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Abstract

This study analyses how career orientations can help rural high school learners to become more self-directed and flexible in developing their careers in today's dynamic world of work. Career counsellors are needed in schools to guide the way learners subjectively make sense of their self-perceived talents and abilities. The study used a qualitative approach to obtain information about how career orientation can change the lives of rural high school learners. The purposive sampling technique was used to choose rich information from rural high school learners and teachers, councillors, and the surrounding employers/educational institutions in Waterberg District. Data analysis was done through inductive thematic data analysis where themes and categories emanated. The outcome of the study considered the fundamental aspects to develop career paths, career orientation programs, changing the mind set and the impact of career orientation in rural high schools. The product of the study will be shared with all four schools, nearby employers, and the Department of Education, Waterberg District in Limpopo province. The outcomes of the study might help in dealing with persistent educational obstacles like broader educational equity and public funding for developmental career orientation programs that face many youth and adults in rural communities. It is recommended that policy developers establish career orientation models that would benefit the livelihood of rural high schools.

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Review Article

The Career Orientation Impact in the Livelihood of Rural High School Learners: A Case of Selected High Schools Waterberg District, South Africa*

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Abstract

This study analyses how career orientations can help rural high school learners to become more self-directed and flexible in developing their careers in today's dynamic world of work. Career counsellors are needed in schools to guide the way learners subjectively make sense of their self-perceived talents and abilities. The study used a qualitative approach to obtain information about how career orientation can change the lives of rural high school learners. The purposive sampling technique was used to choose rich information from rural high school learners and teachers, councillors, and the surrounding employers/educational institutions in Waterberg District. Data analysis was done through inductive thematic data analysis where themes and categories emanated. The outcome of the study considered the fundamental aspects to develop career paths, career orientation programs, changing the mind set and the impact of career orientation in rural high schools. The product of the study will be shared with all four schools, nearby employers, and the Department of Education, Waterberg District in Limpopo province. The outcomes of the study might help in dealing with persistent educational obstacles like broader educational equity and public funding for developmental career orientation programs that face many youth and adults in rural communities. It is recommended that policy developers establish career orientation models that would benefit the livelihood of rural high schools.

Keywords: Career orientation, rural high school learners, achievement gaps, career opportunities, career counselling

1. INTRODUCTION

Career orientation deals with how individuals search the way their careers have to be directed, that is being able to choose careers according to their personality. Actually, current career orientations include different choices that assist learners to become more focussed in the direction of careers of their choice in today's dynamic world of work (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019: 280). This is to re-direct the career focus of the rural high school learners. Career orientation seeks to capture the way learners subjectively make sense of their careers. It encompasses one's talents and abilities. Fit between career orientation and employment settings lead to higher work-related outcomes. Tschopp et al. (2015: 7) examined career orientation impact on the stable and strong relationships between student turnover intention and job satisfaction.

There are new career orientations and attitudes with their demanding assessments. Dabula and Makura (2013: 89) said most of the South African learners' careers are inadvertent, and influenced by

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parents or outside people, especially rural high school learners that never receive career orientation and counselling. This is confirmed by the stampedes that occur year in year out at different universities.

1.1. Background of the Study

Career orientation is core in the curricular implemented in South Africa. It addresses socio-economic situation of the rural setting. In South African Schools, Life Orientation teachers are responsible for teaching career and career choices, but they were never trained for that (Miles, 2017: 213) stated that career orientation may prepare learners in transition from high school to tertiary institutions and working space. Baruch (2014: 2702) emphasised that contemporary careers systems are characterized by a boundary less career environment and dynamic jobs. Dabula and Makura (2013: 89) said most of the South African learners' careers are inadvertent, and influenced by parents or outside people. Especially rural high school learners, never received career orientation and counselling. This is confirmed by the stampedes that occur year in year out in different universities. In Waterberg District, the Career Exhibition Association conducts exhibitions throughout the area, inviting various schools to attend.

