

https://dspace.org/

Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools

Vunandlala, Malibongwe Cyprian

2024

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/48576

Vunandlala, Malibongwe Cyprian. (2024). Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools. [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/48576

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICE: A COMPARISON BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATES FROM RURAL AND PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Industrial/Organisational Psychology.

BY

Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala

Faculty of Humanities

at the

University of the Witwatersrand

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Sifiso Mlilo

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION TO BE SIGNED BY ALL HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY: APPENDIX ONE

I Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala (Student number: 947895) am a student registered for the degree of Masters by CW and RR in the academic year 2024.

I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above degree is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.
- I have included as an appendix a report from "Turnitin" (or other approved plagiarism detection) software indicating the level of plagiarism in my research document.

Signature:  Date: 05 February, 2025

Abstract

This research study focused on the factors that influenced the career decision-making process of university undergraduate students whilst they were operating at the secondary school level. This qualitative study compared the factors that influenced the career choices of undergraduates from rural secondary schools to undergraduates from private secondary schools. The aim of this research was to generate a clearer and more in-depth narrative, whilst enhancing the understanding of the similarities and differences in these factors, when comparing rural and private secondary schools. Career choice is a very important life decision in one's long-term future and overall sense of fulfilment (Rousseau & Venter, 2009). For this reason, and given the rapidly changing landscape of the world of work, it is essential that an understanding of the factors that influence these career choice decisions continue to be developed. This study employed an exploratory, qualitative, cross-sectional research design. The sampling method that was used for data collection was non-probability in nature, whereby the purposive sampling technique was employed. A sample of six students from each of the two groups of students (rural and private) was collected (total sample size = 12). A Semi-structured interview guide based on the Systems Theory Framework was developed and utilised by the researcher. In depth interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This research found that the career choice of secondary school students is influenced by a wide range of factors, highlighting key differences and commonalities between rural and private secondary school students. The findings revealed that students from rural schools often face significant socioeconomic challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to career counselling, and a lack of exposure to diverse career opportunities. Conversely, undergraduates from private schools tended to have greater access to resources such as career guidance programs, mentorship opportunities, and role models, which broadened their career aspirations and enabled them to explore a wider range of professions. Furthermore, this research paper also emphasised the significance of taking a proactive approach in seeking additional career information, reinforcing that students are not merely passive subjects of their circumstances.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Sifiso Mlilo, for his patience, support, and invaluable guidance throughout this research journey. Your encouragement and insightful feedback helped me navigate the many challenges I faced, and I am truly grateful for your unwavering belief in me and my work. No amount of words can fully express my gratitude.

A special acknowledgment goes to my firstborn son, Apula, who came into this world during my research journey. His presence became my greatest source of strength, inspiring me to persevere even in the most difficult moments. His arrival brought new meaning to my efforts, reminding me of the importance of resilience and determination.

I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family and friends for their constant support, understanding, and encouragement. Your belief in me gave me the strength to push forward even when the journey seemed overwhelming.

Lastly, I acknowledge all the participants and individuals who contributed to this research. Your time, insights, and cooperation were invaluable in making this study possible.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

CHAPTER 1 1
1.1 Rationale 2
1.2 Research Report Structure 3
Chapter 2 4
2. Literature Review 4
2.1 Introduction 4
2.2 Importance of Career Choice 4
2.3 Overview of Career Choice Theories: Traditional vs Post-modern Theories 5
2.3.1 Traditional Theories 5
2.3.1.1 Limitations of Traditional Career Choice Theories 7
2.3.2 Post-modern theories 8
2.4 Factors Influencing Career Choice 9
2.4.1 Personal Factors 9
2.4.2 Environmental and Situational Factors 10
2.5 Factors Influencing Career Choice: International Context 12
2.6 Factors Influencing Career Choice: A South African Context 14
2.7 Systems Theory Framework 18
2.8 Research Aims 21
2.9 Research Questions 21
CHAPTER 3 22
3. Methodology 22
3.1 Research Design 22
3.2 Sample and Sampling Method 23
3.3 Instruments and Procedure 23
3.3.1 Instrument 23
3.3.2 Procedure 24
3.4 Method of Analysis 25
3.5 Ethics 27
CHAPTER 4 29
4. Results 29
4.1 Demographic of Participants 29
4.2 Factors Influencing Career Choice in Private Schools 30
4.2.1 Background and Self-awareness 30
4.2.1.1 Self-Awareness 30

4.2.1.2 Home Environment....32
4.2.1.3 Financial Background....33
4.2.2 High School Experiences....34
4.2.2.1 School Location....35
4.2.2.2 Peer Influence and Extracurricular Activities....37
4.2.3 High School Support, and Resources....38
4.2.3.1 Teacher Support....38
4.2.3.2 Availability of Resources in Schools....41
4.3 Factors Influencing Career Choice in Rural Secondary Schools....43
4.3.1 Background and Self-awareness....43
4.3.1.2 Home Environment....44
4.3.1.3 Financial Background....46
4.3.2 High School Experience....47
4.3.2.1 School Location....47
4.3.3 High School Support and Resources....49
4.3.3.1 Teacher Support....49
4.3.3.2 Availability of Resources....51
CHAPTER 5....53
5. Discussion....53
5.1 Factors Influencing Career Choices for Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools....53
5.2 Factors Perceived as Main Enablers and Main Inhibitors of Career Choice Decisions by Undergraduates from Rural and Private Schools....62
5.3 What are the Similarities and Differences between Factors Influencing Career Choice between Students from these Two Distinct Backgrounds?....65
5.3.1 Home Environment and Parental Support....65
5.3.2 Financial Background....65
5.3.3 High School Experiences: Location and Peer Influence....66
5.3.4 Teacher Support and School Resources....66
CHAPTER 6....68
6.1 Limitations....68
6.1.1. Sample Size and Selection Bias....68
6.1.2. Lack of Representation....68
6.1.3. Limited Scope of Influencing Factors....68
6.1.4. Temporal Constraints....69
6.2. Recommendations....69

6.2.1 Enhance Career Guidance Programs 69
6.2.2 Increase Access to Resources 70
6.2.3 Foster Community and Parental Engagement 70
6.2.4 Utilise Technology for Career Exploration 70
6.2.5 Strengthen Peer Support Networks 70
6.2.6 Advocate for Policy Changes 70
6.2.7 Future Studies 71
Chapter 7 72
7. Conclusion 72
References 74

Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison Between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools

CHAPTER 1

Career choice is one of the most important decisions that individuals have to make during the course of their lives (Chuenyane, 1983; Hackett & Betz, 1995). In contrast to the views of 20th century theorists such as Erikson (1963) and Super (1990), career choice is no longer seen as just a single, logical, stable, and predictable decision that individuals make during their lifetime (Van Esbroeck et., 2005). Rather, in the post-modern society, career choice is seen as a continuously evolving decision-making process that individuals progressively negotiate throughout their career (Ahmed et al., 2017; Rousseau & Venter, 2009; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). The kind of career choices that individuals make are influenced to varying degrees by personal, environmental, and situational factors, which together shape one's decision-making process (Ahmed et al., 2017; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Rousseau & Venter, 2009).

Research on career choice in South Africa has mainly focused on the frequently rigid and inaccessible (expensive) nature of career counselling and career guidance, through work done by researchers such as Maree and Molepo (2007), Maree (2009), and Chireshe (2012). Their work aimed to raise awareness on the lack of adaptability and the expensive nature of career assessment tools within South Africa. They also observed that career assessment tools are still largely Westernised and, therefore, do not provide accurate results in a culturally diverse country such as South Africa. Furthermore, Maree and Molepo (2007) and Maree (2009) stated that the expensive nature of these tools and career counselling services meant they could only be accessed by a privileged few.

The aforementioned information holds heightened relevance within the South African context, where wealth distribution remains significantly uneven, with 85% of the nation's wealth concentrated within the top 10% of the population (Von Fintel & Orthofer, 2020). This disparity is similarly evident within the education sector, where private schools often benefit from extensive resources, while rural schools, often operate with minimal provisions (Maree, 2009). Existing literature suggests that an individual's socio-economic background may partially influence their eventual career choices, indicating a complex interaction between social dynamics, economic status, and professional aspirations (Ukweuze & Obiefuna, 2017).

Hence, the current study focused on the factors that influenced the career decision-making process of university undergraduate students whilst they were operating at the secondary school level. This qualitative study compared the factors that influenced the career choices of undergraduates from rural secondary schools to undergraduates from private secondary schools. The choice to use undergraduates instead of high school learners was because undergraduates were in a position to provide reflective, introspective views on how their choice of career was devised and decided upon prior to entering university. This research focused on the high school level, as opposed to earlier years or the university level, because this stage coincides with individuals' adolescent years, which, according to Hadiyati and Astuti (2023), is a stage where people start to seriously think about their careers and career choices.

The aim of this research was to generate a clearer and more in-depth narrative, whilst enhancing the understanding of the similarities and differences in these factors, when comparing rural and private secondary schools. It is essential to clarify that throughout this study, the terms "rural schools" or "rural secondary schools" and "private schools" or "private secondary schools" will be used as primary naming conventions. Specifically, "rural schools" refers to rural public schools, while "private schools" refers to urban private schools.

1.1 Rationale

Career choice is a very important life decision in one's long-term future and overall sense of fulfilment (Rousseau & Venter, 2009). For this reason, and given the rapidly changing landscape of the world of work, it is essential that an understanding of the factors that influence these career choice decisions continue to be developed. The demand for new skills as a result of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) are likely to increase the unemployment rate, as it will render many existing skill-sets obsolete (Manda & Dhaou, 2019). This will result from a skills mismatch between the skills that will be required in the 4IR job market, and the skills individuals already possess (Manda & Dhaou, 2019). If this prediction comes to pass, Covid-19 may have accelerated the process even more, this will further increase inequality in South Africa. Therefore, career choice at the secondary school level takes on even more significance for the newer generation that is moving through the schooling system. Previous studies have mainly focused on factors influencing career choice for either rural or private secondary schools. However, limited research seems to be available comparing these factors for rural and private secondary schools in the same study. Thus, this study aimed to explore these factors from diverse perspectives to identify gaps in career counselling and career guidance across the

two worlds. Additionally, the study also aimed to identify unique learnings from one world that could possibly benefit the other. By doing so, it sought to encourage a shift toward a more inclusive approach that benefits everyone. The current research addressed this gap at a critical time for South Africa as a country, as its people are dealing with devastating levels of inequality and a bleak economic outlook.

1.2 Research Report Structure

Following the introductory chapter, which also outlines the rationale of the study, this research paper continues into chapter 2, which is the literature review chapter. Chapter 2 outlines the importance of a career choice and explores some of the most influential traditional and post-modern career theories. It goes on to provide a view of these factors from both an International and South African perspective. This chapter continues to discuss the factors that influence career choice, which are then further discussed from an International and South African Perspective. The literature review concludes by discussing the theoretical framework, research aims and research questions. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology. This methodology chapter discusses the following: the research design that was used, the sample and sampling method, the instruments and the procedure, the method of analysis, as well as the ethical component. Chapter 4 then shares the results based on the thematic analysis that was conducted. The discussion chapter then follows. This chapter (Chapter 5) links participants' insights to the already existing literature, whilst being guided by the Systems Theory Framework. The paper concludes with Chapter 6, which discusses some of the limitations and recommendations that emerged from this research.

Chapter 2

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Prior to discussing career choice factors in detail, this literature review will commence by discussing the importance of career choice, which will lay the foundation for why this study is essential. Thereafter, this chapter goes onto discuss career theories, by providing a comparison between traditional and post-modern theories. Following that, this literature review chapter explores existing literature around factors influencing career choice, and also provides a view of these factors from an International and South African perspective. A theoretical framework for this research is then subsequently chosen and explored. To close out the chapter, the research aims, and research question are then thrashed out.

2.2 Importance of Career Choice

An individual's choice of career ultimately determines the type of work and environment in which they will probably spend a significant amount of their time in (Hackett & Betz, 1995; Nyamwange, 2016). Studies indicate that about one-third (30%) of a person's life is spent working (Bandura et al., 2001; Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). Given the importance of this choice, individuals tend to consider both intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes. Intrinsic outcomes are those outcomes arising as a result of internal motivation, satisfaction, and feelings of fulfilment. Extrinsic outcomes, on the other hand, refer to those outcomes that arise from external motivators or rewards (Chuenyane, 1983; Sharif et al., 2019). Regarding intrinsic outcomes, people consider things such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, and achieving an overall sense of fulfilment and happiness (Rousseau & Venter, 2009). While extrinsically, their focus is on personal prestige and occupational rewards (Nyamwange, 2016; Rousseau & Venter, 2009). Intrinsic outcomes have the power to shape one's personality and, ultimately, their overall outlook on life (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). While on the other hand, extrinsic outcomes can determine one's socioeconomic status and, subsequently, their social grouping (Kazi & Alkhaq, 2017; Nyamwange, 2016).

The implications of career choice actually go further. Not only do individuals' career choices affect them as decision-makers, but such decisions can also affect their relationships with family, friends, and their community (Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). Things like work demands and long hours can reduce time spent with friends and family and potentially strain

one's relationships with them. On the other hand, the status associated with one's job, coupled with how well the job pays, can also potentially elevate or lower one's status within their community, in turn, determining the level of respect one is likely to receive as a member of the community (Lent et al., 1994; Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017).

Furthermore, the choices that individuals make can also impact a country's economic landscape (Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). Career choice decisions have ramifications on the workforce distribution, employment levels, and ultimately, the country's socio-economic status (Maree & Molepo, 2007; Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). Balanced workforce distribution across different sectors supports economic stability and growth by ensuring all industries have sufficient talent and skills to meet market demands (Lent et al., 1994). However, when this balance is not achieved, and some sectors are over-supplied with skills, while others experience a skills shortage, this can lead to structural unemployment (Blustein, 2006). Structural unemployment is a situation whereby a country experiences unemployment as a result of its population not having the required skillset to take advantage of employment opportunities (vacancies) available in the market (Super, 1980).

Unemployment reduces the spending power of consumers, which ultimately affects the country's economic development (Jones & Brown, 2017). Secondly, increasing levels of unemployment consequently increase the number of people dependent on the country's social welfare services (Taylor, 2019). As a result, the budget that could have been used for public investment, in sectors like education and public infrastructure is subsequently repurposed into the social welfare system, leading to economic stagnation (Taylor, 2019). This highlights why there is a heightened importance when it comes to ensuring that students receive career information and the right level of career guidance in order for them to make informed career decisions.

2.3 Overview of Career Choice Theories: Traditional vs Post-modern Theories

2.3.1 Traditional Theories

Traditional career choice theories have played a fundamental role in providing a framework for understanding how individuals make decisions about their careers. These theories have focused on several common ideas, such as stability, linear progression, and the alignment of individuals' personal traits with specific occupations (Holland, 1997). One influential theory within the traditional theory framework, is the Trait-Factor Theory, which suggests that individuals possess unique traits and abilities that are suited for particular jobs

(Ismawati & Iswari, 2022). Holland's Vocational Personality Theory, a significant contributor to the Trait-Factor Theory, categorises individuals into personality types and proposes that they seek work environments that align with their specific types (Holland, 1997).

The trait and factor theory makes the assumption that personality is stable and, thus, can be measured at a point and time in order to aid with the identification of a career choice that one should ideally pursue (Ismawati & Iswari, 2022). The measure of personality is done through the use of psychological tests, to get an understanding of things like one's skills, interests, attitudes, and temperament (Ismawati & Iswari, 2022). These tests are then used to diagnose one's personality by collecting their data and that of their environment, where then, the counsellor can provide guidance on viable career opportunities based on what the data postulates (Ismawati & Iswari, 2022).

Another important theory in the traditional career choice framework, is the Social Cognitive Career Theory. This theory emphasises the interaction between personal factors, contextual influences, and career choices. It highlights the role of self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, and observational learning in shaping individuals' career decisions (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy expectations refer to an individual's beliefs concerning their ability to perform a specific task. The strength of one's self-efficacy expectations is said to influence an individual's persistence on a given task when faced with adversity. Low self-efficacy expectations lead to low persistence, while high self-efficacy expectations lead to high persistence (Lueng, 2008). Self-efficacy expectations are said to be influenced by four key factors, namely; performance accomplishment, vicarious learning, emotional arousal, and verbal persuasion (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lueng, 2008). For example, previously, as a result of the lack of women role models in specific male-dominated fields (in some professional fields), as well as stereotypes, and the discouragement of women from pursuing certain careers that were regarded as being for men, women's choice of career was therefore, influenced to a degree by their low self-efficacy expectations in male-dominated fields (Betz & Hackett, 1981). However, as more women joined these male-dominated fields and stereotypes regarding gender roles started to change, self-efficacy expectations of young girls started to grow, and that resulted in more and more women choosing to pursue careers that were previously regarded as male careers (Lueng, 2008; Maree, 2009)

Outcome expectations refer to an individual's beliefs about the outcomes or consequences of performing a particular task (Lueng, 2008). These expectations are associated

with beliefs about extrinsic rewards related to completing a certain task or behaviour. These outcome expectations, together with self-efficacy and an individual's interest, dynamically interact to form one's intentions and goals, which serve to maintain behaviour over time, even in the face of adversity (Lueng, 2008).

