US-China Education Review A 2 (2012) 199-205
Earlier title: US-China Education Review, ISSN 1548-6613

General or Technical High School: Parameters Related to Greek Students' Choice

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This research attempts to examine the demographic characteristics of Greek adolescents who choose either general or technical high schools as well as the parameters related to students' specific educational decision. The sample of the survey includes 198 students from both schools. Results showed that students' choice was not directly related to their family. Personal preferences, career development, independence and professional stability were the most significant parameters that students had taken into account when considering their educational choices. Results revealed gender differences concerning the relationship between family, parental variables and students' educational choice.

Keywords: secondary education, educational choice, demographic characteristics, adolescents, family

Technical Education

Technical education in Greece has gone through a crisis, especially in recent years. In all European countries, except Mediterranean ones (Italy, Portugal and Spain), the average number of students in technical training is larger than the amount of students in general education, since Europe relies on vocational training and apprenticeships to prepare its workforce for the labor market. In Greece, only 28.6% of students choose technical education, whereas in many European countries, the opposite is the norm: Student's percentage in technical education reaches 70%, while student's percentage for general education reaches 30% (Antoniadis, 1999).

In Greece, the area of technical education is plagued by the prevailing social perception, which puts technical education in a second place, behind general education. Even today, technical education carries the stigma of social inferiority. More specifically, technical education is regarded by the Greek society as an area appropriate for those students who cannot cope with the academic requirements of tertiary education (Palaiokrassas, 2008).

According to Pedagogical Institute (2006), students' profile attending technical education is divided into three categories. The first category, consisted of 10% to 30%, refers to students with low family annual income, steady employment in family environment, immigrants and working people. The second category, consisted of 10% to 30%, refers to students derived from low and middle level classes, with average or good school performance, who may attend undergraduate studies in technological educational institutions. Finally, the third category, consisted of 50% to 70%, refers to students who come from low and middle class, usually immigrant

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Greek people of the same descent, with low school performance, communication problems and indifference towards the field of specialty taught, and these students have already accepted the fact that the educational system has rejected them and their main interest is limited to getting a high school certificate.

Career and Educational Choice

Many theories and models (Roe, 1956; Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006; Ginzberg, 1972; Holland, 1985; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Roberts, 1977; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) have been put forward in an attempt to establish the factors that affect educational and career choices. The primary aim of all these theories is to detect the factors that influence vocational behavior, so that a suitable and effective guidance is provided by the relevant competent authorities. According to the theorists, career and educational choice is the result of educational, socio-economic, family and personality factors. The issue of student's educational choices is one of the most crucial ones in education and society. The realization of student's personal ambitions and wishes, their preferences and interests, as well as their values, appear to play a major part in career choice.

Robert's (1977) model supported that admission to a vocation is defined by the educational system, the family, peer pressure, the social origins and the "structure of the opportunities provided". In his theory, he claims that the basic factor affecting career choice is the "structure of the opportunities provided" rather than personal choice or ambitions. Besides, even personal ambitions are sometimes affected by economic and social structures.

Bryant et al. (2006) developed a multifactor model which deals with the direct and indirect influence of the family environment (e.g., parents, parental roles, parent's profession, etc.) on children's career development. This model shows clearly how different parameters interact and determine students' development. As the model supports, parental behavior is influenced by the socio-economic status of the family, the working conditions and the family type. The socio-economic level of the family affects parental behavior and the messages that children receive for their own career goals (Kounenou, 2010). The social interaction and contact with family members, friends and colleagues provide new opportunities to family and children. Parents also affect children indirectly, as they become role models for them (Middleton & Loughead, 1993). As a result, children reach conclusions regarding their profession and their future by observing their parents' experiences in their work: financial insecurity, or on the contrary, great financial benefits, long working hours, unemployment or pleasure from particular employment (Cinamon, 2001; Galinsky, 2000).

The influence exerted by the family environment almost defines, not only students' career choice, but also their lifestyles as parents affect the emotional and mental development of their offspring, their motives and life values (Liantas, 1996).

School seems to be the second factor which affects the individual longer and more decisively. Students spend an important part of their lives in schools. Its impact on their development is very important, especially through the structure of educational system, the standards and the learning conditions that prevail in it. Studies on educational issues cannot ignore the social environment in which students choose their profession (Kantas & Chatzi, 1991). The economic system is possibly the most powerful social factor, given that, in reality, it is the most defining force in the formation of certain policies. It affects directly decisions and practices as much on the part of the official state as on the part of its members. Random situations cannot be ignored in everyday reality, especially when the economic conditions and consequently, the job market conditions appear to develop substantial instability (Malikiosi-Loizou, 1987).

The present research focuses on exploring the parameters related to high school students' choice concerning either technical schools or general schools for their education. More precisely, the socio-economic profile of the students of both schools will be analyzed in order to explore the social background of each student which may be related to their specific educational decision. Furthermore, this research aims at exploring the possible parameters that could be related to children's choices, such as personal preference, career development, independence, professional stability, achievement from work, immediate job placement, school performance, prestige, salary, school environment, friends, epoch's tendency, financial problems, similar job with a relative, random circumstances, parents' profession and parents' wish.

