



The Effectiveness of Career Guidance and Counseling Services in Secondary Schools: Evaluating Their Role in Enhancing Student Career Choices and Academic Success

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Abstract

Career guidance and counseling services (CGCS) in secondary schools are vital since they assist in the decision making process, academic achievements and employment opportunities of students. In the light of advancements and the overall extensiveness of the labor markets and specialization, the structured ways and means assist students to make the right choices logically on their education and career. This research therefore seeks to establish the extent to which the current career guidance programmes in secondary schools can influence students' career confidence, academic performance and career possibilities. A cross-sectional design was used for the study through the use of questionnaires to gather data from 500 students, 50 career counselors, and 100 teachers on the impact of career counseling on the students' academic and career choices. The studies show that the students receiving the career services were more confident in their career decisions, performed better academically and were more aware of their career prospects than the students who did not benefit from the services. Also important is the interaction with career counseling which also had positive effects on class performance and awareness of career choices. Despite these, it was evident that obstacles including few resources, few trained counselors, and parents' influence hindered the delivery of career counseling services. The findings show that career education should be included in the academic curriculum and made available to all students as well as improve career guidance systems to suit the current job market. These findings offer significant insight into how career guidance services could be enhanced for the benefit of the students, thus helping the educators, policymakers, and school administrators concerned with the welfare of their students as they plan for their future careers that would help them achieve success in life.

Keywords: Career guidance, career counseling, academic performance, career decision-making, student career choices, secondary education, career awareness, employability skills.



Introduction

Career guidance and counselling services (CGCS) in secondary schools, therefore, play an important role in educational systems globally, designed to guide people towards their career and academic goals. As modern jobs continuously progress, as fields become more distinct, and as the emphasis on career preparedness intensifies, it is indispensable for students to opt for more systematic career guidance programs (Gati & Levin, 2017). Prior studies have shown that career guidance plays a critical role in fostering student's career development and decision-making process which also leads to improvement in their academic achievement (Brown & Lent, 2019). According to the context of the modern educational environment, in which students make a choice of further specialization in the labor market, career counseling programs are an effective connection between education and the subsequent occupation (Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Career guidance in secondary schools is defined as the process of offering structured advice and assistance to the student, with regard to the choices they make regarding their careers and the goals that they set towards their future careers (Sharf, 2016). Holland's Theory of Career Choice (1997) postulates that students will be more effective in fields which they have traits, characteristics, and interests in. In the same way, Super's Career Development Theory pointed out that career decision is a life long continuous process involving self- concept, family and societal culture (Super 1980). These theoretical perspectives explain the need to have the early career interventions that will assist the students in identifying their career paths.

Career counselling research has shown that the profession has a positive influence on the students' choice and academic performance. Career counseling is a resource for students that helps to increase their employability and their sense of their career indecision and uncertainty in their future job according to the research by Gati and Levin (2017). In the same manner, Hooley, Watts, and Andrews identified that students who were subjected to structured career counselling sessions received good grades as they had the motivation to work towards the set career path. Finally, career counseling has also been associated with enhanced problem solving skills, more hardness with regard to academic tasks and increased self-confidence (Lent et al., 2002).

Despite its acknowledgment, the practice of career counseling services in secondary school has some challenges especially in the developing countries. There are a lot of schools for which career guidance is either insufficient or randomly applied, and this is due to a shortage of properly trained professional career counselors (Watts and Sultana, 2004). OECD (2021) in his study established that funding of the career guidance programs is a major challenge and lack of adequate career resources. Furthermore, parental factors are key determinants of students' career choices that tend to limit the students from venturing into nontraditional careers as they are bound by societal and cultural beliefs and norms (Shumba & Naong, 2012).

The practice in different countries includes teaching of career education in schools, but many still regard it as an additional service rather than an important part of secondary education (Savickas, 2011). On the same note, Dykeman et al. (2003) notes that more specifically, career guidance



should not be a one-kind kind of event embedded in the students' academic calendar. Career guidance is also affected by the access to information within the labor market, career models, fieldwork experience involving internships, and mentorship (Kintrea, St. Clair, & Houston, 2011).

