



AN INVESTIGATION INTO CAREER DECISION-MAKING AMONG FINAL YEAR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IBADAN: THE ROLES OF SELF-EFFICACY, PEER PRESSURE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media on the career decision-making processes of final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan. A descriptive survey research design was employed, and data were gathered from a sample of 300 pupils selected through simple random sampling. Standardized instruments with acceptable reliability coefficients were used, including the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = .75$), Peer Pressure Scale ($\alpha = .79$), Social Media Scale ($\alpha = .83$), and Career Decision Scale ($\alpha = .83$). The findings revealed statistically significant positive correlations between academic self-efficacy ($r = .427, p < 0.05$), peer pressure ($r = .351, p < 0.05$), and social media ($r = .275, p < 0.05$) and pupils' career decision-making. Regression analysis further showed that social media had the strongest positive predictive effect on career decisions ($\beta = .415, t = 7.238, p < 0.05$), followed by academic self-efficacy ($\beta = .175, t = 3.001, p < 0.05$) and peer pressure ($\beta = .109, t = 1.832, p < 0.05$). The study highlights the need for early, age-appropriate career guidance programs in primary schools. Such initiatives should aim to build pupils' confidence in their academic abilities while fostering media literacy skills and strategies for resisting negative peer influence, all of which can play a crucial role in shaping their emerging career interests and decisions.

Keywords: Career decision, Self-efficacy, Peer pressure, Social media, Student

1. Introduction

Career preparation in the final years of primary school serves as a vital stepping stone toward long-term career development. It is increasingly considered essential for pupils' overall adjustment and well-being (Abomah, 2021). Although more complex career decision-making typically occurs during adolescence, the foundation for such decisions begins earlier, as upper primary pupils start forming ideas about future occupations and educational paths. At this stage, children transition from general aspirations to more realistic thinking about their interests and abilities, making it an ideal time to introduce structured career awareness. Even though younger children often express broad and imaginative career goals, the pressure to make meaningful decisions increases as they approach the end of primary school. Many pupils may lack the necessary information, guidance, and self-understanding to align their developing interests with realistic career possibilities (Abomah, 2021). This lack of preparedness can contribute to uncertainty later, especially during the transition to secondary education, a period that often shapes future academic and career trajectories.

Research has shown that making career-related decisions can have lasting psychological, social, and economic consequences (Bubic & Ivanišević, 2016). Although the critical age for career planning is often identified as 15–24 years (Sandra & Mularsih, 2021), early exposure to career concepts helps children become more confident, informed, and reflective about their goals and capabilities. Without such early guidance, pupils may enter secondary school without a clear sense of direction, increasing the risk of choosing educational and career paths that are mismatched with their skills and personality (Omojonle, 2023; Koçak et al., 2021). In today's changing world, marked by rapid technological advancements, educational reforms, and increased competition in the job market, it is becoming more challenging to navigate career choices effectively (Pignault, Rastoder, & Houssemand, 2023).

In regions such as many African countries, high youth unemployment is partly attributed to poor early career guidance and limited awareness of viable career paths (Abomah, 2021). As such, exploring how various factors influence children's emerging career interests is essential. The present study investigates the influence of social media, peer pressure, and self-efficacy on final-year primary school pupils' career thinking and decision-making. Understanding how these factors shape young learners' early career perspectives can inform the development of targeted educational interventions that promote healthy, informed decision-making from an early age.

Self-Efficacy and Career Decision

The importance of self-efficacy, that is, one's belief in their own competence to achieve specific goals is becoming more apparent in the early formation of career awareness, including among primary school students. While the focus has often been on older age groups, emerging evidence indicates that these self-perceptions are formed at a young age and significantly influence future career choices. Grounded in Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory, this construct helps explain how a student's confidence drives them to pursue objectives, persist through difficulties, and consider their future paths (Pignault, Rastoder, & Houssemand, 2023).

Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social-cognitive career framework proposes that self-efficacy functions as a mediating variable, translating the influence of personality traits on specific vocational outcomes, including career indecision. While career indecision is often studied in older populations, early manifestations can be observed in primary school children who begin to form more concrete ideas about their future roles. Several empirical studies have established self-efficacy as a protective factor against career indecision and a catalyst for proactive career exploration (Udayar et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2011). Research demonstrates that elevated self-efficacy in students predicts proactive career behaviors, including managing indecision, seeking information, and formulating realistic goals based on their interests (Jimoh et al., 2023; Reddan, 2015). Nevertheless, the correlation with a well-defined vocational identity is not universally positive, with some studies reporting contradictory findings that suggest moderating influences from contextual and developmental variables (Crisan & Turda, 2015; Chinyamurindi et al., 2021).

