployment in Nigeria is threatening the career preference of school leavers. Secondary school students are expected to choose their careers in the senior secondary school. More often than not, they rush to their parents for guidance as to which subject and career to choose. In some other cases, they resort to careers that they heard of even when they do not have the potentials for such careers. This seems to be the case in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District, Nigeria.

During a counselling practicum in the study area, the researchers, on interviewing some students on their career preference, noted that most of the students preferred engineering courses such as Petro-chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and similar others in order to work in Exxon-Mobil as a leading oil company in the Senatorial District. Many others preferred their parents' jobs, while many others were confused over their preferred career. Very few of the students considered their skills, abilities, interests and basic requirements that can make them fit into any career. This situation of wrong career preference often leads these sets of students to drop out of tertiary institutions for not being able to cope with their courses. And those who manage to finish may discover that they were making wrong choices because the work will not be available for them due to their incompetency during interviews.

More worrisome is the fact that most of these students prefer these careers as a result of pressure from parents, peers, siblings, society and prevailing economic situation. Incidentally, these ignorant students may witness mass failure in senior secondary school certificate examinations. Majority of these students may enter those professions, which they are less likely to cope with, and later on leave the job and become frustrated. Equally, some of these students may end up causing problems in their various places of work due to incompetency occasioned by wrong career preference and may not be happy with their work. This situation would be a problem not only to the individual but also to the general public in the area of poor service delivery. In this Senatorial District, not much has been done with regards to how personal and family variables influence students in their preferred careers. This is the problem which this study sought to investigate.

By virtue of birth, a child may have limitless opportunities and privileges. Children born into smaller families may be blessed with the capacity to pursue any career due to the fact that available family resources are not shared between too many siblings. This may not be the case for children born into very large families, if the resources are limited. The limited family resources may not be sufficient to train all the children in their desired vocations. Thus, these children may be compelled to seek out occupations that require lower costs and shorter periods of training. In this way, the size of the child's family may exert a decisive influence on the child's career preference.

Adler (as cited in Bedu-Addu, 2000) was a pioneer in the study of birth order. His research suggested that the position a child had by the order of birth significantly affected the child's growth and personality. Research in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century shows even greater influence, contributing to intelligence, career choice, and, to a certain degree, success in adulthood. Being born first, last, or somewhere in the middle, by itself is not of significance. What matters is how that

birth order affects a child's treatment by parents and other siblings and how that child feels about it. Other factors also influence the child's socialisation and the parents' expectations. Birth spacing, gender, physical attributes, and being a twin also affect personality formation and the interpretation of birth order and behaviour. These factors influence how parents treat children and how each child is viewed by the other siblings.

Bedu-Addu (2000) found a relationship between birth order and occupational choice among students. According to Bedu-Addu, children who are first born and last born often have their career choices influenced by significant agents such as parents and other siblings. For instance, the author stated that it is easy for parents to decide which career a first child should aspire for, while the last child's career preference is sometimes influenced his/her senior siblings.

Van der, Siegrist and Giger (2010) stated that birth spacing changes the dynamics of strict birth order, too. According to the authors, if there is a gap of five or more years between children, each child may be treated as an only child or as a firstborn. If there is a large gap between groups of children in a large family, each group may be treated as a separate birth order family. For example, if child 1, 2 and 3 are three years apart and there is a gap of six years before child 4 is born and child 5 and 6 follow in two year intervals, then child 1, 2 and 3 form a birth order grouping of firstborn, middle, and last, and child 4, 5 and 6 form another grouping of first, middle and lastborn. The firstborn of either gender, no matter where in the sibling order the child falls, would be treated as a firstborn. According to Van der et al, if a family has two daughters, then two sons, the first daughter and the first son will be treated as firstborns. The daughter is the true firstborn, but the first son is the first child in the household to be treated with what the family perceives as maleness. Historically, this held true and usually contributed to older sisters not having a claim to inheritance because of their gender (Van der, et al, 2010).