1.2. Problem Statement

Most of rural high school learners don't access higher institutions or job opportunities. Providing all students with effective college and career counselling services is a cornerstone (Neale-McFall & Owens 2016: 5). They are faced with lack of career orientation at schools. Some rural high school learners drop out of school before completing their matric due to lack of motivation. Basically, these learners are from poor socio economic conditions. Lack of parental interest in educational activities discourages learners' participation (Lusse et al., 2019: 201). In most of rural high schools, learners struggle to choose subjects of interest. There is lack of resources, leadership network, information exchange between schools and the voice in policy development (Association of African Universities, 2013). The appropriate career topics for rural learners should also be revised and the qualification of teachers considered. The Department of Basic Education is doing less in fortifying career orientation in the South African Curriculum. Guidance was an ancillary subject in the curriculum framework of the old Teachers' Training Colleges. It was never taken very seriously to date. Swisher and Dennison (2016) spotlighted the troubling gaps in educational opportunities between the low income learners and more affluent peers. That's why we have fewer graduates from rural communities. Most rural communities are vulnerable to education, health care, and lack of infrastructure in their villages (Weda & de Villiers, 2019: 1013). The rural teachers are conflated with a wide range of contextual variations, community amenities, geographic or professional distances, technology access. Steyn and Kamper (2015: 263) emphasised that institutions of higher education have wavered their interest in and commitment to rural teacher-learner education. The above justifies how career orientation can change the livelihood of rural high school learners

1.3. Main Research Question

Which strategies can change the livelihood of rural high school learners and empower their communities, to reach relevant career opportunities?

1.3.1. Research Sub-Questions

- What is the impact of career orientation in the livelihood of rural high school learners?
- How can career orientation change the livelihood of rural high school learners?
- Which career orientation programs are available in the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit?
- Which career orientation framework can play the most significant role in the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to fortify career orientation in rural high schools in order to create vast job opportunities. The study addressed the achievement gaps of rural high school learners and empower their communities to reach relevant career opportunities. It will consider the framework that should evaluate rural high school learners' livelihood (Chen & Chang, 2018: 1614). There is more positive impact of integrated curriculum, with career orientation. The curriculum development may bring changes in rural communities. Dodge and Weldernfael (2014:7) weighed students' perceptions of career choice and their barriers in rural high schools.

- To evaluate the impact of career orientation in the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit.
- To explore how career orientation can change the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit.
- To identify career orientation programs available in the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit.
- To draw a career orientation Framework that can play the most significant role in the livelihood of rural high school learners in Nylstroom circuit.

1.5. Rationale for the Study

Education directly influence the South African viable economy (Van der Heever et al., 2015:1). The employable population is necessary for a country's economic growth. Career patterns in South Africa remain skewed in favour of some individuals in receiving equal education and career orientation. Swisher and Dennison (2016:842) showed that students who grew in rural communities have unrealistic future. This may be because they lack career exhibitions and how to overcome the barriers their professional careers. Rural high school learners should be guided to attain their desired career (Bayat et al., 2014: 183). Rural high school learners have limited role models to consider and experience and observe failure.

1.6 Literature Review

A preliminary literature review shows that poor career opportunities is something that is disturbing in rural communities. Given the importance of supporting newly qualified teachers in rural setting, advanced training is key. There has been little improvement in rural learner performance (Du Plessis, 2019: 40). As teaching environment is the major factor in determining learner performance, the government should provide adequate financial and human resources in rural schools (Susanti et al., 2020: 2047). Active community members (SGBs) must participate in rural schools to monitor teaching and learning. Rural high schools have fewer scarce skills like Computer trainings and have fewer advanced placement offerings. DeFeo and Tran (2019:5) stated that progress has to be made to train teachers for advanced career guidance to direct learners in choosing the correct subjects for appropriate career paths (variety of gateway subjects are offered in rural schools). It takes a servant's heart and dedication to teach in rural schools (Lohmann et al., 2019: 151) The comprehensive and structured programme of partnership should expand career aiding resources and information exchange between institutions-learning as the latest wave of education (Di Giulio & Defila, 2017:630).