Also, as part of the traditional theory framework, developmental career theories also contributed significantly to the understanding of career choices. Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory suggests that individuals go through sequential stages and periods in their career development (Lueng, 2008). It emphasises the concept of career maturity, which involves the acquisition of skills, experiences, and self-awareness over time (Super, 1957). Levinson's Seasons of Life Theory also falls within the developmental career theories, and highlights different life stages and transitions that individuals experience throughout their careers (Levinson, 1978). These theories underscore the importance of considering the developmental aspects of individuals' career choices and the role of self-concept development in career decision-making processes.

2.3.1.1 Limitations of Traditional Career Choice Theories

The traditional career choice theories, such as the Trait-Factor Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and developmental theories, have undoubtedly contributed valuable insights into understanding the factors that shape career choices, and have guided career counselling practices for many years (Lueng, 2008; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). However, as the nature of work and individuals' aspirations have evolved, post-modern career development theories have emerged to address the limitations of traditional theories and capture the complexities of modern career choices (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

One of the major limitations of traditional theories is that they often "predicted" that individuals assumed a passive role in their career decision-making process, and placed significant emphasis on predefined career paths, where individuals had limited autonomy/influence in their career choices (Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). Additionally, these early theories were also mainly conceptualised using male figures, with limited research focused on females as they were still a minority of them participating in the labour market when these theories were developed (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). However, with the growing population of women joining the labour market around the end of the previous century, a growing need to understand this population and their choices was soon realised by researchers (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005).

However, the lack of adequate theoretical frameworks to help explain, understand, and predict women's career choices, provided a bottleneck to this sudden need (Betz & Hackett, 1981). In an attempt to address this need, a few theories were subsequently developed, with Hackett and Betz proposing a "self-efficacy" approach to understanding women's career development journeys, which was influenced by Bandura's social learning theory (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005).

Another limitation of traditional career theories is that they mainly focus on the use of psychological tests with limited room for additional tools to collect and evaluate data about the individual and their environment in the career assessment process (Ismawati & Iswari, 2022). Secondly, the psychological tools used in these assessments are still largely Westernised (Maree & Molepo, 2007). Many of them have not been appropriately normed for different populations and, therefore, do not provide accurate results in culturally diverse countries (Maree & Molepo, 2007). The norming and adaptation of these tools is paramount in a culturally diverse country like South Africa. Without proper adaptation, the tools risk producing inaccurate results, which can, in turn, lead to inappropriate or ineffective career guidance (Maree, 2009).

2.3.2 Post-modern theories

Post-modern career development theories challenge the linear and deterministic assumptions of traditional theories and emphasise the importance of context, self-expression, and personal fulfilment in career decision-making (Hall, 2002). They recognise that careers are no longer solely defined by stability, linear progression, and alignment with predetermined paths. Instead, post-modern theories acknowledge the dynamic and fluid nature of careers in the face of changing work environments and the diverse aspirations of individuals (Hall, 2002).

One influential post-modern career development theory is the Protean Career Theory. This theory, proposed by Hall (2002), suggests that individuals take charge of their careers, pursuing self-directed goals, and adapting to changing work environments. It emphasises personal values, self-identity, and continuous learning as drivers of career choices (Hall, 2002). The boundaryless career theory, introduced by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), also challenges traditional career boundaries and linear progression. It suggests that individuals navigate their careers by building diverse experiences, forming networks, and embracing mobility. Additionally, the Career Construction Theory by Savickas (2005) emphasises the role of

narrative and meaning-making in career choices, highlighting that individuals construct their careers through self-reflection, exploration of life themes, and aligning work with personal values.

These post-modern career development theories provide alternative perspectives that consider the individual's agency, context, and the pursuit of personal fulfilment and well-being in career decision-making (Hall, 2002). They recognise the importance of factors such as work-life balance, self-expression, and meaningful work in today's career landscape (Hall, 2002).

While traditional career choice theories have laid the foundation and informed career counseling practices, it is, however, crucial to integrate post-modern theories to account for the complexities and diverse aspirations of the younger generation that is engaged in their career decision-making process. This paper will now explore some of the factors that influence individuals' career choices.

2.4 Factors Influencing Career Choice

Career choice is defined as a continuously evolving decision-making process mainly as a consequence of its underlying factors of influence (Rousseau & Venter, 2009). These dynamic factors which are said to synchronously (to varying degree) influence an individual's career choice can be categorised as either personal, environmental, or situational (Rousseau & Venter, 2009).

2.4.1 Personal Factors

Personal factors pertain to individual characteristics, including variables such as one's personality, interests, and talents. Personality is made up of a combination of an individual's qualities and characteristics of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, which ultimately constitute one's character (Bandura, 1994; Bandura et al., 2001). These three personality factors should not be considered as fixed and stable, but rather be viewed as malleable and evolving, as they are gradually shaped and developed over time (Bandura, 1994; Bandura et al., 2001). On the other hand, interests with regards to career choice, refers to the work options that one would possibly like to explore and pursue (Rousseau & Venter, 2009). Talent refers to an individual's aptitude, skills, and knowledge (Rousseau & Venter, 2009).

According to Bandura (1994) and Bandura et al. (2001), central to all the above-mentioned personal factors, is the individual's perceived self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to

an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviours necessary to achieve specific goals or outcomes (Bandura, 1994). It is a core component of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and influences how people approach tasks, challenges, and obstacles (Pajares, 1997). Self-efficacy is distinct from self-esteem, as it focuses on confidence in specific abilities rather than overall self-worth (Pajares, 1997; Bandura *et al*., 2001). The presence of self-efficacy has been found to ameliorate other aspects, such as interest, motivation, commitment, resilience, and perseverance. Whilst lack of self-efficacy has an inverse relationship with these aspects, which ultimately leads to the elimination of certain career options. The self-efficacy aspect is a major part of the cognitive component of Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory (Zulkosky, 2009; Bandura, 1994).

2.4.2 Environmental and Situational Factors

Environmental and situational factors, on the other hand, are defined as both one's immediate environment and the greater contextual factors of influence. These factors significantly influence an individual's decision-making process by shaping their perceptions, values, and available choices (McMahon et al., 2004). Bandura (1986) highlighted some of these social influences in his Social Cognitive Theory, emphasising how observing and interacting with close social groups can impact learning and personal growth. These factors include friends, family, school, financial background, religion, culture, society, information availability, job opportunities, economic climate, and a host of other potential influences (McMahon et al., 2004).

Friends and family play a very important role in shaping an individual's behaviour, attitude, and decisions. They often provide support and a sense of belonging, while simultaneously acting as role models who constantly influence one's interests, their way of being, and their value system. Additionally, friends and family also provide advice, feedback, and guidance aimed at helping one navigate social situations and, ultimately, their life decisions (Bandura, 1986). The school environment can also influence an individual's decision-making process. According to Eccles and Roeser (2011), teacher support, peer interaction, and access to career guidance and resources all collectively influence students' decision-making processes. Teacher support fosters academic motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being by providing encouragement, constructive feedback, and mentorship. Peer interaction impacts one's social skills and aids personal development through various social interactions. Availability of career counselling and guidance services, with the addition of resources for

practical application of theory, allows for students to understand and explore different career paths, which subsequently allows for informed career decisions (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). An individual's choice of career can also be influenced by their financial background. People with limited financial support tend to pursue careers that require limited training and financial demands. While individuals with greater financial backing have the luxury of exploring different career options (Sirin, 2005).

Additionally, career choice decisions are also deeply rooted in one's cultural and religious beliefs. Culture and religion impact how individuals make decisions, by shaping their moral values through established principles and practices of what is right and wrong. These principles ultimately guide one's behaviour and how they want to show up, thus impacting their personal choices, lifestyle, and career decisions (Ajzen, 1991). Information availability can also influence an individual's decision. This is because people make their decisions based on the information, they have available to them at that particular point. Thus, limited information leads to limited career options, while ample information leads to broader career options (Ajzen, 1991). Lastly, perception of job opportunities and economic climate can also impact one's career decision. People tend to pursue careers that they believe they have job opportunities available in the market, while shying away from those careers that they perceive as having limited opportunities for employment (Blustein, 2006). Together, these factors interact in complex and dynamic ways to influence an individual's career decision.

For the purpose of this research study, these three categories (personal, environmental, and situational factors) will further be simplified into two classifications, namely, internal and external factors. Internal factors are considered to constitute one's skills and talents. These include one's attitude, values, personality, aptitude, interests, needs, and abilities (Rousseau & Venter, 2009; Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). External factors, on the other, include aspects such as friends, family, school, companions, culture, religion, finances, social environment and support, role models, information availability, and job opportunities (Rousseau & Venter, 2009; Ukwueze & Obiefuna, 2017). Taking all of this into consideration, it is essential to explore these factors further based on research focusing on an international and South African perspective.

2.5 Factors Influencing Career Choice: International Context

Personal factors contribute substantially to individuals' career-choice decisions. According to Ahmed et al. (2017), students' interest or liking of particular subjects can be a significant influence on their decision to follow a particular career path. A fit between an individual's interests and their choice of career is seen as important. Individuals tend to pursue activities that are congruent to their needs, and that are likely to cause them minimum discomfort (Ahmed et al., 2017). Similar to most of the personality factors, career choice interest can be developed over time through exposure, availability/access to information about a certain career, and by other external factors (Nyamwange, 2016). Nyamwange (2016) states that having prior knowledge of a career and what it entails, can positively influence and nurture one's interest in that particular career. Prior knowledge also increases one's self-efficacy and commitment to their selected career choice. Hence, career education is particularly important throughout a child's education. Prior knowledge, however, is not only acquired through the schooling system. Children can also acquire this knowledge through their parents, mentors, research, and social learning (Nyamwange, 2016).

Other external factors that may influence a child's interest about a particular career choice include things like prospective job opportunities and job benefits. In support of the above notion, Nyamwange (2016) and Sharif et al. (2019) state that future income and other lucrative prospective benefits such as allowances and holidays may influence a student's interest and ultimately their career choice decision.

Gender is also often seen as a significant factor in individuals' career decision-making process. According to Gottfredson, early socialisation experiences, most notably orientation to gender roles, shape interests, and both gender-role orientation and interests then circumscribe one's range of acceptable career alternatives (Tokar & Jome, 1998). Hence, when women initially joined the labour market, they tended to elect careers that were in line with the gender roles that they were traditional exposed (confined) to. They also tended to have lower career aspirations when compared to their male counterparts, when looking at professional careers and top managerial positions. This could be attributed to the traditionally reinforced gender role expectations of men being the breadwinners of households (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Nadeem & Khalid, 2018).

An American study on Mexican-American Women by Flores and O'Brien (2002) highlighted how this population still had a relatively low percentage of its people participating

in typically traditionally male career options when compared to other American ethnic groups. However, there has been a noticeable shift in mindset in the younger generation of this group, as evidenced by a study conducted by Reyes et al. (1999), which sampled predominantly Mexican American grade 10 learners. These learners were asked about their career aspirations, whereby 87% indicated that they would like to pursue non-traditional or previously male-dominated career options. This was partly attributed to increased self-efficacy as these young women saw more and more women (especially those of their ethnic groups) being successful in non-traditional careers (Flores & O'Brien, 2002). This represented a significant shift in mindset from the previous generation of this group, which had typically aspired to pursue career options that were seen as being for women. However, in Pakistan, as recently as 2014, only 5% of the total female labour force was employed in male-dominated careers (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018).

These studies are significant because, Mexico and Pakistan, similar to South Africa (especially in S.A rural communities), are also some of those countries that predominantly follow a traditional mindset in terms of how they do things. These two countries are also classified as developing countries, with their people also experiencing similar socio-economic challenges to those faced by ordinary South Africans (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018; Flores & O'Brien, 2002). These authors acknowledge that there has been a dramatic shift in ideologies relating to gender roles worldwide; however, one needs to acknowledge that some areas are still very much influenced by traditional ideologies.

According to Sharif et al. (2019), parents and their parenting styles are also one of the major factors that affect children's career decisions. Nyamwange, (2016) supports this notion, stating that most people tend to pursue careers that are favoured by their parents. Sharif et al. (2019) further added that mothers, in particular, play a very important role in the career decision process of their children, as they are the ones who usually provide support to children as they grow and try to negotiate through crucial life decisions. Prospective future benefits such as higher potential earnings and the likelihood of promotions, were also noted as significant in students' decisions (Ahmed *et al*., 2017).

Hadiyati and Astuti (2023) also mentioned the importance of contextual factors, such as the school type and its location, in the career decision-making process of students. Egbochuku et al. (2021) further support this notion, stating that high school facilities, the type of school, and its location can have a significant impact on adolescents' career decisions. They

highlighted that students in rural schools tend to have lower aspirations compared to those attending schools in urban locations (Egbochuku et al., 2021). Stating that, the isolation of rural schools makes it difficult for students to obtain satisfactory career information or even visually observe unconventional and lucrative careers, which they might have aspired to pursue had they had exposure. On the other hand, as a result of exposure to various career options and trying to conform to urban career expectations, students in urban schools tend to have higher career aspirations (Egbochuku et al., 2021). Additionally, a Pennsylvania study conducted on young adults from rural backgrounds found that parents, the society, the state of the economy, financial constraints, and an individual's perception of a better job, were identified as some of the major influences of career choice (Ahmed et al., 2017).

In light of the above in-depth discussion of the factors influencing career choice from an international perspective, the next section will then examine these factors from a South African perspective, where comparisons between rural and private secondary schools will also be made.

2.6 Factors Influencing Career Choice: A South African Context

In line with international research, career decision-making within the South African population is shaped, to a degree, by similar factors. However, the significant economic disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots" results in these factors influencing different segments of the population in distinct ways (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Maree & Molepo, 2007).

Focusing on career counselling as one of the factors, Chuenyane (1983) and Naicker (1994) provided reasons why it is essential as part of the school curriculum. The crux of their argument was that career counselling is an influencing factor to career choice, as it strengthens individuals' decision-making skills and self-concept. Stating, it further bolsters communication skills and coping strategies which in turn allows individuals to make prudent career decisions (Chuenyane, 1983; Naicker, 1994). Ideally, counselling in schools should allow students to progressively gain a better understanding of themselves and begin to envision and take steps in constructing their future (Chuenyane, 1983; Naicker, 1994). Hence, self-understanding is considered a pre-requisite when one seeks to make a well-informed career choice decision (Chuenyane, 1983).

The counselling process should also help learners improve their knowledge regarding various career choices (Chuenyane, 1983; Farao & Du Plessis, 2024). Ideally, this process will also equip learners to better understand other factors related to the career choice decision-making process, including social and economic constraints. Therefore, career counselling should help learners become better decision-makers (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Naicker, 1994). Naicker (1994) further emphasised the urgent need for enhanced career guidance support services, as well as the overall transformation of the educational system/and structures in relation to these services. These arguments may have been made decades ago; however, their inferences are still very much relevant. Thus, highlighting why effective career counselling is a necessity at every secondary school.

However, even after decades of democracy, the consequences of apartheid, coupled with poor governance in the years after, remain evident within South African society (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021; Maree & Molepo, 2007). For instance, according to Maree and Molepo (2007), career counselling services are still very expensive and thus can only be afforded by a privileged few. This means that South African rural secondary school pupils still find themselves very much on the peripheries when it comes to the provision of such services to their learners (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021; Maree & Molepo, 2007). This is a stark contrast to the more affluent, private secondary schools, which are able to provide these counselling services to their learners (Maree & Molepo, 2007).

A study conducted in a rural community in Limpopo revealed that many learners exhibited low levels of career maturity and were at an increased risk of dropping out of school. This outcome was partially attributed to their limited access to career-related information (Letlape, 2019). Maree (2009) also shared that far too many students leave high school without having received any form of career counselling. She highlighted that this does not only deny these students an opportunity to apply and access highly sought-after fields of study in university, but they are also consequently denied a chance to fulfil their potential and uplift themselves, their families, and their communities. Given the aforementioned South African context, and the need for the country to improve in sectors deemed critical for economic development (i.e Science, Engineering, and Technology), Chinyamurindi et al. (2021) argue for the urgent necessity to address career counselling and guidance in all South African schools.

This is not to say that there is an absence of career guidance in South African rural public schools. However, it has been found that a majority of high school learners from

underprivileged communities often do not receive proper and adequate career guidance (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Diale, 2016). This is usually attributed to the lack of sufficient access to career counselling services in these schools as a result of a shortage of educational psychologists and properly trained teachers (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Diale, 2016).

