

**STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL PREFERENCES AND  
OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS**

**by**

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## NOMENCLATURE

$B$	linear regression coefficient
$B$	logistic regression coefficient
$\beta$	standardised linear regression coefficient
$C$	contingency coefficient
$C_s$	standardised contingency coefficient
$f$	frequency
$n_{form5}$	total number of form five students in the sample
$n_{first}$	total number of first year students in the sample
$n_{final}$	total number of final year students in the sample
$n_{total}$	total number of students in combined sample
$r$	Pearson correlation coefficient
$R^2$	coefficient of determination
Nagelkerke $R^2$	$R^2$ -like measure used in logistic regression
$SES$	<i>Socio-economic Status</i>
$VIF$	variance inflation factor

## ABSTRAK

### PILIHAN PENGAJIAN DAN PEKERJAAN PELAJAR

Pilihan pengajian and pekerjaan pelajar dari tiga peringkat pengajian telah dikaji. Pengumpulan data kuantitatif telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan tiga sampel pelajar bersaiz 500 orang yang telah dipilih di kalangan pelajar tingkatan lima di Kedah (tidak termasuk Pulau Langkawi) dan Pulau Pinang, pelajar tahun satu di Universiti Sains Malaysia (tidak termasuk cawangan Kubang Krian) dan pelajar tahun akhir di Universiti Sains Malaysia (tidak termasuk cawangan Kubang Krian). Pengumpulan data kualitatif telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan dua sampel yang setiap satunya bersaiz 15 pelajar tahun satu and tahun akhir. Analisis kuantitatif dan kualitatif telah digunakan untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pilihan pengajian dan pekerjaan pelajar serta untuk menerangkan proses membuat pilihan pekerjaan. Proses membuat pilihan pekerjaan berlaku dalam satu jangka masa yang panjang. Proses pilihan pekerjaan bagi pelajar-pelajar yang berada dalam peringkat akhir remaja dan peringkat awal dewasa boleh dibahagikan kepada empat peringkat iaitu: semasa berada di sekolah menengah; semasa memohon kemasukan ke peringkat ijazah Sarjana Muda; semasa menerima tawaran dan mendaftar bagi kursus ijazah Sarjana Muda dan sebelum tamat pengajian ijazah Sarjana Muda. Daripada analisis data kuantitatif, keputusan peperiksaan, pendidikan ayah dan pekerjaan ayah merupakan antara tiga pembolehubah terpenting yang mempengaruhi pilihan pekerjaan pelajar. Selain itu, gender, etnik dan pendidikan ibu juga mempengaruhi pilihan pekerjaan

pelajar. Keputusan peperiksaan, pendidikan ayah, pekerjaan ayah dan pendidikan ibu pula mempengaruhi pilihan pengajian pelajar. Daripada analisis data kualitatif, keputusan peperiksaan pelajar, harapan ibubapa, minat dan peluang pekerjaan telah dikenalpasti sebagai faktor-faktor yang boleh mempengaruhi pilihan pengajian and pekerjaan para pelajar. Keempat-empat faktor ini merupakan faktor yang paling kerap dinyatakan oleh pelajar tahun satu dan tahun akhir semasa temuduga.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL PREFERENCES AND OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS**

Educational preferences and occupational aspirations of students from three educational stages were investigated. Quantitative data were collected from three samples of approximately 500 students each: form five students in the states of Kedah (excluding Pulau Langkawi) and Penang; first year students in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM, excluding Kubang Krian branch); and final year students in USM (excluding Kubang Krian branch). Two samples of 15 first year and 15 final year USM students were drawn for qualitative data collection. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used to determine factors that influence students' educational preferences and occupational aspirations. The process of making occupational choices spans over many years. Students' educational preferences and occupational aspirations have a reciprocal relationship with one another. The process of occupational choice for students who are in their late adolescence and early adulthood can be divided into four stages: during secondary school; while applying for a bachelor's degree programme; when accepting and enrolling in a bachelor's degree programme; and, prior to the completion of a bachelor's degree programme. The three most important variables influencing students' occupational aspirations found from the quantitative data analysis are students' results, father's education and father's occupation. Other than these variables, gender, ethnicity and mother's education show

some influence on students' occupational aspirations. Students' results, father's occupation, father's education and mother's education show influence on students' educational preferences. The analysis of qualitative data on the other hand, yielded results of students, parents' expectations, interests and job opportunity as some of the factors influencing students' educational preferences and occupational aspirations. These four factors were the most common factors mentioned by the first and final year students when interviewed.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In modern society, almost every individual encounters the problem of choosing an occupation (Ginzberg et al., 1951: 3). According to Vroom (1984: 49-50), this is very different in a primitive society where occupation is determined by the existing division of labour and social sanctions compel the sons to follow the footsteps of their fathers. The development of capitalism, however, has changed this. It gives more freedom to an individual to choose an occupation. In addition to this, capitalism has also introduced a high degree of specialisation, giving individuals a high degree of freedom in choosing their occupation (Ginzberg et al., 1951: 3).

Occupational choice does not only concern an individual but also the society (Vroom, 1984: 50). This is because the individual making an occupational choice is trying to organise his/her impression about himself/herself and the external environment in order to choose among the available alternatives (Ginzberg et al., 1951: 3). At the same time, the society needs people to take over the available tasks or occupations to safeguard the future existence of the society (Ginzberg et al., 1951: 3; Vroom, 1984: 50). It also ensures that the society operates well through the interdependence of functions of different occupations (Parsons, 1951: 29-36).

