Research in Vocational Guidance: Some Guidelines

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Abstract: This study attempted to identify the trends in vocational guidance research. There are both content areas and subject populations that have received a great deal of research while other areas and subject types are in need of more emphasis. The study clearly showed the significant positive contribution of research in vocational guidance. It was focuses on the improvement of career guidance services through research programmed and evaluation of quality of existing requirements for career guidance. Teachers, those who have to guide and counsel their students in matters relating to education, careers and personal problems, may find this article useful. The study provided answer to the questions like 'what to do in guidance, why and how to do'?

Key words: Vocational counseling • Decision making • Career education • Guidance efficacy • Research needs

INTRODUCTION

A vocation is a career or calling and the word is derived from the Latin vocare, which means "to call." Vocational guidance means helping someone find his or her calling or at least a suitable career choice. Vocations or careers can be loosely categorized into areas such as service, technical, mechanical, creative, health and business.

According to Ramesh Chandra [1] Vocational guidance is often started in high school although some high schools also have vocational training programs. Vocational exploration courses offer students the opportunity to research different career possibilities as well as learn which vocational areas they have aptitude or talent in. For instance, many vocational guidance classes give tests to the students that test their ability with numbers, words, mechanical concepts and many more subjects. Tests designed to measure an individual’s personality traits, intelligence quotient (IQ) as well as his or her main values and interests are administered and analyzed by career counselors.

- Vocational guidance is a service to help other find appropriate jobs.
- Research in vocational guidance is the scientific method of solving problems so as to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the vocational guidance program.
- The core components of a vocational guidance program are: an appraisal service, an informational service, a counseling service and a planning, placement and follow-up service.
- The vocational guidance service is provided in educational institutions like school, colleges and universities and non-educational settings like government and non-government employment exchange services.
- A variety of research methods are used in vocational guidance. These include basic, applied and R and D research, survey research, case study research and experimental research.
- A sound research program in vocational guidance is characterized by rigor in methodology and relevance in attacking significant problems.
- In Pakistan, the field of vocational guidance is virgin crying for research in almost all of its core components.

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Concept and Content: The concept of Counseling and Vocational Guidance refers to expert (science based) assistance and support with the aim to help individuals:

- Explore, analyze and develop the factors constituting their self-concept (interests, personal qualities and characteristics, values, skills, etc.).
- Explore, evaluate, process and classify information and alternative education and vocation pathways with respect both to their needs and choices and to labor market requirements,
- Integrate information about education and vocation/career with information derived from self-observation so that they develop to decision-making capabilities both with respect to their orientation in education and choices in occupation(s) befitting their particular psychosocial make up,
- They Create and implement their own education and vocation plans.

Ultimately, the individuals will be able to make the correct choices with respect to their future occupation/vocation and thus be (re)included into active life. Counseling and Vocational Guidance activities [2] target individuals who are:

- About to make a choice with respect to their education and vocation,
- In search of new fields of study/training,
- Already employed but dissatisfied with their current occupation, hence in search of new areas of training and professional development,
- Unemployed or have lost their jobs for whatever reason and wish to resume employment and
- Threatened with social exclusion owing to personal circumstances or misfortune.

According to Plant [3] Selecting a career is an uphill task and most crucial decision in ones life. Occupation of a profession of a person determines his mode of living and economic prospects. Moreover, a particular working atmosphere and service structure influences attitude and behavior of an individual. A particular line of work is the focal way to accomplish goals, materialize ambitions and realize dreams in the twisting and meandering life course. Therefore, appropriate information and guidelines are mandatory to select a vocation according to ones aptitude.

Lack of awareness about career planning has grave implications for the future of the candidates. The changing of a profession results in wastage of energy and resources. Education and experience gained for one profession become useless after changing the row of employment. Changing of vocation also generates frustration in the educated people because of comparison with previous professions and looking for future avenues in the new service.

Frank Persons [4], generally considered to be the father of vocational guidance, defines vocational guidance as “the choice of a vocation adequate preparation for it and the success” He also said that ideal career choices are based on matching personal traits (aptitude, abilities, resources, personality) with job factors (wages, environment, etc) to produce the best conditions of vocational success..

According to Kagan and Havemann [5], vocational guidance is “the technique of helping a person selects the right lifetime occupation, often through test of attitudes and interests”.