In 2002, South Africa introduced Life Orientation (L.O) as a compulsory subject in the Foundation (Grade R to 3), Intermediate (Grade 4 to 6), and Senior Phases (Grade 7 to 9) of the school curriculum. This subject was later phased into the Further Education and Training (FET) phase in 2006 (Diale, 2016). The aim of introducing L.O into the curriculum was to ensure there was a holistic development of all learners, especially in relation to socio-economic and topical issues (such as, Crime, Youth Unemployment, HIV and Aids, Poverty, Drug and Substance Abuse, etc), which were disregarded by the previous school curriculum (Diale, 2016). Amongst the many socio-economic issues that this subject aimed to address, it also needed to focus on learners' career guidance. However, the numerous topics included in the L.O curriculum, plus the limited training that L.O teachers subsequently received on these topics, meant that there was insufficient effort directed to each student's career guidance and development (Diale, 2016). Additionally, the overpopulation of under-resourced schools also puts a further strain on the already limited career guidance resources (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024). As a result, this population of students (from underprivileged secondary schools) often makes ill-informed career choice decisions, resulting in elevated levels of youth unemployment due to the skills mismatch between their subsequent qualifications and the skills required in the South African labour market (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024).

While the inclusion of Life Orientation in the school curriculum was a positive step, further efforts are necessary for it to meaningfully support students in making well-informed career choices. This is because, currently, for students to receive proper career guidance, schools have to independently employ additional qualified resources to assist and guide learners in their career decision-making journey (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024). This is something that under-resourced rural schools cannot afford, as they are consistently grappling with fundamental issues, such as ensuring that every classroom has a teacher (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024).

Furthermore, as briefly referenced in the section on environmental and situational factors. Prior research has demonstrated that an individual's socio-economic background can also, to a degree, influence the career choice that they eventually make (Ukweuze & Obiefuna,

2017). Stating that a relationship exists between an individual's socioeconomic background and their career aspirations. Whereby, learners from poor backgrounds tend to have lower career aspirations, while those from affluent backgrounds aim higher (Ukweuze & Obiefuna, 2017). Letlape (2019) goes on to say that students from impoverished rural schools tend to receive little support from parents regarding their careers. This is usually as a result of the parents' lack of education, finances, and understanding of the importance of tertiary/further education.

A study on 721 undergraduate students from South Africa highlighted perceived financial support from parents, as well as prospective bursaries, as significant influencers of students' career choice decisions (Ahmed et al., 2017). These findings are further supported by Ngesi (2003), who stated that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to select careers that require minimal training, in order to not put further financial strain on their families (Shumba & Naong, 2012). However, this is expected to have changed following the Fees Must Fall movement in 2015 that resulted in adjustment to the terms and conditions, and funding allocation process by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

Disparity in information availability on different career choices between rural and private schools is also said to influence the choice of career that these students make (Alexander et al., 2010). As a result of the lack of career counselling services, students from rural schools generally receive less information on careers when compared to their private schools' counterparts (Naicker, 1994). Also, rural secondary schools normally lack resources and infrastructure such as computers, engineering equipment, and laboratories. This prevents these schools from teaching certain subjects which in turn denies their students early exposure to certain career pathways (Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006). In contrast, private secondary schools are able to afford building such infrastructure and buying the required equipment, which allows their students to be exposed to a multitude of career pathways from an early age (Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006). By providing private school students with this seemingly exclusive education, it provides them with the opportunity to think about and develop the necessary skills required for careers in these fields (Bujuwoje & Mbanjwa, 2006). A study by Alexander et al. (2010) also stated that students become reluctant to enrol in ICT (Information, Communication, and Technology) courses when they do not have prior knowledge of them or an understanding of what they entail.

A study by Chinyamurindi et al. (2021), which examined a sample of 536 high school learners in the rural Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, identified several career-influencing factors that align closely with those highlighted in both the international and South African context. These factors included Peer influence, Teacher Influence, Parental Influence, Ethnic and Gender Expectations, Negative Social Events, and Academic Experience and Self Efficacy (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). This congruence underscores the pervasiveness and multifaceted nature of these influences across diverse settings. Thus, it is important to consider the disparities in the factors themselves, as well as the differences in their level of influence on these two distinct groups of students (from rural and private secondary schools).

When examining complex constructs such as factors influencing career choice, employing a well-established theoretical framework can provide a structured and rigorous mechanism for the analysis and discussion of these constructs. The Systems Theory Framework (STF) has been identified as particularly appropriate for this study, as it offers a comprehensive model for exploring the multiple, interconnected influences on the career decision-making process (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). The Systems Theory Framework emphasises the dynamic interaction between personal, social, and environmental factors, making it well-suited for comparing career influences across diverse educational contexts, such as rural and private secondary schools. Additionally, this framework also allows for the incorporation of events that happen by chance when making sense of the constructs (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). By utilising the STF, the study can more effectively capture the complexity of career choice while also allowing for the integration of post-modern perspectives that highlight the fluid and evolving nature of career development (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). This is because this framework provides a map for conceptualising career development by dissecting the origins of career counselling and the challenges it faces in the post-modern environment (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021).

2.7 Systems Theory Framework

There have been several theories that have tried to explain the concept of career choice. Some of these theories include the social-cognitive career theory, Super's mini-cycles and maxi-cycles model, and Holland's person and environmental fit. While useful, especially in the 20th century, these theories have been found to be lacking, because of their failure to take into

account the dynamic nature of the 21st century post-modern world (Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). With that being said, the Systems Theory Framework will therefore be utilised.

The Systems Theory Framework represents a shift from traditional positivist logical theories that emphasise measurement, objectivity, observability, and generalisability (Watson & McMahon, 2009). These positivist theories fail to adequately account for individual differences and circumstance by applying one-size-fits-all frameworks (Jena & Nayak, 2020). They also rely on the predictable and stable nature of human behaviour and the world they live in, and generally fail to account for the changes in a person's needs and the dynamic nature of the modern world (Jena & Nayak, 2020).

In contrast, the systems theory framework is guided by the ideologies of constructivism (McMahon et al., 2004). In this regard, an individual is given the opportunity to construct and co-construct their own reality. The contextual nature of this approach allows for the recognition of socio as well as economic influences on an individual's career decision-making process (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Patton & McMahon, 2006). Furthermore, rather than describing one's career development through stages, where unsuccessful negotiation of the previous stage negatively impacts the next stage, the Systems Theory Framework sees one's career development as a dynamic inter-related process between the content and processes of this development (Watson & McMahon, 2009). The framework asserts that the boundaries of influence within the system are permeable and allow for fluid interaction and influence amongst the various components of the system (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Patton & McMahon, 2006). This permeability of boundaries is illustrated by the broken lines in the System's Theory Framework diagram below (see Figure 1). This approach also recognises one's past, present, and future as a key feature of the decision-making process.

As seen in Figure 1 below, this approach recognises the dynamic nature of the interaction between one's individual aspects and the contextual environment within which they exist (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Therefore, apart from individual aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, ability, personality, self-concept, and interests; this approach also considers societal and environmental influences, such as geographic location, historical trends, economic climate, and political decisions (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; McMahon et al., 2004). The nature and degree of these influences are said to vary over time and can affect different individuals at any point in their lives (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2004). This framework also acknowledges the influence of chance in one's career development (Patton & McMahon,

2006). The accounting for chance events of this framework is commended by researchers such as Stead and Watson (2006), who acknowledge that most traditional career theories fail to account for or consider such events (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). In the diagram below, chance events are illustrated by the flashy lines across all the spheres of influence. This Highlights that these events can happen at any time and through any of the spheres of influence (McMahon et al., 2004).

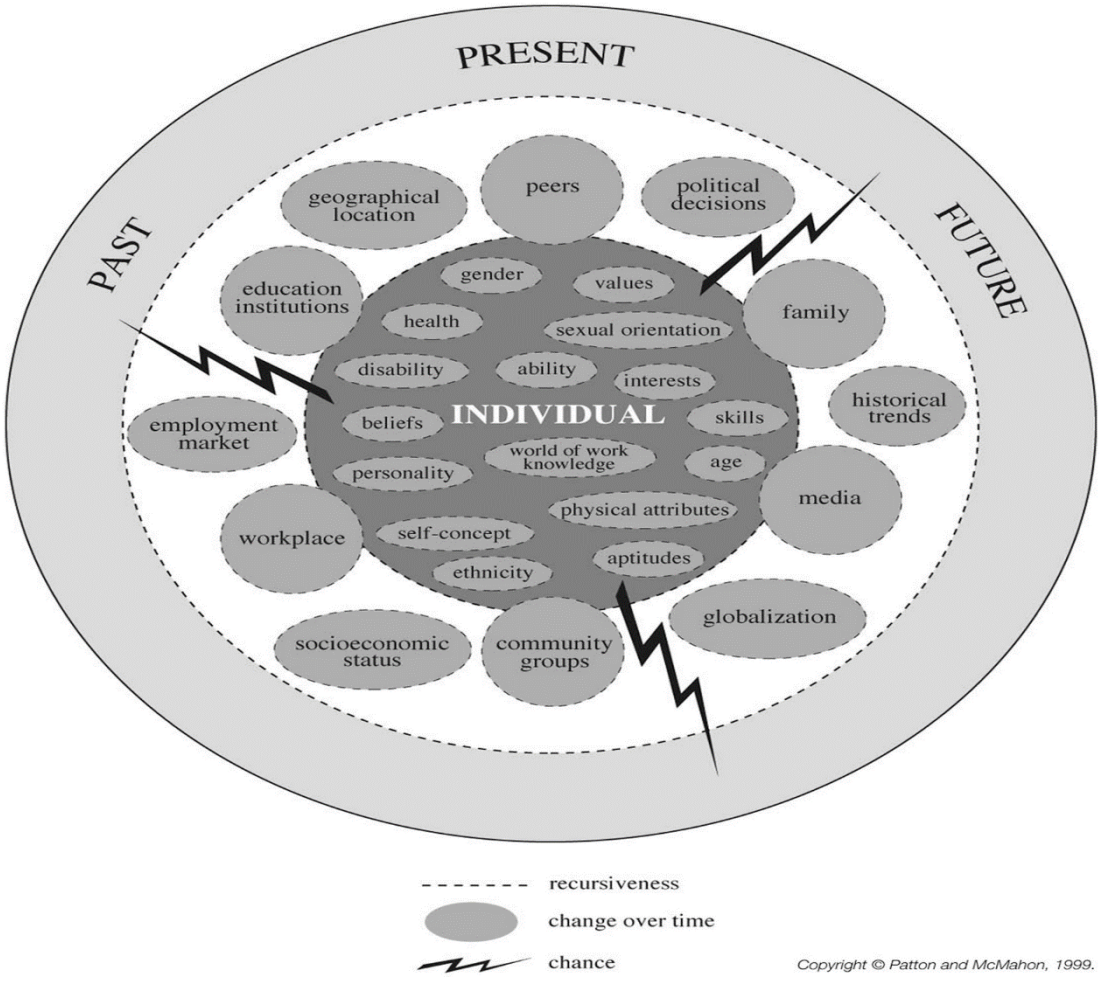


Figure 1: The Systems Theory Framework (McMahon & Patton, 2019).

Even though constructivism theories are seen as very useful in capturing subjective contextual experiences, they are still considered difficult and problematic to operationalise (Watson & McMahon, 2009). This is due to the fact that constructivism theories treat each individual as unique, thus, require constant adjustment and flexibility in application especially in a culturally diverse population (Van Esbroeck et al., 2005; Watson & McMahon, 2009). Hence, this provides a difficult challenge when looking to apply these theories in culturally diverse country such as South Africa.

However, the Systems Theory Framework represents one of the more robust ways these challenges have been dealt as indicated by its successful application on various occasions within the South African context. The My System of Career Influences (MSCI) has been consistently utilised for the qualitative assessment of the career decision-making process (Farao & Du Plessis, 2024; Watson & McMahon, 2009). Thus, considering all the above-mentioned theoretical and practical components of the Systems Theory Framework, in conjunction with the current research study's aims, this framework seems well-equipped to enable a sensible analysis and understanding of the different factors.

2.8 Research Aims

- Exploring whether there are similarities and/or differences in the factors influencing career choice for undergraduates from both rural and private secondary schools, with the goal of enhancing the understanding of these dynamics.

2.9 Research Questions

- What factors influence career choice for undergraduates from rural/private secondary schools?
- What factors are perceived as the main enablers and main inhibitors of career choice decisions by undergraduates from rural and private schools?
- What are the similarities and differences between factors influencing career choice between students from these two distinct backgrounds?

CHAPTER 3

3. Methodology

According to Wilkinson (2000), a research methodology "is a set of procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and evaluate data on a certain issue". Research methodology is a collective term for the structured process of conducting research (Gounder, 2012). The research methodology becomes a universal approach when conducting research; it decides what research methods the study will utilise. A research methodology is said to be the most crucial part of a thesis as it explains to the readers how the researcher/writer designed his/her study, how he/she collected data, from whom data was collected, how data was collected and how the collected data was analysed in order to reach a certain conclusion. This then grants readers the opportunity to critically evaluate the overall validity and reliability of the study, hence why proper/thorough research is needed when conducting a study. The methodology section answers three main questions. Being, how was the data collected or generated? How was it analysed? And what tools were used to analyse data? (Gounder (2012). According to Gounder (2012), research methodology strives to provide insights into the objective of a research study, the process of defining the research topic, hypothesis formation, data collecting and analysis, and the selection of specific methods and techniques.

The methodology section discusses the approach that will be utilised to answer the research questions. The section begins by briefly describing the research design that was employed in this study. It describes and elaborates on the sample and sampling method, the procedure, as well as the instrumentation that was utilised. Finally, this section concludes by discussing the method of analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an exploratory, qualitative, cross-sectional research design. The nature of the study meant that it was not possible to generalise the results of the study to a bigger population, but rather, the aim was to get in-depth knowledge on the phenomenon under study and improve understanding. A qualitative research design is subjective in nature (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). This research design captured people's in-depth experiences and perceptions regarding a phenomenon that the researcher sought to study and better understand (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Furthermore, this design relied on participants and the

researcher providing a detailed and accurate representation of the participants' experiences to allow for more precise interpretation (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007; Jackson et al., 2007).

3.2 Sample and Sampling Method

According to Alvi (2016), sampling is the process of choosing a sample from the targeted population. As part of qualitative research, the researcher was required to identify and sample participants whom he worked with to answer the research questions. This section briefly describes the sample and the sampling method that was utilised for this study. The inclusion criteria for participants in this study required: The participants to be over the age of 18; be at an undergraduate level of their university studies; and have completed their secondary schooling at either a rural or private secondary school. The sampling method that was used for data collection was non-probability in nature, whereby the purposive sampling technique was employed. Non-probability refers to a sampling process whereby not every individual's chance of being sampled (within the population) is known (Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Taherdoost, 2016).

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is less expensive and less time-consuming. Using this technique, researchers use their judgement to create a specific criterion for which they will then utilise to select their sample (Koerber & McMicheal, 2008; Taherdoost, 2016). Hence, since this research study did not seek to generalise the findings to the entire population, the non-probability purposive method was employed. A sample of six students from each of the two groups of students was collected (total sample size = 12).

3.3 Instruments and Procedure

This section describes the instrument that was used during the data collection process. It then goes on to describe the process of how data was collected, stored, transcribed, and analysed.

3.3.1 Instrument

- A Semi-structured interview guide based on the Systems Theory Framework was developed by the researcher (A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted).

The interview guide (Appendix C) consisted of a number of open-ended questions that sought to allow the participants to narrate their subjective stories in relation to the influences that shaped their career journeys. The questions aimed to solicit detailed information that pertained to one's background, school experiences, environmental and socio-economic factors,

and their role in influencing the career choices of the participants. Below are some of the questions that formed part of the questionnaire;

- "How would you describe your upbringing and family life?"
- "Which subjects did you choose when you were entering your FET phase in high school? Why did you choose those subjects?"
- "Did you feel that the type/location of your school hindered or benefitted you with discovering more career choices and knowledge on these various careers? Do you still feel the same way now? Why?"
- "How much information did you have about your career choice/s when you made your decision? How/where did you get this information?"

The detail shared by the participants in response to the questions, thus aided with the formulation of a wholistic understanding of the different factors and their varying degrees influence in the participants' career decisions making processes.

3.3.2 Procedure

Once ethical clearance was obtained for the study, students were approached in both their personal capacity (through the researcher's existing data and snowballing) and through the University of the Witwatersrand's internal process. This process required the researcher to first submit a written request to the university, requesting to recruit and conduct their research study within the University of the Witwatersrand premises. This request specified the target population and detailed how the data will be collected. Once this was approved, the researcher then proceeded and begin with the data collection.

Participant information sheets outlining the aims and objectives of the study were used to invite potential participants (in their individual capacities and through the University of the Witwatersrand) to participate. Once a potential participant had agreed to participate, the researcher, in collaboration with the participant, communicated and scheduled the interview at a location and time of their convenience. The researcher ensured that the location decided upon was quiet, private, and free of disturbances. Each participant was requested to read and sign two informed consent forms prior to the interview. One informed consent form was for consenting to the interview, the other one was for agreeing to the interview being recorded. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any prejudice. They were also informed that their information was going to be treated as private and confidential.

