



Career Guidance, Self-Awareness and Occupational Preferences Among Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. A descriptive correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 38,420 Senior Secondary School II students in public secondary schools in Rivers State, while a sample size of 395 students was selected using Taro Yamane's formula and multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Career Guidance, Self-Awareness and Occupational Preference Questionnaire (CGSAOPQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation, while its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha with coefficients of 0.81, 0.79, and 0.83 for career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students. The results also showed a significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences. In addition, career guidance and self-awareness jointly showed a significant relationship with students' occupational preferences. Based on these findings, the study concluded that career guidance and self-awareness play significant roles in shaping students' occupational preferences. The study recommended strengthening career guidance programmes and promoting self-awareness activities in secondary schools to assist students in making informed career decisions.

Keywords: Career Guidance, Self-Awareness, Occupational Preferences, Career Decision-Making, Secondary School Students, Rivers State

1. Introduction

Career choice is one of the most important developmental tasks faced by adolescents in secondary school. At the senior secondary stage, students begin to think seriously about their future occupations, educational pathways, and life goals. These decisions often determine access to higher education, professional training, and long-term socio-economic opportunities. However, making appropriate career decisions requires adequate knowledge of occupational opportunities as well as a clear understanding of personal interests, abilities, and

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values. This process of aligning personal characteristics with occupational opportunities is largely facilitated through career guidance and counseling services provided within the school system [1], [2].

Career guidance refers to structured activities designed to help students understand themselves and the world of work so that they can make informed educational and occupational decisions. In the secondary school context, career guidance involves providing students with information about different professions, assisting them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and supporting them in selecting careers that correspond with their abilities and aspirations. Studies have shown that effective career guidance programmes improve students' career decision-making skills, strengthen their confidence in career planning, and assist them in transitioning successfully from school to higher education or employment [3], [4]. When students are exposed to structured career counseling activities such as career talks, aptitude assessments, and mentoring programmes, they tend to develop clearer occupational goals and greater readiness for career decision-making.

Closely related to career guidance is the concept of self-awareness. Self-awareness refers to the ability of individuals to understand their personal attributes, including interests, abilities, personality traits, values, and career aspirations. For adolescents, developing self-awareness is essential because it enables them to evaluate which occupations match their personal characteristics. Research indicates that students who possess a strong career self-concept are more likely to select occupations that align with their abilities and long-term goals [5], [6]. Similarly, Otwine et al. [4] noted that self-awareness developed through career guidance programs significantly improves students' ability to evaluate career options and reduces uncertainty during occupational decision-making.

Occupational preference represents the type of career or profession an individual desires to pursue based on personal interests, perceived abilities, and environmental influences. During the senior secondary school stage, students begin forming preferences for careers in areas such as science, technology, business, health, and social services [7]. These preferences are influenced by several factors including school exposure, parental expectations, peer influence, and societal perceptions of certain occupations. Fernandez, Balijon, and Ancho [8] observed that students often select careers based on perceived prestige or social pressure rather than a clear understanding of their abilities. Such misalignment between personal characteristics and occupational choice may lead to career dissatisfaction later in life.

Empirical studies have also shown that demographic and contextual factors influence students' occupational preferences and career development. For instance, Gimarino [9] found that educational strands and academic specialization significantly influence students' career choices and self-efficacy levels. Students exposed to specialized learning tracks often develop stronger confidence in their career goals compared with those who lack clear academic orientation. However, other demographic factors such as gender and age appear to have relatively limited influence on students' career preferences in some educational contexts.

Despite the recognized importance of career guidance and self-awareness in shaping occupational decisions, many secondary school students continue to experience difficulties in choosing suitable careers. Several studies indicate that students often lack adequate career information, motivation, and counseling support needed to make informed occupational decisions [10]. In many schools, career guidance services are either insufficiently structured or inadequately implemented, leaving students to rely on guesswork, peer advice, or parental

influence when selecting career paths. Upoalkpajor [11] also noted that ineffective career guidance programs can result in confusion, indecision, and career conflicts among students.