According to Okonee (2010), firstborns often feel pressure to succeed or perform well, either by parents or through their own inner drives. They are often called on to take care of younger siblings or do chores because they are responsible. Firstborns also feel pressure to be good examples for their siblings. Some parents are quick to punish firstborns for not measuring up. Others constantly correct firstborns because they think it will help them to succeed. If firstborns cannot meet these expectations or fear that they cannot, they often become depressed and, in extreme cases resort to suicide to escape the pain they feel. Okonee (2010) further stated that parents need to realise that firstborns need not be perfect in order to succeed. They are already eager to please their parents, as such, criticism should be limited to broad strokes rather than focus on minor imperfections.

Cleland, Johnston, French and Needham (2012) stated that firstborns, when placed in leadership or mentoring roles with their younger siblings, some firstborns may demonstrate aggressive or domineering behaviour. They may supervise their brothers or sisters or lord over them. These behaviours can also transfer to the school setting, making these children uncooperative with their peers. Parents should monitor leadership behaviour to make sure these children learn to lead with kindness while respecting other people's feelings.

Many secondborns are also middle children. They often report feeling inferior to older children because they do not possess their sibling's advanced abilities. Sometimes, they are very competitive with their firstborn sibling. Others choose to focus their energies in areas different from those in which their older sibling is already established. This competition with firstborns drives secondborns and middleborns to innovation, doing or being different from their older siblings in order to make themselves stand out in the family dynamics. They are often more competent at an earlier age than their older siblings because they have had their example to follow.

As stated by Akwaji (2003), secondborns and middle children often feel invisible. Parents need to make a special effort to seek out their opinions in family discussions. Finding out what special talents or interests these children have and encouraging them through classes or events make them feel like they matter and are as important as firstborns or lastborns. All of the children in family then feel special and loved as the unique individuals they are.

As stated by Myburgh (2005), lastborns are generally considered to be the family "baby" throughout their lives. Because of nurturing from many older family members and the example of their siblings, lastborns from large families often develop strong social and coping skills and may even be able to reach some milestones earlier. As a group, they have been found to be the most successful socially and to have the highest self-esteem of all the birth positions (Myburgh, 2005). Youngest children may feel weak and helpless because they compare themselves with older siblings who are able to do more things physically and socially. They may feel that they always have more growing up to do in order to have the privileges they see their older siblings have. Some lastborns develop self-esteem problems if older siblings or parents take power away from these lastborns so that they cannot make decisions or take responsibility. Because of this powerlessness, some lastborns may be grandiose, with big plans that never work out. Some lastborns transfer this powerlessness into a personal asset by becoming the boss of the family, coyly eliciting or openly demanding their own way. Some families jump to and cater for these lastborns. Other lastborns engage in sibling rivalry because of the injustices they think they experience because they are the youngest. Some ally with firstborns against middleborns.

According to Mburza (2002), it is no surprise that many people are the third or fourth generations of their families to work in the same profession. They have an insider's glimpse into their parents' occupations, making it easier for them to break into the industry. If their parents' jobs give them great satisfaction or provide a comfortable lifestyle, children see the perks early on, and may favour these careers over others. In contrast, if parents complain about their jobs or struggle to support the family on the income their jobs provide, children are more likely to seek more fulfilling or higher-paid occupations.

Watts and Sultan (2003) noted that chronological age has influence on students' preference for a career. According to the authors, male students who are 18 years and above prefer careers that are applauded by the society such as Medicine and surgery, Engineering, Law, Aviation, among others. The authors further stated that students, especially females, who are physically more mature because of advancing age, may begin to think of other developmental tasks like marriage and childbearing. This, in turn, may significantly influence what careers the individual student may wish to pursue in order to allow room for the other desires to be actualised.

Heijden, Lange, Demerouti and Heijde (2009) conducted a study on age effects on the employability-career success relationship. This study investigated the similarity of the factor structure for self-reported versus supervisor-rated employability for two age groups of workers, and then validated a career success enhancing model of employability across the two age groups. The results confirmed a two-factor model including self-reported and supervisor-rated employability as underlying factors. Moreover, Multi-Group Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicated that for the youngsters, both self and supervisor ratings of employability related significantly to objective career success outcomes. However, for the over-forties, self-rated employability related positively to promotions throughout the career, while the supervisor ratings related negatively to overall promotions. The findings have important implications for performance appraisal practices aimed at increasing life-long employability and career success.

Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District is full of career opportunities for students as a result of the presence of oil producing and oil servicing companies in the area. The area also has students with high ambition of working with the oil companies. Parents in this area also have high expectations of their children to go to school, graduate and work with the oil companies. This and many other reasons exert pressure on the career preference of the students from this Senatorial District. It is against this background that this study was conducted to determine the influence of birth order and age on students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

## Hypotheses

- Ho1: There is no significant influence of birth order on students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.
- Ho2: There is no significant influence of age on students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

## Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all the 15,202 senior secondary school students in all the 72 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District, Nigeria in the 2015/2016 school year. Sample size of 588 senior secondary two students was obtained. The instrument used for this study was Vocational Interest Inventory (VII) developed by Bakare (1977). The data collected for this study were organised and analysed using percentage for analysis of descriptive data and chi-square was used for testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. In testing the hypotheses, the calculated chi-square values were weighed with the critical value and where the former is greater than the latter, the null hypothesis was rejected and vice-versa.

## Presentation of results

**Ho1:** There is no significant influence of birth order on students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

The analysis on the influence of birth order on students' career preference as presented in Table 1 shows a calculated chi-square-value of 89.44, which is found to be greater than the critical chi-square value of 55.8. The null hypothesis which stated that birth order has no significant influence on secondary school students' career preference was rejected, meaning that birth order significantly influence students' career preference.

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**Table 1:** Chi-square Analysis of Students' Career Preference based on Birth Order

Career Preference	Birth Order				$\chi^2_{\text{cal}}$
	First Born		Middle Born	Last Born	
	FO	FO	FO	FO	
Engineering	25 (19.34) **	17 (16.91) **	15 (11.9) **	8 (16.8) **	65
Banking	10 (8.33) **	6 (7.28) **	7 (5.14) **	5 (7.2) **	28
Journalism	4 (9.52) **	6 (8.32) **	8 (5.87) **	14 (8.27) **	32
Law	7 (13.39) **	18 (11.7) **	15 (8.03) **	5 (11.6) **	45
Medicine	19 (18.45) **	25 (16.13) **	9 (11.38) **	9 (16) **	62
Pharmacy	13 (12.5) **	15 (10.9) **	3 (7.7) **	11 (10.8) **	42      89.44*
Teaching	9 (9.52) **	11 (8.32) **	6 (5.8) **	6 (8.27) **	32
Military	7 (7.44) **	10 (6.5) **	4 (4.6) **	4 (6.46) **	25
Farming	4 (4.46) **	3 (3.9) **	1 (2.8) **	7 (3.9) **	15
Architectural Science	13 (14.6) **	15 (12.75) **	5 (9) **	16 (12.7) **	49
Business	19 (15.8) **	7 (13.8) **	9 (9.7) **	18 (13.7) **	53
Computer Science	13 (12.2) **	11 (10.7) **	5 (7.53) **	12 (10.6) **	41
Nursing	17 (13.1) **	6 (11.44) **	3 (8.08) **	18 (11.4) **	44
Aviation	6 (10.7) **	7 (9.36) **	13 (6.61) **	10 (9.3) **	36
Veterinary Medicine	9 (5.65) **	2 (4.9) **	5 (3.5) **	3 (4.9) **	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>588</b>

\*Significant at .05, df = 42;  $\chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 89.44$ ;  $\chi^2_{\text{cri}} = 55.8$ ; \*\* represents expected frequencies

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of age on students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