The researcher also informed participants that written notes may be taken during the interview. One-on-one semi-structured contact interviews that were guided by the Systems Theory Framework, which strictly followed COVID-19 protocols, were then conducted and recorded for each participant. To set up these interviews, the researcher collaborated independently with each participant to decide on a convenient date, time, and location for the interview. Once everything was agreed upon, the researcher then organised a venue for the interview, ensuring that it met the criteria for a suitable location.

In cases where sit-down interviews were not possible as a result of Covid-19 protocols, virtual interviews (i.e. Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.) were conducted and recorded. Whereby, electronic copies of the two consent forms were sent to potential participants prior to the interview. Once the signed consent forms were returned, the researcher, together with the participants, collaborated to decide on a convenient time to schedule the interview. In instances where connectivity was lost during the interview, the recording was saved, and the interview continued once connectivity was regained or at a rescheduled date and time. Prior to these virtual interviews, participants were informed of this backup process in cases where connectivity was lost. The interviews with participant generally took between 30-45 minutes depending on the level of detail that the participant went into when responding to questions.

Recordings and hand-written notes from all interviews were initially kept in a locked cupboard before being transferred to a password-protected laptop, with the initial copies destroyed. The collected data reached data saturation. The researcher started to get similar responses the more interviews they conducted. The amount of data collected allowed for the identification of key themes and provided sufficient insight to address the research objectives. Lastly, once all the interviews here concluded, transcription, analysis, and interpretation followed.

3.4 Method of Analysis

A thematic analysis was utilised for the analysis section of this study. Thematic analysis is “a method of analysing qualitative data, where the researcher examines data to identify common themes, ideas, topics, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly” (Caulfield, 2019, p. 1). It is also defined as a qualitative analysis method that helps with the organising, analysis, description, and interpretation of subjective participants’ data (Nowell et al., 2017).

Steps in thematic analysis;

- Familiarization: Involves going through the interview transcripts and field notes made during the interview sessions.
- Coding the information - Identifying and coding important concepts, ideas or patterns in the data.
- Generating themes: Reviewing the initial codes and identifying potential themes that emerge.
- Analyse the identified themes and assess their coherence and meaningfulness.
- Interpreting the information and writing a report: Developing a coherent report presenting the findings of the thematic analysis (Caulfield, 2020).

This method analyses large amounts of collected raw data by creating codes and identifying patterns, which later develop into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Using this method, the researcher extracted both intrinsic and extrinsic information from the original dataset. This extracted information must be relevant to the construct that the research intends to understand and must also look to address the aims and answer the study's research questions (Alhojailan, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

How well the researcher codes the dataset will impact upon the reliability and validity of the study (Buetow, 2010). After the coding, the sub-theme and the theme creation, the researcher began to analyse and interpret the simplified data. As this data was being analysed, the researcher started to notice similar patterns within the dataset, which helped with the interpretation and comparisons. The thematic analysis method has the ability to extract factors that influence participants' decision (Alhojailan, 2012). When conducted properly and in detail, this analysis method is said to produce reliable and insightful information (Nowell et al., 2017). Additionally, this method is very useful when dealing with large amounts of information and seeking to compare various participants' perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017).

However, the thematic analysis method is usually criticised for not following a structured approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; Buetow, 2010). Therefore, to guide against this criticism, the thematic analysis process was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step analysis process. The first step involves reading and re-reading; the second step is about generation of initial codes; the third step is about looking for initial patterns and beginning to generate themes; the fourth step is concerned with reviewing the generated themes; the fifth step deals with naming and defining these themes; and lastly, the final step involves interpretation and report writing (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Additionally, this approach is also criticised for lacking depth and not being grounded in a strong theoretical framework, and thus, can be superficial. However, there are other methods of analysis that could have been applied to counter some of these limitations. Some of these approaches include; grounded theory, content analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis amongst others (Caulfield, 2019). Grounded theory utilises an iterative coding process and comparisons of empirical data to develop a theoretical framework (Caulfield, 2019). Content analysis is a systematic method used to analyse data through the interpretation of its meaning, context, and themes to outline its underlying or latent meaning (Nowell et al., 2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis, on the other hand, explores how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences through in-depth understanding of personal perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017). These approaches also have their own limitations. Thus, based on the amount of data that was collect, and the objective of this research study, a thematic analysis was identified as being the most suitable.

3.5 Ethics

In conducting this study, ethics were prioritised. Thus, when collecting the data, the researcher endeavoured to "do no harm". Therefore, before data collection, the first step was to apply for the University of the Witwatersrand's ethical clearance. Only after this was obtained, was the researcher able to proceed with data collection. The Ethical Clearance Certificate Protocol Number was MAORG/21/10 (as per Appendix D). Prior to the interview, participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any stage during the study without prejudice. They were informed that their information will be treated as private and confidential. Participants were asked to read and sign two informed consent forms prior to participating. One consent form was for the interview, while the other was for the voice recording. To ensure confidentiality, potential participants were given pseudonyms, and any identifying information was deleted when writing up the results and discussion. Furthermore, potential participants were informed that only the researcher and their supervisor would have access to data. Additionally, to ensure the safety of the participants' data, the dataset together with the notes, were stored in a password-protected computer.

Lastly, to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of this study, the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was utilised. This criterion assesses credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Thus, to ensure credibility, the researcher collected all the data themselves, and ensured that where there was ambiguity in a participant's response, clarifying questions were posed. All interviews were also recorded, to allow the researcher to go back and review participants' insights to make certain that they were captured correctly. To support Transferability, a detailed description of the research context, the data collection process, and the demographic information of all participants was provided. To allow for the replication or review of the study by another researcher, dependability was also enhanced through maintaining a detailed audit trail of the entire research process. Finally, to strengthen confirmability, frequent data reviews were conducted by the researcher, supported by his supervisor. Verbatim quotations of participants' responses were also prominently included in the data analysis to unsure the perspectives of participants were correctly captured.

CHAPTER 4

4. Results

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis that followed the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis model. This method analyses large amounts of collected raw data by creating codes and identifying patterns, which later develop into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This analysis was conducted following the interviews, and highlighted the salient themes found. The chapter begins by describing the sampled participants' demographics, then moves into presenting the results.

The main objective of this study was to enhance the understanding of the differences as well as the similarities among factors influencing career choice for undergraduates from both rural and private secondary schools

4.1 Demographic of Participants

The demographics of the participants who participated in this study are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Age (Years)	Gender	School Type: Rural / Private	University
1. RSS.1	25	Male	Rural	UNISA
2. RSS.2	22	Female	Rural	Wits
3. RSS.3	21	Female	Rural	UJ
4. RSS.4	23	Female	Rural	DUT
5. RSS.5	23	Female	Rural	UKZN
6. RSS.6	20	Female	Rural	UKZN
7. PSS.1	24	Female	Private	UJ
8. PSS.2	20	Female	Private	UKZN

9. PSS.3	19	Female	Private	UKZN
10. PSS.4	22	Female	Private	UJ
11. PSS.5	21	Female	Private	UKZN
12. PSS.6	20	Female	Private	UKZN

Key: RSS – Refers to Rural Secondary School, and the number next to it, is the participant number from that designated group. PSS – Refers to Private Secondary School. These were the pseudo-names that were given to all the participants to help identify them, and ensure that their information remained confidential.

4.2 Factors Influencing Career Choice in Private Schools

4.2.1 Background and Self-awareness

This theme explored how an individual's background and self-awareness can shape their career decisions within the context of private secondary schools. This theme was further broken down into subthemes, namely; Self-awareness, home environment and parental support, and financial background. These subthemes aided in the concise classification of participants' insight.

4.2.1.1 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness emerged as a key theme in the students' career journey. Participants reflected on their understanding of their abilities, skills, and interests, and how these shaped their academic paths and future aspirations.

PSS.2 expressed a strong sense of self-awareness about her abilities and the importance of recognising what she could and could not do when selecting her career path. She emphasised that it was crucial to know one's strengths and weaknesses, as they directly influenced academic performance in critical subjects necessary for her chosen career. PSS.2 said,

"I was definitely aware. I think it is important to know what you can and cannot do because, at the end of the day, the career that I chose needed these subjects, and you needed to pass them really well... So yes, it is very important that you know what you are good at."

This self-awareness allowed her to make informed decisions and excel in subjects that were essential to her future career.

PSS.1 shared how her self-awareness developed gradually during her high school years. Initially, she lacked confidence, but by observing the strengths of her peers. She reflected,

"I didn't know I had those talents... but seeing the other kids and how they were flourishing... I discovered part of myself that I didn't even know."

Her self-awareness helped her recognise her strengths, which later aligned with her career choice in psychology.

Similarly, PSS.6 demonstrated a solid sense of self-awareness regarding her abilities and interests, which gave her confidence. She said,

"I was aware of my interests, skills, and abilities, which actually helped a lot, especially once I had received my offer... I believed in my abilities and that I would still be able to cope with the demands of the course."

This self-assurance played a pivotal role in her decision to pursue her chosen field.

PSS.4 showed a high degree of self-awareness in understanding her physical abilities and personality. She mentioned,

"I was self-aware, in terms of my physical abilities... my personality as well... I understood myself fully back in high school."

Her clear understanding of her own sense of self helped PSS.4 navigate her social and academic settings effectively.

In contrast, PSS.5 viewed self-awareness as an evolving process, noting that it was a journey of discovery during high school. She said,

"I would say to a certain extent... It's always like a journey to figure yourself out... there were stuff that I learned about myself as I grew."

PSS.5 recognised her strengths in subjects like accounting, where she excelled, and acknowledged her limitations in areas that required extensive reading. This growing self-awareness enabled her to focus her efforts on subjects that matched her abilities.

These reflections highlight that self-awareness is not only essential for identifying one's strengths and limitations but also for making informed and confident career choices. For some, like PSS.2 and PSS.4, self-awareness was apparent early on, while for others, such as PSS.5 and PSS.1, it was a process that unfolded throughout their high school years.

4.2.1.2 Home Environment

In the context of exploring factors influencing career choices among students in private schools, the data shows a significant subtheme centered on the type of home environment and the level of parental support. Participants consistently highlighted how their upbringing and family dynamics have shaped their academic and career paths.

PSS.2's narrative highlights a nurturing and supportive home environment where freedom and encouragement are principal. She describes her upbringing as "very happy," "*very warm*," and "*free to be anything that you want to be*". This positive environment allowed her to explore her interests freely. A significant influence was having a family member in the health sphere, which she observed daily, fostering a growing passion for the field. She says,

"You know when you grow up being a bright kid and everyone just generally calls you a doctor or a pharmacist, so it is things like that that are engraved in your mind. I think that might have been an influence too."

This highlights how family expectations and suggestions from close people can shape career aspirations from a young age.

PSS.4's story reflects the impact of being raised in a single-parent home with a "strong female personality". Her mother played a pivotal role in her academic choices, guiding her towards subjects that would open various career paths. PSS.4 states,

"My mom was a big influence on that; she has always taken me and put me on the right track and said, OKAY, this is what you should do; she has always advised me of better options".

This illustrates how a proactive and involved parent can steer their child towards beneficial educational opportunities, shaping their future career choices.

PSS.5's experience highlights the influence of family expectations and sibling dynamics. With an older sister pursuing similar subjects, PSS.5 was encouraged to follow the same academic path. She notes,

"Also, family played an important role. I have an older sister; she did the same subjects as well, so my family also said they think it would be best for me to do these subjects."

The data clearly illustrates that the type of home environment and the nature of parental support significantly influence career choices. Whether through direct guidance, role modeling, or sibling mentorship, the family's role is influential in shaping the education and career paths of students in high school. Each participant's unique home environment provided a foundation that supported and directed their aspirations, underscoring the critical interplay between family dynamics and career development.

4.2.1.3 Financial Background

Finances significantly influence student's career choices, not only for learners attending rural schools but also for learners in private schools where the cost of education can be substantial. Family income is a significant factor in determining access to education, as education potentially incurs a range of costs, both upfront and hidden (Hunt, 2008). This subtheme explores the varied financial circumstances of participants and how these influenced their educational journeys and career decisions.

PSS.3's experience illustrates a scenario where financial constraints were a major concern. She states,

"If something was needed at school, they would make sure that even though they might not have the money, they would put something together."

This determination is evident in the sacrifices her family made, as she continues,

"When my mom passed away, all the money that she had left behind strictly got taken to school, so there was no money that we spent for anything else besides school-related expenses."

This highlights a situation where education was prioritised above all else, with all available resources directed towards ensuring that she attended a proper school.

PSS.4 describes a relatively comfortable financial situation, stating,

"It was okay, it wasn't too bad… financially it was very affording upbringing, we had everything we needed and relatively enough of our wants."

This environment likely provided her with more stability and fewer worries about meeting educational expenses, which can reduce stress and allow for greater focus on academic and career aspirations.

PSS.5's narrative tells how she helped her parents alleviate school-related financial burdens. She shares,

"My mom is a nurse, my dad was a principal, and now a Pastor, I did think about them paying, more specifically I thought about them not paying, so in a sense I tried by all means possible to make sure my parents didn't pay I started applying for bursaries in grade 11."

PSS.6's provides insight into the social pressures associated with financial disparities in private schools. She says,

"Coming from a not-rich family, it was a bit of a challenge relating with other students, as most of them came from rich families. I guess I felt a bit of peer pressure as well."

In terms of financial backgrounds, participants' experiences highlighted a range of financial narratives, from financial constraints to privileged circumstances, each shaping their educational paths and career choices in distinct ways.

4.2.2 High School Experiences

High school experiences play a crucial role in shaping the career choices of learners within the unique environments of high schools. This theme explores how various aspects of the high school experience, including the academic atmosphere, social dynamics, and overall school culture impact a student's career aspirations. In this case, private high schools often provide a distinct environment characterised by smaller class sizes, individualised attention,

and a broad range of resources and activities. By examining these elements, we can gain insight into how the environment, atmosphere, and social life within private high schools can influence students' decisions regarding their future careers.

4.2.2.1 School Location

The location of a school can significantly influence the career choices of its students. For learners in private high schools, the school's location often provides unique advantages or challenges that shape their career aspirations. This subtheme examines how the proximity to urban centers, exposure to diverse environments, and accessibility to resources have either benefited or hindered the career choices of students. The narratives of the participants reveal how the location of their schools played a pivotal role in broadening their horizons and providing opportunities that may not have been available in more remote or rural settings.

PSS.2 emphasises the benefits of her school's location, noting its proximity to urban resources and the "outside world". She explains,

"It is not far from civilisation, it is not far from outside resources. So, the location definitely benefited me."

PSS.2 believes that attending a school in a rural area would have limited her exposure and opportunities, stating;

"If you are in a rural area, you don't get to experience what outside looks like; you are more in a shell in a sense".

PSS.2's narrative is similar to what was said by Egbochuku, Igbineweka and Aghahowa (2021), that "children who live in the metropolis may have high career aspirations than children in the rural environment who are not exposed to urban life".

PSS.2 also highlights issues like limited network connectivity in rural areas, which would have hindered her ability to connect with the broader world and pursue her current career path.

PSS.6 echoes similar sentiments, indicating that the school's location facilitated exposure to various career options. She briefly states;

"The actual location of the school somehow made it easier for us to get exposed to a variety of careers".

This suggests that being in a more accessible and resource-rich area expanded her career awareness and opportunities.

PSS.1 reflects on the benefits of her school's location in relation to her upbringing on the outskirts of central Johannesburg. She recalls numerous educational excursions which enriched her learning experience:

"For geography, we got to go to Sandton to see what an OBD looks like". She concludes that "the accessibility to different locations definitely did benefit me."

PSS.5 provides a different perspective, noting how the school's location opened her mind to different lifestyles and aspirations. She reflects;

"You see a sister driving a Range Rover, something you wouldn't see in rural areas…. I would say that where my school was really opened my mind, not just with my career choice. But also, in terms of my overall thinking, I was like, "I also want to get into a space like that, drive my own Range Rover, and have children looking at me and being motivated"".

This exposure to different socioeconomic conditions influenced her aspirations, demonstrating how location can impact not only career choices but also broader life goals and ambitions.

Egbochuku, Igbineweka and Aghahowa (2021) also speak about the importance of exposure, stating that: "Children from urban schools, due to their exposure to urban life, will always want to meet up with the expectation of the society by choosing professional careers such as medicine, pharmacy, and engineering. As the influence of location on career choice varies from one geographical location to another.

The data clearly shows that the location of a private high school can significantly influence the career choices of its students. Closeness to urban centres and resources provides greater exposure to diverse career options, facilitates educational excursions, and inspires students through direct and indirect experiences. The participants' narratives stress the importance of a school's location in broadening career choices, providing opportunities, and shaping career aspirations.

4.2.2.2 Peer Influence and Extracurricular Activities

Peer influence and extracurricular activities play a pivotal role in shaping the career choices of private high school learners. Through friendships, peer mentorship, and active participation in sports and clubs, students gain insights into their strengths, passions, and potential career paths. This subtheme examines how these elements of high school life contribute to students' personal growth and career development.