Research in vocational guidance, generally involves the selection of problem in the field of vocational guidance reviewing the related literature, often formulating one or more hypotheses, adopting a strategy for research, collecting data, analyzing and writing a research report.

The Rationale of Research in Vocational Guidance Can Be Described in Three Sentences:

- Vocational guidance can be improved.
- Certain conditions must be met for improving vocational guidance.
- Research unfolds these conditions.

Thus, research is an information generating activity and its result can serve as a basis for maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational guidance program. As compared to nonscientific sources of information like common sense, trial-and-error, authority, tradition, precedence, ivory tower thinking or sheer ignorance, research provides more valid and reliable information for decision making and the results of research are usually more acceptable to people than results obtained from other sources.
There are two major criteria for measuring the soundness of research in vocational guidance: relevance and rigor. Relevance refers to the appropriateness of the problem selected for research from the domain of vocational guidance. Rigor refers to the quality of technical sophistication in planning, executing and evaluating research activities.


- To provide qualitative information about learning and employment opportunities for Pakistani inhabitants;
- To provide qualitative services of career guidance for all inhabitants, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, place of living and social status and following individual and society’s needs;
- To improve employment skills of young people and adults, to promote their entrepreneurship and permanent aspiration of knowledge;
- To develop people’s social activity and the responsibility for their professional activity for the purpose to avoid unemployment.

Career guidance system is in the process of development in Pakistan. That’s why quality assurance issues in career guidance are only in the strategic planning level. The Strategic Guidelines of Career Guidance in Pakistan indicated few basic indicators of quality assurance in career guidance. They are closely related to the strategic objectives for career guidance. These indicators according to Zina Baltreniene and Indre Augutiene [7] are as following:

- Accessibility - All inhabitants have to have equal opportunities to get services of career guidance, regardless of their place of living, social status, etc.
- Expedience - The services correspond to individual needs of inhabitants and society;
- Efficiency - Change of the career guidance services, which is determined according to the changes in the labor market, are evaluated;
- Qualified professionals of career guidance - Professionals, who have proper background and competence;
- Active dialogue with social partners - Educational institutions, employers, labor exchange, trade unions, public authorities;
- Modern technical and methodical equipment - Diversity of software, approved curriculum and methodical materials;
- Reliability of information - Actual, right and reliable information about the educational opportunities and conditions and situations in the labor market.

Above strategic objectives for career guidance described as the evaluation whether the activities of assessment, counseling and collaboration correspond to the existing requirements. This strategic includes 2 parts:

- Improvement of career guidance services through research programmed.
- Evaluation of quality of existing requirements for career guidance.

Guidelines for Research in Vocational Guidance Role Identification Research: In Pakistan we are mostly concerned with two categories of guidance workers. In the first category are those guidance workers who are working in educational institutions like schools, colleges and universities. They are only a few in numbers. Their role is much broader than vocational guidance and includes educational and personal guidance also. The other category of guidance workers are operating within non-education settings like government employment exchange agencies and non-government employment services.

The major tasks of these counselors are to be found in testing, often training and retraining, counseling and placement, the ultimate goal being the placement of individual in jobs.

The key question posed in role identification research is: what is the role of the guidance worker?

The research strategy involved in answering this question is usually survey research in which the views of the relevant groups like clients, administrators, professors of guidance and guidance.

Workers themselves are sought, analyzed and consolidated in a list of roles.

The Steps to Be Followed in the Survey Research Are Outlined below [8]:

Step 1: Select a Problem: For example: “The role of the counselors as viewed by the counselors”.

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Step 2: Review the Related Literature: Both conceptual and research literature must be surveyed. First, gather information from a brief write-up from some secondary source like a textbook or encyclopedia. Then, consult preliminary sources like bibliographies, index and abstracts and move on from there to primary sources like journals and research reports. The outcomes of the review should be a list of items for your, questionnaire and interview and a few hypotheses regarding the possible differences in the views of various groups of respondents classified on such demographic variables as sex, age, marital status, experience, qualification and location.

Step 3: Specify the Population: For example, a multistage, stratified, cluster sampling design may be used. The sample size may be arbitrarily fixed as 30, defined as large sample in statistics. To be more reliable, the sample size may be determined by applying statistical formulas on the basis of a pilot study.

