

A STUDY OF THE OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES OF FIRST
GENERATION LEARNERS

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Introduction :

The Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE) has been conducting for the past seven years an action research project aimed at designing remedial measures to boost the scholastic achievement of first generation learners from the scheduled castes. This project studied the various factors that result in low scholastic performance of students belonging to the deprived sections of the society, identified the specific difficulties hindering their academic progress and developed remedial measures to overcome the identified difficulties.

Batches of forty students, each studying in standard VIII of the secondary schools of the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) and belonging to the socio-economically backward classes (scheduled castes), were selected in 1980, 1981 and 1983 and were exposed to remedial treatment at the HBCSE in weekly sessions. It was found that the remedial measures worked well and the scholastic performance of these students could be boosted. Detailed reports on this Talent Search and Nurture Project (TSNP) are available.^{1, 2, 3.}

The study described in this article is concerned with the impact of this programme on nurturing talent and on various behavioural aspects of the project students. Career aspirations being a multifaceted behaviour was considered a first step in such a study. This study aimed at understanding the career choices of project students, the change in their career choices over a period of time as

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well as a variety of factors influential in career selection.

Ginzberg and others (1951)⁴ have proposed a theory of career selection according to which career selection is viewed as a process having developmental sequences. According to this theory, an individual goes through various stages in the process of selecting a career for himself. These stages are : the fantasy stage, the stage of tentative choices and the period of realistic choices. The three stages suggest increasing maturity of choices, made with an awareness of one's potential in addition to the knowledge of the requirements of the chosen career.

Super⁵ has postulated that career development conforms to the principles of human development and can be compared to the life-stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline.

The study conducted at the HBCSE was a preliminary one, aimed at understanding the process of career selection and at learning various factors that influence the selection of a particular career, especially among the socio-economically deprived. An attempt was also made to see how improved scholastic performance affected vocational choice.

Sample :

The sample consisted of thirty-five students out of the forty participating in the TSNP since 1983. Of these, twenty-four were boys and eleven girls. All the respondents were within the age-group of 14-18 years. These students were studying in the 10th standard, which is the final year of schooling and hence important in terms of career selection.

Data Collection :

Individual interviews were conducted to learn about the career choices of these students. An 'interview schedule' was prepared for this purpose which covered all the major areas of inquiry.

Methodology :

The study was conducted in two phases and career

choices at three stages in each individual's life were collected, that is, childhood, intermediate and final.

Phase 1 :

In this phase of the study (conducted in November 1985), students were interviewed, in order to learn about the career choices held by them then, as well as those which they may have held in childhood. Thus two stages of career selection were covered in this phase.

Phase 2 :

This phase was conducted in June-July 1986, after the results of the SSC examinations were out and after the students had taken some steps in view of their futures, such as continuing education, taking up vocational training or a job. These choices were called 'final choices'.

Scale for Occupational Ranking :

For the purpose of this study it was considered essential to prepare a scale to classify and rank occupations. Various classifications of occupations do exist, such as Super's classification (1971)⁶. This classification has categories such as professional, managerial, commercial, skilled and semi-skilled occupations.

For this study, however, it was relevant to know how the respondents viewed various occupations in terms of their desirability or prestige. In order to do this, a list of occupations was given to the respondents to grade on a three-point scale, with the first suggesting high desirability, the second average desirability and the third least desirability. There were 29 occupations in all on this list. The occupations selected covered all the career choices given by the students (20) as well as a few others which had not been selected by the students.

Only 23 out of the 35 students interviewed were available to do this grading. The sum total of the scale values received by each occupation were taken and divided by the number of students, giving the average scale value for the occupation, on the basis of which the occupation could be ranked from 1 to 29.

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Table 1 gives the list of occupations arranged according to their average scale values and their ranks.

Table 1
The Average Scale Value and Ranks of
Different Occupations According to Prestige

Occupation	Average Scale Value	Ranks	Occupation	Average Scale Value	Ranks
Doctor	1.04	1.5	Police	1.69	15.5
Engineer	1.04	1.5	Telephone Operator	1.69	15.5
Sports	1.17	3.5	Farmer	1.73	17.0
Pilot	1.17	3.5	AC/TV Repairer	1.78	19.5
Professor	1.26	5.0	Secretary	1.78	19.5
Computer Operator	1.34	6.5	Hotel Owner	1.78	19.5
Soldier	1.34	6.5	Nurse	1.78	19.5
Mechanic	1.43	8.0	Airhostess	1.86	22.0
Manager	1.47	9.0	Taxi-driver	2.08	23.0
Teacher	1.52	10.0	Clerk	2.26	24.0
Business	1.56	12.5	Grocer	2.30	25.5
Chemist	1.56	12.5	Tailor	2.30	25.5
Lawyer	1.56	12.5	Mill Worker	2.43	27.0
Artist	1.56	12.5	Peon	2.52	28.0
			D. Servant	2.69	29.0