PSS.4 highlights the importance of friends in her high school experience. While she notes that there wasn't a single person who directly influenced her career choice in high school, she, however, states that her friends helped her understand herself better. She says,

"I did have a few friends who actually helped me understand myself better, and pointed out the different things I did, which made me self-introspect and think about who I am."
Additional she states, *"it was the place [high school] where I found or I realised my passion and my love for sports, and how much of a leader I can be and I am."*

PSS.3 shares a similar sentiment about the positive impact of sports and clubs. She describes sports as "amazing in high school", noting that it was a significant part of her high school experience. She says, *"It was nice, and it made you forget about academics, and you easily able to make friends".*

PSS.1 emphasises the value of peer mentorship in her high school experience. She mentions having older friends who acted as mentors. She also mentions how her school's diverse offerings contributed to her personal growth. Stating;

"I had one particular girl whom I considered a mentor; talking to her definitely helped."

"I would say the exposure to different things whilst being in that school really allowed me to push myself. Like, I did public speaking and poetry evenings; it was like a whole gate opened to new cultural experiences that I would have otherwise not had. So that made it more enjoyable, to just be able to be in interactive spaces and do high school musicals and plays."

This shows that peer influence and extracurricular activities significantly shape the career choices of learners. Friendships and peer mentorship foster self-reflection and personal growth, while participation in sports and clubs helps students discover their passions and develop important life skills.

4.2.3 High School Support, and Resources

The support and resources provided by high schools are pivotal in guiding students' career choices. This theme delves into the critical role of teacher support in helping students select subjects for the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, ensuring they align with their future aspirations. Additionally, it examines the importance of essential resources such as science labs, computer facilities, and other educational tools that enable students to explore their interests in depth. Beyond the classroom, career guidance initiatives including career fairs/ career expos, aptitude tests, and university visits, play an instrumental role in shaping students' perceptions of various career paths and preparing them for post-secondary school education. By analysing the experiences of private high school learners, this research seeks to uncover how their high school's influence, support, and resources have steered their career decisions and readiness for tertiary education.

4.2.3.1 Teacher Support

Amongst other factors, teacher support was noted to be crucial in high school, as educators not only facilitate academic learning but also provide invaluable guidance to students navigating career choices. This was evidenced by the views of the following participants:

In support of findings from a study by Mtemeri (2022) which states that teachers play a pivotal role in career guidance. PSS.5 emphasises the role of teachers in offering career insights and guidance based on their professional experiences. She states,

"Even my teachers, cause a lot of my teachers were accountants, and they decided to do PGCE, so I would speak to my teachers and stuff like that. If they saw opportunities, they would tell us. [Stating] if you want to go in this path, these are the expectations."

PSS.1 discusses how teachers influenced her subject choices and career aspirations by emphasising the importance of selecting subjects that offer broad career prospects. She recalls,

"Definitely the teachers themselves. So, we were always told to choose subjects that will broaden your horizon..." She adds that her teachers advised that "the broader your subjects are, the higher the chances of you entering the workplace and flourishing."

PSS.1 also reflects on the support she received from her Afrikaans teacher, stating,

"I would definitely say my Afrikaans teacher; she took a deep interest in all of our success as learners in high school; she always wanted you to be your best."

This proves that teacher support in private high schools encompasses a range of guidance, from practical career advice based on professional experience, to encouragement and motivation. Teachers help students make informed decisions about their academic paths and future careers.

4.2.3.2 Career Counselling and Career Guidance

In exploring the career counselling and guidance offered in private schools, the data showed varying levels of support provided to students, with students reflecting on the support they received through different programs and activities, such as career days, university visits, and advice on university applications.

PSS.1 shared her positive experience with the guidance provided through the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum. She highlighted that LO was divided into physical education and guidance. The guidance component focused on life after high school, and career days were a key feature. PSS.1 noted that these events allowed students to interact with companies and explore different career options, which helped broaden their perspective.

"*Guidance definitely opened my mind, because before, I was like science and technology that is where you have to be. But then because of the guidance classes I was like no you can go into psychology; you can go into different fields."*

PSS.2 similarly appreciated the guidance she received, particularly through university visits and career talks. She emphasised the importance of seeing firsthand what different careers entailed, saying,

"*They took us places to actually see and not just to hear about it, but actually see what goes on in those career choices."*

PSS.2 also noted the school's referral to a career counsellor but expressed that these services were external and required payment, which limited accessibility for many students. She stated,

"*The school did refer us to a career counsel that we could go to. The teachers will tell us about things such as career guidance, but it was not done within the school, so you had to pay money to go and see those people outside."*

Although the university representatives provided information about applications, PSS.2 felt that the focus was more on application processes rather than on the practical aspects of what students would do in university, sharing,

"*People from universities used to come, but when they came, they came with the idea, 'this is how you apply, this is how you enter the system'*."

PSS.4 mentioned that although she did not feel the need for career support, she still benefitted from the school organising career days, university visits, and providing access to resources.

"*I don't think I needed the support from the school, but I did get the support in terms of them setting up career days taking us to various universities and providing us with information*," she explained.

However, PSS.4 noted that they did not participate in formal aptitude testing, but were instead given pamphlets and asked to answer questions that would help the school understand their career interests. Stating,

"*We [have] never done aptitude testing, but they just gave us pamphlets and asked us to answer questions so that they get more information. Thereafter, they would call us and advise us further. We never wrote tests, but they gave us something to answer so they have an idea of where we are at*."

PSS.5 described the peer counselor centre as an important resource, where students could seek advice and support. She also mentioned taking part in online career quizzes and aptitude tests, which helped guide subject choices, particularly in grade 9. She explained,

"*In grade 9, before we started choosing subjects, we also had an aptitude test to check if you can go into maths core, for example. They helped check.. Fine, you love doing this, but are you good at it as well.*"

PSS.5 also mentioned frequent visits from universities and career fairs, although she did not attend them personally.

"*We had visits from universities a lot, from the University of Cape Town, everywhere… We had career fairs, it's just that I never went.*"

PSS.6's experience was different, as she felt the support provided by her school was limited. She explained that the school primarily provided application forms and expected students to take the initiative in seeking more information about careers.

"*They provided us with application forms only, and we as students had to take the initiative to visit the university and get more information regarding the careers that we were interested in.*"

PSS.6 also recalled a visit from a representative of Varsity College but felt that this was insufficient for making informed career decisions.

"*I feel the school could and should have done more*." She said.

The participants' responses show varying degrees of satisfaction with the career guidance provided by their schools. While some students benefitted from structured programs, visits, and access to resources, others felt the support was limited and lacked in-depth advice.

4.2.3.2 Availability of Resources in Schools

Access to resources within private high schools significantly influences student's educational experiences and shapes their career choices. According to Esongo (2017), technical resources are one of the many capacity dimensions of a school to which high students' performance depends. This subtheme examines the impact of well-equipped facilities, such as laboratories, computer labs, libraries etc., on students' future academic and career endeavours.

PSS.4 shared insight about the accessibility and availability of resources at her school, stating;

"Definitely, we had accessible laboratories, we had a library, internet, and a computer lab. We had a lot of access to information about different things, and also physical resources".

Her statement underlines the importance of fundamental resources like libraries and internet access, alongside specialised facilities such as laboratories, in providing students with diverse learning opportunities and information access crucial for career exploration.

PSS.3 reflects on the adequacy of resources available for different subjects, noting;

"I think we had enough resources for the subjects that were there; we had proper labs. I think we had like four labs, and everything was there. If you were doing consumer studies, you had four proper kitchens, [and also] we had proper arts resources.."

She highlights the school's commitment to subject-specific resources, including multiple labs and specialised spaces like kitchens for consumer studies and well-equipped arts facilities. This way, the school ensured that students received hands-on experiences essential for understanding and excelling in their chosen fields.

PSS.1 discusses her learning experiences within science and arts disciplines, stating,

"Especially within science and life science. So, just the exposure within a subject itself, we had access to labs, microscopes and other equipment. I would say the labs were well equipped."

PSS.5 highlights the role of support services and technological resources in career preparation, stating,

"We had everything, we had computer labs, the peer counsellors' place [also] had computers, and the peer counsellors would help you with your applications."

PSS.6 discusses the school's focus on technical education and practical training, stating,

"The school was more of a technical school. It offered mechanical, electrical and civil engineering, and there were workshops [which had the equipment and machinery] for students to do their practical work."

Consequently, by offering a range of facilities, from laboratories and computer labs to specialised workshops and support services, schools enable students to explore, excel, and make informed decisions about their educational and professional futures. These resources not

only support academic achievement but also foster a rounded approach to career readiness, equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in diverse fields of study and employment.

4.3 Factors Influencing Career Choice in Rural Secondary Schools

4.3.1 Background and Self-awareness

Like in private schools, understanding the factors that influence career choices in rural schools requires a close examination of students' backgrounds and self-awareness. This theme explores how elements such as family circumstances, socioeconomic status, and individual traits intersect to shape student's career aspirations and decisions. By analysing the diverse experiences and personal characteristics of rural school students, this section aims to uncover how their unique backgrounds and self-awareness contribute to their career paths and educational goals.

4.3.1.1 Self-Awareness

The participants' reflections on their self-awareness regarding abilities, skills, and interests during high school reveal varying levels of insight, which significantly influenced their career choices.

RSS.3 and RSS.2 expressed a distinct lack of self-awareness during their high school experiences. RSS.3 stated,

"No, I don't think I was aware of anything at that time. I started exploring all of that when I was out of high school". Indicating that her high school environment did not foster exploration or self-reflection.

Similarly, RSS.2 noted,

"Nope, the only thing I know about in high school was that I am smart. So, I never got a chance to know anything else besides work-related stuff".

Her experience highlights a focus primarily on academic performance, leaving little room for broader self-exploration.

In contrast, RSS.4 demonstrated a more defined self-awareness of her strengths. She stated,

"I knew what my strengths were and how important they were. I have always known that I am a problem solver and enjoy that, which is what made me go for a career that comes with such challenges."

This clarity of self-awareness allowed her to align her career path with her intrinsic abilities, emphasising the role of understanding one's strengths in career decision-making.

RSS.1 reflected on his gradual awareness, saying,

"I would say I started being aware of those after I finished high school, even though I had a clue, but then it was nothing serious."

His statement indicates that while he had some initial awareness, it wasn't until after high school that he began to take it seriously, suggesting that transitions beyond high school can cause deeper self-reflection and understanding.

RSS.5's perspective illustrates how personal experiences can enhance self-awareness. She shared,

"I always knew I was a kind person, and living with my grandparents, who are very old people, made me believe that I am good at taking care of people…because at times I would help my granny take her medication, and that alone made me see I can be able to take care of patients should I become a nurse."

Overall, the participants' responses showed that their self-awareness regarding their abilities, skills, and interests varied significantly during high school. While some individuals lacked awareness, others began to identify their strengths through personal experiences or reflection. This underscores the importance of supportive environments and experiences in nurturing self-awareness among students, ultimately influencing their career aspirations.

4.3.1.2 Home Environment

The home environment and parental support play fundamental roles in shaping the career choices of students in rural schools. This subtheme explores how different familial

settings and levels of parental encouragement influence students' career aspirations and decisions. By examining the diverse experiences of participants, we gain insights into the profound impact of family dynamics and support on career pathways.

RSS.5 reflects on a nurturing upbringing, stating,

"My upbringing was good; I grew up in a warm home filled with so much love. I was raised by my grandparents. So, growing up, I lived with my grandparents, my uncle, my sister and my two brothers. My mom passed away when I was in grade 6."

Raised by her grandparents after her mother's passing, RSS.5 benefited from a stable and warm home environment, which likely provided a strong foundation for her personal and academic growth.

RSS.4, on the other hand, describes a challenging/emotional upbringing that ultimately pushed her to work hard and potentially influenced her career choices. She states,

"My upbringing was not a 'normal' one. I was not brought up under a family structure that is said to be 'normal', where both parents live under the same roof. As a result, I experienced a lot of things that I do not believe any child that age could have undergone. To be frank, I used to be reminded by my stepfather's family members that I am not their blood, and they would make sure I felt as such. Those experiences created a monster inside me that I, even today, am still trying to destroy and become a better version of myself."

The role of parental support in career decisions is evident in RSS.3's account. RSS.3 narrates:

"My parents wanted me to do something else, and I loved something else... they supported that. They were not so stubborn about which career I chose."

This flexibility and encouragement from her parents allowed her to pursue her true interests, contributing to her clarity and confidence in her career path.

Similarly, RSS.1 attributes his career choice to the influence and support of a family member. He states,

"My biggest influence was my uncle, who is an electrical engineer. I have always liked the way he works... I saw that as a good thing, then I thought maybe one day, if I study electrical engineering, I might own a company."

His uncle's success and the support he received from his family inspired RSS.1 to pursue a career in electrical engineering with the aspiration of one day owning his own company.

RSS.4 also emphasises the importance of maternal support. She states,

" My mother used to tell me that I was a smart kid. Also, the educational radio programmes she used to listen to recommended that parents should encourage kids to do science because of the 'job opportunities' that apparently 'come' with science subjects/modules. To me, my mother is a very influential person. I believe in everything she says or any advice she provides me with. Nothing has ever gone wrong with me taking her advice."

This shows that her mother's encouragement played a crucial role in shaping RSS.4's educational and career decisions.

Overall, the data highlighted the critical role of a supportive home environment and parental encouragement in shaping students' career choices. It highlighted how positive reinforcement and role models within the family can significantly influence career aspirations, while also recognising the challenges faced by those who grow up in less supportive environments.

4.3.1.3 Financial Background

As stated before, the financial background of students plays a critical role in shaping their career choices, especially in rural schools where resources can be limited. This subtheme examines how the economic capabilities of families influence student's educational opportunities and career decisions, as reflected in the experiences of the participants.

RSS.4 and RSS.1 both highlight the challenges of coming from families with limited financial means. RSS.4 states,

"Not really, my family did not have the means to support me." Similarly, RSS.1 mentions that his parents *"did not have the economic means to help me explore my career options."*

These financial constraints likely restricted their ability to pursue certain educational paths or careers that required significant investment in terms of tuition fees, study materials, and other related expenses.

In contrast, RSS.3 reflects on a more affluent upbringing, saying,

"I think my parents afforded almost everything I needed at that particular time, so yes, we were well off. Everything I needed at that time was taken care of."

This financial stability must have provided her with the necessary support to focus on her education and career goals without the added burden of financial concerns.

RSS.5's situation provides insight into the complexities of financial support within a family with multiple children. She explains,

"Yes, I do believe my guardians had the economic means to support my exploration, but I'm not sure, though, how long they would have been able to pay for my studies, especially because I wasn't the only child going to school." She continues, "First year, first semester in varsity, I didn't have funding, and my grandad was able to pay for my registration fee, first semester modules, my accommodation, and my grocery."

All this proves that the financial background of students significantly influences their career choices. Financially stable families can provide the necessary resources for comprehensive career exploration, while those with limited means face restrictions and uncertainties that shape their educational and career paths. These narratives emphasise the need for financial support systems to ensure equitable access to education and career opportunities for all students, regardless of their economic background.

4.3.2 High School Experience

4.3.2.1 School Location

The location of a school can profoundly impacts student's exposure to career opportunities and resources necessary for making informed career decisions. In most cases, for students residing in rural areas, the location of their school hinders them from exploring or being exposed to various career choices. Hence, this subtheme explores how geographic location affects student's ability to access career guidance and explore various career paths.

RSS.3's experience illustrates how rural school locations can limit career exploration:

"The location of my school hindered me from getting knowledge on various careers... my school is in a village... the resources were limited, we could not get access to everything that we needed at that time."

Her difficulty in accessing essential resources, such as internet cafes, is a direct result of the school's remote location, which restricted her exposure to different career options.

RSS.6 similarly faced challenges due to her school's rural setting:

"Yes, my school hindered me from discovering more career choices because it is from a rural area, and libraries were too far from home."

RSS.4 and RSS.5 both experienced significant hindrances due to their school's location.

RSS.4 noted, *"I feel like it hindered me. I did not get to see a lot of different professionals from where it was located. We did not even have access to things like libraries and internet cafes to help us explore different career options."* Similarly, RSS.5 reflected, *"I still feel like the location of my school hindered me in discovering or being exposed to various career choices."*

She further explains that the geographical location made it difficult for universities to visit, depriving students of valuable opportunities for exposure to higher education options.

RSS.5's experience further highlights another consequence of rural school locations:

"The location of my school is what stopped people from various universities from coming to visit. As it was geographically located far from cities that have universities."

This geographical isolation limited student's exposure to different career opportunities and higher education institutions, impacting their ability to make well-informed decisions about their futures.

These findings highlight the significant impact of school location on career exploration. Schools located in rural or remote areas often struggle with limited access to resources and

professional exposure, which can hinder student's ability to explore and choose from a broad range of career options. Improving access to career resources and opportunities, even in remote locations, could help mitigate these challenges and support students in making well-informed career decisions.