Step 5: Prepare Research Instruments: For example, a questionnaire consisting of, say, 60 items be prepared following the summated ratings method of Likert or Equal Appearing Intervals methods of Thurstone. Studies should be conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. An interview schedule may also be prepared to collect data for cross-validation.

Step 6: Collect Data: Data may be collected through mailed questionnaire and face to face or telephone interview.

Step 7: Analyze Data: Present data in tables and graphs. Test the hypotheses through the tests of significance like T tests (for two groups) and F test (for more than two groups). Factor analysis that involves higher level of statistical sophistication may be run to reduce the number of items and classify them in broader categories.

Step 8: Write a Research Report: Use a manual of style for writing report. For journal article, APA manual of style may be used while for theses and dissertations the Chicago Manual of style or its derivations may be used.

Program Development Research: Krumboltz [9] presented a ten-step system approach for program development in guidance. These steps are outlined below:
The Vocational Program Is Generally Organized Around the Following Major Services Provided to the Client [11]:

- The appraisal service which is designed to collect, analyze and use a variety of data about each client for the purpose of better understanding clients as well as assisting them to understand themselves.
- An information service which is designed to provide clients with a greater knowledge of vocational opportunities so that they may make better informed choices and decisions in an increasingly complex society.
- A counseling service which is designed to facilitate self understanding and self development through one on one or small group relationship.
- A planning, placement and follow up services which is designed to enhance the development of clients by helping them select and utilize opportunities within an educational institution or in the labor market.

In any comprehensive evaluation process, three component elements are inherent. First, the objectives of the program, services, or activity are stated in observable behavioral terms. Second, the activities are methods that are used to attain the objectives established. Third, procedure is developed to collect evidence as to whether the activities or methods result in the attainment of objective.

Three major approaches to guidance evaluation, or a mixture of them, have been adopted. These are survey approach, experimental approach and case study approach.

The survey approach is most commonly used. Basically, the survey approach (1) selects predetermined criteria to inventory (2) collects evidence of the services being offered and (3) makes judgments regarding the degree to which these services are provided in reference to the predetermined criteria.

The experimental method is scientific method par excellence. It is the most effective method in determining cause and effect relationship. Basically, it involves (1) the determining of objectives and methods of attaining these objectives, (2) the development of ways to measure the attaining to these objectives, (3) the selection of one or more groups for control and experimentation, (4) the process of carrying out necessary steps for the objectives and (5) a measurement of the out comes of experimentation.

The case study approach is designed to assess the changes that take place in individuals as a result of introducing a variable such as counseling. Basically, it involves (1) Appropriate goals are formulated, (2) counseling is provided, (3) data are collected on progress toward goals and (4) review and assessment of changes in the individual that are attributable to counseling are carried out.

During the evaluation of career guidance services career counselors have to pay attention to following aspects, which also show the some quality indicators, used for the evaluation of the career guidance services [12]:

- Evaluation and analysis of the effectiveness of the career guidance services;
- Identification and elimination of the interference in career guidance;
- Evaluation of the relevance of the strategies and methods, used for the purposes of career guidance;
- Evaluation of the relevance and reliability of the methodologies, used for the assessment of the job search skills;
- Evaluation of the relevance and reliability of the research methods and tools, used for the purposes of career guidance;
- Evaluation of the opportunities of the social partners for the purposes of career guidance;
- Evaluation of the relevance of the intellectual, material and financial resources for the quality assurance of career guidance services;
- Evaluation of the guidance process, according to the basic principles of career development.

Joubish [13] Proposed an Evaluation Model Consisting of Five Steps as Follows:

**Step 1:** Identification of the aims and objectives of the program (the dependent variable)

**Step 2:** Restatement of the aims and objectives in behavioral terms (an operational definition)

**Step 3:** Construction of a content valid (or appropriate) test to measure the behaviorally stated aims and objectives (measurement of the dependent variable)
Step 4: Identification and selection of a control, comparison or criterion group against which to contrast the test group (establishing the independent variable)

Step 5: Data collection and analysis

It may be noted that this model is an experimental approach to evaluation and represents the summative evaluation - a systematic attempt to determine whether a fully developed program is meeting its objectives more successfully than alternative program (or no program). If step 4 is removed from the model, it becomes formative evaluation - internal evaluation of a program. Usually undertaken as parts of the development process, in which, the performance of clients in a program is compared to the objectives of the program.