While looking at occupational choices, one cannot deny the importance of educational choices. This is because there is a reciprocal influence between the process of making educational choices and occupational choices. Each process has significant implications for the other. Educational choices have implications for occupational

choices and vice versa (Ciavarella, 1972: 252; Rottinghaus et al., 2002: 1-2). Students' early educational choices have implications for later educational and occupational choices (Arbona, 2000: 270-271).

During the process of being educated, an individual is faced, at several points, with a decision to continue or to drop out of the system. In addition to this, if the decision is to continue, then the direction of the educational course must be decided. The educational system provides individuals with various alternatives and while choosing between these alternatives, the individual makes a commitment to the type of occupation he/she will subsequently choose (Miller, 1960: 118-119).

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

At the outset, the researcher wishes to state that this is a sociological enquiry focusing on educational preferences and occupational aspirations of students. Education is an important aspect of our modern lifestyle. The education system plays an important role in the process of making occupational choices (Butler, 1968: 11). The educational system has two main commonly expressed purposes; training intelligent citizens and preparing its clientele for earning a living (Miller, 1960: 118-119).

In Malaysia, the people and the government both place great importance on higher education as it is seen to be an important means of social mobility and economic advancement (Lim, 1993: 264-276). Almost every year, the development of education receives the largest allocation within the budget for social services in Malaysia. The federal government allocated RM 7.1 billion in the year 2000 (Ministry of Finance, 2001: 87), RM 10.4 billion in the year 2001 (Ministry of Finance, 2002: 79), RM 9.3 billion in the 2002 (Ministry of Finance, 2002: 79) and RM 9.8 million in the year 2003

(Ministry of Finance, 2002: 79) for the development of education. This amounts to 64.1 per cent and 65.9 per cent of the allocation made for development expenditure for social services in 2001 and 2002. This allocation includes the maintenance and development of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. It also includes an allocation for scholarships for higher education as well as for the National Higher Education Fund to provide loans for students in institutions of higher learning (Ministry of Finance, 2001: 87).

### **1.2.1 Education System in Malaysia**

The objectives of Malaysian Education System are to achieve national unity, produce quality manpower for national development, achieve democratisation of education and inculcate positive values (<http://www.moe.gov.my/objective.htm>).

The education system in Malaysia can be divided into three major categories: primary, secondary and tertiary education (see Figure 1.1). Primary education involves two different types of schools, national schools and national type schools. The national schools use Bahasa Malaysia as the main instruction language, together with English. National type schools use Tamil or Mandarin as their main instruction language, together with English and Bahasa Malaysia. Primary education takes six years, i.e. Year 1 to Year 6 (Ministry of Education, 2002: 5).

After completing primary education, students move on to secondary schools. At this stage, the students go through five years of education (Form 1 to Form 5). At the end of the five years, form five students sit for a general examination known as *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM), which is equivalent to the GCE O' Levels.

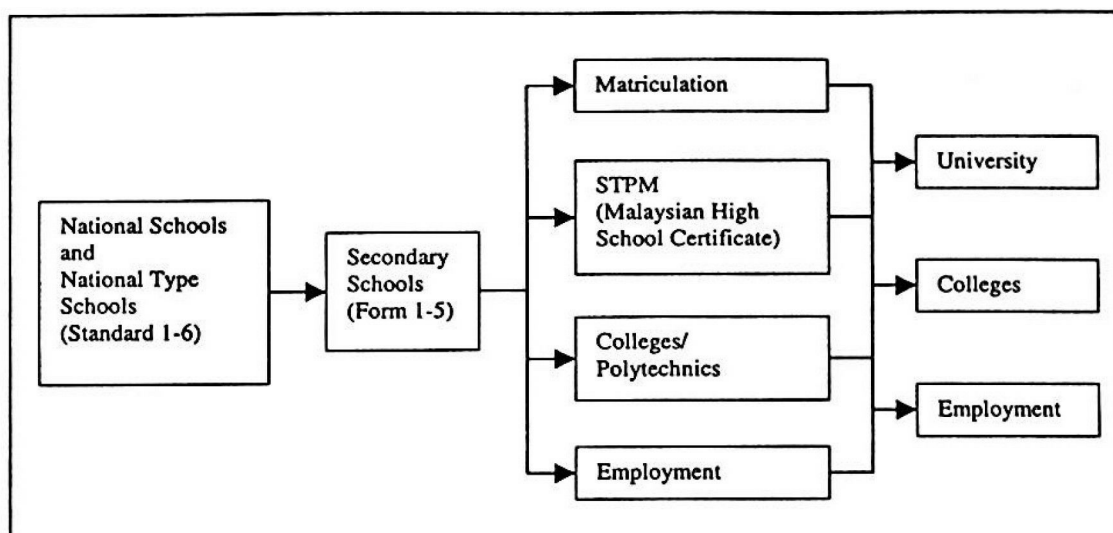


Figure 1.1: The Education System in Malaysia (Adapted from Ministry of Education, 2002: 5)

After SPM, students have the option of either continuing their education or seeking employment. Those who wish to continue their education can either enroll in a pre-university programme, such as matriculation or *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM), or enroll in various programmes in colleges or polytechnics. STPM is equivalent to A' Levels. Matriculation programmes, which run for one or two years can be used to meet the requirement for the entry into local universities. STPM, on the other hand, is a two-year programme that is conducted in selected schools and colleges and can be used to meet the entry requirement into local universities (Ministry of Education, 2002: 5).