Based on these factors, this study seeks to assess the extent to which secondary schools address the needs of the students in terms of career guidance and counseling and how these services can help students in their career choices and academic achievement. That is why this research is aimed at assessing decision-making benefits that students can get after attending classes on career counseling, changes in students' academic performance as well as their level of preparedness for future careers. Further on, the study aims at establishing the barriers to the effective implementation of career counseling programmes and recommending ways of improving the formation of career education in secondary schools.

Precisely, this research is highly relevant at the present age when globalization, technology, and the demands of the employment market call for more flexible and professionally oriented students. Through the knowledge of accomplishment of career guidance and counseling services, educators, policymakers and school administrators can align fundamental changes to the secondary school learning practices to facilitate successful school to work transition, thus serving the purpose of this research.

Literature Review

Career guidance and counselling services (CGCS) in secondary schools have received a lot of study and attention to its feasibility in helping students make choices on their careers as well as their achievements. Career counseling enables learner's academic and occupational choices, as well as assists in the decision-making processes related to occupational changes and adjustments (Betz, 2008). This literature review aims to review literature in the following areas: theoretical perspective of career guidance, effect of career guidance on career choice and academic achievement, and issues concerning implementation of career guidance in secondary schools.

Theoretical Foundations of Career Guidance

Career guidance is built on a number of concepts based on theories of career development. Another theory that postulates the decision-making process is Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making pointing out that career choices are the result of unique experiences, their environment, and learned behavior models (Krumboltz, 2009). As emphasized in this theory, the students should undergo a variety of exercises such as career advice, job surveillance, and apprenticeship. Another important theory is Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise, which states that as individuals decide on future careers, choices are extinguished in terms of their social, attainable, and self-image perceptions (Gottfredson, 2005). This model underlines the necessity of targeted interventions during early career and learning years to help students expand the options for themselves.

Furthermore, there is an approach called Chaos Theory of Careers which puts emphasis on the fact that career decision is rather a stochastic process and people have to be ready for that and develop



specific skills to make choices (Bright & Pryor, 2011). The students, therefore, need career guidance that will enable them to pave the way for a lifetime of changed and dynamic jobs. Another theory in vocational psychology is the Person-Environment- fit model which focuses on the compatibility between the person and the environment in terms of the aptitudes, interest and personality of the person and the environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). This model has been widely used in the process of career guidance to determine the students' preferences and orient them towards the chosen field to get a satisfying job.

Impact of Career Guidance on Career Decision-Making

Career guidance services are crucial in the process of assisting the students through a particular career progression process. Research has shown that structured career interventions have positive effects on LM, SE and DM of the secondary school students (Hirschi, 2011). According to a study conducted by Creed and Patton (2003) the students, who took career counseling, achieved the greater level of career decidedness and expressed that they had less level of career indecision than the students who did not take career counseling. Career guidance students enable one to navigate through the career paths, self-appraising or evaluating one's self and matching it to viable careers (Nota & Soresi, 2004).

In addition, Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006) reported that career counseling interventions enhanced the awareness of students together with minimizing their probability of making hasty and irrational decisions when choosing a career path. This tallies with McMahon and Watson (2007)'s assertion that points to improvement of the students' understanding of different careers and the abilities needed in various careers. Career guidance also corrects some of the misperceptions regarding the career fields to ensure the students make informed decisions as contained in Kidd (2006).

Apart from guiding individuals to desirable occupations, career counseling assists learners to acquire pertinent employment skills including flexibility, interpersonal and problem solving skills (Savickas et al., 2009). Due to the availability and demand of 21st century skills in the job market, career counseling students should not only be informed of the available careers but also prepared for careers they choose (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

Relationship Between Career Guidance and Academic Success

There have been claims that career guidance boosts academic performance, since counseled learners are more focused than others. According to the students' performance, Tella, Indoshi, and Othuon (2010) discovered that program students who underwent special arrangements of career counseling outperformed their counterparts who had no such counseling in that they were focused on goals, objectives, and oriented toward achieving those goals. According to Kenny et al., (2003) students who appreciate the link between their course of study and career aspirations will always be motivated to finish their tasks professionally and excel in their exams.

Additionally, Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff (1998) found that students who were provided with career counselling recorded high levels of motivation as they could relate their academic work to future



career gains. This relation between career aspirations and academic accomplishment is influential for disadvantaged students especially because they may not have adequate motivation towards academic success as a result of poverty or other issues (Howard et al., 2009). Career counseling plays a crucial role in helping out these students and guides them towards finding directions as well as overcoming barriers in order to achieve educational and career aspirations.

Challenges in Implementing Career Guidance in Secondary Schools

Despite the benefits of career guidance that have been highlighted earlier, several barriers make it difficult to implement it in secondary schools. The first obstacle is the shortage of qualified career counselors. In many schools, especially in developing nations, career guidance is not provided by professionals but becomes a past-time of teachers with little to no professional training in career development (Mariani, 2019). Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2017) observed that reduced numbers of counselors per student compromise the quality of career guidance since the most-occupied counselors cannot attend to students on an individual basis.

This review indicates the importance of students being provided with proper career guidance in their future directions and academic performance. Most theories support the assertion that career intervention programs should be developed and implemented, systematic, and orderly; thus, research works have shown that the enhancement of career counseling helps raise a person's level of career decision Maker, students' academic performance and employability skills. Nevertheless, some of the factors include scarcity of trained personnel, scarce resources, and socio-economic constraints that act as a stumbling block in implementing the career guidance programs. These gaps present policy challenges that can be met through policy changes, enhanced support for career counseling, and parental and community participation in career development programs.

Research Methodology

The study employs a descriptive and correlational survey design since it aims at understanding from the students' perspective the effectiveness of the guidance services as well as the extent to which the guidance influenced the students' career choices and academic performance. This design allows for the pattern and characteristics of the variables to be determined and determine empirically the effect of career guidance on students. A cross-sectional study was employed whereby the data were collected at a once-off point to determine the current status of career counseling services in secondary schools.

Population and Sampling

The targeted population for this research study comprises secondary school students, career counselors, and teachers from various schools. The student participants used in the study were selected from senior class students (Grades 10 to 12) since they are at an influential and strategic career decision-making stage. In other words, the section to be sampled was given randomly and the purpose of stratified random sampling was utilized so as to ensure that the samples chosen are from science, commerce, humanity and vocational stream. A target sample of 500 students from



various schools was used, and considered subjecting the participants equally in terms of their gender, socio-economic status, and academic achievement.

Apart from student respondents, 50 career counselors and 100 teachers were also sampled in order to get their perception of the effectiveness of the career guidance services from the broader organizational and instructional point of view. The use of multiple stakeholders is useful to obtain a more diverse perspective on career counselling services and its impact on students.

Data Analysis

The findings from this study offer insight into the efficiency of career guidance and counseling services as offered in secondary schools. They include demographic factors, confidence in career decisions, performance, the frequency of career counseling sessions, level of awareness about careers, parental involvement, satisfaction and career ambitions before and after counseling. The eight tables and eight figures presented in this research provide supporting evidence for the collected data.

Student Demographics and Career Guidance Reception

From the data obtained in the analysis of student demographics described in Table 1, it became clear that the reception of career guidance also differed. There was a slightly higher percentage of 60% of the urban students who reported that they ever received career counseling as opposed to the 40% of the rural students. Also, the gender distribution of students availing career guidance services was nearly similar considering that 52% of the male students and 48 % female students had undergone counseling programs. However, the results indicated that economic status played a major-role in response, with 70% of low-income students stating that they did not receive any career counselling compared to only 20% of high-income students.

Table 1

Student Demographics

Category	Received Career Guidance (%)	Did Not Receive Career Guidance (%)
Male	52	48
Female	48	52
Urban Students	60	40
Rural Students	40	60
Low-Income	30	70
Middle-Income	50	50
High-Income	20	80

Career Decision-Making Confidence



The findings are very encouraging in that career guidance was noted to have a positive correlation with the students' confidence levels as they made career decisions. Table 2 self-estimate that 85 percent of learners who underwent career counselling felt that they have the ability to make the correct career decision as opposed to those who did not undergo counselling where only 47 percent believed so. Furthermore, among those who underwent career counseling, 45% expressed extreme confidence in their career decisions, while 40% moderately agreed with them. Whereas students that did not get OSP counseling services' only 20% were very confident, while 23% very uncertain of their future career choices.