For rural high school learners to adapt is merely to understand the benefits of e-learning to prepare them for online classes. Tawafak et al., (2019:1) pointed out that vulnerable learners should create positive attitude and enough time to overcome challenges in e-learning. What is salient is to initiate basic courses in computer literacy for the rural high school learners (Barker & Harris, 2019: 876). The Department of Education should make provision of strong internet connections in rural high schools to enhance participation in online matters without interruptions and hindrances. Mabaso (2017: 48) emphasised that twenty first century skills development is salient for employability, economic development and globalisation.

The digital innovation in remote schools effect a great change around the community (Finnerty, 2013:103). Technology prepares rural high school learners for academic opportunities. Bjerede (2018:2) recommended personnel to be trained to deliver 21st century skills. Swisher and Dennison (2016:843) supported that connected learning is the way to go, as learners start to have interest in that. The companies market themselves to rural students, so more outreach programs, sponsoring of science and technological projects, more scholarships, and encouragement of the Department of Higher Education to provide information about, and improve career orientation officers' knowledge (Zuma et al., 2019: 29). The study generated helpful insights for organisations and practitioners to introduce modern learning environments in rural schools (Deieso & Fraser, 2019:133). What is important is to provide greater equal opportunities for all South Africans. This is spotlighting the real troubling gaps in educational opportunities between the rural learners and their affluent peers. Districts face unique challenges including funding disparities, difficulty in procuring resources in isolated areas, eg broadband internet and difficulty in retaining effective teachers. There are factors like poverty, hunger and violence that contribute to lower performance in rural high schools.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

Self-concept theory of Career Development regards effective mentoring as a valuable asset future career. Mentoring is the vehicle to nurture the novice to the right direction. Vision makes you maintain clear reflection, focus and future. Career planning should be aligned to career vision. The value of diligence and planning should be key. Kass and Miller (2018: 90) pointed out that, in order to enhance your career opportunities one must develop strength and capitalise on it. There are free and budget friendly courses online. Taking classes and embracing the spirit of continuous learning is a useful strategy to advance your career (Baruch, et al 2015:3). Rural high school learners should locate experts, leaders and likeminded individuals in your career choice and connect with them

2. METHODOLOGY

The Qualitative research method provided complex textual descriptions of people's experiences. O'Leary (2014:201) emphasised that the major objective of such an approach is to collect evidence systematically using a predefined set of procedures to answer specific questions and produce results that are hidden. It will be realistically set in various rural high schools in order to gain a deeper understanding from learners and teachers (including school management team), and councillors (Rudestam & Newton, 2015: 27). The research focuses on data collection in participants' natural contexts. Every participant, including the researcher is valued during this study. The paradigm of interpretivism revealed that human belief attribution practices are governed by rich diversity of normative standards (Curry, 2020: 905). The case study design was selected for this study and will be developed by interviewing the rural high school learners to change their mind set and identify the barricades towards studying. Akcam et al. (2018: 40) posited that a case study sinks into the activities and processes to collect different data inquiry plan.

2.1. Research Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to choose rich information. The focus group interviews were conducted in four rural high schools with one teacher of each school and one councillor of the situated schools. Ideally the interviews should be held in a location that is familiar to participants. The participants' recruitment was through permission application to Education District and Traditional House of that rural community. The small sample of four rural community leaders (population) was under cross-sectional survey to collect data. In the questionnaires and interview open, questions began with what, why, how, or describe, to elicit rich quality information.

2.2. Data Collection

The following techniques will be used to collect data: field notes (with the aid of tape recorder), focus group in-depth interviews, and face-to-face interviews.

