
Designing for Career Choices in Namibia

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Abstract

Career guidance plays a vital in the life of all secondary school learners, especially when they are about to enter university. Most of the things that are taught at an early age are believed to work out in individuals' lives. Guidance with regards to careers also work out well if it starts on time. Namibian youth face various difficulties when it comes to career choices as most of them are only exposed to information about possible career choices when they apply for university admittance. Therefore, the aim is to investigate and analyze the views of high school learners, unemployed youth and learners at a high school, After School Care Centres and a Youth Centre at an informal settlement on career exploration. This will enable us to understand the process behind career choices in Namibia. We will then explore how technology can assist with career guidance.

Author Keywords

Career Guidance; Youth; Games; Social Media

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous;

Introduction

Learners from all over Namibia apply to enroll at different Institutions of Higher Education annually in September of their last school year. However, many learners only get information about types of careers when they need to apply to universities. Some schools also take their learners to career fairs at the universities, but this also happens the year before the learners graduate. Some schools do not provide any other information on careers. As a result, many high schools learners get stuck when it comes to choosing the route to follow after Grade 12, as there is no sufficient information guiding them when choosing what they want become in the future. For example, Loise is now in Grade 12 and she is still not sure of what to study next because she does not have enough information on the many careers out there. Loise says that they have Internet access at school and she has a smartphone, but they do not really get adequate information when surfing the Internet.

Another example is Isak who obtained very good Grade 12 results, but he did not want to study to become a teacher and the results were not good enough for medical school, yet he did not know what other career choices he had.

The challenge is not limited to only poorer schools in Namibia, but it applies worldwide with varying degrees. Literature shows that career developments researchers studied challenges in career decision making, but solutions remain few and mostly inadequate [2].

An exploratory visit

Havana is an informal settlement in Windhoek, Namibia. We joined a research team who meets

regularly at a church with unemployed youth and learners after school for participatory co-creation activities. We conducted some exploratory interviews with five females who were out of school youth and four learners (one male and three female). Two of the out of school youth were studying at a Vocational Training Centre (VTC) and one was attending distance education classes to improve her Grade 12 results in order to enroll at a VTC or university. Two had dropped out of school. We explored with them how they make career decisions and how they discover the existence of other possible careers. They all indicated that their schools do not offer career guidance or information until their Grade 12 August results are released. These are the results that are used to apply to universities before the final examinations are written in November. Since the application closing date of universities and colleges in Namibia is in September, they do not get much information on different career choices. Some schools do not have adequate information about career exploration and the lack of information is one of the biggest obstacles faced by the youth [1].

One youth went to a university's Career Fair when she was in Grade 11. Through the interviews, we found out they were only exposed to the visible career opportunities around their neighborhoods. Havana settlement is exposed to less resources and this has a big impact on the young teens. Three young teens indicated that they do not have own cell phones but they use their parents' phones to play games among others. The rest of the group had cell phones.

One participant said that she had wanted to study Office Administration at the VTC but since the course was full, the only option left was to study Welding and

Plumbing. She enjoyed this course, but she would never have given it any thought before. This type of forced career choices also happen at university level. For example, the University of Namibia (UNAM) offers places in programmes according to the grades obtained, e.g. although the person applies for Medicine, they might be offered acceptance in Education or another programme. The Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) asks applicants to indicate first and second choices.

We also discovered that career choices are influenced by how much social impact the choice will have. One of those that dropped out of school indicated that she wants to become an Electrical Engineer because they do not have electricity in Havana. She also wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. She however did not reveal where she got the idea from and neither did she know what path to take to achieve that. Another one indicated that she wants to become a doctor, because every time she goes to the clinic, the queues are very long and they all wait for one doctor. The other two participants wanted to set up their own businesses and one was studying catering to enable her to start her business.

Nonetheless, none of the interviewees knew what the requirements for their chosen career fields. Therefore, Computer Science could help to create a solution that identifies the requirements needed to pursue those careers.

They also stereotyped certain careers, i.e. a taxi driver is a male because all taxi drivers are male. However, they do not stereotype careers that are unknown to them, e.g. the first author is a Programmer and

although she explained what she does, they had no gender association with it. Besides Programmer was an invisible career.

Through the exploratory interviews, it was found that all the participants had little information on careers. They are only exposed to what is around them and they are missing out on the other invisible careers. For example, they can only see the doctor and the nurse, but not the pharmacists, radiologists, medical technician, paramedics, etc. They do own or have access to cellphones, are connected to the Internet and on social media via mobile internet and school laboratories.

Future work

We will initially conduct more interviews with learners, teachers and university admission staff as well as study current career guidance materials and methods used in the schools. We will also study the use of cellphones and social media by our target group and the types of games they play.

Participatory co-creation sessions with lots of interviews and creativity activities will be used where participants will actively contribute to solutions to enhance career guidance. Our target groups are unemployed youth from Havana, a local high school and an After School Care center who had approached us to assist in developing some solutions for their learners on career guidance.

Although the co-design and co-creation approach might eventually offer a different direction, the initial idea is to design a social media or mobile game or combination social media game about career guidance for youth.

This stems from the fact that the youth own cellphones and many have smart phones. Most schools and after school care centres have computer labs, except the high school in Havana.

We would like to analyze the opinions and understanding of the youth towards careers guidance. We will partner with researchers who are studying factors contributing to school drop-outs. Our research is primarily based on communities in Windhoek, Namibia but our partner university for this research is in Cape Town, South Africa. We invite research collaborators who work with similar groups.

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Conclusion

Through the exploratory interviews, we found that the youth at informal settlement is only exposed to careers around their areas and not to different careers, because they do not receive career guidance at their schools. As a result, other careers remain invisible to them and they believe that some careers are stereotyped. They also indicated that they do not have access to computers, but they have access to cellphones and mobile data package is cheap in Namibia.