4.3.3 High School Support and Resources

4.3.3.1 Teacher Support

Teacher support plays a crucial role in shaping students' career choices, as revealed by the experiences of the participants. Their accounts highlight the impact of teacher guidance in providing advice and addressing individual concerns related to career planning.

RSS.1 emphasised the approachable nature of some teachers, expressing confidence in their willingness to assist with problems.

"Some teachers were very supportive; if I had a problem, I knew [that] if I went to any of them, they would help me with the problem that I had at that time."

RSS.6 shared a positive experience of receiving personalised support from a teacher who actively helped them explore career options.

"I feel like I needed support from my school to understand career options, and I got the support I needed. My teacher did some research about my career choices and gave me feedback."

RSS.2 recounted a conversation with her math teacher, Mr. Mele, who provided insight into the relationship between subject choices and career options.

"I spoke to Mr. Mele, my maths teacher, who told me that if you are doing commerce, your options are limited... but you can choose any career if you study science."

These narratives underscore the significance of teachers as a source of guidance and mentorship, demonstrating how their support can influence students' understanding and decisions regarding their career paths.

4.3.3.2 Career Counselling and Career Guidance

Career counselling and guidance play a crucial role in shaping students' career choices. The experiences of participants highlight varying levels of support in rural schools, particularly regarding university visits, career fairs, and advice on university applications.

RSS.1 shared that their career ambitions became more concrete in grade 12, specifically during a career exhibition. Reflecting on the impact, RSS.1 stated,

"That is when I started to take this career thing seriously because they taught us about these things and how we must choose our careers. We also went to visit uMzimkhulu College this one time."

RSS.2 recalled the presence of career expos at school but admitted to not fully engaging with the process.

"I think we had career expos, I just don't recall what was happening there. Maybe people who were focused on that day did get the idea of careers and everything,"

RSS.2 said, indicating limited personal impact from these events.

RSS.3 reported an absence of formal career guidance activities such as aptitude tests or university visits in their schooling experience. Instead, they relied on external sources of support, saying,

"I think I got all that from my family, friends who we were in the same grade as, brothers, and mentors."

RSS.4 highlighted the lack of timely and sufficient information provided to students regarding university visits and career fairs. This resulted in many students missing opportunities for tertiary education due to late applications and poor academic preparedness.

"In terms of university visits/career fairs, there very little information that came to students' attention and [it was} very late {in the year], and as a result, most students weren't accepted by tertiary institutions because of late applications and poor academic performances."

RSS.5 shared their experience of limited exposure to career resources, describing a reliance on college representatives at local libraries rather than comprehensive school-led initiatives.

"The only visits we had were from different Colleges and not Universities. Grade 12 learners from around Bulwer were invited to the local library, and there were people from various Colleges. I remember there was Boston College, Springfield College, but there was no one was from the universities. But also, nothing much was explained to us, we were only given pamphlets of the various choices they offered in those Colleges and links to join if we wanted to apply. There was no aptitude testing as well."

RSS.6 similarly highlighted the lack of aptitude testing, stating,

"We did not have aptitude tests done; we only received advice on university applications from my teachers."

These accounts collectively highlight uneven access to career guidance in rural schools, with some students benefiting from limited activities while others relied on external or informal support to navigate their career paths.

4.3.3.2 Availability of Resources

The availability of resources in rural schools profoundly impacts students' career choices and educational experiences. This subtheme explores how the presence or absence of key resources influences students' ability to explore and pursue various career paths.

RSS.4 pointed out the broader issue of resource scarcity, particularly in rural areas:

"There weren't sufficient resources... schools from rural areas are still very much behind in terms of internet access and exposure to technology, which I believe are the two most important elements to have access to if one wants information."

The lack of internet and technological resources restricts access to valuable career information and opportunities.

RSS.6 spoke of the impact of resource deficiencies on practical experience:

"No, because we did not have any practical experience in subjects such as Mechanical Engineering to see if this is really something that we would be interested in after high school. Also, because of the lack of funding for the school, we did not have things like laboratories for science, or gardens for agriculture."

RSS.5's experience highlighted severe resource constraints:

"We didn't have resources or equipment in our school... I remember we even had a computer slot in our weekly timetable, but there has never been a day where we went to the computer day... the computer teacher once told us all the computers had broken down."

She also notes the lack of laboratories and a library, which hindered both academic and career exploration. This supports what was said by Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa (2006), that lack of resources denies students early exposure to certain career pathways.

RSS.2's experience, while acknowledging resource limitations, highlights a positive aspect: *"Even though they didn't have many resources... they still encouraged sports... debate teams/expos... the teachers were good."*

Despite limited resources, the school's encouragement and support in these areas provided valuable opportunities for personal development and career exploration.

The above data proves that schools with limited resources face challenges in providing comprehensive career guidance and practical experiences, which can impact students' ability to make informed career choices. The findings underscore the need for improved resource allocation and support systems in rural schools to better equip students for their future careers.

CHAPTER 5

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings based on the analysis of factors influencing career choices among students in private and rural secondary schools. However, prior to examining the above analysed data, this section will take a step back and highlight the research aims of this literature, and also bring forth some of the research questions that this research paper aimed to answer. Furthermore, this discussion will be guided by the Systems Theory Framework. This theory emphasises the interconnectedness of various aspects of personal, social, and environmental factors in influencing an individual's career decisions.

The aim of this research was to "Explore whether there are similarities and/or differences in the factors influencing career choice for undergraduates from both rural and private secondary schools, with the goal of enhancing the understanding of these dynamics". The three research questions that it aimed to answer were;

- What factors influence career choice for undergraduates from rural/private secondary schools?
- What factors are perceived as the main enablers and main inhibitors of career choice decisions by undergraduates from rural and private schools?
- What are the similarities and differences between factors influencing career choice between students from these two distinct backgrounds?

5.1 Factors Influencing Career Choices for Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools

The interviews with the students highlighted a multitude of factors that ultimately influenced their career decisions. This section will make sense of these findings using empirical research and theory.

The shared insight from the students highlighted factors relating to one's home environment, parental support, financial background, and self-awareness. These factors were then sub-themed under the background and self-awareness theme. Other factors mentioned were related to their high school's location, peer influence, and extracurricular activities, which

were sub-themed under the high school experiences' theme. Lastly, they also mentioned aspects relating to teacher support, and availability of resources, that were then sub-themed under "high school support and resources".

5.1.1 Background and Self Awareness

Starting with the self-awareness theme. The findings of the study highlighted a notable disparity in self-awareness among the high school students and how this subsequently had an impact on their career choices. For instance, students like PSS.4, PSS.6, and PSS.5 (from private schools), as well as RSS.4 (from rural schools), highlighted that they were already self-aware of their abilities, skills, and interests during their high school journey, and that subsequently made their career decision-making process easier. However, others like RSS.1 and RSS.5 (rural school), as well as PSS.1 and PSS.5 (private school), shared that even though they already had some level of self-awareness, their high school years help developed it more concretely. Thus, gradually understanding their areas of strengths and weakness, which then helped them immensely when they had to make their career decisions. Additionally, there were also other students like RSS.1 and RSS.2, who admitted that they lacked self-awareness during these years, and this made their career decision-making process a bit more challenging.

Students that shared insight indicating a high level of self-awareness were more likely to pursue careers aligned with their interests, strengths, and values. On the other hand, students who demonstrated low levels of self-awareness tended to make their career choice decisions based on external pressures. This is not to say that the career decisions of students with high self-awareness were solely influenced by it, but rather that these decisions were made having considered both one's personality, skills, and talents, plus the external environment. According to Chuenyane (1983), self-understanding is considered a pre-requisite when one seeks to make a well-informed career choice decision. Hence, career guidance is considered essential in schools, as it helps students to progressively gain a better understanding of themselves (Chuenyane, 1983; Naicker, 1994). However, the participants' perspectives highlighted that opportunities for career guidance and other means of improving students' self-awareness were not equally available between private and rural secondary schools. As a result, for students in rural secondary schools, a more proactive approach in seeking opportunities to enhance their self-awareness was required. Such opportunities often emerged through interactions with friends and family, followed by deliberate reflection on these experiences and their personal

significance. Self-awareness falls within the individual system of the Systems Theory Framework. This aspect of the self, develops at different rates for different people. It is significantly depended on individual attributes and, therefore, affects people's decisions differently.

From a home environment perspective, the findings underscored the pivotal role of the home environment and parental support in shaping students' educational and career trajectories. While most students from the two groups received support from their families, it is important to note that one or two students from rural secondary schools were devoid of this support and often received very little encouragement in their education and career decisions. On the other hand, in addition to parental support, students from private schools also frequently benefitted from having role models who provided guidance and inspiration. These role models were either their parents or older siblings.

These findings highlight how the type of home environment and the nature of parental and family support can influence a student's career choice. These findings are supported by Nyamwange (2016), who states that most people tend to pursue careers that are favoured by their parents. Sharif et al. (2019) further added that mothers, in particular, play a very important role in the career decision process of their children, as they are the ones who usually provide support to children as they grow and try to negotiate through crucial life decisions. This statement is particularly true for students like PSS.4 (from Private School), who stated that her mother played a pivotal role in her academic choices, as she guided her towards subjects that would open various career paths. Similar sentiments were shared by RSS.4, who highlighted that her mother's encouragement and support was essential in her overall development and, ultimately, her career decision. In summary, both groups emphasised the crucial role that family support played in shaping their career decisions. However, students from rural secondary schools faced a notable limitation in having family role models to look up to and guide in their decision-making process. As a result of the lack of role models in their families, rural secondary students had to seek them within their communities, where such figures were also limited.

Family income also came up as a significant factor in students' career choice decisions. Participants reflected on how their family income, or lack thereof, influenced their career choice decisions to a degree. Students from private secondary schools mostly highlighted that their families had financial means to support their aspirations. On the other hand, even though

one or two rural secondary students shared similar sentiments, most students from this group shared that their families experienced financial constraints, which they then had to properly consider when making their career decisions. According to McMahon et al. (2004) financial background can significantly influence an individual's decision-making process by shaping their perceptions, values, and available choices. For example, RSS.4 and RSS.1 shared that their families did not have the financial means to support career options that would require significant financial backing. As a result, they then had to explore career options that would require minimal financial support or be fully funded by NSFAS. Additionally, for some learners, the lack of financial support subsequently became their motivation to work even harder in order to secure bursaries and achieve their career goals. This highlights how a lack of financial backing can either limit a students' choices, or become a catalyst for achieving their career aspirations.

Family income is classified under the social system of the STF, specifically relating to socioeconomic factors. This factor can shape one's access to resources, opportunities, and career aspirations, as evident in the insight shared by the participants, and how it ultimately led to varying career choice decisions.

5.1.2 School Experience

Participants also shared their insights regarding the location of the school, peer influence, as well as extra-curricular activities in influencing their career choice decisions. Hadiyati and Astuti (2023) mentioned the importance of contextual factors, such as the school type and its location, in the career decision making process of students. In addition, Egbochuku et al. (2021) highlighted that students in rural schools tend to have lower aspirations compared to those attending schools in urban locations. Stating that, the isolation of rural schools makes it difficult for students to obtain satisfactory career information or even visually observe unconventional and lucrative careers, which they might have aspired to pursue had they had exposure. On the other hand, as a result of exposure and trying to conform to urban career expectations, students in urban schools tend to have higher career aspirations (Egbochuku et al., 2021).

Private secondary school participants shared their insight regarding the location of their schools. Highlighting that the proximity of their schools to urban centres offered them greater exposure to diverse career options, access to educational excursions, and inspiration through

both direct and indirect experiences with diverse industry professionals. The participants' narratives highlighted the significant role a school's location plays in expanding career choices, creating opportunities, and shaping students' career aspirations. For example, PSS.6 shared that the fact that her school was located in a more accessible and resource-rich area, allowed her to expand her knowledge of various careers and opportunities that were currently available within the South African economic context. On the other hand, PSS.2's insights brought to the fore that Private School students are aware of the limitations experienced by those studying in schools located in rural areas when looking to make career decisions. Upon reflection, she pointed out that issues like limited network connectivity in rural areas would have hindered her ability to connect with the broader world and pursue her current career path.

These sentiments were similar to those shared by students who attended rural public schools, as they pointed out that the location of their schools restricted them from accessing resources that would have helped them get more knowledge about different careers. For example, RSS.3 shared her difficulty in accessing essential resources, such as internet cafes. This, as a result, restricted her exposure to different career options. This was a consistent theme across rural secondary school students, as RSS.4 and RSS.5 also added that they had limited access to libraries, internet cafés, and opportunities to observe different professionals as a result of their schools' location. This highlighted the importance of a school's location in a student's career decisions-making process.

Additionally, private secondary school students also shared their insight regarding the influence of peers, and how this also influenced their career decision-making process. According to a study by Eccles and Roeser (2011), peer interaction impacts one's social skills and aids personal development through various social interactions. For example, Kerrie-Leagh pointed out that her high school friends helped her to self-introspect and better understand herself. PSS.1, on the other hand, added that she had a high school mentor (who was also a student) who helped her navigate important educational and prospective career decisions. This, thus, underlines the impact of friendship and mentorship on a student's personal and professional development. This is something that students in rural communities can also lean heavily on in order to aid their decision-making process. The relationships that these students had with their peers and how they influenced their decisions form part of the social system in the Systems Theory Framework. This type of influence impacted the students' decisions at

different times in their high school journey, thus aligning with the STF, which asserts that different factors impact individuals at different stages of their journey (McMahon et al., 2004).

Furthermore, private secondary school students also shared their insight on the impact of participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports and social clubs that were readily available in their schools. PSS.4 mentions how sports helped her discover herself as a leader and see her limitless potential. PSS.1 also shared similar sentiments, stating that being part of social clubs helped her develop essential skills that ultimately allowed her to push herself and discover some of her previously untapped potential. This highlights how students' participation in extra-curricular activities such as sports and social clubs helps them discover their passion and develop important life skills which can subsequently influence their career decisions. Schools in rural locations can also leverage the influence sports and social clubs in helping their students build the social skills, confidence, and self-awareness. High school extra-curricular activities form part of the environmental system of the STF. The experiences of these students highlight how different environmental factors can influence individuals differently.

5.1.3 High School Support and Resources

The support and resources provided by high schools are also pivotal in guiding/influencing students' career choices. Participants from both rural and private secondary schools shared their insights on the importance of high school support and the availability of resources (or lack thereof) in influencing their career choices.

From a private school perspective, teacher support emerged as one of the key themes when discussing high school factors that influenced the students career choice decisions. The insights shared by the participants were in support of a study by Eccles and Roeser (2011), which stated that teacher support fosters academic motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being by providing encouragement, constructive feedback, and mentorship. PSS.5, for instance, shared that her teachers played an important role in her career decision. She stated that they not only guided her thinking by discussing various career options available within the accounting stream, but also shared their own career journeys, as they were also qualified accountants. Additionally, PSS.1 discussed how her teachers influenced her subject choices and career aspirations by emphasising the importance of selecting subjects that offer broad career prospects. She particularly mentioned her Afrikaans teacher and how she took a keen interest in all her students' success by providing them with career advice.

Similar sentiments regarding teacher support were shared by most rural secondary school participants. Stating that their teachers provided them with support to aid in their career decision-making process. RSS.6 and RSS.2, particularly highlighted the positive impact and the high level of support that their teachers provided them as they tried to navigate their career decisions. RSS.6 shared that her teacher even went as far as conducting the necessary research on her behalf to ensure that she made an informed career decision. Within the System Theory Framework, teacher support forms part of the social system. The above sentiments highlight the significant impact that these role players have on career development of a student.

Students also shared their insights regarding the provision of career counselling and career guidance by their respective schools. Starting with the experiences of private secondary school students. This group reflected positively on the provision of career counselling and career guidance services by their schools, apart from one particular individual (PSS.6), who shared her level of dissatisfaction in this regard. She felt that her school provided very limited and insufficient support to help learners make informed decisions about their careers. She particularly highlighted that apart from providing students with application information, no other additional guidance or support was provided. This meant that students had to go externally to get sufficient information for them to make informed career decisions.

However, for this group, PSS.6's sentiments were an outlier to the views of the rest of the participants. The majority of the students who attended private schools highlighted the considerable amount of support provided by their schools in ensuring that they received the right level of career guidance in order to make informed decisions. These students spoke about how their schools had additional career guidance services. University visits, school career fares, career excursions, aptitude testing, and the additional presence of career counsellors were some of the things that these students mentioned as some of the ways their schools provided additional support. They highlighted that these supplementary efforts played a significant role in helping them understand various options a bit more, and thus, make more informed decisions. These sentiments were in support of research by Chuenyane (1983) and Naicker (1994), which highlighted the importance of interventions such as career counselling and career guidance in a student's life, and how this improves their self-awareness and subsequently their career decision-making process.

