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Career Socialisation as Correlates of Individual Career Choice among Undergraduates in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract

This paper examined career socialisation as a correlate of individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. Four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. The population of this study consisted of all undergraduates in the three public universities in Rivers State, with a total of 72,113 undergraduates. The sample size was 400 undergraduates, using the Taro Yamane formula to determine the sample size. Proportionate sampling technique was used to draw the number of students from the public universities in Rivers State. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed instrument titled “Career Socialisation and Students Career Choice Questionnaire” (CSSCCQ). The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha for a measure of internal consistency, which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.83 for Mentorship, 0.82 for Role Model, 0.80 for Boss-ship, 0.84 for Supervisory Support, and 0.85 for Individual Career Choice Scale. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions and test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed a strong positive relationship between mentorship, role model, boss-ship, supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. Based on these findings, it was recommended, among others, that university management should establish effective mentorship programmes and provide adequate career guidance opportunities to help undergraduates make informed and realistic career choices.

Keywords: Career Socialisation, Mentorship, Role Model, Boss-ship, Supervisory Support and Individual Career Choice

Introduction

Career choice has remained one of the most significant developmental tasks in the lives of young people because it determines occupational direction, economic stability, social identity and personal fulfilment. The process of choosing a career is often complex and influenced by several psychological, social, environmental, and institutional factors that shape individuals' aspirations and occupational preferences. Among undergraduates in public universities, career choice represents a major transition from academic preparation to the world of work, requiring students to evaluate their interests, abilities, values and opportunities before making occupational decisions. In recent years, the dynamic nature of the labour market, technological advancement, globalisation, and increasing unemployment rates have intensified the need for students to make informed and realistic career choices. Consequently, researchers and educators have become increasingly concerned with factors that influence individual career choice among university undergraduates, particularly socialisation experiences that expose students to occupational information, career expectations and professional interactions (Brown & Lent, 2023).

Career choice refers to the process through which individuals select occupations or professions that align with their interests, competencies, values, personality traits and life goals. It is a lifelong developmental process involving exploration, planning, decision-making, and commitment to a particular occupational pathway. Career choice is not merely an individual action but a socially influenced process shaped by interactions with family members, peers, educational institutions, mentors, supervisors, and other significant individuals within society (Hirschi, 2022). Within the university environment, students are constantly exposed to diverse academic and social experiences that influence their perceptions of occupations and future aspirations. These experiences may either motivate students toward suitable occupational pathways or create uncertainty and confusion regarding career decisions. Individual career choice specifically refers to the personal decision made by an individual concerning the occupation or profession he or she intends to pursue based on self-assessment and environmental influences. Such decisions are influenced by intrinsic factors as well as extrinsic factors such as parental expectations, peer pressure, socio-economic background, labour market trends and social interactions (Okolie et al., 2020). This implies that undergraduates' career choices are not formed in isolation but emerge through continuous interaction with influential persons and institutional structures within their social environment.

Undergraduates in public universities constitute a critical segment of the population undergoing intense academic, social and vocational development. Public universities are established to provide accessible higher education and equip students with the knowledge, competencies, and professional skills necessary for national development. In Rivers State and Nigeria at large, undergraduates in public universities are exposed to several academic and social experiences that significantly shape their occupational aspirations and career decisions. However, university students often encounter challenges such as inadequate career guidance services, unemployment concerns, societal pressure, poor mentorship structures, and uncertainty about labour market opportunities, all of which may negatively affect their career choices and future adjustment (Adeosun et al., 2021). Consequently, there is growing concern regarding the extent to which career socialisation processes within the university environment contribute to shaping students' occupational preferences and professional identity formation.

Career socialisation refers to the process through which individuals acquire career-related values, attitudes, behaviours, expectations, and professional orientations through interaction with significant persons, institutions and occupational environments. It involves exposing individuals to workplace norms, professional ethics, occupational realities, and career-related experiences that influence vocational identity and career decision-making. Career socialisation helps students to develop awareness of occupational opportunities, understand workplace expectations, and build confidence in their chosen professions. It also provides students with social learning experiences that facilitate occupational adjustment and career commitment (Ugoani, 2020). In the university context, career socialisation may occur through mentorship relationships, interaction with role models, workplace supervision during industrial training, and guidance from lecturers and professional leaders.