**Table 2:** Chi-square Analysis of Students' Career Preference based on Age

<b>Career Preference</b>	<b>13-15 Yrs FO</b>	<b>16-17 Yrs FO</b>	<b>18Yrs &amp; Above FO</b>	<b>Total</b>	$\chi^2_{cal}$
Engineering	21 (20.22)**	23 (21.9) **	21 (22.9) **	65	
Banking	8 (8.71) **	11 (9.4) **	9 (9.85) **	28	
Journalism	8 (9.95) **	10 (10.8) **	14 (11.26) **	32	
Law	13 (14) **	14 (15.2) **	18 (15.8) **	45	
Medicine	22 (19.3) **	21 (20.8) **	19 (21.8) **	62	
Pharmacy	13 (13) **	15 (14.1) **	14 (14.8) **	42	
Teaching	13 (9.95) **	12 (10.8) **	7 (11.3) **	32	
Military	8 (7.78) **	9 (8.4) **	8 (8.8) **	25	
Farming	6 (4.7) **	5 (5.1) **	4 (5.3) **	15	
Architectural Science	10 (15.2) **	16 (16.5) **	23 (17.2) **	49	
Business	18 (16.5) **	15 (17.8) **	20 (18.6) **	53	
Computer Science	13 (12.76) **	13 (13.8) **	15 (14.4) **	41	
Nursing	14 (13.69) **	15 (14.8) **	15 (15.5) **	44	
Aviation	11 (11) **	13 (12.1) **	12 (12.7) **	36	
Veterinary Medicine	5 (5.9) **	6 (6.4) **	8 (6.7) **	19	
	<b>183</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>588</b>	

\*Not Significant at .05, df = 28;  $\chi^2_{cal} = 5.62$ ;  $\chi^2_{cri} = 41.3$ ; \*\* represents expected frequencies

The result in Table 2 shows a calculated chi-square value of 5.62 and a critical chi-square value of 41.3 at .05 level of significance and 28 degree of freedom. The calculated Chi-square value is found to be less than the critical value, hence the null hypothesis, which stated that age has no significant influence on students' career preference is retained. This infers that age has no significant influence on students' career preference.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings from hypothesis one revealed a significant influence of birth order on career preference of students. The finding inferred that a student's birth position in the family has a significant influence on his/her career preference. This diversification in career preference based on birth order seems to depend on the level of family expectations from the children. Observations show that children's career choice influenced by parents reduces with subsequent births. This finding is in support of the finding of Bedu-Addu (2000) who found a relationship between birth order and occupational choice among students. According to Bedu-Addu, children who are firstborn and lastborn often have their career choices influenced by significant agents such as parents and other siblings. It is important to note that most middleborns' and last borns' career preferences are most often tie to the dictates and influences of the senior siblings and parents.

Findings from hypothesis two revealed that age has no significant influence on students' career choice. This was evidenced by the fact that all age brackets choose career almost similarly. There was no serious disparity in their preferred career. All the age groups preferred career almost at the same level. In testing the hypothesis, the calculated value was found to be less than the critical value hence the null hypothesis was retained, showing that age has no significant influence on students' career preference. This implies that age is not a strong determinant of career preference among students. This finding not being significant is not surprising to the researchers. This is because most students do not consider their age before choosing a career. Most students rather prefer career based on other variables such as parents' dictates and peer group instead of their age. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear a child of 10 years, when ask about what he/she will do in the future, telling you that he/she wants to be a lawyer. This means that there are other variables that influence career choice most but not age.

The finding is in disagreement with the finding of Tomer (2008) who observed that age of students significantly influence their career choice. According to Tomer, female students who are fast approaching adulthood often limit their career preference in response to the biological desire to rather get married immediately after secondary school and start having babies. Tomer (2008) further explained that younger female

students on the other hand may be more able to focus on their career goals as they are yet to be inundated by hormonal surges and the pressure to marry as quickly as possible. The situation may not be entirely different for boys. According to the author, young students often think about running a Business and settling down early enough. They may see some career goals as farfetched and time wasting.

## Conclusion

The study investigated the influence of birth order and age on secondary school students' career preference in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. Two research questions and corresponding two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Findings of the study revealed that birth order has significant influence on students' career preference, while no significant influence of age on career preference was found. It is therefore concluded that birth order is a significant factor to be considered while assisting the students on choice of career.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Career counsellors should design a programme of activities, targeted at secondary school students, on birth order and career preference.
2. The students should generally be encouraged to be involved in enlightenment and awareness campaigns irrespective of their age.

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