As a predictor of behavior, self-efficacy has shown strong explanatory power in academic and career-related domains (Adewuyi & Odutayo, 2024; Foley et al., 2023). For final-year primary school pupils, these beliefs influence early decisions about secondary education tracks, extracurricular involvement, and perceptions of future societal roles. Hui and Lent (2018) identify self-efficacy as a key intrinsic motivator in the career development process, while Guay et al. (2006) demonstrate that greater efficacy in task performance corresponds with reduced levels of career indecision. Similarly, Rossier (2015) conceptualizes self-efficacy as a self-regulatory mechanism guiding the enactment of career-related behaviors. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating self-efficacy during the late primary school years. Educators and counselors must provide structured opportunities for pupils to explore their strengths, set achievable goals, and build confidence in their abilities, thus laying the groundwork for informed and adaptive career decision-making in later stages of development.

Peer Pressure and Career Decision

The transition to late childhood and early adolescence marks a period where peers begin to function as key models. The attitudes and career-related decisions of young people are substantially shaped by their peer groups, an effect that has been widely studied (Schellenberg et al., 2022). Although the influence of peers is most extensively documented during adolescence, emerging evidence suggests that final-year primary school pupils are not immune to peer pressure when forming early career aspirations (Schellenberg et al., 2022). At this developmental stage, pupils internalize social norms and compare themselves to others, particularly within school environments where group dynamics and social belonging become increasingly important. The impact of peer influence on vocational decisions extends to sub-Saharan Africa, as documented by regional research. A series of studies in Kenya established that career choices among secondary school students are significantly shaped by peer pressure and broader social dynamics within their peer groups (Ogutu, 2017; Ogutu, Odera, & Maragia, 2017). While these studies primarily address adolescents, the mechanisms they highlight, such as social comparison, desire for approval, and reliance on shared experiences, can also be observed in upper primary school contexts, particularly as pupils begin discussing future ambitions with classmates. Gender differences in peer influence have also been noted. Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) found that female students were more likely to base career decisions on peer opinions, a pattern attributed to the higher value placed on social connectedness among girls. Similarly, studies across various cultural contexts indicate that peer influence ranks just below parental and teacher input in its impact on career-related choices, particularly among young girls (Howard et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2013). These findings suggest that peer groups may function as informal but powerful social agents guiding pupils' early thoughts about future roles even in the final years of primary education.

Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) argue that peer influence operates through social comparison and the pursuit of group acceptance, both highly salient processes during late childhood. In contexts where structured career guidance is limited, children may turn to their peers—who share similar experiences and environments—as accessible sources of advice (Mtemeri, 2020). This pattern is not limited to low- and middle-income countries; Roy (2016) found similar peer influence among adolescents in the United States, further supporting the global relevance of peer dynamics in early career development. However, peer influence is not universally strong across all contexts or educational levels. Ausman et al. (2013), in a study conducted among medical students in the United Arab Emirates, found minimal impact of peer mentorship on career choice. Such findings highlight the variability in peer influence across age groups, educational stages, and sociocultural contexts. Moreover, as Andersen and Hjortskov (2019) note, young individuals may be unaware of how much their career preferences are shaped by peers, underscoring the often-subtle nature of these interactions.

Social media and Career decisions

Although empirical research specifically examines the relationship between social media use and career decision-making, it remains limited, particularly among younger age groups. Emerging findings suggest that digital platforms are increasingly influential in shaping how children form ideas about their future careers (Rowan, 2023). While most existing studies center on adolescents and college students, the pervasive reach of technology and the widespread availability of mobile devices mean that even final-year primary school pupils engage with social media content that could shape their early career perceptions. Perrin (2015) noted that approximately 90% of young adults are active on social media, a statistic that has only increased in subsequent years and has trickled down to younger populations. Today's children, many of whom are digital natives, are frequently exposed to career-related content through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, whether through educational content, influencer culture, or peer-shared aspirations. Poncy et al. (2017) reported that active engagement on Facebook was associated with increased career confidence among youth. Although Facebook usage has declined among younger audiences, similar behaviors now occur on platforms more popular with children, suggesting comparable impacts.