Every year, thousands of students complete their secondary education and move on to further their studies in more specialised fields in various higher learning institutions. These institutions provide students with many different choices to further their studies. In the year 2003, 71,625 students applied for a place in local public universities. Among them, 37,034 students gained admission for bachelor's degree programmes commencing at local public universities in June 2003 (McIntyre, 2003). In 2002, the total number of admissions to bachelor's degree programmes at local public

universities was 32,752 (McIntyre, 2003). In 1998 and 1999, the total number of admissions to bachelor's degree programmes was 33,870 and 31,076, respectively (Chok, 1999). According to the Economic Report 2001/02 (Ministry of Finance, 2001: 87) and the Economic Report 2002/03 (Ministry of Finance, 2002: 79), the student enrolment in universities has increased from 100,041 in 1996 to 245,989 in 2001.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

This research studies educational preferences and occupational aspirations of students during the period from late secondary school to the end of undergraduate education. The reasons for undertaking the study are as follows:

First, in view of the growth of higher education in Malaysia, it is important to understand why students choose certain educational programmes. It is also important to understand whether this choice relates to their choice of occupations, and, therefore, why students make their choices.

Second, there is a major research gap on educational preferences and occupational choice in Malaysia of adolescents and young adults. According to Powlett and Young (1996: 30), transition from school to work is an important period in adolescences or young adulthood. During this difficult period, seemingly irrevocable decisions (e.g. regarding academic subjects, coursework, training, qualifications and occupation) have to be made by the individual. However, very little is known about this among Malaysian adolescents. Educational and occupational choices are important choices that youths must make in life, and this choice is likely to have profound effects on later experiences or choices. Making educational and occupational choice is not an easy task for youths (Galinsky and Fast, 1966; Powlett and Young, 1996). This is mainly because choosing

a particular type of educational programme enables a person to pursue either one or a few types of occupations, while, at the same time, restricting them from entering other types of occupation. Obtaining a degree in law, for example, will enable an individual to practice law, pursue a career as a legal advisor in an organisation or teach law related courses in colleges. However, obtaining a degree in law does not enable a person to pursue a career as a chemist, an engineer or accountant, unless the particular individual has other appropriate qualifications. Therefore, the progress through the educational system requires that some choice, in relation to the type of training, and hence, the type of occupation, be made by persons passing through that system (Miller, 1960: 117-118).

Third, very little is known about the process by which occupational choices are made. According to Ginzberg et al. (1951), there are three major periods: (i) the *fantasy* period, which is during childhood and comes to the end at eleven years of age; (ii) the *tentative* choice period, which includes ages eleven to seventeen; and (iii) the period of *realistic* choices, which starts in late adolescence and goes into early adulthood.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The various aspects of the research problem have been reduced to a concise set of research questions that was investigated.

1. What is the relationship between students' choice of educational programme and their occupational aspirations?
2. Why do students plan/choose to pursue certain educational programmes?
3. Why do students plan to pursue certain occupations?

4. To what extent do preferences and reasons change at different educational stages?

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The research questions are translated into the following set of objectives.

- To investigate the relationship between students' choice of educational programme and their occupational aspirations.
- To establish the reasons for students' choices of educational programme and occupation.
- To compare the choices and reasons at different educational stages.

## **1.6 Arrangement of the Chapters**

The first chapter consists of introductory information regarding the study. It explains the research questions and the objectives of this study. The second chapter is a review of literature. It includes a theoretical framework, specific theories on occupational choice and a theoretical model. The third chapter deals with the methodology used in the study and the methods of data collection. It explains the population, the sample and the instruments used. The fourth chapter reports the findings and answers the research questions set out in Chapter 1. The fifth chapter provides a discussion of the findings, while the final chapter presents the conclusion to the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The modern theorists in the field of career development emerged in the 1950s (Gysbers, 1982: 336, 1988, 1990: 620). These modern theorists created a broader and more comprehensive view of individuals and their occupational developmental process over the life span. At this time, occupational choice was beginning to be seen as a developmental process. The term 'vocational development' became popular in the 1950's as a way to describe the broadening view of occupational (vocational) choice (Gysbers, 1974, 1997). In the 1960's and 1970's the term career and career development became popular. This development expanded the perception of career as not merely work that is done by an individual (Gysbers, 1982: 337, 1990: 621, 1997).

Career can be defined as encompassing a variety of possible patterns of personal choice related to an individual's total life-style, including occupation, education, personal and social behaviour, learning how to learn, social responsibility and leisure time activities (Jones et al., 1972). According to Herr and Cramer (1996: 14), careers are unique to each person. Career not only includes occupations but prevocational and post vocational concerns as well as integration of work with other roles: family, community and leisure. Super (1984: 204) explains that career involves a cluster of roles which involves study, work, home and family, community service, and leisure activities. These roles are interacting and interdependent on one another.

It can be concluded from these definitions that occupational choice is just a subset to career development. Therefore, this research uses the term 'occupational choice' as it only focuses on studying students' educational choice and occupational choice and does not include all aspects of career such as leisure activities. However, terms like careers and occupations are often used synonymously or interchangeably (Herr, 1982: 373; Isaacson and Brown, 1997: 10; Young and Collin, 2000: 3). Parsons, in his book *Choosing a Vocation* (1967) used all three terms i.e. vocation, occupation and career in describing the process of choosing an occupation. In addition to this, it is also interesting to note that many researchers use terms like occupation, vocation and career interchangeably in their research. Kelly (1989: 182), for example, uses terms like job/occupation/career choice or preference to denote the concept of occupational preference of young adults.