In the Nigerian educational system, the challenge appears even more pronounced. Many secondary schools face shortages of trained counselors, limited career information resources, and inadequate guidance programmes. As a result, senior secondary school students may graduate without a clear understanding of their abilities or the occupational opportunities available to them. This situation increases the likelihood of inappropriate career choices, low career satisfaction, and poor adjustment to future educational or employment environments.

Given the importance of career guidance in developing students' self-awareness and shaping their occupational preferences, it becomes necessary to examine how these variables interact within the context of senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Understanding the relationship between career guidance, students' self-awareness, and their occupational preferences will provide insights into how schools can better support students in making informed career decisions. Such knowledge will also contribute to improving career counseling practices and ensuring that students are adequately prepared to navigate the increasingly complex world of work.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Choosing an appropriate career is one of the most critical decisions senior secondary school students are expected to make before leaving school. At this stage, students are required to identify educational pathways and occupational directions that will influence their future academic pursuits and professional lives. Ideally, career guidance services provided in schools should assist students in understanding their interests, abilities, and personality traits while exposing them to various occupational opportunities. Through such support, students are expected to develop adequate self-awareness and make informed occupational choices that align with their capabilities and aspirations.

However, in many secondary schools, career guidance services are either inadequately implemented or not sufficiently structured to effectively support students' career development. As a result, many students approach career decision-making with limited knowledge about available occupations and little understanding of their own strengths, interests, and abilities. This lack of self-awareness often leads to uncertainty, indecision, or unrealistic occupational preferences. Instead of making choices based on personal aptitude and career information, students may rely heavily on parental expectations, peer influence, or societal perceptions of prestigious careers.

The situation is particularly concerning because poor career decisions at the secondary school level can have long-term consequences for students' educational progression, job satisfaction, and productivity in the workforce. When students choose careers that do not match their interests or abilities, they may experience academic difficulties, lack of motivation, or eventual dissatisfaction with their professional paths. This indicates that inadequate career guidance and insufficient development of self-awareness can negatively influence students' occupational preferences.

Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of career guidance and self-awareness in shaping career decisions, there is still limited empirical evidence examining how these factors interact to influence occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Most existing studies have focused on general career counseling outcomes without adequately exploring how career guidance contributes to the

development of self-awareness and how both variables jointly influence students' occupational preferences.

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State, with the aim of providing empirical evidence that can guide improvements in career counseling practices within secondary schools.

1.2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
3. Examine the joint relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
3. What is the joint relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

1.4. Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

H03: There is no significant joint relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Upoalkpajor [11] conducted a study titled Career Guidance and Its Implications for Students' Career Choices: The Case of Public Senior High Schools in Ghana. The aim of the study was to explore senior high school students' knowledge of career counselling and the benefits of career guidance in shaping their career choices. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive survey design and used purposive sampling. The article reports that the data were analyzed using two major themes and related sub-themes. The findings showed that different occupations require different interests, abilities, personality traits, and professional values, and that career counselling helps students connect what they learn in school with their interests, capacities, aspirations, and available opportunities. The study recommended stronger guidance and counselling programmes in schools. This review is relevant to the present study because it establishes that career guidance is closely connected to students' occupational choices and self-understanding, which are central variables in the present work. The accessible article summary does not report a reliability coefficient, sample size, or instrument details.

Fernandez, Balijon, and Ancho [8] carried out a study on Career Preferences of Filipino Senior High School Students. The study aimed to determine the trends and challenges in the career preferences of public high school students in Cebu City, Philippines. The study used a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, with focused group discussion used to confirm participants' responses. The participants were 35 individuals, including students and five guidance counselors and advocates drawn from identified public national high schools. The findings revealed that students often selected careers that suited family needs, showing that occupational preference was shaped not only by individual interest but also by family expectations and practical realities. This study is useful to the present study because it demonstrates that occupational preferences among senior secondary students may reflect external pressures as much as personal aspiration, which helps explain why career guidance and self-awareness are necessary in helping students make more informed decisions. The available source summary does not state the instrument reliability index.