Research presents a nuanced picture of social media's role in career development. While some studies, such as that of Kazi and Akhlaq (2017), report a minimal influence, finding it secondary to the guidance of peers, teachers, and family—this highlights that its effect is contingent on variables like user age, content consumed, and existing real-world role models. However, this limited influence in one area does not negate the well-documented risks that excessive use poses to academic outcomes and cognitive decision-making processes. Gordon and McCauley Ohannessian (2023) highlighted that excessive engagement with social media platforms could detract from academic performance and delay or impair effective career planning. For primary school pupils at a formative stage of development, unmoderated digital exposure could distort realistic expectations about careers, particularly when dominated by idealized portrayals of success. Health organizations, including the American Psychological Association (2023), have advocated for healthy digital habits to reduce the potential developmental harms associated with excessive or unfiltered social media use. These recommendations are particularly relevant in early career formation, where exposure to misleading or glamorized content can shape unrealistic aspirations.

The rise of social media influencers presents a new dimension of impact. Lajnef (2023) observed that influencers often become aspirational figures for young audiences, shaping lifestyle choices and career ambitions. For final-year primary school pupils, the popularity and visibility of digital content creators may prompt interest in social media, entertainment, or public visibility careers, sometimes without fully understanding the skills, education, or risks involved. Importantly, while social media offers opportunities and challenges in early career development, its role in influencing final-year primary school pupils warrants closer attention. As digital engagement becomes a routine part of childhood, educators and parents must proactively guide children's media consumption and foster critical thinking about the content they encounter. Structured interventions that promote media literacy and realistic career exploration could help balance the influence of online exposure with informed decision-making.

Research Question

The following questions guided this study:

- What is the relationship between self-efficacy, peer pressure, social media, and career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?
- How do self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media jointly influence career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?

- What are the individual contributions of self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media to career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?

2. Method

The study employed a descriptive ex-post facto research design, appropriate for examining relationships among variables that the researcher cannot directly manipulate, either because the events have already occurred or the variables are naturally occurring. The participants were final-year primary school pupils from Ibadan, representing male and female students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. A total sample of 300 pupils was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Initially, ten primary schools were randomly chosen from different Local Government Areas within Ibadan. Subsequently, thirty pupils were selected from each school through a simple random ballot method, yielding an overall sample size of 300 pupils.

Instrumentation

To guarantee the validity of the research, a standardized, structured questionnaire was employed for data collection. The instrument comprised two sections: demographic details (Section A) and variables related to the research objectives (Section B). Its content validity was verified by a panel of educational psychologists and measurement specialists. A pilot study was then administered in schools not included in the final sample to evaluate reliability. Using the split-half method and the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, the following reliability coefficients were obtained, demonstrating strong internal consistency: Academic Self-Efficacy ($\alpha = .75$), Peer Pressure ($\alpha = .79$), Social Media Influence ($\alpha = .83$), and Career Decision ($\alpha = .83$). These results confirmed the instrument's suitability for the population. Ethical approval was granted by the pertinent school authorities. All participants and, where applicable, their parents or guardians provided informed consent. The study upheld strict ethical standards, protecting participant privacy and ensuring response confidentiality to foster honesty and reduce bias. The principal investigator, aided by six trained research assistants, carried out the data collection.

3. Findings

Research question one: What is the relationship between self-efficacy, peer pressure, social media, and career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?

Table 1: Inter-correlations between the variables and descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Career decision	300	29.52	3.41	1.00			
Self-efficacy	300	29.63	4.07	.427**	1.00		
Peer pressure	300	26.99	2.72	.351**	.387**	1.00	
Social media	300	29.52	3.41	.275**	.127*	.434**	1.00

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for the study variables. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between adolescents' career decision-making and self-efficacy ($r = .427$, $p < .05$), peer pressure ($r = .351$, $p < .05$), and social media use ($r = .275$, $p < .05$).

Research question two: How do self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media jointly influence career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Joint Effects of IVs on Career Decision-Making

Analysis of variance				
	Sum of Square (SS)	DF	Mean Square	F
Regression	747.392	3	249.131	26.958
Residual	2735.444	296	9.241	
Total	3482.837	299		

a) $R = .463^a$

b) $R^2 = .215$

c) Adjusted $R^2 = .207$

d) Standard error of estimate = 3.03996

Table 2 presents the combined effect of self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media on career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils. The regression model explained 21.5% of the variance in career decision-making ($R^2 = 0.215$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.207. The ANOVA results revealed a statistically significant F-value of 26.958 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the overall model significantly predicts career decision-making within this population.

