





# Efficacy of career guidance and counselling among secondary schools in Uganda



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**Background:** In Uganda, students face difficulty during career transition between different levels of education and employment despite government policies about implementation of career guidance and counselling services. Little has been documented about students' levels of awareness, utilisation and extent of implementation of career guidance and counselling services within secondary schools in Uganda.

**Objective:** This study aims at documenting students' level of awareness and utilisation career guidance and counselling services, and how these services were being implemented in secondary schools in Uganda.

**Method:** Cross-sectional survey was conducted using mixed methods in secondary schools in South Western Uganda. A total of 161 students in final year of secondary education (senior six) and 35 teachers across four schools met inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study. Standardised questionnaires as primary tools of data collection were used. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS (Version 23) and content analysis for qualitative data.

**Results:** Majority of students (98.8%) revealed high awareness about existence of career guidance and counselling services, while 87.0% reported utilising the services. Implementation of career guidance and counselling in schools was demonstrated by type of programmes, information sources, models, timing and information structure by class level. However, challenges to implementation were sited, namely student, teachers, administrators, parents and policy factors.

**Conclusion and recommendation:** Career guidance and counselling services were available and used in secondary schools. However, implementation was affected by functional and structural challenges that affected the quality of career counselling information and required alignment to national development goals.

**Contribution:** The efficacy of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Uganda was documented in this article.

**Keywords:** Uganda; students; secondary schools; career guidance; counselling services; awareness; utilisation; implementation; challenges.

## Introduction

In Uganda, formal implementation of career guidance and counselling services in secondary school was established since 2008 through Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Its goal was to oversee creation of guidance and counselling departments in schools, printing and distribution of materials, capacity building of career masters and monitoring and evaluation of the services (Otwine, Oonyu, & Kiweewa, 2018). Despite existing career guidance and services in secondary schools, documentary evidence shows that students' transition from secondary to higher education and employment has not been smooth because of limited skills and knowledge gaps (Wamajji et al., 2020; Zerihun & Sennoga, 2018). Other factors identified included poor attitude to science subjects, teenage pregnancies, early marriages, lack of fees and gender disparities (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2019; Uganda National Planning Authority [UNPA], 2020). Therefore, examination of students' behaviour about awareness of career guidance and counselling services in schools and patterns of implementation of these services were pertinent to this study.

## Literature review

Students' ability to transition from education cycle to employment has not been smooth in Uganda. The main challenges the youth faced that are highlighted by Wamajji et al. (2020)

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included limited training, inappropriate employment skills, lack of experience and limited information communication technological (ICT) skills. Vernon (2006) observed that students' career guidance and counselling seeking behaviour was a cognitive response, which individuals developed towards work life. Cook and Maree (2016) concurred with Vernon and argued that exposing students to career guidance and counselling interventions early in life had positive effect on their career life transition. In their study, Otwine et al. (2018) found that most schools had put in place various programmes to address not only students' educational needs but also career, physical, social and spiritual development. This study corroborated findings in similar studies which established that schools provided a medium from which students' career needs were facilitated to promote occupational information knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant for their future work-life balance (Staunton, 2019; Wong & Wing, 2017).

Despite this finding, secondary schools still face challenges during implementation of career guidance and counselling programmes. These include high student-to-teacher ratio estimated to be 3500:1 (Otwine et al., 2018). In addition schools find it difficult to distinguish between roles about guidance and counselling and career guidance and counselling which brings confusion during implementation of career guidance and counselling. (Nsubuga & Kronholz, 2018). Furthermore, teachers and counsellors who offer career guidance and counselling in schools have been found to have limited skills to provide authentic career counselling support, career assessment, test interpretation and feedback to students (Kabunga, 2020). This phenomenon may be blamed on poor teacher training where student teachers were found to have limited skills for guidance and counselling (Knettel et al., 2020). Therefore, investigation of students' awareness, utilisation and extent of implementation of career guidance and counselling services in secondary school was necessary in order to document this information for future reference.

## Problem statement

Despite the existence of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Uganda, documentary evidence shows that human capital development has remained low because of high youth unemployment, limited career information and lack of career resilience among employees (Republic of Uganda, 2019). Whereas some students in Uganda undergo 6 years of secondary education where they get exposed to career guidance and counselling services, they face difficulties when transitioning between different levels of education and employment. Most university graduates opt for jobs within the informal sector that have limited relevance to their initial course of study (UNPA, 2020). Little has been documented about students' awareness and utilisation of career guidance and counselling services and much less is known about how such services are implemented in secondary schools across the country. This research is an attempt to bridge that information gap so as to inform policy and practice necessary

to support students' career transitions to match national development goals.

## Objectives

- To establish the level of students' awareness of career guidance and counselling services among secondary schools in Uganda.
- To evaluate students' level of utilisation of career guidance and counselling services.
- To assess the levels of implementation of career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Uganda.
- To establish challenges faced during implementation of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Uganda.

## Research questions

- What are the levels of students' awareness about the existence of career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Uganda?
- To what extent were students utilising career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools?
- How are secondary schools implementing career guidance and counselling services?
- What are the challenges experienced by secondary schools during implementation of career guidance and counselling services?

## Methodology

A cross sectional survey design was conducted, in which data was collected using a mixed methods approach. The survey took place among secondary schools in Ankole sub-region of South Western Uganda. Quantitative method was used to gather students' views while qualitative method was used on teachers in order to capture their in-depth views about the study problem (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Senior six secondary school students between ages of 15 and 25 were targeted because they fit into what Leung (2008) categorised as a prime state for career exploration. The sub-region had an estimated 310 schools with 123 547 enrolled students and 7193 teachers (Republic of Uganda, 2017). In total, 161 students in Senior six and 35 teachers across four schools in the region met inclusion criteria to participate in the study.

After obtaining ethical clearance from Makerere University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, the authors proceeded to Uganda National Council of Science and Technology for clearance. In addition, permission from the head teachers was obtained to allow researchers to conduct the study in the respective schools; and also seek assent to enroll students below 18 years into the study. However, individual consent was obtained from teachers and students above 18 years each of whom signed a consent form.

The authors used questionnaires that were developed based on literature as primary tools of data collection. Questionnaires

were validated using test and retest procedures and triangulation of data. The main areas tested included students' awareness about existence and utilisation of career guidance and counselling services, areas of implementation and challenges faced. Student questionnaires were close ended and designed on Likert scale whereby 3 was (agree), 2 (neutral) and 1 (disagree). However, open-ended questions were included at the end of each set of test items to capture students' in-depth views that could not be captured in the questionnaire. The questionnaire administered to the teachers was open ended and focused on specific information about awareness, nature of information by class level and challenges faced. After cleaning, quantitative data were entered into SPSS (version 23.0) for analysis, while qualitative data were analysed manually to create themes. Conclusion and recommendation were made based on study results.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). (No. SS-4734).

## Results

### Demographic characteristics

A total of 161 students, and 35 teachers were enrolled into this study across the four schools. Students were further distributed by schools as follows: 2 boys boarding schools  $n = 75$ ; 1 girls boarding school  $n = 67$ ; 1 mixed day and boarding under government arrangement of Universal Secondary Education (USE) ( $N = 19$ ). There were more boys in the study at 59.0%, than girls who were 41.0%. Participants average age was 18.5 years.

### Awareness and utilisation

Students' level of awareness about existence and utilisation of career guidance and counselling in schools was tested using two direct questions to which they responded either, 'yes' or 'no'. Findings revealed that 98.8% of students reported high levels of awareness about existence of career guidance and counselling services in their schools. Students who had utilised career guidance and counselling services were 87.0%. All participating teachers confirmed the existence and use of counselling services by students.

### Implementation of career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools

#### Students' results

The results from this study revealed the following as the most common career guidance and counselling programmes: general special career days 82.0%, regular class meetings 78.9%, career class days 74.5% and continuous individual and group counselling 57.1%. In addition, participants reported that the main sources of career guidance and counselling information were interaction with professionals 88.2%,

academic progressive tests 75.8% media 65.2%, parents, teachers and peers 64.4%, occupational information materials 64.0% and industrial visits 47.8%. It was further established that group counselling was the main modality 64.6% relative to individual counselling 39.1%, while guidance and counselling services were mostly implemented at the beginning 63.4% and end school term 60.2%. Table 1 presents the given results.

#### Results from teachers

Information about nature and category of information presented to students at different class levels was examined by capturing teachers' views. In general, results revealed that students received guidance and counselling information at different class levels and justification was given for each category. Table 2 presents a summary of the results.

### Challenges faced during implementation of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools

The authors also sought to capture participants' perspectives on challenges experienced during the implementation of career guidance and counselling.

#### Students' results

In general, 82.6% identified students' poor attitude and lack of cooperation as the main challenge, while 75.8% pointed to lack of time for related activities. Furthermore, 63.4% identified limited information about training and school to work opportunities as a problem and 62.1% observed a lack of awareness about the relationship between career self-awareness and academic achievement. Table 3 presents a summary of related findings from students. This information was further supported by views captured from teachers that are presented in Table 4.

This voice was also captured from a student participant:

**TABLE 1:** Career guidance and counselling programmes, sources of information, models and timing.

Variable	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Career guidance and counselling programmes in schools</b>						
General special career days	132	82.0	14	8.7	15	9.3
Career class days	120	74.5	21	13.0	20	12.5
Regular class meetings	127	78.9	17	10.6	17	10.6
Continuous individual and group counselling	92	57.1	32	19.9	37	23.0
<b>Sources of career guidance and counselling information</b>						
Academic progressive tests	122	75.8	14	8.7	25	15.3
Occupational information materials	103	64.0	22	13.7	36	22.3
Interaction with professionals	142	88.2	10	6.2	9	5.6
Industrial visits	77	47.8	29	18.0	55	34.2
Media	105	65.2	42	26.1	14	8.7
Parents, teachers and peers	104	64.6	15	9.4	42	26.1
<b>Models used</b>						
Group counselling	104	64.6	43	26.7	14	8.7
Individual counselling	63	39.1	53	32.9	45	28.0
<b>Timing</b>						
Beginning of term	102	63.4	17	10.6	42	26.1
End of term	97	60.2	19	11.8	45	28.0

**TABLE 2:** Class category, nature of information and justification.

Class category	Nature of information		Justification
	Theme	Content	
Senior one	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to curriculum, school environment and routine</li> <li>• Information about physiological changes and psychosocial support</li> </ul>	'Students are introduced to guidance and counselling at this stage to assist them adjust to new school life after primary education to promote their social adjustment and career development' (Career master).
Senior two	Psychosocial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational excellence and school subjects' choice</li> <li>• Physiological changes and life skills</li> </ul>	'Career guidance is more emphasised because students are at a stage of narrowing subjects of study and are getting the feel of directing their career choices' (Subject teacher).
Senior three	Educational excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career information, educational exploration and career decision making</li> <li>• Subject choice and educational excellence</li> </ul>	'Besides career guidance and counselling, students are supported psychosocially to uphold positive social, health, interpersonal relationships; and also maintain personal study techniques, and academic excellence' (School counsellor).
Senior four	Educational excellence and career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic excellence and study techniques</li> <li>• Career goal setting</li> <li>• Psychosocial support</li> </ul>	'Career guidance and counselling are intensified at this stage to assist students to score good grades to enable students to get subject combinations at A' level school' (Director of studies).
Senior five	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to A' level subject combinations</li> <li>• Psychosocial support and life skills</li> <li>• Academic excellence</li> </ul>	'Senior five career guidance and counselling become more emphasised because students at this stage have entered A' level stage of education and they are required to select subject combinations which will lead them to their career paths' (Head teacher).
Senior six	Career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career planning</li> <li>• Academic excellence</li> <li>• School to work transition</li> </ul>	'At senior six, career guidance offered is aimed at preparing students for tertiary education mainly for university and college entrance' (Career master).

**TABLE 3:** Students' responses about challenges faced during the implementation of career guidance and counselling services.

Variable	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Challenges</b>						
Lack of information about training and school to work opportunities	102	63.4	20	12.4	39	24.3
Lack of awareness about relationship between career self-awareness and academic achievement	100	62.1	17	10.6	44	27.3
Limited time set aside for career guidance in schools	122	75.8	17	10.6	22	13.7
Students' poor attitude and cooperation	133	82.6	13	8.1	15	9.3

'We lack career information materials ... if our schools could provide us with electronic information installed on computers, we could read them during our free time to improve our knowledge of careers and their requirements.' (participant 1, male, senior six)

From results in Table 4, it may be concluded that secondary schools were experiencing real time challenges that were both functional and structural in nature and require urgent attention to make career guidance and counselling more effective.

## Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to document awareness, utilisation and implementation of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Uganda. The results revealed high level of awareness among students about the existence of career guidance and counselling services in their schools. This finding means that at any one time, students get exposed to career guidance and counselling in their secondary school time. Thus, fulfilling the country's goal to implement guidance and counselling services in schools to aid students' career and social development (Government of Uganda, 2007). Available reports in Uganda show that many students continue to find transition from school to employment very difficult, a phenomenon that was attributed to knowledge and skills gap found among graduates (UBOS,

2017; UNPA, 2020). This finding may point to a serious gap between what information and skills students receive in school and reality in institutions of higher education and employment that may require urgent redress.

Furthermore, high rates of utilisation of career guidance and counselling services were found among students, which implied that students were not only informed about the availability of career guidance and counselling services but utilised the services. This may include the number of students attending career guidance and counselling programmes organised by schools, groups and individuals seeking counselling to deal with anxiety related to career indecision, undertaking decisions related to subject combination and career path, course of study in higher education and nature of employment. Dodd (2021) in their study observed that increased awareness and utilisation of career guidance and counselling among students improved their career decision making skills. Savickas et al. (2002) also argued that by the end of adolescence, students who get sufficient career guidance and counselling were able to narrow down their career choices and attain stable career self-concept in life than their counterparts. Therefore, results from this study provide useful information about the need to support students' access to career guidance and counselling during their exploration stage of career development with a hope that it may ease complications related to career decisions.

With regard to implementation of career guidance and counselling services in schools, findings revealed three main ways such information is shared with students, namely general special careers day, careers' class day and class meetings. Although these programmes were found to be implemented in the schools covered by this study, it shows that in between these programmes, students were engaged in other curricular and non-curricular programmes, which creates a disconnect between what is taught in school and how it may be translated into career information needed to facilitate students' career decisions. Therefore, this finding identified a gap between the nature of career guidance and

**TABLE 4:** Views from teachers about challenges faced by schools during implementation of career guidance and counselling.

Variable	Challenges	Justification
Student factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor attitude and lack of student cooperation</li> <li>Little access to information on careers</li> <li>Congested school timetable</li> </ul>	'In my opinion, the problem is that students know the available courses and what they have to do to get them but they have no real-life experience ... this makes them confused about the requirements, strength and outcomes of certain career choices' (Teacher).
Teacher and/or counsellor factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of confidence and poor communication about availability of career information</li> <li>Lack of up-to-date career information</li> <li>School and personal demands on time</li> <li>Low motivation</li> </ul>	'We received these materials from the ministry of education; however, I have never used them during career guidance and counselling ... there are many copies in my shelf and library ... I did not know that I can use them during career guidance activities' (teacher).  'Arts students should be motivated to love their future careers because most career counsellors usually provide more information about science careers and limited information about arts subjects' (Teacher).
School administration factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited support from head teachers and other school administrators</li> <li>Poor sensitisation of career guidance and counselling programmes</li> <li>Lack of time</li> <li>Lack of funds</li> <li>Poor policy implementation</li> </ul>	'Career guidance and counselling should be extended to O' level ... the role of careers and counselling in schools should be given the support it deserves because it plays an important role in the future of every learner. This is rather a neglected sector of secondary school education' (Teacher).  'We face a lot of pressure ... beginning and end of term are the only time when teachers and students were relaxed and therefore could provide career guidance and counselling' (teacher).
Parent involvement factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate parental support because of lack of career awareness sensitisation</li> <li>Some parents impose careers choices on their children</li> <li>Poor family economic background</li> <li>Lack of successful career models</li> </ul>	'Parents and teachers sometimes discourage students about the courses they should pursue especially when it comes to choice between ARTS and SCIENCES' (Teacher).
Government policy factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low-capacity building among career masters</li> <li>Government policy on student selection and placement</li> <li>Compulsory sciences at lower secondary</li> <li>Lack of sensitisation and supervision of career guidance and counselling in organisations</li> </ul>	'Ministries of education and sports, ethics and integrity, public service –all the ministries should create such desks to draw programmes to visit schools and show learners career challenges and opportunities' (School administrator).  'Career guidance and counselling is limited to a few schools; it should be rolled out and emphasised in all schools countrywide' (Teacher).

counselling in schools and the requirements by education standards in Uganda, which recommends continuous career guidance and counselling for all classes at all times to allow students make sound career choices by the end of their secondary education cycle (Directorate of Education Standards, Uganda, 2012). Therefore teachers are encouraged to integrate career education into curriculum delivery to assist students naturalise career information into classroom learning so that by the time students embark on career decisions, they may do it with less difficulty both in and out of school. Therefore, increasing career guidance and counselling space in school curriculum may empower students to make better career decisions in future.

Again it is established that timing of career guidance and counselling programmes was common during beginning and end of term. This finding was in agreement with previous finding where career guidance and counselling in schools lacked continuous frequency. This was attributed to pressure of competing roles on both teachers and students, which increased their workload. Thus, irregular career guidance and counselling programmes in schools denied students benefits associated with timely and continuous career guidance and counselling such as increased self-awareness, self-confidence, career identity and career maturity as suggested by Hooley and Rice (2019) and Bounds (2013). Anghel and Gati (2019) and Maree and Che (2020) observed that delayed career guidance and counselling contributed to career indecision among students, of which secondary schools in Uganda may need to be mindful.

It was again established that the main sources of career guidance and counselling information utilised in schools included the following: interaction with professionals from

different backgrounds; students' results from progressive tests; parents, teachers and peers; and other occupational information sources such as scholastic materials, media and industrial visits. However, this finding was contradicted by information in a study by Kizza, Damba and Kasule (2019) where it was documented that students in Uganda relied on social media as a main source of career information. Post (2020) also observed that information given to students during career sessions was biased to general guidance and counselling than career guidance. This finding may partially explain why students in this study expressed high awareness and utilisation of career guidance and counselling services, and yet after secondary school cycle most of them fail to make confident career decisions in life. According to Nsubuga, youth unemployment estimated in Uganda was estimated at 13.3%, with labour underutilisation at 38%, which was attributed to poor guidance and counselling services in schools. Increased access to career information may improve students' career decisions.

With regard to modality, group counselling was found to be more popular than individual counselling, a finding that makes sense given the limited personnel, time and limited skills among career teachers. In addition, Maree (2020) highlighted advantages of group counselling, including increased students' career decision-making efficacy, peer support, reduced manpower gaps and time saving than individual counselling. Chen et al. (2020) observed that group counselling benefitted not only students but also teachers because it helps them to reflect on personal career development. However, it is important to pay attention to Argyropoulou (2018) who called for increased individual support to students who developed career indecision anxiety that required personal attention. Therefore, balanced

employment of both individual and group counselling may be more effective than group counselling alone.

Lastly, it was established that schools in this study provided career information to students at different levels of their secondary education. Orientation information was specific to new students in both senior one and senior five to assist them to adjust to new school environment, curriculum and socialisation. This finding was supported in literature by Jonck (2015) who observed that orientation of students had power to guide learners exploit their full physical, intellectual, personal and social potential. Cook and Maree (2016) also observed that career guidance and counselling orientation improved students' adaptability during career and life transition. Therefore, orientation was an important intervention in schools necessary to assist new students formulate educational plans and academic goals and therefore should be further promoted.

Continuing students in senior two and three received continuous psychosocial support messages that included social adjustment, physiological changes and life skills. This aspect of guidance and counselling was crucial because available reports in Uganda have revealed low student completion rate of 38.4% at lower secondary because of poor outcomes in science subjects, early pregnancy and marriage among females students, delinquency and poverty (UNPA, 2019; UNPA, 2020). Therefore, increased psychosocial support for students through self-awareness exercises such as music, dance, drama, school based clubs and interschool competitions may help to increase their self-confidence, sense of responsibility and team work to keep them in schools and achieve their career goals (Government of Uganda, 2007).

In candidate classes, academic excellence and career planning were emphasised to assist students identify programmes within their career paths and devise study mechanisms to excel and pursue their career dreams at higher education. However, Kizza et al. (2019) established that students in Uganda lacked career planning skills while transitioning from secondary to higher education. This finding was affirmed by Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) and Kim (2021) who added their voice that poor career planning negatively impacted students' career self-efficacy. It is prudent that teachers in secondary schools in Uganda should spend more time assisting students to develop skills of career planning alongside academic work to prepare them for future career roles.

Results of this study identified several challenges faced during implementation of career guidance and counselling in schools. Both students and teachers agreed that students had negative attitude, and lacked cooperation during implementation of career guidance and counselling services either due little access to career information and congested school time table. This finding was in agreement with similar studies that highlighted several factors that contributed to poor attitude and lack of cooperation from students,

namely low sensitisation, irregular programmes, inadequate information about careers and lack of career models in schools (Chireshe, 2011). Other factors included lack of support from stakeholders and education policymakers limited support from teachers because of teaching overload, lack of designated career counselling centres, poorly resourced career education in schools, poor quality career guidance and counselling services, gender inequality and social segregation (Maree, 2018; Moote & Archer, 2018; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2012). Therefore, investing in career guidance and counselling may improve students' behavioural change towards uptake of its services in schools.

Results about challenges associated with teachers revealed that some teachers had limited skills to carry out effective career guidance and counselling among students. This was coupled with limited sources of updated career information and materials and demand on personal time. Save for irregular capacity building for career teachers by MoES, teachers hardly may afford personal career development in career counselling skills. Kabunga (2020) advocated for increased capacity building of teachers in skills of career assessment and counselling. Other challenges affecting teachers include lack of career guidance curriculum, poor teacher training background, high student teacher ratio and non-existent professional standards of school counsellors (Knettel et al., 2020; Otwine et al., 2018). Therefore, increasing capacity building for teachers and access to relevant career guidance materials may have potential to improve implementation of career guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Uganda.

In addition, school-related factors were identified, which included limited support from head teachers and other school administrators, poor sensitisation of students, teachers, parents, employers and policymakers, limited time and funds allocated to career guidance and counselling services and poor policy implementation because of either delayed or no supervision by staff from MoES. This has kept career guidance and counselling service delivery in schools very low: a phenomenon that could explain why career guidance and counselling remains ineffective on students' career decisions during their career life transition. Therefore, sensitisation of school administrators about the role of career guidance and counselling in learning is likely to increase its visibility of service delivery and utilisation in both education and employment world.

Besides, parental factors were also identified among the challenges affecting career guidance and counselling service delivery in secondary schools. It was established that parents were not well sensitised about the importance of career guidance and counselling. Some parents forced their children into careers outside their interest and ability, while others lacked information about different occupations because of limited exposure to career information. Poor financial background was also mentioned, which hindered some parents from financing children's education into good schools and also lacked mentors and models in families to motivate students to pursue careers of their dreams. According to Abe and Chikoko

(2020), it was established that parents were a negative force on students' career decisions. However, Xin, Tang, Li and Zhou (2020) disagreed with this notion and instead opined that students who received parental support had potential to make confident career choices than their counterparts. Therefore, parental involvement during career guidance and counselling programmes in schools is encouraged.

Lastly, government policy factors were identified among challenges secondary schools faced that limited effective implementation of career guidance and counselling. They included low-capacity building of teachers in career counselling skills, contradiction on compulsory science subjects and placement of students in science courses, and imbalance between career guidance and counselling coverage in rural and urban schools. Limited supervision of career guidance and counselling programmes in schools was also mentioned among other factors. This finding was in agreement with past studies, which revealed that policy challenges in Uganda were associated with inadequate technical expertise at MoES, low sensitisation, poor funding, lack of full time and trained school counsellors and inadequate training manuals (Kizza et al., 2019; Knettle, 2020). Existing reports have again highlighted the need to redesign career guidance and counselling interventions in schools appropriate to drive low income economies towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (African Economic Outlook, 2017; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2020; Republic of Uganda, 2019). Therefore, harmonising career guidance and counselling in schools to national human capital development strategies was likely to improve career guidance and counselling outcomes among students and also act as a mitigation factor against youth unemployment in Uganda.

## Limitations of the study

The tools used to collect data were generated by the researchers and were tested on a small population of 20 students and 10 teachers. Therefore, comprehensive testing of this study tools may yield better and generalisable results in future.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that students had high awareness about availability and utilisation of career guidance and counselling services in their schools of study. And schools employed different strategies to implement career guidance and counselling, although they faced challenges that made its implementation ineffective. These included poor attitude and lack of cooperation from students, low of capacity among teachers and school administrators, poor parental involvement and lack of policy support.

## Recommendations

There is need to increase policy support from the department of guidance and counselling in the MoES to all schools in order to improve capacity building of teachers, access to update career guidance and counselling materials,

develop curriculum for career guidance and counselling and harmonise policy on compulsory science subjects and space to accommodate students' career choices on science courses.

Lay strategy for schools to increase collaborations with educational stakeholders including parents, employers, researchers, civil society and development partners to close gaps in service delivery and implementation of existing career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Uganda.

Future studies may investigate how such collaborations may be established to link school career guidance and counselling services to national development plans.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

A.T.O. is the corresponding author of the original manuscript and contributed to the original research idea, methodology, data collection and analysis, manuscript writing, review and met all the costs of research and publication. L.M. assisted in conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, manuscript writing and editing. L.M. was also a supervisor on this study. J.M.K. was a supervisor on this study and participated in conceptualisation, methodology, validation, manuscript writing and editing. A.E.H. provided support towards conceptualisation, methodology, manuscript writing and editing.

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## Data availability

The raw data are available and can be accessed from the researcher on request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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