2.2.1. Face to face interview

This method is a continuum of formality around interviewing (formal interviews, taped and transcribed) (Schaeffer, 2021:181). Eskom, Exarro, Waterberg Wildlife, and Lepalale TVET College officials were interviewed in a respectful manner and maintained boundaries at all times. The interview focussed on how rural high school learners can be assisted or enticed to their institutions/workplaces. Collaborative interaction of different stake holders can assist in sharing future options and labour market opportunities for these rural communities. In total, 13 participants were interviewed, 4 rural high school teachers, 4 community leaders (councillors), 5 surrounding employers, and 1 educational institution (Eskom = 1, Exarro = 1, Waterberg Wildlife = 1, Hotel Manager = 1, and Lepalale TVET College = 1).

2.2.2. Focus group discussion interviews

Focus groups consist of a number of individuals invited to discuss their views on the research topic (Lupton & Maslen, 2019:11481). The focus was on rural high school learners. The researcher will be asking relevant and open questions (shortlist of questions, ideas, and thoughts on the topic). Interaction is encouraged through collaboration and debate stimulation. An in-depth interview was conducted in four rural high schools with 80 learners (n = 80). It will be 40 Grade 11 learners, and 40 Grade 12 learners from four schools. There were 20 learners from each school.

2.2.3. Field notes

Data was collected in the course of qualitative research work by observing participants and their events. Notes (with the aid of tape recorder) emerged from what was seen, heard, and interpreted during the interviews and observations (Sanjek, 2019: 92). The researcher's notes will emerge from interviewing rural high school learners, teachers, councillors, and surrounding institutions. The notes were utilised to evaluate the rural high school learners' mind set for perceptions on studying and closing their achievement gap. Follow up questions strengthened the fuller version of the course.

2.4. Data Analysis

Over all, thematic content analysis (TCA) was used to analyse data in this study. For focus group interviews, qualitative data analysis was used by interviewing rural high school learners from four different schools. Developing explanatory theory and coherent conclusions based on qualitative data is key (Bazeley, 2013: 47). The face to-face interview relied on the inductive approach that condenses extensive and varied raw data into brief or summary format (Belfiore et al., 2019:160). The summary findings were transparent and justifiable. The teachers, councillors and nearby institutions were transparent on addressing the learners' challenges on finding employment. Verbatim transcription of interview data is best to accumulate raw information. Field notes looked for analysis and interpretation of verbal data for qualitative investigation.

3. FINDINGS

This study has shown that most rural high school learners do not access higher institutions or job opportunities. Providing all students with effective college and career counselling services is a cornerstone. They are faced with lack of career orientation at schools. Some rural high school learners

drop out of school before completing their matric due to lack of motivation. Basically, these learners are from poor socio-economic conditions. Lack of parental interest in educational activities discourages learners' participation. In most of rural high schools, learners struggle to choose subjects of interest. There is lack of resources, leadership network, information exchange between schools, and the voice in policy making.

3.1 Career Orientation Impact in Rural High Schools

3.1.1. Value of career orientation in rural high schools

Career orientation presented variant pathways and patterns that play powerful roles in rural high school learners' career choices. Environmental influences directly shaped the career choices of many students. Department of Higher Education has to provide information and improve career orientation officers' knowledge (Zuma, et al, 2019: 29). Most of the teachers do not have knowledge on right sizing subject streams in schools. In reference of circulars 6 of 2016, all technical subjects should be paired with maths or technical math. Career orientation will assist our learners to choose subjects they are good in. This goes with abilities and interests in the subjects and the future career.

3.1.2 Closing the achievement gaps in rural high schools

Literature shows that poor career opportunities are something that is disturbing in rural communities. Given the importance of supporting newly qualified teachers in rural setting, professional advanced training is key. There has been little improvement in rural learner performance (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019: 40). As the teaching environment is the major factor in determining learner performance, the government should provide adequate financial and human resources in rural schools. Parents do not attend meetings. School and home have to be linked through close cooperation between the schools, parents, and community. So it is imperative that teachers receive advanced career orientation.