Gimarino [9] examined Career Choice and Self-Efficacy Toward Senior High School Students' Career Goals in the Philippines. The purpose of the study was to investigate senior high school students' career choices and self-efficacy and to determine how these were influenced by demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational strand. The study adopted a descriptive-correlational design and used an adapted questionnaire containing sections on demographic variables, career choices based on Holland's categories [7], and self-efficacy measured with the Career Development Self-Efficacy Inventory. Data were collected from 308 Grade 12 students through Google Forms and analyzed using SPSS. The study found that educational strand significantly correlated with career choices and self-efficacy, while age and gender did not significantly influence career preferences or self-efficacy. Students also showed high self-efficacy in career goal-setting and training selection. This review is relevant to the present study because it confirms that students' occupational preferences are associated with internal career-related attributes, especially self-belief and self-understanding, which are conceptually close to self-awareness. The accessible abstract does not provide a reliability coefficient for the instrument.

Gure and Kumar [10] conducted a study titled A Comparative Study of Career Preferences and Career Conflicts among the Secondary and Senior Secondary School Students. The aim of the study was to analyze career preferences and career conflicts among secondary and senior secondary school students. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 240 students in class 10 and class 12 was selected from eight schools in two blocks of Sirsa district, Haryana, using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using two standardized instruments, namely the Career Preference Record developed by Bhargava and Bhargava [12] and the Career Conflict Scale developed by Kumar and Rekha [13]. The findings showed that, overall, secondary and senior secondary students gave the highest career preference to law and order and education, while agriculture ranked lowest. The study also found no significant difference in career preferences between the two school levels, but senior secondary students had significantly higher career conflict than secondary students. The authors recommended that school administrators, teachers, and counsellors should develop school-level mechanisms to help students choose the best career options and reduce conflicts. This review relates to the present study because it highlights the reality that students may have occupational preferences yet still experience conflict, thereby reinforcing the importance of career guidance and self-awareness in clarifying career decisions. The article summary available online does not report reliability coefficients for the instruments.

Butal and Pevida [3] studied Examining the Impact of the Career Guidance Program on Senior High School Students' Career Decision-Making and Transition at Tomas V. Rivera National High School. The study aimed to investigate the impact of a school career guidance programme on students' career decision-making and transition readiness. According to the abstract, a survey was administered to senior high school students who participated in the programme, and both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used to determine its influence on students' confidence, career clarity, and preparedness for postsecondary transitions. The findings indicated that the programme had a significant positive effect on career decision-making and transition readiness. Participants also reported increased self-awareness, stronger motivation, clearer understanding of career options, and greater confidence in their abilities. The study concluded that structured career guidance programmes are important in secondary education. This review is directly relevant to the present study because it empirically links career guidance with both self-awareness and career clarity, which mirrors the focus of the current investigation on career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences. The abstract accessible online does not specify the sample size, sampling technique, reliability coefficient, or exact instrument name.

Otwine, Matagi, and Baguma [4] carried out a study titled Career Self-Concept of Students and School-Based Career Guidance and Counseling: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Ankole Sub-Region Southwestern Uganda. The purpose of the study was to document school-based career guidance and counselling and examine its relationship with students' career self-concept. The available summary reports a significant correlation between students' career self-concept and career counselling and guidance, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.182$ and $p < 0.05$. The study also found that students' self-concept showed a bias toward conventional career domains, school subject combinations, and career interests, while no gender differences were found. The authors recommended thorough career guidance and counselling in secondary schools to improve students' career self-concept. This study is relevant to the present research because career self-concept overlaps strongly with self-awareness, and the findings suggest that school-based guidance can shape how students understand themselves and their future occupations. The abstract available through ERIC does not provide full methodological details such as sample size, sampling technique, instrument reliability, or method of analysis beyond the reported correlation result.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development [2], Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments [7], and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory [6]. Super's theory views career development as a continuing process in which individuals gradually construct a career self-concept based on their interests, abilities, values, experiences, and social roles. At the senior secondary school stage, students are in an exploratory period during which they begin to clarify occupational interests and connect their personal characteristics with educational and career opportunities. Career guidance is therefore relevant because it helps students obtain occupational information, examine available educational pathways, and develop a more realistic understanding of their future roles. Holland's theory complements this perspective by proposing that satisfactory occupational choices occur when an individual's personality, interests, and competencies correspond with the characteristics of a particular work environment. Accordingly, self-awareness enables students to recognize their strengths, interests, values, and limitations,