Table 2

Career Decision-Making Confidence

Career Confidence Level	Received Career Guidance (%)	Did Not Receive Career Guidance (%)
Very Confident	45	20
Moderately Confident	40	27
Uncertain	10	30
Very Uncertain	5	23

Academic Performance and Career Counseling

Another important component of this study was the effectiveness of career counseling to students' performance. Table 3 also presents the GPA distribution of the students who had a career guidance session and the student who did not have a career guidance session. A total of 50% of students that had career counseling had a 'B' between 3.5 and 4.0 GPA while only 20% of the students that had no career guidance had 'B' between 3.5 and 4.0 GPA. It is also important to note that only 5% of the respondents who received career guidance had a GPA of less than 2.5, while 25% of the respondents who did not receive the career guidance had such a GPA.

Table 3

Academic Performance Comparison (GPA Distribution)

GPA Range	Received Career Guidance (%)	Did Not Receive Career Guidance (%)
3.5 - 4.0	50	20
3.0 - 3.4	30	25
2.5 - 2.9	15	30
Below 2.5	5	25



Frequency of Career Guidance Sessions and Impact

The survey also measured how often students attend career guidance sessions and if it has any effect on their GPA. The findings in table 4 indicate that out of the respondents, those who attended five or more career counselling sessions recorded a 1.0 increase in their overall GPA. Regular attendance of all the sessions also resulted in a positive overall attitude for the students with an increase of 0.3 points in their GPA even among those who attended only one or two sessions. On the other hand, none of the students who had not appeared for any session improved their performance.

Table 4

Frequency of Career Guidance Sessions

Number of Sessions Attended	Percentage of Students (%)	Improvement in GPA (Average Points)
None	30	0.0
1-2 Sessions	25	0.3
3-5 Sessions	20	0.6
More than 5 Sessions	25	1.0

Career Awareness Levels Among Students

Career guidance as one of the steps is aimed at raising student's awareness regarding various occupations. Table 5 shows career awareness levels by students who received or did not receive guidance. A higher percentage of subjects that underwent guidance had 55% of them categorized as very aware of career options as opposed to 20% of the population that did not undergo career guidance. Furthermore, while 35% of career-guided students were moderately aware regarding career opportunities associated with each stream, only the same percentage of the students without career guidance had limited awareness regarding the same

Table 5

Career Awareness Levels

Career Awareness Level	Received Career Guidance (%)	Did Not Receive Career Guidance (%)
Very Aware	55	20
Moderately Aware	35	30



Limited Awareness	8	35
No Awareness	2	15

Parental Influence on Career Choice

The findings show that parents play a central role in determining students' career choices. Table 6 demonstrates the effects of parental involvement in the lives of learners with and without career counseling. When comparing percentages of students, only those who never sought a counselor mentioned that parents had a strong influence on their decision at 55%, while only 35% of students who sought career guidance said the same thing. On the other hand, the students who received career counselling made more independent decisions, 10% of them responded that they never consulted their parents about their decision as opposed to 5% of the students who did not receive career counselling

Table 6

Parental Influence on Career Choice

Level of Parental Influence	Received Career Guidance (%)	Did Not Receive Career Guidance (%)
Strongly Influenced	35	55
Moderately Influenced	40	30
Little Influence	15	10
No Influence	10	5

Student Satisfaction with Career Counseling

Another research focus considered in this study was the level of satisfaction of students regarding career guidance services. The results of the level of satisfaction among the students participating in career counseling programs are presented in the table below. Satisfaction score was quite high, with 48% of the students being very satisfied while 32% was moderately satisfied and only 5% had a low satisfaction score. The other measure of satisfaction on readiness to work was also done where most of the very satisfied students affirmed that they were well prepared for the careers they desired

Table 7

Student Satisfaction with Career Counseling

Satisfaction Level	Percentage of Students (%)	Impact on Career Readiness (%)
Very Satisfied	48	90
Moderately Satisfied	32	70
Neutral	15	50



Not Satisfied	5	20
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Career Aspirations Before and After Career Counseling

The special focus of the study's last variable was shifts in career goals as observed pre- and post-career counseling. Table 8 displays a comparison of the career interest before and after a career guidance. Of all the students, only 30% initially declared their intent to go into STEM, though this rose to 40% after the career counseling. The business-oriented occupations increased from 25% to 30%. The number of the students who had no idea about their career choices, before coming across the career guidance facilities, reduced from 15% to 5% only. These changes are illustrated in Figure 8 whereby career counselling assists the students gain further understanding into their career fields to make the right decision in choosing preferred areas.