Research question three: the individual contributions of self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media to career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan?

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables to the Prediction

Model	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	17.633	1.965		8.976	.000
Self-efficacy	.147	.049	.175	3.001	.003
Peer pressure	-.136	.074	.109	1.832	.068
Social media	.365	.050	.415	7.238	.000

Table 3 indicates that the independent variables significantly predicted career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils. Social media was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .415$; $t = 7.238$; $p < 0.05$), followed by self-efficacy ($\beta = .175$; $t = 3.001$; $p < 0.05$). Although peer pressure contributed to the prediction, its effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = .109$; $t = 1.832$; $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

To address the first research objective, the relationships between self-efficacy, peer pressure, social media, and career decision-making were analyzed. A key finding was a strong positive correlation for self-efficacy, indicating that final-year pupils with higher self-efficacy approached career decisions with greater confidence. Participants demonstrated competence in overcoming challenges and identifying strategies to achieve their goals. This aligns with Reddan (2015), who found that students with elevated self-efficacy exhibit greater confidence in problem-solving and utilizing resources to support career development. Such self-assurance fosters resilience in the face of future workplace challenges. These results also support Cantos et al. (2019), who reported that students' self-awareness and confidence in their abilities enhance their capacity to plan and make career decisions effectively. Pupils with strong self-efficacy are better equipped to set goals, develop strategic plans, and resolve career-related issues.

Peer pressure also demonstrated a positive correlation with career decision-making, confirming the significant role peers play in shaping the vocational choices of young learners. This reinforces prior research by Naz et al. (2014) and Kanmodi et al. (2020) on peer influence. The findings echo Ogutu et al. (2017), who found peer-influenced students expressed higher career satisfaction than those guided mainly by parents, with Anyango et al. (2024) identifying information-sharing as a critical conduit for this peer effect. Similarly, social media use showed a significant positive relationship with career decision-making, corroborating Kim (2018) and underscoring the platform's growing role in career exploration and shaping aspirations (Gallup, 2019; Ukpabi, 2019).

Regarding the second research question, the combined independent variables, such as self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media, accounted for 20.7% of the variance in career decision-making. This suggests that additional factors, such as parental influence or emerging technologies, may also play essential roles in shaping pupils' career choices. The joint predictive effect of self-efficacy corroborates Lent et al. (2013), who identified self-efficacy as a key predictor of career decision satisfaction. The combined independent variables, self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media, explained 20.7% of adolescents' career decision-making variance. This means that while these factors significantly contribute to understanding how students make career choices, a substantial proportion of the influences remain unexplained by this model.

The relatively moderate percentage indicates that other essential elements are likely at play beyond self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media. For instance, factors such as parental guidance, family expectations, socioeconomic background, educational opportunities, and the rapid advancement of emerging technologies could also impact pupils' career decisions. These influences might interact in complex ways, shaping how adolescents perceive and evaluate their future career options. The collective influence of social media aligns with Schneider (2010), who argued that peer-related online environments boost adolescents' confidence and motivation toward career success.

However, these findings contrast with Mburu (2013), who emphasized the role of school type as a more critical determinant of career decisions. The combined effect of peer pressure is consistent with Klapan (2018), who reported that friends' career choices influence adolescents. Yet, it contradicts Morgan and Skaggs (2017), who suggested peer influence may sometimes be overstated.

The analysis of the third research question revealed that all three predictors, self-efficacy, social media, and peer pressure, significantly influenced career decision-making among adolescents. Among these variables, social media exerted the most substantial relative influence, underscoring its increasingly central role in shaping young people's career aspirations and choices. The pervasive presence of social media platforms provides adolescents with unprecedented access to information, role models, and peer interactions, which can significantly impact their confidence and motivation in exploring potential career paths. Following social media, self-efficacy emerged as the second most influential predictor. This finding aligns with Zeidin and Pajaras (2020), who identified self-efficacy as a critical factor influencing academic achievement and adolescents' perceptions of career opportunities. Similarly, Lent et al. (2019) and Duru (2022) linked self-efficacy to job satisfaction, suggesting that a strong belief in one's abilities supports more positive career outcomes and greater satisfaction with career choices. Peer pressure was also a significant determinant, albeit with a comparatively lower influence than social media and self-efficacy. This indicates that the opinions and behaviors of friends and peer groups contribute to adolescents' career decision-making processes (Rodinda & Eva, 2023).