On the other hand, for students who attended rural secondary schools, their experiences of additional career guidance were quite different to their private school counterparts. Even

though most of these students acknowledged and appreciated the additional efforts of their teachers in trying to assist them with career information, despite their limited capacity. They, however, felt that those efforts were discretionary and depended on how much the teacher cared, as opposed to much more intentional and readily available assistance from the school. A majority of these students pointed out that their schools had no career guidance counsellors, career fares, university visits, aptitude testing, and career excursions. These would have helped them massively in their decision-making process; given that these students were located in remote areas with minimal exposure to the diverse career options typically available in urban settings. As a result, their decisions were subsequently based on the limited information they already had at their disposal, plus the additional but limited support from their friends, families, and their teachers. The insight shared by these students is in support of earlier research by Chinyamurindi et al. (2021) and Maree and Molepo (2007) that highlighted how the expensive nature of these career guidance services has resulted in their absence in rural schools, and thus denying these students further opportunities to help them better understand themselves, and the career opportunities at their disposal.

Additionally, participants also shared their insights about the availability of resources in their respective schools. Their focus was on school facilities that aided their learning and practical application while also enhancing their ability to make informed career decisions. These resources included, but were not limited to, laboratories, computer labs, cooking facilities, engineering workshops, libraries, internet access, art studios, peer counsellors, etc. According Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006), when schools lack such infrastructure, students are denied opportunities to explore their interests in certain career options from an early age, and this tends to subsequently limit their decisions when having to later make career decisions.

Insight shared by private secondary school students highlighted their satisfaction with the availability of these resources in their respective schools. These participants pointed out that their schools provided them with various tools and resources to practically apply/implement the theoretical information that was taught to them in a classroom setting. Various examples were shared by these participants, highlighting their ease of access to things like science laboratories (for experiments), kitchens (for consumer studies), computer labs (for computer literacy and research), libraries (for research), workshops (for engineering application), art studios and even peer counsellors. For example, PSS.4 shared that her school had laboratories, computer labs, a library, and even internet access, which allowed learners to source additional information where needed. This subsequently allowed learners in this school

to not limit their career choice to what was taught in the classroom, but were also able to conduct additional research and explore their options more broadly and with greater detail. Other participants, such as PSS.1, PSS.6, PSS.3, and PSS.5 also echoed similar sentiments, stating that they were generally happy with the resources that their schools provided to help them better understand and explore various career options. They mentioned that their schools also had laboratories, computer labs, kitchen, and even workshops that allowed them to further understand what their chosen paths encompassed. These practical experiences allowed them to have firsthand experience, to some extent, of what to expect in a work setting, thus helping them gauge their interest in those fields quite early. Thus, aligning to early research by Eccles and Roeser (2011) that shared the same sentiments.

However, the shared insight was quite different for those students who attended rural secondary schools. This group of students reflected on how their schools had limited resources for practical application of learned theoretical concepts, and how this subsequently impacted their career exploration opportunities. For example, RSS.6 pointed out that in her school, they had no access to computers and internet access, thus limiting their ability to improve their computer literacy and gain access to career information through research. She also added that because of the lack of funding available to the school, they did not have any facilities for practical application of subjects such as mechanical engineering, science, or agriculture, which would have allowed them to practically explore these career paths and gauge their interests in order to later make more informed decisions. RSS.5 added that their school had a computer literacy timetable slot; however, she never even had one opportunity to attend that computer class throughout her time in high school. As they were told the computers were broken and not working. According to Alexander et al. (2010) students become reluctant to enrol in ICT (Information, Communication, and Technology) courses when they do not have prior knowledge and understanding of them. Similarly, RSS.2 added that her school also had limited resources and facilities for practical subject application. These insights highlighted a noticeable disparity between private and rural secondary students when looking at the availability of resources that could have aided their career decision making process.

In summary, it is important to note that even though the themes and subthemes were mostly consistent across the two groups, their presence or lack thereof, was in most cases quite varying in between the two groups. There were also aspects of chance that were prevalent in influencing how students eventually came to their career decisions. The above factors and how they constantly interacted with each other is consistent with the Systems Theory Framework.

The framework asserts that the boundaries of influence within the system are permeable and allow for fluid interaction and influence amongst the various components of the system (Patton & McMahon, 2006). It is evident that career choice is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors. In private schools, students often navigated more supportive and resource-rich environments, that enhanced their opportunities for career exploration. In contrast, rural secondary school students often faced systemic challenges related to financial limitations, geographical constraints, and inadequate support systems, that significantly impeded their career development, thus requiring some level of creativity and proactivity from these students to ensure they made informed decisions.

5.2 Factors Perceived as Main Enablers and Main Inhibitors of Career Choice Decisions by Undergraduates from Rural and Private Schools

The previous section discussed the factors that influenced the career choices of students from both rural and private secondary schools. This section will now focus on which of these factors were perceived as the enablers and inhibitors by these students. However, because these factors were discussed in detail in the previous section, this segment will now focus on a few of these factors that were deemed to have had more a significant impact on the students' choices based on the insight that was shared.

The findings of this study highlighted that, depending on an individual, the presence of a factor or lack thereof, can either be an enabler or an inhibitor in their career decision-making process. In cases where notable differences in the presence of positive factors were observed between the two groups, private secondary school students were more often the ones who experienced favourable conditions. For example, looking at financial support, most rural secondary school students felt their parents did not have the capacity to support some of the choices that they were considering at the time. This was particularly evident in the insights shared by participants like RSS.4 and RSS.1, who felt that as a result of their poor financial backgrounds, their career choice options had to be limited. However, most private secondary school students felt differently, in this regard. This group shared that when they considered their career options, they felt confident in their families' financial standing to be able to support any of their career aspirations. Prime examples of this were students like PSS.4 and PSS.5, who came from relatively comfortable upbringings and felt their families could afford their career aspirations. The above sentiments highlight how financial support ultimately became an

enabler for most private school students, whilst being an inhibitor for most of their rural secondary school counterparts.

The same can be said about the availability of resources in their various schools. Students who attended private secondary mostly shared similar sentiments around the availability of resources. Most of these students felt their schools had sufficient resources to allow them to explore various options, whether it was through having the resources for practical application of learnt theory, or having access to resources that allowed for further research and knowledge on different career options. However, the same could not be said about rural secondary schools, as most participants shared how they had to navigate their school journey in the absence of key research and practical resources. Students like RSS.5, RSS.6, and RSS.2 highlighted how they had to make do with minimal provisions when it came to things like libraries, laboratories, workshops, and computer labs. This meant that most of these students had to make career choices based on subjects that they did not have any practical experience in, which made their career decisions even more complex. For this group, the appetite for knowledge, through additional research (on careers) outside of what was offered at school, plus teacher support became even more important in order to make informed decisions.

On the subject of teacher support, this was one of the rare occasions where students from both groups simultaneously highlighted a factor as being a key enabler in their career decision. As highlighted in the above section, students from both rural and private secondary schools shared how they particularly appreciated the input and additional support from their teachers in helping them navigate their career decisions. This level of support was instrumental in helping these students further develop their self-efficacy and self-understanding, which became one of the key foundations upon which their decisions were based. Not only that, the support from their teachers also meant that these students received valuable insight into a variety of careers from knowledgeable professionals, thus broadening their career options. The enabling effect/influence of teachers on the career decisions of students is, therefore, a key aspect, as shared in the study by Eccles and Roeser (2011).

High school location was also one of the key factors that influenced and differentiated the career decisions made by private and rural secondary school students. Rural secondary school students particularly highlighted how their schools' location limited (inhibited) their access to diverse career options that they would have been able to observe, had they been located closer to urban centres. As a result, their options were limited to mainly those career

options that were present in their communities and those that were frequently regarded as lucrative in the career education curriculum and by their communities at large. For example, these careers included teaching, nursing, social work, doctors, policeman, law, and engineering, just to name a few. However, the same could not be said by their private school counterparts. In addition to their schools being located closer to urban centres, thus having ample opportunities to observe a multitude of diverse career options, these students also had many opportunities to visit and be visited by universities to further explore their career options. This is not to say that rural secondary school students' career options were only limited to traditional careers. They, however, needed to be a lot more curious and intentional in conducting additional research to better understand the career options that were available in the market that aligned with their personalities, and ambitions. Chance also played a role in the career decisions of these two groups. More so for rural students, who might have occasionally visited or travelled to urban locations and observed career options that peaked their interests and, thus decided to subsequently pursue. This is in contrast to private secondary students who frequently observed these various careers and decided on them based on frequent exposure and additional knowledge, rather than chance. So, in this instance, the school's location became an enabler for private secondary school students, while being an inhibitor for most rural secondary school students.

The same could be said about many more factors that influenced the career decisions of these students. Amongst these factors, one can also evaluate the impact of things like career fairs, career guidance opportunities, and extracurricular activities in acting as enablers or inhibitors for different individuals. In summary, the above insight showcases how disparities in the presence of factors can have a significant impact on the career choices that an individual eventually makes. However, in saying that, even when the factors are similar from one person to the next, one still needs to account for individual differences in how people respond. This is because individuals are not merely passive bystanders but also play an active role in co-constructing their career journeys, regardless of their environment context (Watson & McMahon, 2009).

5.3 What are the Similarities and Differences between Factors Influencing Career Choice between Students from these Two Distinct Backgrounds?

When comparing and contrasting the narratives from students in private and rural schools, there were notable similarities and differences in their experiences and the factors that shaped their career choices. These similarities and difference are discussed in detail below.

5.3.1 Home Environment and Parental Support

A nurturing home environment and parental support emerged as influential factors in both private and rural school settings. For instance, PSS.2, from a private school context, described a supportive family atmosphere that encouraged her aspirations. Her narrative, which emphasised warmth and freedom, reflects a stable environment conducive to career exploration. Similarly, RSS.5, from a rural school setting, spoke of her supportive upbringing by her grandparents, highlighting that despite the loss of her mother, she was raised in a loving home.

Contrary, the narratives of PSS.4 (private) and RSS.4 (rural) illustrate differing parental influences. While PSS.4 benefited from a strong maternal figure guiding her career choices, RSS.4 faced emotional challenges stemming from a disrupted family structure. This discrepancy indicates that while supportive environments are vital for career development, adverse family dynamics can impose significant barriers, influencing not only the choices made but also the emotional resilience required to navigate them.

5.3.2 Financial Background

Financial circumstances played a pivotal role in shaping the career aspirations of students from both settings. In private schools, while some students like PSS.3 faced financial constraints, others like PSS.5 demonstrated a proactive approach to alleviate financial pressures through bursaries. This suggests that, despite challenges, students in private schools often had more resources and opportunities to navigate their financial constraints effectively.

In rural schools, financial limitations were a prominent theme, with students like RSS.4 and RSS.1 expressing how their families struggled to provide the necessary support. This lack of financial backing often restricted their exploration of career options and limited access to resources. The contrasting financial situations between private and rural-school students

illustrate a significant disparity in how economic factors influence career choices, with private school students generally enjoying more financial security and access to opportunities.

5.3.3 High School Experiences: Location and Peer Influence

The location of schools significantly impacted career exploration in both contexts. Private school students, like PSS.2 and PSS.6, reported that urban settings facilitated exposure to various career options and resources. In contrast, rural school students, such as RSS.3 and RSS.4, highlighted the limitations of rural school locations, which restricted access to information and career exploration opportunities. This dichotomy underscores the systemic barriers faced by rural school students, where geographical constraints inhibit exposure to diverse career paths.

Peer influence also played a crucial role in shaping career choices in both environments. In private schools, students like PSS.4 and PSS.3 found that friendships and extracurricular activities contributed positively to their self-discovery and engagement with career options. Conversely, while some rural school students like RSS.6 experienced limited peer support, others, such as RSS.2, recognised the value of encouragement in extracurricular activities, albeit amidst resource limitations. This indicates that peer dynamics are essential in both contexts, but the degree of impact may vary significantly based on the availability of resources and support systems.

While for the most part, private school students enjoyed a plethora of opportunities for engagement, rural school students like RSS.5 tended to experience a scarcity of resources that limited their involvement in such activities. This contrast underscores the systemic disparities between the two educational contexts.

5.3.4 Teacher Support and School Resources

Teacher support emerged as a critical factor influencing career decisions across both private and rural schools. In private schools, students like PSS.5 and PSS.1 benefitted from teachers who provided career guidance and insights based on their professional experiences. These teachers actively encouraged students to pursue subjects that broadened their career prospects, demonstrating a proactive educational environment. In addition, this group (Private School Pupils), for the most part, also highlighted the presence of career guidance counsellors,

research libraries, free access to the internet, as well as career fairs and career excursion opportunities. They underlined how much these opportunities opened their minds and offered them opportunities to know more and sometimes even experience first-hand, what a day in a particular career would look like. This, together with all the other support, thus, helped them make much more informed career decisions.

In rural schools, however, the narratives revealed a mixed experience regarding teacher support. While some students like RSS.6 received valuable guidance from teachers, others like RSS.5 expressed disappointment with the lack of comprehensive career counselling and availability of resources. These resources include things such as libraries, computer labs, laboratories, and any other equipment that would aid in making their learning more practical whilst also building visual cues for their envisioned careers. The absence of career fairs and practical experiences in rural schools limited students' ability to make informed decisions about their futures. This disparity highlights how systemic factors within the educational environment can either facilitate or hinder students' career choices, emphasising the need for equitable support across different school settings.

Ultimately, these findings underscore the necessity for systemic interventions that promote equitable access to resources, support, and opportunities across both private and rural school settings. By recognising and addressing the various factors that influence career choices, educators and policymakers can foster environments that empower all students to explore and pursue their career aspirations, regardless of their background or school context.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Limitations

In conducting this study on the factors influencing career choices in private and rural schools, several limitations were identified that may affect the comprehensiveness, and the assumptions that can be made with the findings.

6.1.1. Sample Size and Selection Bias

The study's sample consisted of a limited number of participants from private and rural schools. While the narratives provided rich qualitative data, the small sample size may not fully represent the broader student population across different geographical regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, or educational systems. Equally, there might also be an aspect of selection bias as a result of the snowball sampling technique that was used to select participants. Such bias can result in collected data/insight not being fairly representative of the population. Hence, further and comprehensive studies will continue to add value in the future.

6.1.2. Lack of Representation

The study aimed to enhance the understanding of factors influencing career choices of university undergraduates, without any specific emphasis on gender. However, the sample is significantly skewed towards the females (Females = 11), with very little representation of the male population (Male = 1). This means that the findings are also not as equally representative, as they are significantly lacking in the insights of the male population. Thus, doing little to enhance the understanding of this particular group.

6.1.3. Limited Scope of Influencing Factors

While the study explored various factors influencing career choices, including home environment, financial background, school location, peer influence, and teacher support, it did not encompass all possible influences. Factors such as cultural expectations, mental health, and broader societal trends were not fully addressed. The exclusion of these factors may limit the depth of understanding regarding the complexities of career decision-making processes among students.

6.1.4. Temporal Constraints

The data were collected at a single point in time, which does not account for changes in participants' career aspirations or circumstances that may arise over time. Career choices are dynamic and can evolve due to various life experiences, external influences, and personal development. Future studies may provide a more comprehensive view of how career choices change and what factors play a role over time.

In summary, while the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing career choices among students in private and rural schools, several limitations must be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations in future research can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding career decision-making processes in diverse educational contexts.

6.2. Recommendations

This chapter presents recommendations aimed at the government, especially relating to basic education. As there is evidently an urgent need to bridge the gap between the career choice influences faced by students in private and rural schools. The findings indicate significant disparities in support systems, resource availability, and guidance, emphasising the need for targeted interventions to enhance career exploration opportunities for all students. This session will also briefly address recommendations for future studies.

6.2.1 Enhance Career Guidance Programs

Both private and rural schools should implement comprehensive career guidance programs that cater to the unique needs of their student populations. Schools could organise regular workshops, mentorship programs, and career fairs involving professionals from diverse fields. Such initiatives would provide students with exposure to various career paths, helping them make informed choices based on their interests and skills.

6.2.2 Increase Access to Resources

Rural schools, in particular, require improved access to educational resources. Investment in libraries, laboratories, and technology, including internet access, is crucial. Partnering with local businesses and organisations can provide additional resources and funding to create more robust educational environments. This investment will facilitate practical learning experiences and enhance students' ability to explore various career options.

6.2.3 Foster Community and Parental Engagement

Schools should actively engage parents and the community in career development initiatives. Workshops that inform parents about available career options and the importance of supporting their children's aspirations can foster a more nurturing home environment. Additionally, community partnerships can help provide students with internships and job shadowing opportunities, further enriching their career exploration experiences.

6.2.4 Utilise Technology for Career Exploration

Leveraging technology can greatly enhance career exploration efforts, especially in rural schools. Online platforms offering career assessments, virtual internships, and webinars with industry professionals can be valuable tools for students. Schools should integrate these resources into their curriculum to ensure students are aware of various careers and the skills required for them.

6.2.5 Strengthen Peer Support Networks

Encouraging peer support networks can be beneficial for both private and rural school students. Establishing peer mentorship programs allows students to share experiences, advice, and resources related to career exploration. Schools should promote collaboration among students through group projects and extracurricular activities, thereby enhancing their social skills and self-efficacy.