The first part of this chapter discusses some of the important concepts related to occupational choice. The next part is regarding the theoretical framework that was used in this study. This is followed by the discussion of some of the major theories in the field of occupational choice. The next section is regarding various researches that have been done in the field of occupational choice. The following section of this chapter discusses the theoretical model that was used in this study. The last section discusses some the voids in the researches related to field of occupational choice.

## **2.2 Definition of Occupational Choice**

Occupational choice can be defined in various ways. First of all, occupational choice can be defined as preference referring to what a person prefers to do (Crites, 1969: 127). This means that given various alternatives, an individual shows preference towards a particular occupation. However, when individuals state their preference they

are indicating what they like to do while in making choices they are predicting what they might probably do (Crites, 1969: 127). Other than this, occupational choice can also be defined as occupational aspiration. Occupational aspiration refers to the occupation an individual considers to be ideal for him/her (Crites, 1969: 130).

Choice is more comprehensive than preference and aspiration. Choice is based upon a consideration of many factors which might include aspiration and preference. The concept of occupational choice, preference and aspiration are relatively distinct however, these concepts are also related to each other (Crites, 1969: 132) (see Figure 2.1).

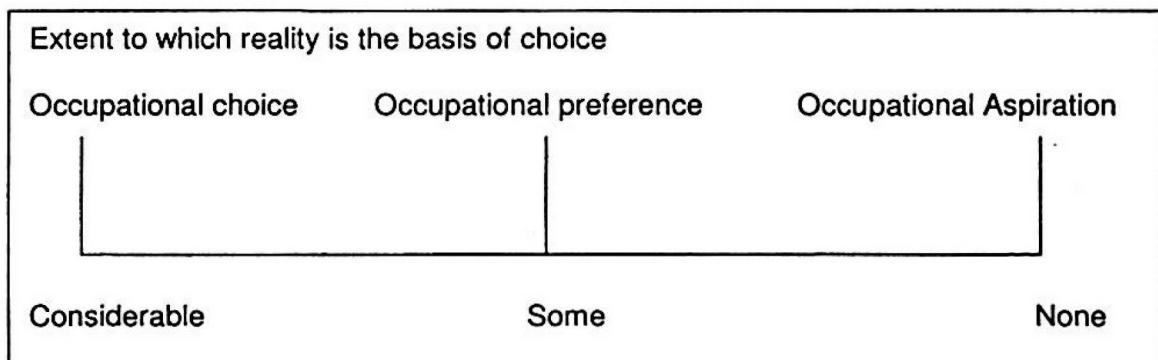


Figure 2.1: The relationship of occupational choice to occupational preference and aspiration in the reality continuum (Crites, 1969: 132)

Occupational choice, preference and aspiration are related because all the concepts involve selection of an occupation, however, these concepts differ in the extent which they represent reality-oriented selection. Choice is more realistic in comparison to preference while preference is more realistic than aspiration. Not all researchers, however, define occupational choice, preference and aspiration in the same way as Crites (1969). Kuvlesky and Bealer (1972: 106), for example, define occupational choice as the psychological preferences or desires that the individual has regarding work statuses.

Gottfredson (1981) on the other hand gives a very different definition for occupational aspiration and preference.

Preferences are one's likes and dislikes which ranges from what is most desired to what would be least tolerable. Preferences are the "wish" rather than the "reality" component of aspirations or goals...An aspiration is the single occupation named as the best alternative at any given time (Gottfredson, 1981: 548).

In this case, Gottfredson's definition of aspiration is similar to the idea of occupational choice defined by Crites (1969). Vroom (1984: 49-95) also differentiates between occupational preference and occupational choice. He defines 'preferred occupation' as the occupation which is most attractive to a person while 'chosen occupation' is a function of attractiveness and the chances of obtaining the occupation.

In a similar manner, researchers have used various terms to refer to educational aspirations of an individual. According to Pavalko and Bishop (1966: 288), the educational plans of students have often been studied under the rubric of educational aspirations, mobility orientation and college plans.

In this study the concept of occupational choice will cover both preference and aspiration because this study involves students from three different educational stages. One group consists of form five students in secondary schools. These students are about to complete their secondary education. The next group consists of first year students in Universiti Sains Malaysia. This group of students are in the beginning of their tertiary education. The third group consists of final year students who are about to complete their bachelor's degree programme in Universiti Sains Malaysia and might be entering the labour market very soon. It is important to cover both concepts in this study because of the nature of students involved. All these students have not made real entry into the labour market. They are only stating the occupation they might pursue when they complete their bachelor's degree programmes. These groups of

students are dealing with different levels of reality and urgency to make a choice regarding their occupation. Therefore, both terms, 'Occupational Aspirations' and 'Occupational Choices' is used interchangeably in this study.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The process of occupational choice can be described using various sociological theories. In this study, six occupational theories have been chosen to deductively generate conceptual and operational variables and these are: Status Attainment Theory, Allocation Model Theory, Human Capital Theory, Ginzberg's Theory, Gottfredson's Theory and Holland's Theory. In addition to this, in order to explain the web of relations that determine educational and occupational choices, this research uses rational choice theory and Giddens' structuration theory.