while career guidance assists them in identifying occupations that match those characteristics. Bandura's theory further explains that students who possess confidence in their abilities are more likely to explore career alternatives, establish occupational goals, and persist in career-related decisions. These frameworks were selected because they jointly explain how external support through career guidance and internal understanding through self-awareness may shape students' occupational preferences.

The theoretical framework also guides the study's descriptive correlational methodology and the interpretation of its findings. Based on the theories, career guidance is expected to be positively related to occupational preferences because access to counselling, career information, aptitude assessment, and mentoring can help students develop clearer and more realistic career aspirations. Similarly, self-awareness is expected to show a positive relationship with occupational preferences because students who understand their interests and abilities are better positioned to select occupations that correspond with their personal attributes. These theoretical expectations are examined through the Career Guidance, Self-Awareness and Occupational Preference Questionnaire and Pearson Product Moment Correlation, which measures the strength and direction of the relationships among the variables without manipulating them. The framework therefore provides the basis for interpreting significant positive correlations as evidence that occupational preferences emerge through the interaction between career-related support and students' developing self-concepts. It also addresses the identified research gap by integrating career guidance and self-awareness within a single explanatory framework, rather than examining them separately, thereby offering a clearer account of how both factors jointly relate to occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the relationship among career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State without manipulating any variables. The design enabled the researcher to examine the degree and direction of relationships among the variables as they naturally occur in the school environment.

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students in public secondary schools in Rivers State. SS II students were considered suitable for the study because they are at a stage where they are actively considering career paths and preparing for subject combinations and future educational opportunities. According to records from the Rivers State Ministry of Education (2025), the estimated population of SS II students in public secondary schools in the state is 38,420.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 395 students was selected for the study using Taro Yamane's formula [14] for determining sample size in large populations. The sampling procedure adopted was a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the three senatorial districts of Rivers State. In the second stage, four public secondary schools were selected from each of the selected Local Government Areas using simple random sampling, giving a total of twelve schools. In the third stage, proportional

sampling was used to select students from each of the sampled schools to make up the required sample size of 395 respondents.

3.4. Instrument for Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Career Guidance, Self-Awareness and Occupational Preference Questionnaire (CGSAOPQ)” developed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A obtained information on respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender and age. Section B contained items measuring the three variables of the study: career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences. Responses to the items were measured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

3.5. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Measurement and Evaluation from a university in Rivers State. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated to improve the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire items. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study conducted among 30 SS II students from a public secondary school outside the sampled schools. The responses obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81 for career guidance, 0.79 for self-awareness, and 0.83 for occupational preferences, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants who helped administer and retrieve the questionnaires from the respondents in their respective schools. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from school authorities before administering the instrument. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and used strictly for academic purposes. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions by determining the strength and direction of the relationships among the variables, while the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Result

4.1. Career Guidance and Occupational Preferences

H01: There is no significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation between Career Guidance and Occupational Preferences

Correlations		Career Guidance	Occupational Preferences
Career Guidance	Pearson Correlation	1	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	395	395
Occupational Preferences	Pearson Correlation	.612**	1

Correlations	Career Guidance	Occupational Preferences
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	395	395

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

Table 1 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis showing the relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The result indicates a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.612$ with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among the students. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences is rejected. This means that increased exposure to career guidance is associated with clearer and more defined occupational preferences among the students.