6.2.6 Advocate for Policy Changes

Stakeholders in the education system should advocate for policy changes that promote equity in career guidance and support across school types. Policymakers should consider

funding initiatives aimed at addressing disparities between rural and private schools, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to explore and pursue their desired career paths.

6.2.7 Future Studies

Lastly, future studies will have to be more representative of both genders as to allow for the findings to provide a more comprehensive view. Also, to complement qualitative studies and to allow for the generalisability of the findings, some studies will need to take a quantitative approach. As this will also allow for larger and more representative sample (size).

In summary, addressing the disparities in career choice influences between private and rural school students is essential for fostering equitable educational outcomes. By enhancing career guidance programs, increasing access to resources, engaging parents and communities, utilising technology, strengthening peer networks, and advocating for policy changes, we can create a more supportive environment for all students. These recommendations aim to empower students to make informed career choices and pursue fulfilling careers, regardless of their educational background.

Chapter 7

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, in an era characterised by rapid societal changes and an evolving job market, the process of career decision-making among secondary school students appears as a complex as ever. This is further complicated by the vast inequality in South Africa's education system, whereby, the more affluent group gets to enjoy a rich array of educational resources, whilst the less privileged group must make do with the barest of minimum (Maree & Molepo, 2007).

This study has highlighted the significant strides that South Africa has made in trying to bridge the educational gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots". However, students' sentiments shared in this paper also highlighted the significant amount of work and systemic interventions required to bridge the career education gap between rural and private secondary schools.

This research found that the career choice of secondary school students is influenced by a wide range of factors, highlighting key differences and commonalities between rural and private secondary school students. The findings revealed that students from rural schools often face significant socioeconomic challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to career counselling, and a lack of exposure to diverse career opportunities. These factors contributed to a more restricted career outlook, with many rural students opting for professions perceived as stable, less expensive to fund or easily accessible within their communities. Conversely, undergraduates from private schools tended to have greater access to resources such as career guidance programs, mentorship opportunities, and role models, which broadened their career aspirations and enabled them to explore a wider range of professions.

Despite these disparities, the study also identified shared influences on career decision-making across both groups. Personal interests, availability of resources, and teacher support were common determinants in shaping career choices, emphasizing the complex interplay between individual preferences and external pressures, as per the Systems Theory Framework. The role of family, the schools' location, and peers also emerged as significant, with varying degrees of influence depending on the schooling environment. The application of the Systems Theory Framework highlighted the interdependence of personal, contextual, and societal

factors in ones' career development. The study also reaffirms the importance of systemic interventions that address disparities in career exposure and access to opportunities, particularly for students from underprivileged backgrounds. Furthermore, this research paper emphasised the significance of taking a proactive approach in seeking additional career information, reinforcing that students are not merely passive subjects of their circumstances.

These findings highlighted the need for targeted interventions, particularly in rural areas, to bridge the gap in career awareness and access to opportunities. Strengthening career guidance programs, improving access to information about higher education and employment pathways, and fostering mentorship initiatives can empower students from disadvantaged backgrounds to make informed career decisions.

Future research should explore the long-term career trajectories of students from different educational backgrounds to assess how early influences shape their professional development. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of current career guidance initiatives in both rural and private schools can provide valuable insights into strategies for enhancing career readiness among South African youth. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and stakeholders in basic education can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable career landscape, ultimately fostering economic growth and social mobility.

References

Ahmed, K. A., Sharif, N., & Ahmad, N. (2017). Factors influencing students' career choices: empirical evidence from business students. *Journal of Southeast Asian Research*, *2017*(2017), 1-15.

Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behaviour. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 50*(2), 179-211.

Alexander, P. M., Holmner, M., Lotriet, H. H., Matthee, M. C., Pieterse, H. V., Naidoo, S., Twinomurinzi, H., & Jordaan, D. (2011). Factors Affecting Career Choice: Comparison between Students from Computer and Other Disciplines. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, *20*(3), 300-315.

Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic Analysis: A Critical Review of its Process and Evaluation. *West East Journal of Social Sciences*, *1*(1), 39-47.

Alvi, M. H. (2016). *A Manual for Selecting Sampling Techniques in Research*. University of Karachi, Iqra University.

Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*. Oxford University Press.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Human Behaviour* (Vol. 4, pp.71-81). New York: Academic Press.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.* W. H. Freeman.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy Beliefs as Shapers of Children's Aspirations and Career Trajectories. *Child Development*, *72*(1), 187-206.

Betz, N. E., & Hackett, G. (1981). The Relationship of Career-related Self-efficacy Expectations to Perceived Career Options in College Women and Men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(5), 399–410.

Blustein, D. L. (2006). *The Psychology of Working: A New Perspective for Career Development, Counselling, and Public Policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bojuwoye, O., & Mbanjwa, S. (2006). Factors Impacting on Career Choices of Technikon Students from Previously Disadvantaged High Schools. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, *16*(1), 3-16.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Buetow, S. (2010). Thematic Analysis and its Reconceptualization as 'Saliency Analysis'. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, *15*(2), 123-125.

Caulfield, J. (2019). How to do Thematic Analysis. *Scribbr*. Retrieved from https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/

Caulfield, J. (2020). Thematic analysis: A guide to analyzing qualitative data. *Scribbr*. Retrieved from https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/

Chesebro, J. W., & Borisoff, D. J. (2007). What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, *8*(1), 3-14.

Chinyamurindi, W. T., Hlatywayo, C. K., Mhlanga, T. S., Marange, C. S., & Chikungwa-Everson, T. (2021). Career Decision-Making amongst High School Learners: A Descriptive-Exploratory Study from South Africa. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, *16*(1), 129-147.

Chireshe, R. (2012). Career Guidance and Counselling Provisions at a South African University: Career Advisors' Reflections. *The Anthropologist*, *14*(4), 305-310.

Chuenyane, Z. M. (1983). Career Guidance Needs Assessment of Black Secondary School Students in the Transvaal Province of the Republic of South Africa. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *6*(4), 271-280.

Diale, B. (2016). Life Orientation Teachers' Career Development Needs in Gauteng: Are We Missing the Boat?. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 30*(3), 85–110.

Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2011). Schools as Developmental Contexts During Adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*(1), 225-241.

Egbochuku, E.O., Igbineweka, M. N., & Aghahowa, O. R. (2021). School Type and Location as Correlates of Career Choice Among Senior Secondary School Adolescents:

Counselling Implications. *Journal of Educational Research on Children, Parents & Teachers, 2*(1), 216–227.

Esongo, N. M. (2017). Correlation between the Availability of Resources and Efficiency of the School System within the Framework of the Implementation of Competency-based Teaching Approaches in Cameroon. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *8*(2), 82-92.

Farao, A., & du Plessis, M. (2024). The Need for Structured Career Guidance in a Resource-Constrained South African School. *African Journal of Career Development, 6*(1), 116-128.

Flores, L. Y., & O'brien, K. M. (2002). The Career Development of Mexican American Adolescent Women: A Test of Social Cognitive Career Theory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *49*(1), 14-27.

Gounder, S. (2012). *Research Methodology and Research Methods*. Victoria University of Wellington.

Hackett, G., & Betz, N. E. (1995). Self-efficacy and Career Choice and Development. In *Self-efficacy, Adaptation, and Adjustment* (pp. 249-280). Springer, Boston, MA.

Hadiyati, M. A., & Astuti, B. (2023). Student Careers: What Factors Influence Career Choice?. *Journal of Education Research and Evaluation*, *7*(4), 608-614.

Hall, D. T. (2002). *Careers In and Out of Organizations.* Sage.

Holland, J. L. (1997). *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (3rd ed.).* Psychological Assessment Resources.

Ismawati, A., & Iswari, M. (2022). Trait and Factor Theory Analysis: Literature Review: Array. Literasi Nusantara, 2(2), 724-734.

Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is Qualitative Research? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, *8*(1), 21-28.

Jena, L., & Nayak, U. (2020). Theories of Career Development: An analysis. *Indian Journal of Natural Sciences, 10*(60), 23515-23523.

Jones, B., & Brown, S. (2017). Economic Implications of Rising Unemployment. *Journal of Economic Studies, 19*(1), 45-62.

Kazi, A. S., & Akhlaq, A. (2017). Factors Affecting Students' Career Choice. *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education (JRRE)*, *11*(2), 187-196.

Koerber, A., & McMichael, L. (2008). Qualitative Sampling Methods: A Primer for Technical Communicators. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 22*(4), 454-473.

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*(1), 79-122.

Leung, S. A. (2008). The Big Five Career Theories. In J. A. Athanasou & R. Van Esbroeck (Eds.), *International Handbook of Career Guidance* (pp. 115-132). Springer Netherlands.

Levinson, D. J. (1978). The Seasons of a Man's Life. Ballantine Books.

Letlape, T. M. (2019). *Ga-Rankuwa Secondary School Students' Awareness of Career Counselling and Factors Influencing Career Choices* (Doctoral dissertation). University of South Africa.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E. G (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publication.

Manda, M. I., & Ben Dhaou, S. (2019, April). Responding to the Challenges and Opportunities in the 4th Industrial Revolution in Developing Countries. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance* (pp. 244-253). Melbourne.

Maree, J. G. (2009). Career Counselling in the 21st Century: South African Institutions of Higher Education at the Crossroads. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *23*(3), 436-458.

Maree, J. G., & Molepo, J. M. (2007). Changing the Approach to Career Counselling in a Disadvantaged Context: A Case Study. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, *16*(3), 62-70.

McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2019). The Systems Theory Framework: A Systems Map for Career Theory, Research and Practice. In *International Handbook of Career Guidance* (pp. 97-114). Springer, Cham.

McMahon, M., Patton, W., & Watson, M. (2004). Creating Career Stories through Reflection: An Application of the Systems Theory Framework of Career Development. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, *13*(3), 13-17.

Mtemeri, J. (2022). The Impact of School on Career Choice among Secondary School Students. Global Journal of Guidance and Counseling in Schools: Current Perspectives. 12(1). 185-197.

Naicker, A. (1994). The Psycho-social Context of Career Counselling in South African Schools. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *24*(1), 27-34.

Ngesi, M. J. (2003). *A Study of Systemic Processes Influencing Educational Change in a Sample of IsiZulu Medium Schools* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1-13.

Nyamwange, J. (2016). Influence of Students' Interest on Career Choice Among First-year University Students in Public and Private Universities in Kisii County, Kenya. *Journal* of Education and Practice, 7(4), 50-58.

Pajares, F. (1997). Current Directions in Self-efficacy Research. *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*, *10*(149), 1-49.

Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development and Counselling: Connecting Theory and Practice. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 28(2), 153-166.*

Reyes, O., Gillock, K., & Kobus, K. (1999). Career Aspirations of Urban, Mexican American Adolescent Females. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 21*(3), 366–382.

Rousseau, G.G., & Venter, D.J.L. (2009). Investigating the Importance of Factors Related to Career Choice. *Management Dynamics, 18*(3), 2-13.

Sharif, Nimra & Ahmad, Nawaz & Sarwar, Samiullah. (2019). Factors Influencing Career Choices. *IBT Journal of Business Studies. 15*. 33-46.

Savickas, M. L. (2005). The Theory and Practice of Career Construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work* (pp. 42–70). John Wiley & Sons.

Shumba, A., & Naong, M. (2012). Factors Influencing Students' Career Choice and Aspirations in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *33*(2), 169-178.

Sirin, S. R. (2005). Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research, 75*(3), 417-453.

Super, D. E. (1957). *The Psychology of Careers*. Harper & Row.

Super, D. E. (1980). A Life-span, Life-space Approach to Career Development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 16*(3), 282-298.

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling Methods in Research Methodology: How to Choose a Sampling Technique for Research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management, 5*(2), 18-27.

Taylor, R. (2019). Welfare Strain Due to Unemployment. *Public Policy Quarterly, 15*(5), 150-165.

Tokar, D. M., & Jome, L. M. (1998). Masculinity, Vocational Interests, and Career Choice Traditionality: Evidence for a Fully Mediated Model. *Journal of Counseling* Psychology, 45(4), 424–435.

Ukwueze, A. C. & Obiefuna, C. C. (2017). Influence of Selected Environmental Factors on Career Choice of Secondary School Students in Lagos Metropolis of Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Empirical Studies in Psychology and Education, 19*(1), 101-116.

Van Esbroeck, R., Tibos, K. I. M., & Zaman, M. (2005). A Dynamic Model of Career Choice Development. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *5*(1), 5-18.

Von Fintel, D., & Orthofer, A. (2020). Wealth inequality and financial inclusion: Evidence from South African tax and survey records. *Economic Modelling*, *91*, 568-578.

Watson, M., & McMahon, M. (2009). Career Counselling in South African Higher Education: Moving Forward Systemically and Qualitatively. *South African Journal of Higher* Education, 23(3), 470-481.

Wilkinson, D. (2000). *The Researcher's Toolkit: The Complete Guide to Practitioner Research*. Routledge.

Zulkosky, K. (2009, April). Self-efficacy: A Concept Analysis. Nursing forum, *44*(2), 93-102.

Turnitin Report

Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala - 947895 - Masters Dissertation-1.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

17%	15%	12%	8%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	core.ac.uk Internet Source	1%
2	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	1%
3	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source	1%
4	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	1%
5	scholar.sun.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	dokumen.pub Internet Source	<1%
7	erl.ucc.edu.gh:8080 Internet Source	<1%
8	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
9	prr.hec.gov.pk Internet Source	<1%
10	wrap.warwick.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
11	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
12	ercptjournal.org Internet Source	<1%

T

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Malibongwe Vunandlala, and I am a Masters student in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating, "Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools", under the supervision of Mr Sifiso Mlilo. The aim of this research project is to enhance the understanding on the differences as well as the similarities amongst factors influencing career choice for undergraduates from both rural private secondary schools.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a one-on-one semi-structured interview session and will take around 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored in password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after 5 years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in password protected laptop and will be kept for 5 years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala

Researcher: Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala

Email Address: 947895@students.wits.ac.za

Contact no.: 072 707 3797

Supervisor: Mr Sifiso Mlilo

Email Address: sifiso.mlilo@wits.ac.za

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools

Name of Researcher: Malibongwe Cyprian Vunandlala

I, ..., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(**Please circle the relevant options below**).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO

I agree that the interview may be video recorded YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained. YES NO

..... (Signature)

..... (Name of Participant)

..... (Date)

..... (Signature)

..... (Name of Person Seeking Consent)

..... (Date)

Appendix C

Semi-structured Questionnaire

Name:

Surname:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Marital Status:

Secondary School Name:

Secondary School: Private Public

University Name:

Current Studies & Level of Study:

Personal background

- Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself as a person?

  Follow up - What is it that you believe best describes/defines you?

- How would you describe your upbringing and family life?

  Follow up – What stands out for you when you think about life growing up?

School experience

- What comes to mind when you think about how you negotiated your way through high school?

  Follow up's – Did you enjoy your high school experience? What was most enjoyable about it? Did you believe you were in a good school? Do you still believe that now? Why?

- Which subjects did you choose when you were entering your FET phase in high school?

  Follow up – Why did you choose these? Was there someone and/or something that influenced your decision?

Career choice - School

- Can you remember when you started seriously thinking about what you would do after high school?

  Follow up – Was there a specific trigger for these thoughts about life after high school?

- Did you feel like you needed support from your high school to understand career options?

- Did you get the support you needed at the school?
  Follow up - Was it career guidance? If yes, how would you describe the guidance provided?
  Follow up – Were there sufficient resources/equipment to explore and pursue the choice of career that you were interested in? Elaborate.

- Were there any (other) major influences on your career choice in high school?
  Follow up if yes – What were they and why were they so important to you?

- How much of a role would you say high school played in your choice ultimately?

Environmental influences

- Were there any family members, friends, community members or social media elements that influenced you regarding your career decision?
  Follow up – If so, why was that? If no, how much of a challenge was that for you?

- Did you feel that the type/location of your school hindered or benefitted you with discovering more career choices and knowledge on these various careers? Do you still feel the same way now? Why?

Self

- Were you self-aware about your abilities, skills, interests, values, gender, physical attributes, and personality in high school?
  If yes, how much influence did these have on your career decision? Follow up – Please elaborate.
  If no, did anyone help you understand these? How much of a role did they play in your career choice?

Socio-economic impact and chance

- Did you perceive your guardians as successful people who had the economic means to support your exploration of career choices?
- How much information did you have about your career choice/s when you made your decision? How/where did you get this information?

- Was there anything specific about how you were brought up/ where you grew up/other children's upbringings etc. that significantly influenced your choice of career? Please say more?

Were there any things that you felt were out of your control/or occurred by chance that impacted on your career decision? If yes, please elaborate

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAORG/21/10**
PROJECT TITLE:	Factors Influencing Career Choice: A Comparison between Undergraduates from Rural and Private Secondary Schools.
INVESTIGATOR	Vunandlala Malibongwe (947895)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	20 June 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 26 June 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Dr Colleen Bernstein)

cc: Dr Sifiso Mlilo (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES