

The Relationship Between Career Guidance Programs and Students' Choice of Subjects in Government Aided Secondary Schools of Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between career guidance programs and students' choice of subjects in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District. A cross-sectional research design was employed, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 346 respondents, including District Education Officers, head teachers, teachers, and students, through questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents rated the quality of career guidance programs positively, although there was moderate disagreement regarding their effectiveness in aligning subjects with students' future goals. Determinants of subject choice included academic strengths, peer recommendations, and career goals. A significant correlation ($r = 0.65, p = 0.012$) was found between the quality of career guidance programs and students' subject choices. The study concluded that high-quality, well-organized career guidance programs lead to more informed subject selections, while academic strengths and peer advice were strong determinants. However, the availability of resources had a negligible impact. Recommendations include allocating more government resources to enhance career guidance programs, integrating these programs into the curriculum by head teachers, and encouraging students to actively engage with available career guidance resources. Further research is also recommended to explore the long-term impacts of these programs on subject choices and career outcomes.

Key Words: The Relationship, Career Guidance Programs, Students' Choice of Subjects, Government Aided Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Career guidance programs are essential in helping students align their academic paths with their personal interests and subject choices (Gati & Kulcsar, 2021). In government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District, these programs aim to assist students in making informed decisions about which subjects to pursue, considering both their academic strengths and available opportunities. However, the implementation of these programs faces significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness and leave students with inadequate support (Ntungamo District Education Officer's report, 2022/2023).

One major issue is the lack of adequate training for teachers responsible for career guidance programs. Many teachers lack specialized training or up-to-date knowledge about current educational trends and subject-specific requirements. As a result, the guidance provided to students is often generic and fails to address the unique subject preferences or academic abilities of individual students. Additionally, there is a scarcity of resources and materials, such as subject exploration tools and updated curriculum information, which limits students' ability to make well-informed subject choices.

Despite the growing importance of career guidance, these programs do not receive the attention they deserve in many schools. The emphasis remains largely on academic performance, leaving insufficient time for structured guidance sessions. Moreover, programs often adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to consider the individual academic strengths and needs of students. Parental and community involvement in career guidance is also minimal, despite their critical role in supporting students' subject choices by offering valuable context and guidance.

The significance of career guidance programs has grown as secondary school enrollment continues to rise, and students face increasing pressure from parents, society, and peers to select subjects that match their abilities and market demands. This pressure is compounded by factors such as the competitive nature of education and the rapid pace of technological advancements, which influence the subjects students choose. Societal expectations and parental influence further intensify the need for students to make informed subject choices that support their academic success and long-term educational goals.

Although the Ministry of Education and Sports has made efforts to train teachers and integrate career education into school programs, these efforts remain inconsistent and inadequate to meet the diverse needs of students in Ruhaama County. Many students choose subjects based on limited information or societal influences, which may not align with their academic strengths or long-term aspirations. This study seeks to examine the gaps in current career guidance programs and their impact on students' choice of subjects in government-aided secondary schools.

Students' subject choices play a crucial role in shaping their academic success, especially in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District. Career guidance programs are designed to assist students in making informed decisions about subject combinations that align with their interests and strengths, which is essential for their long-term educational outcomes (Abdullah, 2019). However, many students, particularly those from resource-constrained areas, face significant challenges in accessing reliable information regarding academic and career opportunities (Anne et al., 2018). Many students are left to make important decisions about their subject combinations with minimal guidance or resources. A report by the Ntungamo District Education Officer (2022/2023) found that fewer than 40% of schools in the district offer structured career guidance programs, with only 30% of students reporting that these programs effectively assist them in making informed subject choices.

Further research highlights the importance of structured and personalized career guidance in improving students' academic performance and aligning their educational paths with their skills and aspirations (Walkington & Bernacki, 2020). Despite the recognition of the need for career guidance, existing studies on the effectiveness of these programs largely focus on urban areas, leaving rural regions like Ruhaama County underexplored. For instance, a study by Mutunga (2019) found that urban schools are more likely to have well-established career guidance services, whereas rural areas face systemic challenges in providing these programs. This discrepancy underscores the need for research in rural settings. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of career guidance programs on students' subject choices in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District, and proposes recommendations for enhancing these programs.

Purpose of the Study

To examine the relationship between career guidance programs and students' choice of subjects in Government Aided Secondary Schools of Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District.

Literature Review

Fletcher et al. (2018) highlighted that students exposed to structured career guidance are better able to align their aspirations with practical realities, making informed decisions about their academic choices. For many students in government-aided secondary schools, career guidance programs serve as a link between their academic performance and future opportunities, helping them understand how their personal interests, academic strengths, and external opportunities align. This is especially crucial for students from disadvantaged or underserved communities, who may not have access to role models or support networks outside of school. However, many students in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County lack access to structured career guidance programs. The current study explored how the absence of these programs affects students' ability to choose subjects that align with their aspirations and available career opportunities.

Access to resources such as career fairs, interactive workshops, and mentorship programs provides students with valuable insights into different professions. By interacting with professionals from fields such as medicine, engineering, and entrepreneurship, students gain a clearer understanding of the qualifications and skills required for various careers. In government-aided schools, however, disparities in program availability limit students' exposure to such resources, particularly in rural areas. Without adequate career guidance, many students default to traditional subjects or those influenced by family and community expectations (Baird & Mollen, 2023). The current study examined how the lack of exposure to diverse career guidance resources in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County affects students' subject choices and whether such limitations influence their overall academic paths.

Tudor (2018) emphasized that students who receive guidance from qualified professionals are better equipped to make strategic and informed choices about their academic subjects. Professional counselors utilize evidence-based approaches to assess students' needs, interests, and abilities, tailoring their advice to align with both academic performance and future aspirations. In

addition to offering career-focused guidance, counselors also provide emotional support, creating a safe space for students to discuss uncertainties or external pressures. However, the absence of qualified counselors in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County may limit students' ability to receive targeted and supportive advice when selecting subjects, potentially affecting their overall academic trajectory. The current study investigated how this gap in professional counseling affects the subject selection process in these schools.

Kendricks et al. (2019) argued that aligning counseling sessions with subject selection and academic progress allows students to make informed choices about both their studies and future goals. For instance, students aspiring to careers in fields such as engineering or healthcare are advised to focus on excelling in subjects like mathematics and science. This alignment helps students connect their academic efforts to their long-term objectives, boosting motivation and engagement. In government-aided schools where such alignment exists, students often show higher confidence in their subject choices. However, many government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County lack this integration. The current study explored how the absence of alignment between counseling and subject selection impacts students' academic decisions.

Paulino (2023) found that schools with regular and well-planned guidance programs experience better student engagement and subject selection outcomes. Continuous exposure to structured guidance ensures that students receive support at different academic stages, from subject selection in lower grades to subject-specific planning as they progress through their studies. Conversely, infrequent or poorly organized guidance sessions fail to provide the consistent support needed, leaving students ill-prepared to make informed choices about their academic subjects. While Paulino (2023) highlighted the positive effects of regular guidance on student engagement and subject choice, the current study examined how infrequent or inadequately structured guidance programs in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County impact students' subject selection and preparedness for academic progression.

Radlick et al. (2020) pointed out that online platforms, mobile apps, and virtual mentorship programs offer students personalized advice and access to a wide range of subject options, enhancing their understanding of various academic pathways. Through tools such as career

assessments or virtual workshops, students can gain insights into the qualifications and skills required for different fields of study. These technological solutions are especially beneficial for government-aided schools with limited traditional resources. However, rural schools often lack the necessary technological infrastructure, creating a digital divide that limits students' access to these resources. While Radlick et al. (2020) emphasized the value of digital platforms for subject guidance, the current study explored how the lack of technological infrastructure in government-aided schools in Ruhaama County limits students' access to these innovations, affecting their ability to make well-informed subject choices.

Mutanga et al. (2023) revealed that students who engage in comprehensive career guidance programs are more likely to choose subjects that align with their abilities and interests, leading to greater academic satisfaction and success. When students are guided to select subjects that resonate with their strengths and passions, they are more likely to excel and find their academic journey fulfilling. In contrast, students from schools with inadequate career guidance programs often make subject choices based on external pressures, resulting in poor academic performance and dissatisfaction. While Mutanga et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of comprehensive career guidance in helping students align their abilities with subject choices, the current study explored how limited career guidance programs in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County affect students' subject selection, potentially leading to poorly aligned academic choices and academic dissatisfaction.

Methodology

Research Design: The researcher employed a cross-sectional research design. A cross-sectional design is a type of observational study in which data is collected at a single point in time from participants, providing a snapshot of the current situation. This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather and analyze data. The cross-sectional design was particularly suitable because it allowed for the efficient collection of data from a diverse range of respondents within a short time frame, especially using instruments such as questionnaires.

Population: The target population for this study included individuals who were directly involved in or affected by career guidance programs in government-aided secondary schools in

Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District. This population comprised the District Education Officer (DEO), head teachers, teachers, and students.

Sample Size and Determination: A sample size of 346 respondents was selected to ensure comprehensive representation of the relevant stakeholders in career guidance programs. The sample included 1 District Education Officer (DEO), 5 head teachers (one from each school), 100 teachers (20 teachers from each school), and 235 students (47 students from each school). The sample size was determined using the sampling table guide by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), ensuring that the selected sample was both representative and appropriate for the research objectives.

Table 1: Population Size, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Category of Respondents	Population Size	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
District education officer	1	1	Purposive sampling
Headteachers	5	5	Purposive sampling
Teachers	150	100	Simple random sampling
Students	2800	235	Simple random sampling
Total	2956	346	

Sampling Techniques and Procedures

Selection of Schools: The schools were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all five government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District, were included in the study. Purposive sampling was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to intentionally target schools that met specific criteria, such as being government-aided and situated within the designated region.

Selection of Head Teachers and District Education Officer: Head teachers and the District Education Officer (DEO) were selected using purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method involves choosing individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the study, rather than at random. This approach was particularly suitable for selecting head teachers and the

DEO, as they were key stakeholders directly involved in the implementation and management of career guidance programs within the schools. By using purposive sampling, the study ensured that the selected individuals had the necessary expertise and experience to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and delivery of career guidance programs.

Selection of Teachers and Students: Teachers and students were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling is a method in which individuals are chosen from the population at random, ensuring that each participant has an equal chance of being selected. In this study, the researcher used a folded-blind method, where pieces of paper labeled “YES” and “NO” were placed in a container and shaken. Teachers and students were then asked to pick a piece of paper. Those who picked “YES” participated in the study, while those who picked “NO” did not. This approach ensured unbiased selection and guaranteed that every teacher and student within the target population had an equal opportunity to be included, making the sample representative of the larger population.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire: A questionnaire is a research tool consisting of a series of questions used to collect data from individuals or groups. The quantitative data collection instrument for this study was a self-administered questionnaire for teachers and students. A self-administered questionnaire was preferred because it allowed respondents time to carefully understand the questions and formulate their responses, improving the quality of the data collected. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions to ensure quicker data processing and analysis. It was divided into three sections: Section A (Background Characteristics), Section B (Career Guidance Programs), and Section C (Students’ Choice of Subjects). This structure ensured comprehensive data collection relevant to the study of career guidance programs and their influence on students' subject choices.

Interview Guide: An interview guide is a list of high-level topics that a researcher plans to cover during interviews, with key questions under each topic. Interview data were collected from head teachers and the District Education Officer (DEO) to supplement information obtained from questionnaires. The interview guide contained general open-ended questions addressing the study objectives.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data: Qualitative data were coded and categorized in alignment with the study objectives and emerging themes. Thematic analysis was utilized to examine the data, allowing clusters of text with similar meanings to be grouped together. This qualitative analysis complemented the quantitative data, providing deeper insights and explanations. The process of thematic analysis involved identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the data to gain familiarity, generated initial codes, and organized these codes into coherent themes. These themes were then refined, defined, and named before further analysis and interpretation. The analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti software version 23, which assisted in organizing, coding, and analyzing the qualitative data effectively.

Quantitative Data: Quantitative data from the questionnaires were sorted, coded, edited, and classified into categories based on the study objectives. The results related to career guidance programs and students' choice of subjects were summarized and entered into SPSS for data analysis. Frequency tables and mean scores were generated to assist in interpreting the findings. Additionally, the relationship between the availability and effectiveness of career guidance programs and students' subject choices in government-aided secondary schools was analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant correlation, as suggested by the research hypothesis. The correlation was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Results

Table 1: Response Rate

Category of Respondents	No. of instruments distributed	No. of Returned Instruments	Response rate %
District education officer	1	1	100.0
Headteachers	5	5	100.0
Teachers	100	100	100.0
Students	235	230	97.9
Total	341	336	98.5

The study achieved a high overall response rate of 98.5%, with 336 out of 341 distributed instruments successfully returned.

Table 2: Responses regarding the quality of career guidance programs in Government Aided Secondary Schools of Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District

Items	5 f(%)	4 f(%)	3 f(%)	2 f(%)	1 f(%)	Mean
The school offers enough career guidance programs.	46 (13.9%)	198 (60.0%)	36 (10.9%)	33 (10.0%)	17 (5.2%)	3.68
Career guidance programs are well-planned and organized.	3 (0.9%)	231 (70.0%)	46 (13.9%)	30 (9.1%)	20 (6.1%)	3.51
The programs help students choose subjects that match their future goals.	3 (0.9%)	165 (50.0%)	50 (15.2%)	33 (10.0%)	79 (23.9%)	2.94
Students actively take part in career guidance activities.	59 (17.9%)	182 (55.2%)	53 (16.1%)	26 (7.9%)	10 (3.0%)	3.77
The career guidance programs are regularly updated to keep up with current trends.	66 (20.0%)	149 (45.2%)	46 (13.9%)	40 (12.1%)	29 (8.8%)	3.55
The career guidance programs cater to the needs of all students.	7 (2.1%)	224 (67.9%)	43 (13.0%)	40 (12.1%)	16 (4.8%)	3.50
All students have access to career guidance.	17 (5.2%)	205 (62.1%)	53 (16.1%)	36 (10.9%)	19 (5.8%)	3.50
Students receive personalized career guidance.	13 (3.9%)	218 (66.1%)	46 (13.9%)	36 (10.9%)	17 (5.2%)	3.53
The effectiveness of the career guidance programs is regularly assessed.	30 (9.1%)	185 (56.1%)	33 (10.0%)	40 (12.1%)	42 (12.7%)	3.37
Parents are kept informed and involved in the career guidance process.	86 (26.1%)	149 (45.2%)	40 (12.1%)	33 (10.0%)	22 (6.7%)	3.74

5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Undecided; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

The majority of respondents (60.0%) agreed that the school offered sufficient career guidance programs, with a mean score of 3.68, indicating general agreement. Most participants (70.0%) agreed that the career guidance programs were well-planned and organized, with a mean score of 3.51 also reflecting agreement. Half of the respondents (50.0%) agreed that the programs helped students choose subjects aligned with their future goals; however, the mean score of 2.94 indicated a general disagreement or lack of consensus regarding this item. A majority (55.2%) agreed that students actively participated in career guidance activities, with a mean score of 3.77, showing clear agreement. Regarding whether the programs were regularly updated to reflect

current trends, 45.2% agreed, and the mean score of 3.55 confirmed general agreement. Concerning whether the programs catered to the needs of all students, 67.9% agreed, supported by a mean score of 3.50, indicating agreement. Similarly, most respondents (62.1%) agreed that all students had access to career guidance, with a mean score of 3.50 reinforcing that view.

When asked if students received personalized career guidance, 66.1% agreed, with a mean score of 3.53 reflecting general agreement. Concerning the regular assessment of the program's effectiveness, 56.1% agreed, and the mean response of 3.37 showed agreement. Regarding parental involvement, 45.2% agreed that parents were kept informed and involved in the career guidance process, supported by a mean score of 3.74, indicating agreement. Overall, the findings showed that most aspects of the career guidance programs were rated positively by respondents, with mean scores above 3.0. However, the item regarding alignment of guidance with students' future goals had a mean below 3.0, reflecting a general sense of dissatisfaction or uncertainty in that area.

From the interviews, one respondent noted: *“The quality of our career guidance programs is crucial; it shapes how well our students understand their options and prepares them for future challenges. When students are equipped with accurate information and resources about various career paths, they can make choices that align with their interests and strengths. This understanding not only fosters academic success but also builds their confidence as they transition into higher education or the workforce. Our goal is to ensure that every student leaves our school with a clear vision of their future, and quality career guidance plays a pivotal role in achieving that.”*

Another respondent stated: *“I believe that effective career guidance can transform a student's academic journey. When students receive proper support, they are more likely to make informed choices that align with their aspirations. This support includes not only one-on-one counseling sessions but also workshops and seminars that expose students to various professions.”*

Similarly, another respondent said: *“Our career guidance programs need to be continuously improved. Engaging with industry professionals and updating our resources can significantly enhance the quality of guidance we provide to our students. We are actively seeking*

partnerships with local businesses and organizations to create internship opportunities and mentorship programs.”

Table 4: Responses regarding the determinants of students’ choice of subjects in government aided secondary schools of Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District

Items	5 f(%)	4 f(%)	3 f(%)	2 f(%)	1 f(%)	Mean
My academic strengths affect the subjects I choose.	44 (13.3%)	196 (59.4%)	38 (11.5%)	34 (10.3%)	18 (5.5%)	3.68
I consider what my peers recommend when selecting subjects.	1 (0.3%)	229 (69.4%)	48 (14.5%)	31 (9.4%)	21 (6.4%)	3.65
My career goals influence the subjects I choose.	1 (0.3%)	163 (49.4%)	52 (15.8%)	34 (10.3%)	80 (24.2%)	3.48
The availability of resources affects my subject choices.	57 (17.3%)	180 (54.5%)	55 (16.7%)	27 (8.2%)	11 (3.3%)	2.91
Teachers' advice helps me in choosing subjects.	64 (19.4%)	147 (44.5%)	48 (14.5%)	41 (12.4%)	30 (9.1%)	3.74
The future job opportunities related to subjects influence my choices.	5 (1.5%)	222 (67.3%)	45 (13.6%)	41 (12.4%)	17 (5.2%)	3.53
My personal interests play a role in the subjects I choose.	15 (4.5%)	203 (61.5%)	55 (16.7%)	37 (11.2%)	20 (6.1%)	3.48
My performance in subjects influences my choice.	11 (3.3%)	216 (65.5%)	48 (14.5%)	37 (11.2%)	18 (5.5%)	3.47
The subjects chosen by popular students influence my decision.	28 (8.5%)	183 (55.5%)	35 (10.6%)	41 (12.4%)	43 (13.0%)	3.50
Guidance from career counselors helps shape my subject choices.	84 (25.5%)	147 (44.5%)	42 (12.7%)	34 (10.3%)	23 (7.0%)	3.34

5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Undecided; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.

The majority of respondents (59.4%) agreed that their academic strengths affected the subjects they chose, with a mean score of 3.68, indicating agreement. A larger portion (69.4%) considered peer recommendations when selecting subjects, and the mean score of 3.65 confirmed this agreement. Nearly half of the respondents (49.4%) agreed that their career goals influenced their subject choices; however, the mean score of 3.48, although above average, indicated only moderate agreement. Regarding the availability of resources, 54.5% agreed that it affected their subject choices, but the mean score of 2.91 reflected general disagreement, suggesting that

responses were more varied and leaned toward disagreement. A majority (44.5%) agreed that teachers' advice helped them in choosing subjects, and the high mean score of 3.74 indicated clear agreement.

In terms of future job opportunities influencing subject choice, 67.3% agreed, with a mean of 3.53 reflecting agreement. Most respondents (61.5%) acknowledged that personal interests played a role in their subject selection, and the mean score of 3.48 supported this view. Additionally, 65.5% agreed that their performance in subjects influenced their choices, supported by a mean score of 3.47. More than half of the students (55.5%) agreed that subjects chosen by popular students influenced their decisions, and the mean score of 3.50 indicated moderate agreement. Finally, 44.5% agreed that guidance from career counselors helped shape their subject choices, with a mean score of 3.34 indicating general agreement.

These findings imply that most respondents agreed with the majority of the listed determinants of subject choice, as reflected in the mean scores above 3.0, except for the availability of resources, which had a mean below 3.0, indicating disagreement.

Qualitative data revealed additional perspectives. One respondent noted: *“One of the primary determinants of students' choice of subjects is their personal interests and strengths. I often observe that when students are passionate about a subject, they tend to perform better and engage more deeply with the material. For instance, students who have a natural inclination toward science often choose subjects like biology or chemistry because they find them intriguing. It is essential for us as educators to help students identify their interests early on, so they can align their subject choices with their inherent talents.”*

Another respondent stated: *“Peer influence plays a significant role in the decision-making process for students when it comes to subject selection. Many students tend to follow the choices of their friends, believing that if their peers are interested in a particular subject, it must be worthwhile. This can be both positive and negative; while it can lead to a supportive learning environment, it may also result in students choosing subjects that do not truly resonate with their personal goals.”*

A third respondent revealed: “Parental guidance is another critical factor influencing students' subject choices. Parents often have their own perceptions of which subjects will lead to successful careers and may inadvertently pressure their children to follow specific paths. For example, a parent who is an engineer might encourage their child to take advanced mathematics and physics, regardless of the child's personal interests. While parental support is valuable, it is crucial for parents to understand the importance of allowing their children to explore their interests.”

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficient for Career Guidance Programs and Students' Choice of Subjects in Government Aided Secondary Schools

		Correlations	
		Career Guidance Programs	Students' Choice of Subjects
Career Guidance Programs	Pearson Correlation	1	0.65
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012
	N	330	330
Students' Choice of Subjects	Pearson Correlation	0.65	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	
	N	330	330

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 5 indicated a moderate positive correlation between career guidance programs and students' choice of subjects in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County, Ntungamo District. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.65$) showed that as the quality and effectiveness of career guidance programs increased, students were more likely to make informed and appropriate subject choices. The p-value was 0.012, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the correlation was statistically significant. This suggests that the relationship between career guidance programs and subject choice did not occur by chance and that effective career guidance plays a meaningful role in influencing how students select their subjects.

Discussion

The study findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between career guidance programs and students' choice of subjects in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama

County, Ntungamo District. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.65$) indicated that as the quality and effectiveness of career guidance programs increased, students were more likely to make informed and appropriate subject choices. The p-value of 0.012, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, confirmed that this correlation was statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship was not due to chance and that effective career guidance plays a meaningful role in influencing students' subject selections.

Additionally, the findings indicated that respondents agreed that their academic strengths, peer recommendations, career goals, and personal interests significantly influenced their subject choices, while the availability of resources elicited general disagreement. This aligns with Fletcher et al. (2018), who revealed that structured career guidance programs enhance students' decision-making capabilities, leading them to make more informed choices regarding their academic paths. Similarly, Tudor (2018) found that effective career counseling significantly impacts students' subject selection by helping them align their personal interests and strengths with academic opportunities. Furthermore, Kendricks et al. (2019) highlighted that the quality of guidance received directly correlates with students' confidence in their subject choices, reinforcing the importance of robust career guidance programs. Baird and Mollen (2023) also noted that comprehensive career guidance helps students navigate future job prospects, thereby influencing their subject choices meaningfully.

Moreover, Radlick et al. (2020) emphasized that access to effective career guidance resources can empower students to make better-informed decisions about their academic paths. Mutanga et al. (2023) supported this by stating that personalized guidance tailored to individual student needs leads to improved subject selection outcomes. Paulino (2023) further pointed out that well-implemented career guidance initiatives can bridge the gap between students' aspirations and their academic choices, reinforcing this study's findings regarding the positive influence of career guidance on subject selection.

Conclusion

There is a significant moderate positive relationship between career guidance programs and students' subject choices in government-aided secondary schools in Ruhaama County,

Ntungamo District. The study found that higher-quality and more effective career guidance programs were associated with more informed subject selection ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.012$).

Recommendations

The government should allocate adequate funding and resources to enhance career guidance programs in schools, ensuring they are well-staffed and equipped with relevant materials.

The government should conduct regular assessments to identify and address factors influencing students' subject choices, such as resource availability and teacher training.

The government should support research initiatives that further explore the impact of career guidance on subject choice, using findings to inform policy and program development.

Policymakers should encourage collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to ensure that career guidance programs are relevant and aligned with labor market needs.

Students should utilize career guidance resources to gain insights into how their subject choices can impact their future careers and actively engage with counselors to discuss potential pathways.

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