The justifications for selecting these two theories (rational choice theory and Giddens' structuration theory) are that these essentially characterise the two opposing assumptions about the nature of human beings and they relate to the differing ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent of the three research strategies that have been chosen to guide the study. Giddens' structuration theory belongs to a more 'determinist' school and offers a contextually situated but powerful agent as the manufacturer of social life (Wilson, 1995: 310). This implies that human behaviour is influenced by some external force. The nature of this external force varies from subject to subject. The ability to ruminate and decide, however, gives them the opportunity to create, recreate or transform their everyday life (Wilson, 1995: 310). Rational choice theory belongs to a more 'voluntarist' school that ascribes a much more creative free will approach to humans, having them act as agents able to create their environment by their thoughts and actions (Campbell, 1966: 446; Flood and Jackson, 1991: 247)

### 2.3.1 Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory has its roots in economics. Economics has assumed that people are motivated by money and by the possibility of making a profit, and this has allowed it to construct formal, and often predictive, models of human behaviour. Sociologists also have tried to build theories around the idea that all action is fundamentally rational in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do. This approach to theory is known as *rational choice theory*, and its application to social interaction takes the form of *exchange theory* (Ritzer, 1996, 2000).

A pioneering figure in establishing rational choice theory in sociology was George Homans (1961), who set out a basic framework of exchange theory, which he grounded in assumptions drawn from behaviourist psychology. Homans' formulation of exchange theory remains the basis of all subsequent discussion of this theory. During the 1960s and 1970s, Blau (1964), Coleman (1973), and Cook and Emerson (1978) extended and enlarged his framework, and they helped to develop more formal, mathematical models of rational action.

Rational choice theory focuses on actors (Ritzer, 2000: 408). Basic to all forms of rational choice theory is the assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed. This standpoint, called methodological individualism, holds that:

The elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals (Elster, 1989: 13).

Rational choice theory postulates that individuals are seen as motivated by the wants or goals that express their preferences. They act within specific, given constraints and

on the basis of the information that they have about the conditions under which they are acting. At its simplest, the relationship between preferences and constraints can be seen in the purely technical terms of the relationship of a means to an end. As it is not possible for individuals to achieve all of the various things that they want, they must also make choices in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these goals. Rational choice theory holds that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction (Heath, 1976: 3; Carling, 1992: 27).

The idea of 'rational action' has generally been taken to imply a conscious social actor engaging in deliberate calculative strategies. This means that actions taken are meant to achieve certain goals. Actors also can be seen as having a hierarchy of preferences that might influence their actions (Ritzer, 2000: 408).

When students decide to pursue a tertiary qualification, they need to choose from various available fields. How do they make the choice? According to Homans (1974: 25):

The more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action.

This means that a person will choose to act in a certain manner if the person finds the result of his/her action more valuable. Homans introduces the concept of reward in this proposition (Ritzer, 2000: 414). Homans (1974: 25-28) argued that human behaviour, like all animal behaviour, is not free but determined. It is shaped by the rewards and punishments that are encountered. People do those things that lead to rewards and they avoid whatever they are punished for. Reinforcement through rewards and punishments -- technically termed 'conditioning' -- is the determining factor in human

behaviour. This behaviour can, therefore, be studied in purely external and objective terms. People learn from their past experiences, and their behaviour can be explained through these experiences.

In choosing between alternative actions, a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time, the value,  $V$ , of the result, multiplied by the probability,  $p$ , of getting the results, is the greater (Homans, 1974: 43).

When making educational choices, the assumptions are that students will have certain expectations regarding the result of pursuing tertiary education. Every field of study will offer different experiences for the students and at the same time it will narrow their job opportunity to one or several fields. Therefore, students will choose a field, which they consider, will reward them with something they consider valuable. The rewards can be either materialistic or altruistic (Ritzer, 2000: 414). John, for example, might choose to pursue an educational programme in the field of education because he likes working with children, while Cathy might pursue a degree in engineering because of the good remuneration offered in industrial sector. Other rewards might be recognition, social status and the opportunity to help or meet people.

Before making decisions, this theory suggests that people usually examine and make calculations regarding the rewards associated with each course of action (Ritzer, 2000: 416). They also compare the amount of rewards associated with each course of action (Ritzer, 2000: 416). In the same way, before deciding what course to pursue, students will look at various fields of study, the rewards from pursuing those fields and also the chances of obtaining the rewards. Any reward that is highly valued will be devalued if actors think it is unlikely that they will achieve it (Ritzer, 2000: 416). Students can also act in the similar manner when making occupational choice.

Toward the end of high school, when youngsters begin to implement their choices in actually seeking training and jobs, they become more sensitive to which particular jobs are most readily available to them. Youngsters will balance their preferences for different occupations to implement 'better bets'. People will not necessarily continue to pursue their most preferred

options but will often take advantage of opportunities to obtain a satisfactory job (Gottfredson, 1981: 549).

Vroom (1984: 49-95) discusses similar ideas in his expectancy theory. In his expectancy theory he explains that there are two dimensions that motivates a person to choose an occupation: the valence dimension and expectancy dimension. Both these dimensions must be at high levels for behaviour to occur. Brooks and Betz (1990) summarises Vroom's expectancy theory as:

The preferred occupation is the one that the person views as having the most positive valence or attractiveness. The chosen occupation is the one toward which there is most positive force and is viewed as a function of both the attractiveness and the expectancy for attainment of the occupation. Thus, persons will be motivated to consider choosing an occupation only if they are both attracted to the occupation and believe they will be able to attain the occupation (Brooks and Betz, 1990: 57).