4.2. Self-Awareness and Occupational Preferences

H02: There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Self-Awareness and Occupational Preferences

Correlations	Self-Awareness	Occupational Preferences
Self-Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.587**
	N	395
Occupational Preferences	Pearson Correlation	.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	395

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

Table 2 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation result examining the relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The result reveals a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.587$ with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among the students. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences is rejected. This implies that students with higher levels of self-awareness tend to demonstrate clearer occupational preferences.

4.3. Joint Relationship among Career Guidance, Self-Awareness, and Occupational Preferences

H03: There is no significant joint relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation among Career Guidance, Self-Awareness, and Occupational Preferences

Correlations		Career Guidance	Self-Awareness	Occupational Preferences
Career Guidance	Pearson Correlation	1	.534**	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	395	395	395
Self-Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.534**	1	.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	395	395	395
Occupational Preferences	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.587**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	395	395	395

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

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation matrix showing the joint relationships among career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The results show that career guidance is significantly related to self-awareness ($r = 0.534$, $p = 0.000$) and occupational preferences ($r = 0.612$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, self-awareness also shows a significant relationship with occupational preferences ($r = 0.587$, $p = 0.000$). Since all the p-values are less than 0.05, the relationships among the variables are statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant joint relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences is rejected. The result indicates that career guidance and self-awareness are both significantly associated with students' occupational preferences.

The first finding of the study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This implies that students who are exposed to career guidance activities tend to develop clearer and more realistic occupational preferences. Career guidance provides students with information about various professions, the qualifications required for different careers, and the opportunities available in the labour market. Such exposure enables students to match their interests and abilities with suitable occupations, thereby reducing confusion and uncertainty in career decision-making. This finding is consistent with the study of Butal and Pevida [3], who reported that career guidance programmes significantly improved students' career decision-making and helped them identify appropriate career paths. Similarly, Upoalkpajor [11] found that effective career guidance services play an important role in shaping students' career choices by providing them with accurate occupational information and counseling support. However, the finding contrasts slightly with the study of Fernandez, Balijon, and Ancho [8], who observed that some students still make career choices based on social prestige or parental influence despite receiving career guidance. The difference in findings may be attributed to variations in the structure and effectiveness of career guidance programmes across different educational systems. The implication of the present finding is that when schools provide consistent and well-organized career guidance services, students are more likely to develop clear occupational preferences that align with their interests and abilities.

The second finding of the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This means that students who possess a better understanding of their interests, abilities, and personality traits tend to make more appropriate occupational choices. Self-awareness enables students to evaluate their strengths and limitations, which helps them select careers that match their personal characteristics. When students

understand themselves better, they are less likely to experience confusion or conflict when choosing careers. This finding agrees with the study conducted by Otwine, Matagi, and Baguma [4], which revealed that students with higher levels of career self-concept demonstrate greater clarity in career decision-making. In the same vein, Shafranov-Kutsev and Gulyaeva [5] found that self-awareness plays a crucial role in helping students identify career paths that align with their personal competencies and aspirations. However, this finding differs slightly from the position of Gure and Kumar [10], who reported that students' occupational preferences were sometimes influenced more by external factors such as peer pressure and family expectations than by personal self-awareness. The variation in results may be due to differences in cultural contexts and educational environments. The implication of this finding is that developing students' self-awareness through counseling, personality assessment, and reflective activities can significantly improve their ability to make informed career decisions.