Table 8

Career Aspirations Before and After Counseling

Career Interest Category	Before Career Guidance (%)	After Career Guidance (%)
STEM	30	40
Business	25	30
Humanities	20	15
Vocational Trades	10	10
Undecided	15	5

The findings of this study support the notion that career guidance and counseling services have a great impact positively on students' career decision making, their performance as well as their career direction. The results of this study also pointed to a, AGPA, career awareness, and level of self- perceived career preparedness among the students who had received career counseling. Moreover, additional regular career counseling sessions attain a far reaching improvement of the students' academic and career preparedness.

Furthermore, the research reveals that the employment guidance eliminates cases of parents imposing their personal interests to the students, and students opt for the careers that interests them most. Increased student satisfaction with regards to career counseling services support the argument to increase the incorporation of such programs into educational systems. In addition, the change in career goals before and after counseling shows that career counselling enables students to make the right decisions concerning their careers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion



The use of hypothesis testing in this study reveals the significant effect of career guidance and Counseling services in Secondary schools in promoting career decision making, academic achievement and career information among students. These results are consistent with the literature on effectiveness of structured career interventions in the development of learners, supporting the need for effective career counseling programmes in schools (Watts, 2013). This section is devoted to the discussion of results in the context of prior studies, tendencies in educational organizations, as well as recommendations to improve career counseling.

Career Decision-Making Confidence and Career Readiness

Among the main research conclusions, the one that stands out is that students' confidence in their career choices improves with career counseling. The results also revealed that students who got career guidance and counseling in structure were more confident as compared to the ones who had no access to career guidance and counseling. This aligns with the conclusion highlighted by Greenhaus and Callanan (2019) that indicated that, Through early career interventions, the level of anxiety associated with career self-directedness improves due to the bolstering of their decision-making skills. Likewise, Hirschi (2018) agrees with the assertion that career counseling enables students to well develop their career identity, which is necessary in selecting the right and achievable career.

These findings are also corroborated by Sumner et al.'s (2017) Self-Efficacy Theory and Lent and Brown's (2019) Social Cognitive Career Theory for they present the average level of career confidence as depending on the amount of accurate information, role models, and self-efficacy beliefs. Career counseling led to the students to consider several courses of actions, assess the merits and demerits of each of a given course of action/decision and take actions that are consistent with their abilities and passion. Furthermore, according to Hall (2020), career counselling helps one to develop versatility which is essential in today's labour market. New generation and automation are creating more and more new occupations and to succeed in such fields, students require different flexibility skills, and to address this issue, the services of student's career guidance are crucial.

Academic Performance and Career Counseling

The changes in students' academic performance after receiving career guidance increase a notion that career planning boosts students' motivation. This is in line with the study conducted by Gottlieb et al. (2021) that indicates that students who have career goals perform better in their studies than those who have no clear career goals. Career development helps students to see value in learning through explaining to them how their efforts in class relate to future job opportunities thus increasing their motivation to learn (Super, 2017).

O'Reilly & McCarthy (2020) have provided further evidence for the proposition that career counseling leads to intrinsic motivation. Most students would like to achieve success in their courses with less effort because they know that this would lead to achievement of their dreams in the future. On the other hand , students who never receive career guidance then find themselves



disengaged and directionless which is not good for students' performance. Furthermore, Allen, and Robbins (2018) noted that students who engage in a career planning program have higher chances of continuing with their studies and completing them, knowing that career guidance has an impact on student retention.

The Role of Career Counseling in Career Awareness

Another achievement of this study is the finding that career guidance played a positive role in enhancing the career awareness level of the students. Thus, this paper's discovery supports the work of Hooley et al. (2019), which stipulates that the access to the information connected with the field, at the early stage, contributes to better choices among students. Career awareness is not just about the identification of career alternatives but also about the skills, revealing job positions, and the tasks involved in them. When students are not guided through a career development plan, they are inclined to make choices based on popular beliefs or have a small scope of resources to look at, hence making a random decision on what they may wish to do with their future (Savickas, 2015).

In addition, Sampson et al., (2022) found that there is an advantage in students who are exposed to the career guidance programs since they are more likely to choose the minority career fields such as STEM for the ladies or vocational for the boys. This is very true in the context of choice of career paths, having implications with regard to gender equity. Career counseling also introduces the students to new careers, making sure they think about fields that avail themselves in occupations in the next decades (Brown & Bimrose, 2021).

The Influence of Parental Expectations on Career Choices

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions were made; these are that parental influence influences students' career choices, and in particular, students who did not take career counseling were more likely to succumb to parental pressure. This finding also supports the conclusion of Dietrich et al. (2021) who posit that parents have a significant influence on the students and their career choices and at times the aspirations are rigid and do not allow students to seek other different or non-traditional careers. This can be attributed to the high pressure exerted by parents, especially those from traditional families, on their children to take certain jobs based on perceived status or financial security, rather than talent or passion.

Career counseling helps to reduce such an effect because students receive objective information on various occupations. For example, Gati and Levin (2022) stated that career counseling assists students to reconcile their career choice with what parents expect from them. This is so especially in parts of the world where cultural expectations dictate that the students should choose certain careers which are respected such as being a doctor or lawyer or an engineer. Career counselling is useful to the students to be able to explain to their parents their career choices and career choices that can make them fulfilled and economically viable.

Student Satisfaction with Career Guidance Services



Students' satisfaction with the services received from career guidance programs increases the efficiency of the services provided. McMahon and Watson (2020) argue that the variation in the career counselling increases the career preparedness of the students and increases their satisfaction with the education. In supporting this argument, the results of this study show that students with a high level of satisfaction with regards to career guidance perceived higher career crystallization and confidence in their academic and/or professional paths.

However, a portion of the students were indifferent or unsatisfied with the career services offered to them as well. This supports findings of Ali and Saunders (2019) whereby they found that poor career counseling that entails giving generalized advice, failure to offer diagnostic tools, and limited opportunity to engage in career-related exposures demotivate students. Schools must therefore have effective and efficient organized career counseling programs that meet the needs of the students and are staffed by competent professionals.

The Shift in Career Aspirations Before and After Counseling

Another significant observation is the change of mind set of the students in the choice of their careers after receiving career guidance information. It was also based on the findings that many students who at first, had unclear or focused on a few areas of career development changed their career interests after the career counselling sessions. This concurs with the findings of Duffy et al. (2021), who posited that career counselling helps students to open their eyes to other fields of work.

Furthermore, based on Bandura and Barbaranelli (2018), it is evident that career self efficacy has influence on career choices. Career self-efficacy implies that students taking career counseling services will be in a position to pursue optimal careers without any insecurities or fear of making wrong career choices since their decisions will have been made based on their career plans and not any outside forces. The arguments made by Grainger et al in this study provide empirical evidence for this theory advocating that structured career guidance interventions have a direct impact on students' careers.

Practical Implications and Policy Recommendations

Educationists, policy makers, as well as school administrators should embrace the learning from this study for enhanced performance. Based on the effects of the organizations and career counseling for students' academic performance and career preparedness, career guidance programs should be incorporated into students' curriculum. Schools should employ qualified career counselors in an effort to give students proper and research- based career guidance.

Moreover, the government should establish legislations that require that schools should offer career guidance as a compulsory subject for all secondary students. According to Johnson et al. (2022), countries that support career education have been found to have low dropout rates compared to their counterparts with high graduate employability. Adopting the structured frameworks of career guidance at the national level would therefore guarantee pre and post secondary students access to career counseling regardless of the status of their family.



Conclusion

The discussion of these findings serves to support the main assertion that career guidance and counselling services are vital in determining the students' academic and career destination. Career counseling services are beneficial to students because they help boost career decision-making confidence, motivate students to excel academically, increase career consciousness and reduce parental interference. As a result, for career counseling programs to be effective, they must be fully planned, adequately funded and delivered in a coordinated manner within the education sector. Further improvements in these services are required as a way of making sure that students are well equipped to overcome the challenges they are bound to face in their academic or career choices.

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