The value of rewards, and the appraisal of chances, are usually acquired and modified through social experiences (Blau et al., 1956).

Both [preferences and appraisals] are conceived to be roughly ordered in a hierarchical fashion for each person -- a hierarchy of preferences (valuations) and a hierarchy of expectancies (appraisals). The course of action upon which an individual decides will reflect a compromise between his preferences and his expectations (an attempt to maximize expected value). Thus, his actual choice will probably not be identical with his first preference if his expectation of reaching the preferred goal is very low. (Blau et al., 1956: 533)

A student who values highly the status and recognition for being in a medical field might not choose the field if he/she thinks that the chances of getting into medical school is very slim due to poor results in science subjects. Therefore, he/she might choose another field of study into which he/she believes there is a higher chance of meeting the requirements.

### 2.3.2 Giddens' Structuration Theory

Structuration is a theory put forth by Giddens (1976, 1979, 1984) in "an effort to reconstruct the basic premises of social analysis" (Giddens, 1991: 205). Structuration aims to link two polarised areas of sociology. Structuration was developed as one way to reconcile the debate that arose in the social sciences between structure and agency or, put very simply, the constraints imposed by society and the intentional acts of individuals. Although structurationist ideas can be traced back to Berger and Luckman's (1967), major credit for the approach is given to Giddens (1984) who conceived a complex of ideas in elucidating his theory. Giddens gives us a now widely recognised set of propositions, under the banner of structuration theory that offers a view of social reality sensitive to the influence of individuals, institutions and societal forces (Giddens, 1981: 26-48, 1984: 5-40).

Giddens melds the strengths of structuralist and hermeneutic theoretical orientations in social theory while re-doing some of their basic propositions. Here elements of Parsonian functionalism, Marxist structuralism, Weberian institutionalism and Heideggerian phenomenology are spliced together to generate the rudiments of a theoretical framework (Wilson, 1995: 310).

Structuration theory is a means to examine the interplay between the agent's actions and social structures in the production, reproduction and regulation of social order. The central notion of structuration rests on the duality of structure. Simply put, the ongoing nature of society is a result of human action and the ongoing nature of human action is a result of society. The complex ideas that Giddens put forward can be summarised in these four concepts:

The *system*, refers to the impulses and forces ingrained in surface patterns of interaction. It is a set of regular social practices, which are performed, in specific times and places (Giddens, 1981: 27).

The *structure* is a process not a product or steady state. It develops through time and across space. The structure is defined by Giddens (1984) as:

Rules and resources, recursively implicated in guiding the reproduction of social systems. Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action (Giddens, 1984: 377).

Structures, then, are not pre-given affective objects, but are humanly constituted or produced elements. Giddens (1981: 26-29, 1984: 16-24) points out that such structures and their encompassing spheres are not mutually exclusive and are often unacknowledged or only dimly perceived as they are continually drawn on. Structures are rules and resources drawn on by people therefore, structure simultaneously enable and constrain. Structures enable in providing pathways for human conduct and constrain by imposing limits to practical human conduct.

*Agency*<sup>1</sup> entails an ability to coordinate one's actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce, and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one's own and others' activities. Agency also entails practical consciousness, namely, "all the things that we know as social actors, and must know, to make social life happen, but to which we cannot necessarily give discursive form" (Giddens, 1979: 59). Moreover, the extent of agency exercised by individual persons depends profoundly on their positions in collective organisations (Sewell, 1992: 21). Agency includes individual or collective human actions and decisions and it arises from the individual's understanding of the rules and capacity to utilise resources. Sewell (1992) elaborates on the concept of agency. He says a capacity for agency is inherent in all humans. However, humans uniformly possess only a highly generalised capacity for agency. On an individual basis, this capacity is formed by rules and resources available in a person's particular social position, which is defined by gender, wealth, social prestige,

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<sup>1</sup> Agency therefore does not refer to "the intentions people have in doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place" (Giddens, 1984: 9).

class, ethnicity, occupation, generation, sexual preference and education. Agency differs in extent according to social position.

*Structuration*, describes the variety of social practices distributed in the spatio-temporal manifold that constitute the society. It entails the ways in which human agency supports, transforms, and is transformed by situations, thereby reproducing systems (Giddens, 1984: 2).

Another very important concept in structuration theory is *duality*<sup>2</sup>, the ways in which structures enable (through rules and resources) human action to take place, while at the same time human behaviours are changing structures (Giddens, 1981: 27, 1984: 1-2).

Giddens uses these four concepts to explain structuration theory. The interaction of the four concepts are diagrammatically shown in Figure 2.2 below:

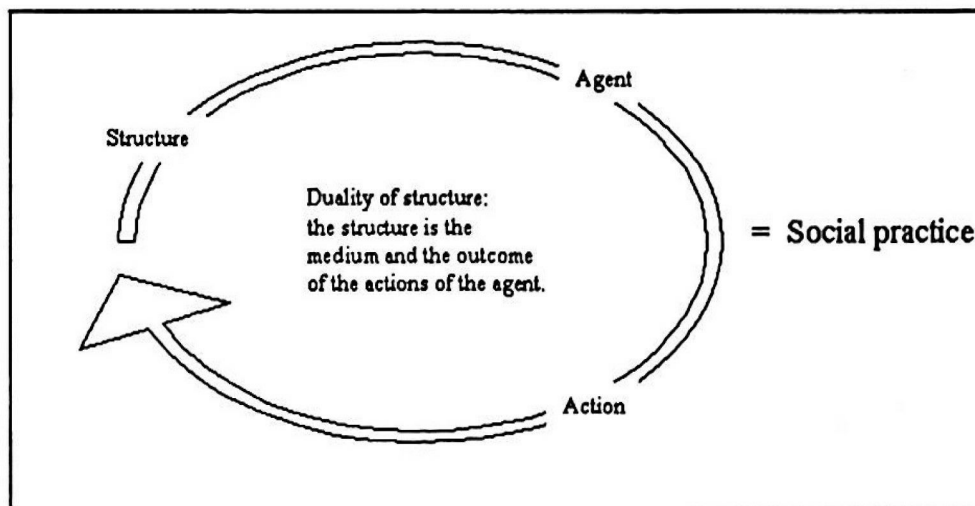


Figure 2.2: An interaction of Giddens' foundational concepts (Source: Boucher, 2001)

<sup>2</sup>Duality of structure is defined as:

"Structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction" (Giddens, 1984: 374).

To begin with, in Giddens' Structuration Theory, social life is not merely random individual acts but at the same time it is also not merely produced by social forces (Gauntlett, 2002). Giddens suggests that the agent and the structure are not mutually exclusive. Human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other. The repetition of the acts of the individuals reproduces the structure, which means that there is a social structure like traditions, moral codes and established ways of doing things. In the case of occupational choice, we can see that some occupations are dominated by a particular gender or ethnic group or family background. However, it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently (Gauntlett, 2002).

According to Giddens (1984: 17), structure is actually a recursively organised sets of rules and resources. Structure is made possible by the existence of rules and resources. Structure themselves do not exist in time and space. Rather, social phenomena have the capacity to become structured (Ritzer, 2000: 525). Giddens does not deny that structure can be constraining on action taken by the actor (Ritzer, 2000: 525). He, however, states that structure is not merely a constraint on the actors but also enables an action (Ritzer, 2000: 525). Constraining or enabling qualities of structure are subject to the modifications and interpretations by the actors (Kühn and Witzel, 2000).

The constraining qualities of sanctions places limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstance (Giddens, 1984: 177).

It does not, however, determine the action that will be taken by the actor (Giddens, 1984).

Students, from their experiences, will have some perceptions regarding occupations. They will notice how occupations are distributed in their society. They will realise that

some occupations are dominated by males while some others by females. They will also notice the existing patterns in the types of occupation chosen by people around them, their family and friends. These existing patterns might serve as rules or resources for the students. The structure, as suggested by Giddens, constraints the choices of the students but at the same time allows them some alternatives from which they can choose. When we look at students making educational or occupational choices it is obvious that they need to make only one choice (at a particular time). This is mainly because it is not possible for an individual to be studying all available programmes in a university or pursuing a few occupations all at the same time. The education system and the labour market, however, do provide various alternatives from which the students can choose.

There can also be negative sanctions while making a choice. Such sanctions can be exercised by various agents. Parents, for example, might show disapproval when a student wants to pursue a particular field of study. Even this only means that the student needs to make a choice from available alternatives. Finally, students will also face structural constraints while making choices.

Structural constraint stems from the 'objective' existence of structural properties that the individual agent is unable to change (Giddens, 1984: 176).

In the case of educational and occupational choices, the agent is not able to change the existing education system or the way selection is made in the labour market. When a student wants to pursue tertiary education, for example, the educational programmes that he/she might choose will be based on his or her qualifications. This is the existing constraint in the system. A student with outstanding results in art, literature and language will not be able to pursue a medical degree, but at the same time, the student will be able to choose from various other programmes related to his/her qualifications. The same principal applies when choosing an occupation. A person who graduates

with a degree in mathematics will not be able to pursue a career as a medical doctor. However, he/she will be able to choose from various occupations which need such expertise.

As conclusion it can be said that, individuals do act as rational agents while making educational or occupational choices. These choices, however, are not made with absolute freedom. Individuals make their choices based on their preferences and their perceived chances of obtaining the occupation of their choice. These preferences and their perception of their chances of obtaining an occupation are based on their experiences while they are growing up. The existing structure provides the students some alternatives and constraints at the same time. The structural properties functions either as levers or restraints to educational and occupational development (Kerckhoff, 1995: 343-344). Therefore, individuals have the ability to make rational choice but in the context of the existing structural properties.

## **2.4 Theories on Occupational Choice**

Related to the specific area of occupational choice there are various theories that explain the process of occupational choice. There are various ways of classifying these theories. According to Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996: 8-10), there are five different approaches in looking at theories of occupational choice. The approaches are trait and factor theories<sup>3</sup>, sociological theories, developmental theories, personality theories and

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<sup>3</sup> Trait and factor theory of occupational choice is the oldest, most persistent and straightforward approach in the field of occupational choice (Herr, 1970). The basic assumption underlying trait and factor theories is that there are unique traits that can be measured and that it is possible to match individual traits to occupational requirements (Brown, 1984a; Kerka, 1998). For details on trait and factor theories see Crites (1969) and Parsons (1909).

social learning theories<sup>4</sup>. Crites (1969: 79-108) looks at the theories of occupational choice from three major perspectives: the non-psychological theories, the psychological theories and developmental theories. The following section discusses some of the major theories in the field of occupational choice.