Mentorship is an important dimension of career socialisation that influences students' occupational development and career decision-making. Mentorship refers to a professional relationship in which an experienced individual provides guidance, encouragement, support and career-related advice to a less experienced person. Through mentorship, undergraduates gain exposure to professional experiences that broaden their understanding of workplace expectations and occupational opportunities. Effective mentorship enhances career self-efficacy, career adaptability, and occupational confidence among students (Eby et al., 2023). The study of Allen et al. (2024) revealed that mentorship significantly relates to students' career choice. Within public universities, lecturers, academic advisers, industry professionals, and senior colleagues often serve as mentors who shape students' perceptions of professions and influence their individual career choices. Students who receive adequate mentorship are more likely to make informed and realistic career decisions because they benefit from guidance, encouragement, and access to professional networks.

Role model influence is another important sub-variable of career socialisation that contributes to individual career choice among undergraduates. Role models are individuals whose achievements, values, behaviour, and professional success inspire others to emulate them. Students often identify with successful professionals, lecturers, parents,

entrepreneurs, and public figures whose occupational accomplishments motivate them toward certain careers. Through observation and imitation, students internalise career-related attitudes and behaviours that influence their occupational preferences. Positive role models therefore provide psychological encouragement and career direction that strengthen students' commitment toward particular occupational pathways (Morgenroth et al., 2024). Again, Gibson (2025) found a significant positive relationship between professional role models and students' career choice in higher institutions. In public universities, students' interactions with accomplished lecturers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and alumni significantly influence their individual career choices.

Boss-ship influence also constitutes an important aspect of career socialisation among undergraduates. Boss-ship influence refers to the impact of workplace leaders, managers, employers, or organisational authorities on students' career orientation and occupational preferences. During industrial training, internships, teaching practice, or workplace attachment programmes, students interact with organisational leaders whose leadership styles, professional conduct, and managerial competence may influence students' perceptions of certain careers or occupations. Positive experiences with supportive bosses can motivate students to pursue careers within particular professions, while negative experiences may discourage occupational interest. Bosses often expose students to organisational culture, workplace ethics, leadership practices, and professional expectations that shape occupational attitudes and career decisions (Spurk et al., 2025). Consequently, boss-ship influence may serve as a critical socialisation mechanism through which undergraduates develop career interests and occupational preferences. Ng and Feldman (2023) found that positive leadership significantly relate to career commitment among university graduates. Similarly, Akinyele and Olorunfemi (2024) revealed a significant positive relationship between managerial support and career choice among undergraduates during internship programmes.

Supervisory support is equally important in understanding the relationship between career socialisation and individual career choice among undergraduates. Supervisory support refers to the guidance, monitoring, evaluation, and professional support provided by supervisors during academic and workplace learning experiences. Supervisors play important roles in shaping students' professional attitudes, work ethics, competencies, and occupational confidence. In public universities, supervisors during teaching practice, industrial training, research projects, and internship programmes provide students with feedback and practical experiences that influence career development. Effective supervision promotes professional growth, skill acquisition, and career readiness, thereby enhancing students' ability to make informed occupational choices. Supervisors also expose students to professional standards and expectations that facilitate vocational adjustment and occupational identity formation (Bauer & Erdogan, 2021). Positive supervisory experiences may therefore strengthen students' commitment toward specific career pathways and improve occupational decision-making. Ng and Feldman (2023) revealed that supervisory support significantly relates to career choice among university students.

Despite the importance of career socialisation, many undergraduates in public universities experience uncertainty, confusion, and poor career decision-making due to inadequate mentorship opportunities, limited exposure to professional role models, weak supervisory support, and unfavourable workplace experiences. In Nigeria, Rivers State is not exempt; the increasing rate of graduate unemployment and career dissatisfaction has raised concerns about the adequacy of career preparation and socialisation processes within higher education institutions. Some students choose careers based on societal pressure, financial expectations, or peer influence without adequate exposure to occupational realities and professional guidance. This situation often results in career indecision, poor job adjustment, low occupational commitment, and reduced productivity after graduation (Nwosu et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need to examine career socialisation as a correlate of individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.

The ability of undergraduates to make appropriate and realistic career choices has become a growing concern among educators, counsellors, parents and university administrators. In recent times, many undergraduates in public universities appear to experience difficulties in making informed career decisions due to challenges such as inadequate career guidance, unemployment concerns, societal pressure, poor mentorship opportunities, and limited exposure to occupational realities. These challenges have been associated with career indecision, low occupational confidence, poor professional commitment, and uncertainty about future career paths, which may negatively affect students' vocational adjustment and productivity after graduation.

The observations of the researcher in public universities in Rivers State revealed that some undergraduates find it difficult to make career choices that align with their interests, competencies and professional aspirations. Despite undergoing academic training and participating in industrial training or internship programmes, many students still appear uncertain about their future occupations and professional directions. Some students seem to depend largely on peer influence, parental expectations, societal demands, or financial considerations rather than adequate professional guidance and career exposure when making career decisions. This situation has continued to raise concerns about the career preparedness of undergraduates and the extent to which career socialisation processes can help students develop appropriate occupational aspirations and informed career choices. Career socialisation has been identified as an important professional and social process capable of exposing students to workplace realities, professional values, occupational expectations, and career development opportunities. Through mentorship, role model influence, boss-ship influence, and supervisory influence, undergraduates are expected to develop career confidence, vocational identity, and realistic occupational perceptions. However, it appears that many undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State do not adequately experience these career socialisation processes, thereby contributing to poor career orientation and uncertainty in career decision-making. It is based on these worries that this study sought to investigate the relationship between career socialisation and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.

This study sought to investigate:

- 1 Examine the extent to which mentorship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.
- 2 Investigate the extent to which role models relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.
- 3 Determine the extent to which boss-ship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.
- 4 Examine the extent Supervisory support relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1 To what extent does mentorship relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State?
- 2 To what extent does role model relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State?
- 3 To what extent does boss-ship relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State?
- 4 To what extent does supervisory support relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State?

The following hypotheses were tested

- 1 There is no significant relationship between mentorship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State
- 2 There is no significant relationship between role model and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State
- 3 There is no significant relationship between boss-ship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State
- 4 There is no significant relationship between supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. Correlational studies have usually been regarded as relational studies or prediction studies, as it seeks to find out the relationship between two or more variables, the magnitude and direction of such relationship. The population of this study consisted of all undergraduates in the three public universities in Rivers State, with 17,536 for Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, 21,795 for Rivers State

University and 32,782 for University of Port Harcourt, making it a total of 72,113 undergraduates for the study (Source: Knoema.com/NGEDUSE 2025/ education-statistics-of-Nigeria). The sample size for this study was 400 undergraduates, using the Taro Yamane formula to determine the sample size. Proportionate sampling technique was used to determine the sample from each of the universities. Thus, 97 samples were drawn from IAUE, 121 from RSU and 182 from UNIPORT, making it a total of 400. This was calculated based on the population of the individual institution and the aggregate sample size. A self-designed instrument titled "Career Socialisation and Students' Career Choice Questionnaire" (CSSCCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha for a measure of internal consistency, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83 for CSSCCQ, while the sub-variables yielded 0.83 for Mentorship, 0.82 for Role Model, 0.80 for Boss-ship, 0.84 for Supervisory Influence and 0.85 for Individual Career Choice Scale. Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered, while 385 were completed, representing a 96% return for data analysis. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions and test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Mentorship and Individual Career Choice among Undergraduates in Public University in Rivers State

		Mentorship	Individual Career Choice
Mentorship	Pearson Correlation	1	.789**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Individual Career Choice	Pearson Correlation	.789**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

Table 1 presents Pearson's Product Moment Correlation result of mentorship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. The result revealed an r-value of .789 with its corresponding p-value of .000. This shows a strong positive relationship between mentorship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This result also indicated that, to a very great extent, mentorship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. Furthermore, since the p-value is less than the chosen level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between mentorship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This also means that as mentorship increases in public universities, there tends to be a corresponding increase in individual career selection among them in Rivers State.

Table 2: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Role Model and Individual Career Choice among Undergraduates in Public University in Rivers State

		Role Model	Individual Career Choice
Role Model	Pearson Correlation	1	.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Individual Career Choice	Pearson Correlation	.774**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

Table 2 presents Pearson's Product Moment Correlation result of role model and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. The result revealed an r-value of .774 with its corresponding p-value of .000. This shows a strong positive relationship between role model and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This result also indicated that, to a very great extent, role model relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. Furthermore, since the p-value is less than the chosen level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between role model and individual career choice among

undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This also means that as role model increases in public universities, there tends to be a corresponding increase in individual career selection among them in Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Boss-Ship and Individual Career Choice among Undergraduates in Public University in Rivers State

		Boss-Ship	Individual Career Choice
Boss-Ship	Pearson Correlation	1	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Individual Career Choice	Pearson Correlation	.768**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

Table 3 presents Pearson's Product Moment Correlation result of boss-ship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. The result revealed an r-value of .768 with its corresponding p-value of .000. This shows a strong positive relationship between boss-ship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This result also indicated that, to a very great extent, boss-ship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. Furthermore, since the p-value is less than the chosen level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between boss-ship and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This also implies that as boss-ship increases in public universities, there tends to be a corresponding increase in individual career selection among them in Rivers State.

Table 4: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Supervisory Support and Individual Career Choice among Undergraduates in Public University in Rivers State

		Supervisory Support	Individual Career Choice
Supervisory Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Individual Career Choice	Pearson Correlation	.782**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

Table 4 presents Pearson's Product Moment Correlation result of supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. The result revealed an r-value of .782 with its corresponding p-value of .000. This shows a strong positive relationship between supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. This result also indicated that, to a very great extent, supervisory support relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in a public university in Rivers State. Furthermore, since the p-value is less than the chosen level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This also implies that as supervisory support increases in public universities, there tends to be a corresponding increase in individual career selection among them in Rivers State.

Discussion

The result of the research question one revealed that the extent to which mentorship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State was very great. While the result of the corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was a significant, strong positive relationship between mentorship and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This result is not surprising because mentorship provides undergraduates with professional guidance, encouragement, career exposure, and access to occupational information that help them make informed and realistic career decisions.

This finding is in accordance with the study of Eby et al. (2023), who found a significant positive relationship between mentorship and career development among university students. This result could be because mentorship provides students with career-related support, professional networking opportunities, and psychological encouragement that influence their occupational aspirations and career decision-making. Similarly, Allen et al. (2024) found that mentorship significantly relates to students' career choice in their own study. This could probably be because mentors serve as guides and role models who help students understand their strengths, career interests, and occupational opportunities, thereby enabling them to make appropriate career choices and develop stronger professional commitment.

The result of the second research question revealed that the extent to which role models relate to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State was very great. While the result of the corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was significant strong positive relationship between role model and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This is not surprising because role models expose students to successful professional behaviours, values, and achievements that inspire and motivate them towards particular occupational pathways.

This finding is in line with the study of Morgenroth et al. (2024) whose results revealed a strong positive relationship between role model influence and career aspiration among university students. This result could be because role models provide students with the motivation, direction, and encouragement needed for career development and occupational decision-making. Similarly, Gibson (2025) found a significant positive relationship between professional role models and students' career choice in higher institutions. This result is not surprising because exposure to successful professionals helps students develop positive attitudes towards occupations and strengthens their commitment towards suitable career pathways.

The result of the research question three revealed that the extent to which boss-ship relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State was very great. While the result of the corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was a significant, strong positive relationship between boss-ship and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This result is not surprising because boss-ship exposes students to workplace leadership, professional ethics, organisational culture, and occupational expectations that shape their career interests and professional aspirations. Positive interactions with supportive bosses encourage students to develop stronger commitment towards particular professions and make informed career choices.

This result is in harmony with the study of Ng and Feldman (2023), which revealed that positive leadership significantly relate to career commitment among university graduates. This might be because effective bosses create encouraging work environments that help students develop professional confidence and clearer career direction. Akinyele and Olorunfemi (2024) corroborated that there is a significant positive relationship between managerial support and career choice among undergraduates during internship programmes. This is not surprising because supportive workplace leaders help students understand occupational realities and develop positive attitudes toward their chosen professions.

The result of research question four revealed that the extent to which supervisory support relates to individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State was very great. The result of the corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was a significant, strong positive relationship between supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. This result could be because supervisory support provides undergraduates with professional guidance, performance feedback, practical exposure, and encouragement that help them understand workplace expectations and make informed career decisions.

This finding is in agreement with the study of Bauer and Erdogan (2021), who found a significant positive relationship between supervisory support and career development among students and young employees. This result could be because supportive supervisors help students develop professional competence, workplace confidence, and occupational commitment needed for effective career decision-making. Similarly, Ng and Feldman (2023) revealed that supervisory support significantly relates to students' career choice in their own study. This could be because

supervisors provide direction, monitoring, and constructive feedback that help students understand career opportunities and develop positive attitudes towards their chosen professions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscored the relationship between career socialisation and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. The research revealed a strong positive relationship between mentorship, role model, boss-ship influence, supervisory support and individual career choice among undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State. The findings of this study showed that career socialisation significantly contributes to individual career choice, as it exposes students to professional guidance, occupational experiences, workplace expectations and career development opportunities. These career socialisation processes serve as important professional and social mechanisms that help undergraduates develop career confidence, vocational identity, occupational commitment, and informed decision-making abilities, thereby enhancing their capacity to make realistic and appropriate career choices and adjust successfully to future professional environments.

Recommendations

- 1 University management should establish effective mentorship programmes to help undergraduates receive proper career guidance and professional support for informed career choice.
- 2 Lecturers and career counsellors should expose students to positive professional role models through seminars, career talks, and alumni interactions to strengthen students' occupational aspirations.
- 3 Organizations and employers supervising students during industrial training should provide supportive boss-ship experiences that promote positive workplace exposure and career development.
- 4 Undergraduates should receive proper supervision and career guidance to enhance effective career choice.

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