The third finding of the study showed that career guidance and self-awareness jointly had a significant relationship with occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This suggests that career guidance and self-awareness complement each other in shaping students' career decisions. While career guidance provides students with information about occupational opportunities and educational pathways, self-awareness helps them understand how their personal attributes fit within those opportunities. When these two factors work together, students are better equipped to evaluate career alternatives and select occupations that align with both their interests and labour market realities. This finding supports the position of Singh, Vig, and Thakral [1], who reported that structured career guidance programmes that incorporate self-assessment activities significantly enhance students' career readiness and decision-making abilities. Likewise, Norli and Bakar [15] found that career awareness programmes that integrate self-discovery exercises help students develop clearer career goals and stronger occupational commitment. The implication of this finding is that career counseling programmes should not focus solely on providing career information but should also incorporate activities that help students develop self-awareness. The reason for this result may be that students who receive career guidance while simultaneously gaining insight into their own interests and abilities are more capable of making realistic and satisfying occupational choices.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that career guidance and self-awareness are important factors associated with occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The significant relationships recorded for all three hypotheses indicate that students' occupational choices are shaped through the interaction between information obtained from the school environment and their understanding of personal interests, abilities, values, and aspirations. This supports the view that career decision-making is not an isolated event but a developmental process in which students gradually connect their emerging self-concepts with available educational and occupational opportunities. The results are therefore consistent with Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory [2], which explains that adolescents clarify their career self-concepts during the exploratory stage of development, and with Holland's theory [7], which emphasizes the importance of compatibility between personal characteristics and occupational environments.

The first finding revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between career guidance and occupational preferences, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.612$ and a probability value below the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that students who receive greater exposure to structured career guidance tend to develop clearer and more realistic occupational preferences. Career talks, counselling sessions, occupational information, aptitude assessments, mentoring, and guidance on educational requirements can help students understand the qualifications, responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges associated with different professions. Such support reduces dependence on assumptions,

peer opinions, or incomplete information and enables students to compare occupational alternatives more systematically. The finding therefore suggests that career guidance contributes not only to occupational awareness but also to students' confidence and clarity when considering future career paths.

This finding agrees with Butal and Pevida [3], who reported that structured career guidance programmes improved students' career decision-making, career clarity, and transition readiness. It is also consistent with Upoalkpajor [11], who found that career counselling helps students connect their school experiences, abilities, interests, aspirations, and available occupational opportunities. However, the result should not be interpreted as meaning that career guidance alone determines occupational preference. Fernandez, Balijon, and Ancho [8] found that family expectations, social prestige, and practical household considerations may continue to influence students' choices. Therefore, the effectiveness of career guidance may depend on its regularity, quality, accessibility, and responsiveness to students' cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Schools must consequently move beyond occasional career talks and establish continuous guidance programmes that assist students throughout the secondary-school period.

The second finding showed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and occupational preferences, with $r = 0.587$ and $p = 0.000$. This indicates that students who understand their interests, abilities, personality traits, values, strengths, and limitations are more likely to demonstrate clear occupational preferences. Self-awareness provides an internal basis for evaluating whether a profession is personally suitable. A student who understands personal academic strengths and vocational interests is better positioned to distinguish between a career selected from genuine compatibility and one chosen merely because it is prestigious or socially desirable. The result supports Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory [6], because students who recognize and trust their abilities are more likely to explore alternatives, establish career goals, and persist in pursuing appropriate occupational pathways.

The self-awareness result is consistent with Otwine, Matagi, and Baguma [4], who established a significant relationship between school-based career guidance and students' career self-concept. It also supports Shafranov-Kutsev and Gulyaeva [5], who emphasized the role of career self-guidance in developing students' vocational orientation and competitiveness. Nevertheless, students' self-awareness may remain incomplete during adolescence because their interests, confidence, and aspirations are still developing. External pressures from parents, peers, social media, and perceptions of occupational prestige may also override personal understanding. This may explain the findings of Gure and Kumar [10], who observed that students may possess occupational preferences while still experiencing career conflict. Schools should therefore promote self-awareness through reflective exercises, personality and aptitude assessments, interest inventories, individual counselling, classroom discussions, and opportunities for students to explore different occupational environments.