Method

Research Tool

The data gathering tool for the research was a comprehensive questionnaire made for the purposes of the study. The questionnaire included four areas of interest. The first area refers to student's personal information (age, gender and hometown), the second area refers to parent's characteristics (father's-mother's hometown and educational level), the third area included the parameters that might have affected student's educational choices (financial reasons, parent's wish, career development and professional stability) and the forth area refers to student's perspectives after school graduation (continuation of their studies and type of educational institute).

Participants

The sample of the survey includes students of two schools, one technical high school and one general high school. Ninety-one questionnaires were distributed to the students of technical school (15-24 years old, males 64.8% and females 35.3%) and 107 to the students of general high school (15-20 years old, males 51% and females 44.9%). The research took place in a small town, in the North-West of Greece called Igoumenitsa. Students were picked randomly as random sampling is likely to produce a representative sample (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001).

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were used for describing the basic features of data. *T*-test was used to test for a difference between two independent groups (such as gender) on the means of a continuous variable.

Table 1

Student's Educational Preference

Continuing of studies to	General high school		Technical high school	
	N	Percentage (%)	*N*	Percentage (%)
Will not continue	5	4.7	4	4.4
University	70	65.4	48	52.7
Technological universities	15	14	20	22
Other	17	15.9	19	20.9
Total	107	100	91	100

According to the results, the percentage of immigrants is higher in technical high school (Greek = 91.2%, immigrants = 8.8%) than in general one (Greek = 98.1%, immigrants = 1.9%). Students in technical high

school had full time job in a higher percentage (41.8%) than students in general high school (12.1%). The percentage of students who will continue their studies after high school graduation is higher in general high school (95.3%) than in technical high school (79.1%). The percentage of students who will continue their studies to university after high school is higher in general high school (65.4%) than in technical high school (52.7%) (see Table 1).

Parameters and reasons related to students' decisions concerning general or technical high school.

Table 2
Reasons for Choosing Technical or General High School-Means and Std. Deviations of Numerical Variables

Variable	Means	Std. deviations
Personal preference	4.16	1.09
Career development	3.73	1.23
Independence	3.67	1.36
Professional stability	3.60	1.22
Achievement from work	3.44	1.28
Immediate job placement	3.35	1.35
School performance	3.35	1.30
Prestige	3.14	1.37
Salary	2.72	1.49
School environment	2.53	1.47
Friends	2.35	1.38
Epoch's tendency	2.11	1.38
Financial problems	2.04	1.32
Similar job with a relative	1.86	1.30
Random circumstances	1.82	1.26
Mother's or father's profession	1.60	1.20
Father's wish	1.60	1.08
Mother's wish	1.58	1.03

The most significant factors related to students' choices concerning each type of school are presented. Descriptive statistics were used for describing the basic features of data (means and standard deviations). According to Table 2, the most significant reason was the personal preference of students to follow each type of school. Other powerful reasons were the personal achievement from career development, independence, professional stability, achievement from work, immediate job placement, school performance, prestige and salary. Students' answers showed that their decision was not related to a great extent to financial problems, friends, school environment, epoch's tendency, similar job with a relative, father's-mother's wish and parents' profession.

Table 3
Parameters Related to Educational Choice (t-test)

Variable	General school deviation	High mean/std.	Technical school deviation	High mean/std.	*t*-test	Statistical significance (*p*)
Similar job with a relative	1.58	1.07	2.19	1.48	3.341	$p = 0.001$
Father's wish	1.30	0.73	1.98	1.30	4.412	$p < 0.001$
Random circumstances	1.57	0.94	2.11	1.52	2.916	$p < 0.005$
Epoch's tendency	1.80	1.11	2.49	1.58	3.500	$p = 0.001$

T-test was used to test for a difference between two types of school and gender on the means of a continuous variable in order to find the statistically significant results. A statistical significance has been found between school type and the variables of father's wish ($t = 4.41$, $p < 0.001$, mean for general = 1.30 and mean for technical = 1.98), similar job with a relative ($t = 3.34$, $p = 0.001$, mean for general = 1.58 and mean for technical = 2.19), epoch's tendency ($t = 3.50$, $p = 0.001$, mean for general = 1.80 and mean for technical = 2.49) and random circumstances ($t = 2.92$, $p < 0.005$, mean for general = 1.57 and mean for technical = 2.11) (see Table 3). The results indicate that all the above variables are more significant for technical high school students.

Table 4

Gender Differences in Parameters Related to Educational Choice (t-test)

Variable	Men	Mean/std. deviation	Women	Mean/std. deviation	*t*-test	Statistical significance (*p*)
Similar job with a relative	2.05	1.38	1.58	1.13	2.655	$p < 0.05$
Father's wish	1.75	1.20	1.40	0.85	2.372	$p < 0.05$
My own decision	4.36	1.05	4.73	0.59	3.145	$p < 0.005$
Immediate job placement	3.16	1.40	3.64	1.24	2.468	$p < 0.05$
Friends	2.52	1.40	2.10	1.33	2.121	$p < 0.05$
School performance	3.14	1.33	3.69	1.19	2.987	$p < 0.005$
Personal preference	3.98	1.17	4.41	0.94	2.859	$p < 0.005$
Work achievement	3.29	1.34	3.68	1.16	2.165	$p < 0.05$
Independence	3.41	1.36	4.05	1.27	3.395	$p < 0.001$

Results show that boys' choice was more related to friends' influence ($t = 2.121$, $p < 0.05$, mean for men = 2.52 and mean for women = 2.10), relevance with a relative's profession ($t = 2.655$, $p < 0.05$, mean for men = 2.05 and mean for women = 1.58) and father's wish ($t = 2.372$, $p < 0.05$, mean for men = 1.75 and mean for women = 1.40) than girls'. On the other hand, girls' choice was more related to their personal preferences ($t = 2.859$, $p < 0.005$, mean for women = 4.41 and mean for men = 3.98), immediate job placement ($t = 2.468$, $p < 0.05$, mean for women = 3.64 and mean for men = 3.16), school performance ($t = 2.987$, $p < 0.005$, mean for women = 3.69 and mean for men = 3.14), work achievement ($t = 2.165$, $p < 0.05$, mean for women = 3.68 and mean for men = 3.29) and independence ($t = 3.395$, $p < 0.001$, mean for women = 4.05 and mean for men = 3.41) (see Table 4).

Descriptive statistics were used for describing the basic features of data. There is a difference between the two types of school concerning parent's education. In general high school, there are a higher percentage of university graduate fathers (21.5%) than in technical high schools (4.4%). Mothers of general high school students present higher percentages almost in all educational fields (six-years high school = 49.5%, university = 15.9%, master = 4.7%) in comparison to the majority of mothers of technical high school students (three-years high school = 35.2% and six-years + high school graduates = 38.5%).

Discussion

This research tried to explore the demographic characteristics of adolescents who choose general or technical high school as well as the parameters related to students' decisions and especially the family's influence on children's educational choices. The socio-economic profile of students in general high schools and technical schools was analyzed in order to specify the social background of each student which might had an

impact on their specific educational decision.

The results of this research have shown that there are some differences between students' characteristics of general high schools and technical ones. These differences concern: (1) students' age with students in technical high school to be older than the ones in general high school; (2) students' gender with boys to be almost twice as many as girls in technical high school in comparison to students of general high school; and (3) student's nationality with immigrants' percentage to be higher in technical high school than in general high school. These findings are in line with the results of another Greek study (Katsampouri, Morfopoulos, Palaiorouti, & Pollatou, 2008). In regard to students' intention to continue their studies, there were no worth mentioning differences. However, it is of high importance to mention that the percentage of general high school students who would like to enter university is higher than the one of technical high school students. Furthermore, there is a preference of technical high school students regarding their entrance to technological institutes and vocational training institutes. These results come in contradiction to the ones presented by Katsampouri et al. (2008) who mentioned that a small percentage of technical high school students intended to enter tertiary education. Differences in fathers' educational level between the two types of schools were highlighted. More precisely, in general high school, there are a higher percentage of university graduate fathers than in technical high schools. Student's mothers have higher percentages almost in all educational fields. This finding is in line with similar reports made by the Greek Pedagogical Institute (2006).

In regard to the parameters related to students' educational choice concerning school type, the results showed that the most significant parameter was their personal preference. Other parameters revealed in the present study were personal achievement from career development, independence, professional stability, work achievement, school performance, immediate job placement, prestige and payment. These findings are in line with some of the most significant theories concerning career development (Ginzberg, 1972; Super et al., 1996). Surprisingly, students' answers showed that the main reasons for choosing either type of school were not related to a great extent with financial problems, friends, school environment, epoch's tendency, similar job with a relative, father's-mother's wish and parents' profession. These findings are inconsistent with the results of other Greek researches (Kounenou, in press; Katsampouri et al., 2008).

The analysis of the results revealed a statistical significance between school type and the variables of father's wish, similar job with a relative, epoch's tendency and random circumstances showing that the aforementioned variables were more important for technical high school students. This finding is consistent with the model supported by Bryant et al. (2006).

The results revealed gender differences showing that boys' choice was more related to peer's influence and a relative's profession than girls'. On the other hand, girls' choice was more related to their personal preferences, immediate job placement, school performance, work achievement and independence. Results also showed that boys' choices were more related to their fathers' wish than girls'. This finding is in line with other research result (Koumoundourou, Tsaousis, & Kounenou, 2011) which showed the parental and family impact on young boys' career decision-making ability.

Summarizing the results, we could say that students' educational decision concerning type of school is mainly related to their personal preference, personal achievement for career development, independence, professional stability, school performance, immediate job placement, prestige and payment. Furthermore, it was found that boys' choice was more related to their father's wish than girls'.

Limitations of this study should be taken into consideration: (1) Research sample was rather small and

research took place in a specific small town, and therefore, results cannot be generalized; and (2) The prospective design of the study does not permit any causality suggestions. Further research is needed in order to understand the relationship between gender and educational choices as well as the role of family in students' educational choices concerning type of school.

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