3.1.3 Empowering rural communities

There is increasingly reliance on government grants as a source of income in rural areas. There is also high share of household income. Such communities should start practising subsistence farming to survive on their own (Sati & Song, 2018: 2). The growth in proportion of rural population living in urban areas is due to job seeking. There is expansion of urban land use and non-agricultural activities. Rural communities should secure their land to be arable. This will serve as a legacy for their vulnerable children. Rural high school learners should resort to farming as an option to be self-employed. For rural high school learners to adapt is merely to understand the benefits of e-learning to prepare them for online classes.

3.2. Fundamental Aspects to Develop a Career Path for Rural High School Learners

3.2.1 Professional teacher development

Patton et al., (2015: 26) said closing the opportunity gap starts with the opportunity gap such as professional development of teachers in technology access in the classroom. When students in high poverty rural schools have greater access to new technologies and teachers who know how to use them, academic performance in science and math tests scores can increase. The communicated teacher development process is essential for driving measurable and lasting learning for learners. They go a long way to make teachers feel valued and appreciated. By doing this, they are investing in accomplished teachers. Many states support board-certified teachers with financial incentives for working in high-need schools (rural schools).

3.2.2 Community (parent) involvement

School and home have to be linked through close cooperation between the schools, parents, and community. It is one of the keys to close the achievement gap. Parent involvement has a strong, direct impact on learner achievement. We need to communicate both strengths and weaknesses of our students to our parents. We need to familiarise them with educational policies and procedures and new educational trends that they may not be familiar with. Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016:5) agreed

that school staff is often not prepared to interact with minority parents, and as a result, teachers' and parents' notions about parental involvement are often narrow and confined to activities like attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering for classroom activities, fundraising, and helping with homework. This limited view can lead to negative judgments about parents by teachers, perpetuating a cycle of discrimination and low expectations.

3.2.3 Addressing funding disparities

Poor students see less funding in many states. Our leaders recognise the importance of education to the survival of individuals and societies in 21st century. Most policy proposals do not serve the needs of rural students and teachers. No Child Left Behind mandated that educators needed to have majored in subjects they are teaching. To many small rural schools, one teacher teaches multiple subjects. Most of lawmakers live in urban or sub-urban areas and do not care about rural schools (Culbertson & Billig, 2016:2017). Most of the rural districts are economically disadvantaged. However, these formulas vary widely both in the efficacy of their design and in the extent to which they are sufficiently funded to achieve design goals. Many state school finance systems attempt to explicitly compensate for differences in child poverty rates across districts, though few actually achieve progressive distributions of funding, wherein districts serving needier student populations actually sufficiently provide additional resources to meet their students' need.

3.2.4 Advanced career orientation

The intent of career guidance is to provide support to individuals throughout their entire lives, not only when they are trying to choose a career. The role of school career counsellors is to support vulnerable learners in choosing the correct jobs. A strengthened vocational career environment is lacking in most of the educational institutions (Hughes et al., 2015:183). Lack of teachers workshops and seminars breeds defects in career orientation among rural high school learners. The trainings and exchange of ideas among teachers and learners would improve their career aspirations.

3.2.5 Comprehensive support for schools

Collaboration between districts and rural schools has helped provide more services at low costs (online classes). Through this one teacher can provide instruction across a number of schools. The lack of economic bases and employment opportunities can lead students to develop and pursue career aspirations outside of their rural community. The limited research on college and career aspirations of rural Black students has found that these students perceived there to be more educational barriers for pursuing postsecondary education than their rural White peers. Ali and Menke (2014:175) found black, rural, male learners have lower college aspirations than their urban and suburban peers, specifically their suburban peers, regardless of socioeconomic status and academic

3.2.6 E-Learning

In a 21st century, which is characterised by the pervasive influence of technology across all spheres, e-learning in classrooms offers an uncompromising alternative form of instruction, especially in the developed world where it is rapidly becoming the mainstream method of teaching and learning in educational institutions (Kaya et al., 2023; Rosen, 2014:1). E-learning has been identified as an important feature and an innovative way of providing quality education through web-based communication, collaboration, multimedia, knowledge transfers and training, to support active learning unhindered by time and space barriers. All societies are working towards changing to become e-learning communities. It further reveals that through e-learning classrooms, learners may develop the potential skills, knowledge, and expertise to unlock the ever-changing world and become game-changers in society.