Graham (2019) supported this view by demonstrating how online peer groups can shape career aspirations, particularly by providing social validation and shared experiences. However, the role of peer pressure is not uniformly influential across all contexts, as evidenced by studies such as Adewuyi et al. (2023) and Hall (2020), which reported a more limited impact of peer influence on career decisions. These contrasting findings suggest that while peer pressure remains a relevant factor, its effect may depend on individual, social, and cultural circumstances. The dominant role of social media in this study corresponds with Lee (2017), who emphasized the significance of platforms like YouTube in shaping adolescents' career choices by offering exposure to various professions and opportunities for career exploration. Nonetheless, this prominent influence is not without contestation. Betsworth (2017), for example, found that Instagram had negligible effects on students' career decision-making, highlighting how the impact of social media may vary depending on the specific platform and how adolescents engage with it. These findings illuminate the complex interplay between personal beliefs and social influences in adolescent career development. They underscore the need for educators, counselors, and policymakers to recognize the multifaceted nature of career decision-making and to harness the positive aspects of social media and self-efficacy while addressing the challenges posed by peer pressure and potential misinformation online.

Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal significant positive relationships between academic self-efficacy, peer pressure, social media, and career decision-making among final-year primary school pupils in Ibadan. Among these factors, social media emerged as the most influential, followed by self-efficacy and peer pressure. These results highlight these variables' critical role in shaping pupils' career decisions during this crucial developmental stage. The prominent influence of social media underscores its growing role as a key source of career-related information and inspiration. However, this raises concerns about the potential for misinformation or unrealistic portrayals of professions, which may mislead young learners. These findings resonate with earlier research emphasizing the complexity of career decision-making during adolescence, a period characterized by exploration and susceptibility to external influences, especially in contexts such as Africa, where high unemployment rates increase the importance of making well-informed career choices.

Also, for educators and policymakers in Africa and beyond, these results underscore the urgent need for inclusive and comprehensive career guidance programs that support learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The strong association with self-efficacy suggests that building pupils' confidence in their academic abilities can empower them to make career decisions that align with their unique talents and interests, reducing the risk of disengagement or pursuing unsuitable career paths. At the same time, the influence of peer pressure and social media highlights the need for targeted interventions to minimize adverse effects, such as conformity driven by peers or unrealistic career narratives encountered online. Schools should incorporate career counseling programs promoting critical media literacy, fostering self-reflection, and providing structured peer engagement opportunities to guide pupils toward realistic and fulfilling career choices. Additionally, teacher training initiatives are essential to equip educators with practical strategies for supporting career exploration, especially in mainstream classrooms where learners may face varying challenges.

Recommendations

To translate these findings into practice, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Future studies should employ longitudinal research designs to explore how self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media influence career trajectories beyond adolescence, thereby addressing the limitations inherent in this study's cross-sectional approach.
2. It is important to investigate additional factors, such as parental influence and socioeconomic constraints, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping career decisions within African contexts.
3. Qualitative methodologies, including in-depth interviews with pupils and educators, could provide rich insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and barriers related to career decision-making processes.
4. Policymakers and educators should develop evidence-based interventions to support adolescents in effectively navigating career decision complexities, ultimately promoting well-being and equitable access to opportunities in the evolving world of work.
5. Future interventions should incorporate parental and community engagement components to strengthen informed career decision-making and address socioeconomic barriers common in African settings.

Limitations of the Study

One notable limitation encountered during the study was the initial resistance from school principals and administrators in granting access to students, which posed challenges for data collection and may have influenced the sample representation. Additionally, while this research focused on self-efficacy, peer pressure, and social media as key predictors of career decision-making, it did not account for other potentially significant factors, such as parental influence, socioeconomic status, or educational resources, which may also affect the pupil's career choices. Furthermore, the exclusive use of self-reported questionnaires may have introduced measurement biases, including social desirability and recall inaccuracies, potentially impacting the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Ethics Statement

Every action that involved human subjects in this study was carried out in compliance with the National Research Committee's ethical standards. Before the research engagement, each participant gave written informed consent.

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