#### **2.4.1 Sociological Theories**

Sociological theories of occupational choice use basically demographic variables to predict types of occupation entered (Minor, 1992: 20). Miller and Form (1964) identified that social background of a person as the crucial determinant of ones occupation. They identified five important factors which are father's occupation, individual intelligence, father's income and education, accessible financial aid and social economic condition of the society as important factors that determine one's occupation.

Historically, most sociologists paid more attention to occupational mobility. Most researches tried to explain intergenerational mobility i.e. the change in occupational standing of a person in comparison with one's parents (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 139, 1996: 285; Johnson and Mortimer, 2002: 37). This trend existed until the publication of *The American Occupational Structure* by Blau and Duncan in 1967 (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 141). One of the major contributions of their work was to move beyond occupational mobility and presenting a theory of occupational attainment (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 141). This marks the introduction of Status Attainment Theory (Isaacson and Brown, 1997: 40). During the same period of time, another

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of social learning theories are Krumboltz's theory (Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1984, 1996) and social cognitive theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2002). These theories extend Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Bandura's sociocognitive theory (1986), respectively, to explain the process of choosing an occupation.

theory that was being articulated was the allocation model theory (Maranda and Comeau, 2000: 41-44). The changes in the 1980s saw the emergence of another theory, the human capital theory (Maranda and Comeau, 2000: 44-45). The status attainment theory uses social psychological measures to explain occupational attainment (Kerckhoff, 1989: 17-19). Human capital theory uses a similar approach. Both these theories give importance to the motivation of the person who is making the choice. The allocation model theory, however, explains how societal forces allocate people a place based on existing criteria (Maranda and Comeau, 2000: 41-44).

#### **2.4.1.1 Status Attainment Theory**

In the beginning status attainment theory posited that socio-economic status of one's family influences education, which in turn affects the occupation entered (Isaacson and Brown, 1997: 40). The father's education and occupation influence the children's educational attainment, the first job they hold and to large extent, their subsequent jobs (Maranda and Comeau, 2000: 40-41). This theory was further developed by Sewell and his colleagues who presented what is popularly known as the Wisconsin Model. The Wisconsin model preserved the basic ideas of Blau and Duncan (1967) but included a few new variables in this model (Johnson and Mortimer, 2002: 37; Maranda and Comeau, 2000: 40-41). Sewell, Haller and Portes (1969: 84) proposed a model which links educational and occupational aspirations with social origins and ability by means of intervening behavioural mechanism.

In brief, the model proposed by Sewell, Haller, and Portes [1969] assumes that predetermined social structural and psychological factors, i.e., socioeconomic status and mental ability, affect the youth's academic performance and the influence significant others have on him; that the significant others and possibly his own ability affect his levels of educational and occupational aspiration; and that levels of aspiration affect educational and occupational status attainment (Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970: 1015).

In 1970, Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf analysed the data from the 1969 study by Sewell, Haller and Portes. Some of the operational definitions were changed when the data was analysed in 1970. The results from this revision further support Sewell, Haller and Portes model. Other studies by Alexander, Eckland and Griffin (1975) that replicated the Wisconsin model also produced results that supported the model. Otto and Haller (1979: 887-914) also produced findings which supported this theory using data from a panel study of males aged 17 in 1957 and 32 in 1972.

In the Wisconsin model, the cognitive variables included a measure of mental ability and academic performance in school while social-psychological processes includes educational and occupational aspiration of youths, and significant others' influences which includes teachers' encouragement and peer plans (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 145). It can be concluded, from this model, that parental status and cognitive variables affect the occupational level of their children. These two variables affect the social-psychological process of a person, which in turn affects his/her educational and occupational attainment (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 145).

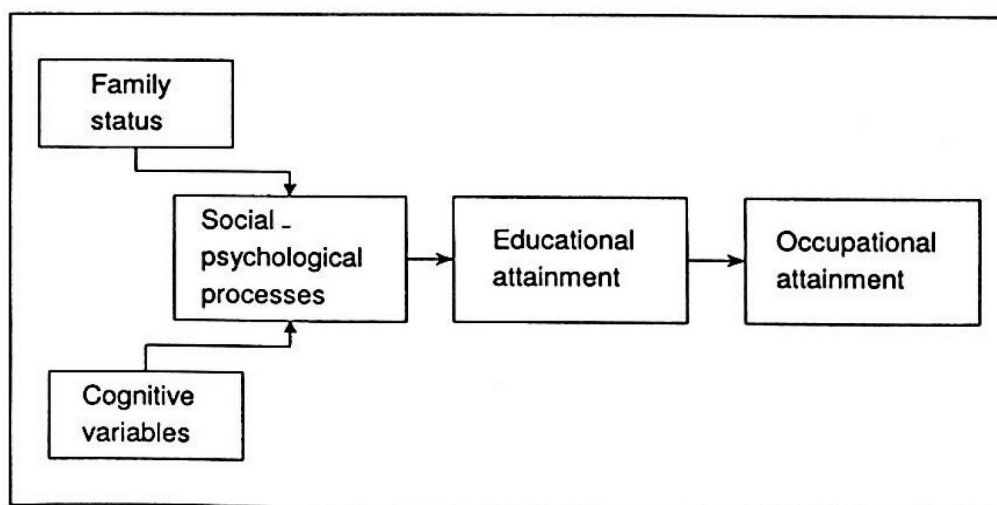


Figure 2.3: Simplified path diagram of the early Wisconsin model of status attainment (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1984: 144)