Factors Influencing Subject Choices at FET Stage of Education

Brief Overview of Findings
Sources of Information

- Gauteng Department of Education - Sibongile Mabena, Life Orientation Coordinator Grades 7-9.

- Career Indaba 2012, Sandton Convention Centre.


- Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, Career Guidance Section – Wesley Kirk.

- Wits University, Student Equity and Talent Management Unit, Targeting Talent Programme for maths and science enrichment - Zena Richards, Director.

- North-West University, Faculty of Engineering – Dr Percy van der Gryp, Senior Lecturer, and Elza Hattingh, Manager: Recruitment, Selection and Student Affairs.

- Life Orientation Curriculum, National Department of Education.

- PACE Career Centre – website.
Contextual Comments

1) We are not dealing with a uniform situation across under-resourced communities, but rather with a mosaic of different community scenarios.

2) The sets of influences on learner FET subject choices differ across under-resourced communities.

3) The quality of relevant information varies from community to community.

4) Career dreams and career choices appear often to be specific (not general) and closely linked to learner subject choices at the end of Grade 9.

5) It therefore looks as if learners are trying to decide on their future careers already in Grade 9, leaving little room for review, flexibility and keeping career options open during their last three years of schooling.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices

1) **University outreach programmes:**
   
   E.g. – Wits University, Student Equity and Talent Management Unit (SETMU): Targeting Talent Programme for maths and science enrichment.

   - Reaches out to 700 learners per year from high-performing schools in under-resourced communities (mostly Naledi schools – Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners).
   - Brings these learners to Wits for 2 weeks during the winter holidays.
   - Teaches these learners to ‘think about their thinking’.
   - Provides rich insights into different career options and into the world of work.
   - Sends these learners back to tutor the other learners in their schools.

**Outcome:**

- High quality career information passed from the university to all learners in participating schools through their selected Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners.
- Learners at the selected schools are able to make well informed subject choices, as well as informed future career choices.

Other universities also have outreach programmes.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices (cont)

2) **People in society who are seen as experts or heroes:**

   In the absence of influences from higher learning institutions or families with education ... 

   • The views of experts or heroes appear to have a direct influence on learner thinking.
   • No filtering of this information by many learners.
   • Learners will choose subjects and career paths because an expert or a hero has advised this.

3) **Family – 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} generation educated:**

   • Learners who have at least one parent with formal education can turn to them for subject and career guidance.
   • Educated parents are able to advise to some extent on appropriate Grade 9 subject choices.
   • Even educated parents often still feel anxiety about their children’s future financial security. They may influence their children to select subjects and careers seen as highly paid careers.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices (cont)

4) **Career Indabas and Exhibitions:**

- Estimated that about 10% of learners in some districts, e.g. Soweto, attend career indabas or exhibitions.
- The information and workshops at career indabas do help with FET subject choices.

**However - note:**
- Some learners have no ‘fall back position’ – unable to turn to any informed person in their environment to discuss all the information gathered at a career indaba/exhibition.
- Such learners may not be able to process all the subject/career information and become confused. Inappropriate FET subject choices may follow.

5) **School – Life Orientation Classes:**

- Careers and the world of work is part of the Life Orientation curriculum at state schools from Grade 6 onwards.
- LO teachers do their best to inform learners, and assist with FET subject choices.
- LO teachers sometimes not confident in this area.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices (cont)

6) **Teachers:**
   - Life Orientation /class teachers who identify capable learners may directly influence and assist these learners in their subject choices and future career directions.

7) **Learner observation of current events:**
   - Evidence suggests that a number of learners are fairly easily swayed simply by their observations of current events.
     
     E.g. – North-West University experienced a surge in applications for civil engineering just ahead of the 2010 Soccer World Cup, when new roads and soccer stadiums were being built. This trend faded after the Soccer World Cup.

   - Learners have a only a cross-sectional view of events - see only the immediate reality.
   - No accompanying longitudinal view – do not realize that civil engineering is by nature a cyclical business.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices (cont)

8) Information available to learners:
   - Learners can be influenced simply by information that is available, especially if that information is supported by the school.
   - Often no filtering or deeper understanding of this information by learners.
   - Inappropriate subject and career decision-making can easily follow.

   E.g. – salary scale information on some websites. Evidence that a fair number of learners are currently making subject and career choices solely on the basis of salary scale information.

   • Note: Unintended consequence of mocking of some career directions with lower salary scales, e.g. teaching, health and caring professions.

9) Peer group pressure:
   - Strong peer pressure in some communities - especially enmeshed communities - to choose only subjects that peers are also choosing. (Often gangs and crime in such communities.)
   - Peer rejection and peer mocking if a learner breaks ranks.
Factors Influencing FET Subject Choices (cont)

10) **Community pressure:**
   - Community pressure and the community’s needs can push learners’ subject and career choices in a particular direction (enmeshed communities). Individual preferences not considered important.

11) **Competitiveness between learners:**
   - Some learners attempt to upstage one another – will choose subjects and career paths to show up somebody else.
   - Choices not based on own abilities or interests.
   - This situation is likely to apply more to boys than to girls. More likely in troubled communities.
Points for Reflection

• There is not much evidence of learner introspection and self knowledge associated with FET subject and career choices. Choices not necessarily matched to aptitudes, real interests and abilities.

• Rural-based students often more diligent and disciplined in their studies than some urban-based students (Wits University).

• Over-concentration of bursary and other support in some geographical areas, e.g. Soweto. Not much support in other geographical areas.

• Over-concentration of support leading to swamping and overwhelming of certain bursary recipients - impacting on their performance.

• Salary scales and perceived future financial gains sometimes the sole determinant of subject and career choices.
  ➢ Could this form of information be too prominent in career guidance?

• Evidence of learner mocking of career directions not supported by bursaries and incentive schemes, e.g. teaching, health and caring professions.
  ➢ Perhaps an unintended consequence?