The third finding revealed significant relationships among career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences. Career guidance was related to self-awareness at $r = 0.534$, career guidance was related to occupational preferences at $r = 0.612$, and self-awareness was related to occupational preferences at $r = 0.587$, with all probability values below the required significance level. These results show that career guidance and self-awareness function as complementary rather than competing influences. Career guidance provides external knowledge about educational pathways and the labour market, while self-awareness enables students to evaluate whether those opportunities correspond with their personal characteristics. Occupational preferences become clearer when students possess both accurate career information and adequate knowledge of themselves. Providing career information without facilitating self-discovery may result in choices that are informed but personally unsuitable, whereas self-awareness without occupational information may produce aspirations that are personally meaningful but unrealistic.

The joint relationship supports Singh, Vig, and Thakral [1], who emphasized the importance of mapping career guidance opportunities for senior secondary students, and Norli

and Bakar [15], who showed that career-awareness programmes can strengthen students' career goals. The finding also extends earlier studies by examining career guidance and self-awareness together within the specific context of public secondary schools in Rivers State. It addresses the identified research gap by showing empirically that occupational preferences are associated with both institutional support and individual self-understanding. This integrated perspective is important because many existing studies have examined career counselling outcomes or personal career attributes separately, without adequately showing how the two dimensions operate together during occupational decision-making.

The findings have important implications for school administrators, counsellors, teachers, parents, and education policymakers. Secondary schools should institutionalize comprehensive career guidance programmes rather than treating career counselling as an occasional activity conducted close to graduation. Such programmes should begin before students make critical decisions regarding subject combinations, educational specializations, and postsecondary pathways. Qualified counsellors should provide current labour-market information, organize career exhibitions, invite professionals to discuss occupational realities, administer validated interest and aptitude assessments, and offer individual guidance based on students' needs. Parents should also be included in career-development programmes so that their expectations do not conflict unnecessarily with students' abilities and interests.

Although the results provide strong evidence of meaningful relationships, they should be interpreted within the limits of a correlational design. The findings establish association but do not demonstrate that career guidance or self-awareness directly causes particular occupational preferences. It is also possible that students with clearer occupational preferences are more likely to seek career information and engage in self-reflection. Nevertheless, the consistency of the results across the three relationships provides substantial support for strengthening career guidance and self-awareness activities in secondary schools. Overall, the study confirms that students are more likely to develop realistic, informed, and personally suitable occupational preferences when schools combine access to accurate career information with structured opportunities for self-assessment and reflection.

6. Research Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study employed a descriptive correlational design; therefore, the significant relationships identified among career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences cannot be interpreted as evidence of causal influence. Second, the participants were limited to 395 Senior Secondary School II students selected from public secondary schools in three Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent students in private schools, other class levels, unsampled areas of Rivers State, or secondary-school students in other parts of Nigeria. The study also used a structured self-report questionnaire, making the responses potentially susceptible to social desirability, inaccurate self-assessment, and differences in students' understanding of the questionnaire items. Furthermore, data were collected at a single point in time, so the study could not examine how students' self-awareness and occupational preferences change as they gain additional educational and career experiences. Other potentially relevant influences, including parental expectations, peer pressure, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, gender, school resources, and labour-market conditions, were not examined in the analysis.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study examined the relationship between career guidance, self-awareness, and occupational preferences among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The findings of the study revealed that career guidance has a significant relationship with students'

occupational preferences. This indicates that when students receive adequate career guidance, they are better able to identify suitable career paths and develop clearer occupational aspirations. The study also found that self-awareness significantly relates to occupational preferences among students. Students who possess better knowledge of their interests, abilities, and personality traits tend to make more informed and realistic career choices. Self-awareness therefore serves as a critical factor in helping students align their personal attributes with appropriate occupational opportunities.

Furthermore, the study revealed that career guidance and self-awareness jointly influence students' occupational preferences. This suggests that career counseling programmes are more effective when they combine occupational information with activities that help students understand themselves better. When both elements work together, students are better equipped to make rational career decisions that correspond with their abilities and future goals. The study therefore concludes that strengthening career guidance programmes and promoting self-awareness among secondary school students will significantly improve their occupational decision-making and career development.

8. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflict of interest that could have influenced the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of this study. The research was conducted objectively, and the findings are presented solely on the basis of the data obtained from the participants.

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