3.2.7 Vocational education

During the progress report on development of skills and vocational qualification and learning programmes, DBE said that the draft General Education and Training Certificate (GETC): Skills and Vocational Education and Training have been completed, and 26 draft learning programmes had been

developed. A draft policy framework for children and youth with profound intellectual disability had been developed. Career and technical education has to deliver the knowledge, skills, and experiences that future farmers, mechanics, manufactures, and health care workers need to be successful in the workplace. Fatoki (2014:668) affirmed that a large number of students are diverted into vocational and technical education after Grade 9, while students who advance to upper secondary schooling are channelled into tracks that align with tertiary education and training pathways. Economic needs of rural communities seek rapid transformation and equip learners for the 21st century economy.

3.2.8 Initiating partnership programs

Larson et al, (2016: 27) explained that through the introduction of new educational reforms, local leaders should meet with employers, community members, students, and educators to examine the state and regional labour market information to develop an action plan that will align programme offerings with post-secondary entrance requirements and regional labour market. The collaboration of different stakeholders has to give support services and monetary incentives to make teachers valued and appreciated. Beyond community partnership between the non-profit and private sector could be a potential approach to help meet the rural learners' career development needs.

4. CONCLUSION

South African government should to provide quality and equal education for rural high school learners living in disadvantage communities. Career orientation will help rural high school learners acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to identify options, explore alternatives, and succeed in society. It was noticeable during the research action that programmes of teaching labour market and complexity of the workplace are needed to prepare rural high school learners for the changing workplace of the 21st century. There is a large discrepancy in the livelihood between the rural and urban schools. The results of the research show that there are barriers of parental absences, poverty, educational context, and environment, and lack of role models in rural communities.

4.1. Recommendations for practice

- The government should provide career guidance and counselling training for teachers to be professional counsellors who are well equipped with career knowledge and skills. This will enable our teachers to guide learners appropriately on subject choices and career opportunities. There will also be more improvement in rural learner performance.
- The government, through its responsible ministry of education, should build enough TVET colleges for rural learners to access vocational qualifications. This will be a means for the rural high school learners to advance job opportunities.
- Career seminars and advanced career exhibitions in rural high schools need special attention since they prepare the youth who are expected to be a future work-force of the country.
- Teaching environment is the major factor in determining learner performance. The government should provide adequate financial and human resources to improve the state of teaching and learning in rural high schools.
- It is therefore crucial for Life Orientation teachers to be trained in computer technology because a lack of computer training often accounts for teachers 'low self-confidence when they need to initiate computer activities or tasks. Technology prepares rural high school learners for academic opportunities.
- Stakeholders like municipalities and corporate companies should assist in funding the rural schools to balance their livelihood. They may install Wi-Fi for schools that cannot reach connectivity. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres are key in rural communities to match urban life. This will prepare rural learners to face the outside world.

- Today, communities survive through land possession. The government should speedup land reform, Agricultural support, Tourism support, Human capital development, and Local economic development initiative for our rural communities to sustain themselves.
- There is an urgent need for some principals and teachers to change their attitude towards subjects like Life Orientation. Life Orientation is the fundamental subject that facilitates career orientation in the South African curriculum design. Life Orientation is an anchor of the future General Education Certificate (GEC). GEC is the departmental project orientated pilot programme to be introduced in schools.

4.2. Suggestions for Further Research

The objective of this study is based on the impact of career orientation in the livelihood of rural high school learners. From the findings of this study, the following are suggested for further research:

- The role of municipalities, business, and social sector partners, working collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation in rural communities.
- Effective management to support comprehensive career guidance services. The government should provide career guidance and counselling training for teachers to be professional counsellors who are well equipped with career knowledge and skills. This will enable our teachers to guide learners appropriately on subject choices and career opportunities

Ethics Committee Decision

Due to the scope and method of the study, ethics committee permission was not required.

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