

Factors Affecting the Professional Orientation and the Selection of Higher Education Institutions

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Summary

INTRODUCTION

High school years are very important in forming priorities in the selection of higher education institutions and occupational programs. Any wrong choice may result in lifelong unhappiness, low self-efficacy, burnout and school dropouts. Given the fact that almost a quarter of higher education students dropout from their institutions to retake entrance exams, it is cruel to guide high school students in choosing programs best suited to their personal interests and abilities. The purpose of the study is to determine the factors affecting senior high school students' choices of higher education institutions and occupational programs. It is also aimed to help policy makers by providing them research based evidence in making decisions to improve the transition to higher education process.

METHODS

The mixed methods research methodology was employed in this study. The research design used was the sequential exploratory mixed methods design which consisted of qualitative and quantitative phases respectively. The qualitative phase was done by interviewing 22 high school senior students attending at a high school. The study group were selected using maximum likelihood method based on their majors. The interview form included 8 open ended questions constructed after a comprehensive literature review and specialist consultation. 5 main and 15 subthemes appeared after the inductive coding procedure. Inter-coder agreement was over 70%. A frequency table and example participant responses were presented to elaborate findings. In the quantitative phase a 16 item 5 point Likert type questionnaire was developed using the findings of the qualitative phase, literature review and specialist consultation. The population of this phase consisted of 776 senior high school students attending at 8 high schools located in Artvin city center, which is a province of Turkey. The sample included 254 students selected by employing simple random sampling method.

FINDINGS

Students are highly affected by the possibility of finding jobs, exam scores, fiscal abilities and city facilities rather than personal interests and abilities as indicated in the literature. Teachers remained insufficient in guiding students. Students do not know the courses and faculties of the programs they prefer. They guess the quality of education in the higher education institutions they prefer on the basis of the prestige and entrance score of that institution. A great portion of the participants have a desire to personal development and they believe that they will be successful in the higher education institutions they prefer. Families, friends and teachers were ranked at lower levels in affecting student choices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrance to higher education system that is based solely on exam scores should be abandoned in favor of the holistic approach which takes personal interests and abilities into consideration. Guidance and counseling activities should be conducted more efficiently. Courses and faculties of the programs preferred by students should be introduced to students. The idea that it is more important to choose an occupation suited to personal interests and abilities than choosing another just for its high income should be communicated in schools by every stakeholder. Families should be guided in this manner too so they can affect their children effectively.