Occupation Information Research: The informational service is an integral part of an effective vocational guidance program. It is designed to provide pupils with appropriate educational vocational and personal social data needed to understand themselves and their environment.

The occupational information is valid and unable data about positions, jobs and occupations, including duties requirements for entrance, conditions of work, rewards offered, advancement pattern, existing and predicted supply of and demand for workers and sources for further” information.

- The labor force: size, composition, geographic factors, sex, social, age distribution, major industrial groups.
- The occupational structure and major occupational groups.
- Work trends including labor supply, population changes, public demand for goods, technological changes.
- Labor legislation.
- Sources of information for studying occupations.
- Classification of occupation and occupational information.
- Essential and critical occupations.
- Duties of certain occupations, nature of work.
- Qualification necessary for employment in various occupations.
- Preparation needed for various occupations.
- Methods of entering occupations and methods of advancement
- Earning and other rewards of various occupations.
- Conditions of work in various occupations.
- Criteria for evaluating occupational informational materials.
- Typical places of employment
- Meaning of work.

A variety of research methods may be used to provide an effective information service. The first is the survey method. Surveys may be conducted on various dimensions of information service. The second is R and D research. This method may be used to develop dictionary of occupational titles as well as a large number of brochures regarding various occupations and jobs and courses of training, it may also be used in developing a computer based occupational service. The third is the case study for intensive investigation of an information service centre.

Test Standardization Research: The client appraisal system is the heart of a vocational guidance program. The purpose of appraisal system is counseling in schools have been listed as follows [14].

- Building realistic self-picture on the part of pupils.
- Helping pupils to set education and vocational goals.
- Helping pupils choose an occupation or plan for further education.
- Discovering interests of which the pupil may not be aware.
- Improving counselor, teacher’ and parent understanding of problem cases.
- Helping pupil select suitable courses of study.
- Predicting success in future educational work.
- Identifying superior or gifted student for scholarship purposes.

A variety of appraisal instruments are available. They are generally grouped into two categories: tests and on-test techniques.

- The non-test techniques include observation, anecdotal records, rating scales, cumulative records, pupil-data questionnaires, the interview, autobiographies, socio-metric techniques and case studies.
- A test is systematic procedure for measuring a sample of the client’s behavior in specified conditions.
The test can be classified into two broad categories according to the behavior tested: ability tests and personality tests.

The ability tests measure the maximum performance of client - what a client can do. There are three types of ability test: achievement tests which measure the attained ability of a client; aptitude tests which measure the potential ability of a client; and intelligence tests which measure the overall mental ability of client.

The personality tests measure the typical performance of a client - what a client well do. They include interest tests attitude tests, adjustment and temperament tests, personality tests, character tests and tests of other motivational and interpersonal factors. These tests can be adapted for use in Pakistan. They can also serve as guides for developing standardized tests of various kinds in Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

The term vocational guidance means assistance given to an individual in solving problems related to occupational choice and progress with due regard for the individual's characteristics and their relation to occupational opportunity. Vocational guidance is based on the free and voluntary choice of the individual; its primary object is to give him full opportunity for personal development and satisfaction from work, with due regard for the most effective use of national manpower resources [15].

Vocational guidance is a continuous process, the fundamental principles of which are the same irrespective of the age of the individuals being counseled. These principles have an immediate importance for the welfare of individuals everywhere and for the prosperity of all countries. Facilities for vocational guidance should be adapted to the peculiar needs of each country and be adopted progressively [16]. Their development within each country should proceed from a widespread understanding of the purpose of vocational guidance, the establishment of an adequate administrative structure and the provision of technically qualified personnel.

In recent years many countries have developed a new interest in creating or strengthening the vocational part of the educational system, both at the basic and higher education level [17]. These developments ask for a sound scientific underpinning of policy decisions and have therefore created a new need for empirically oriented academic research in vocational guidance, education and training issues.

It was concluded that without sound research in Vocational Guidance there will be no socio-economical development in the country. Like education, it is a continuous process, so continuous research in Vocational Guidance is necessary for Career planning, Vocational education and personal development.

REFERENCES

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