On the basis of the rankings, five categories of occupations could be developed. The categories were:

professional, semi-professional, clerical, semi-skilled occupations or petty trades and organised/unorganised labour. This scale was used in analysing the direction of the change of the changed choices.

Findings :

Questions about the parents' educational and occupational background revealed the extent of deprivation within the family background. Both paternal and maternal education was low, with 69 per cent of mothers having nil to primary education. None of the parents had studied beyond S.S.C.

The occupational levels of both fathers and mothers were also low, with 71 per cent of mothers unemployed or housewives, while 79 per cent fathers were engaged in blue-collar work. Table 2 presents the occupations held by the parents of the respondents.

Table 2
Occupational Status of Parents of Respondents

Kind of Occupation	% of Respondents' Fathers	Kind of Occupation	% of Respondents' Mothers
Professional	3	Professional	--
Clerical	17	Clerical	--
Semi-skilled occupation/ Petty trades	29	Semi-skilled occupations/ Petty trades	9
Organised labour	49	Organised labour	9
Farmer	3	Unorganised labour	11
		Housewife	71
	101		100

The career aspirations reported by the respondents, as those held by them in childhood, were very ambitious.

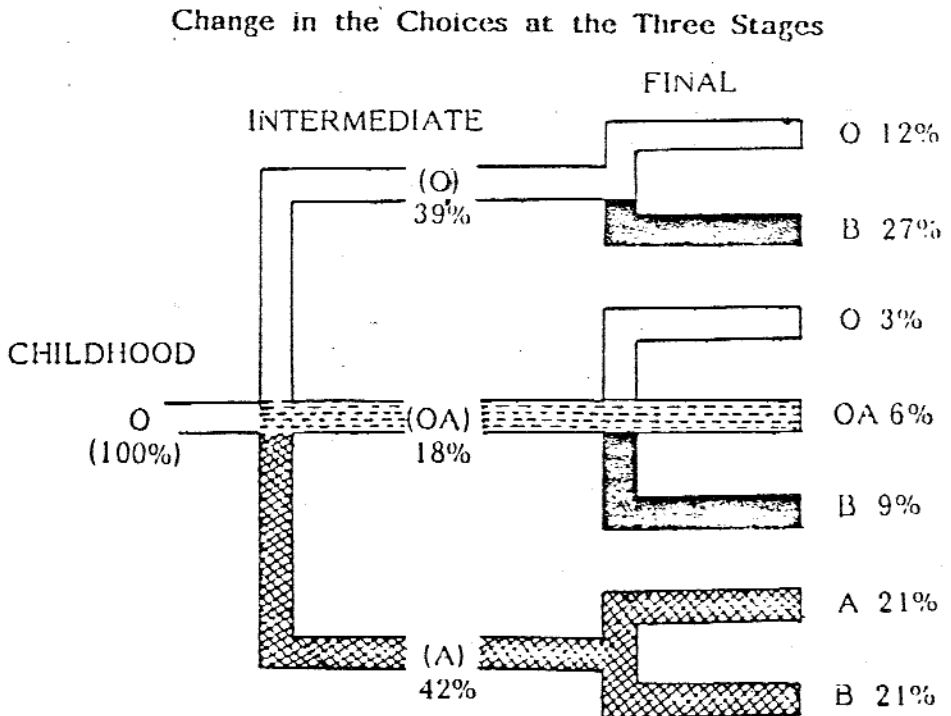
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About 88 per cent of those who reported their childhood choices (two students did not, saying that in childhood they had held no expectations for the future) had chosen prestigious professional careers. White-collar work was preferred to blue-collar work. Thus a majority of the choices were concentrated at the 'Professional' end of the scale.

The career choices also varied with the sex of the respondents. Nursing, law, and clerical careers were chosen only by girls whereas engineering was selected only by boys. Careers chosen by both sexes were medicine and teaching. Thus career choices of childhood reflect sex-role stereotyping prevailing in the society.

These childhood career choices changed at the intermediate and the final stage. The changes were of two types. Some choices were completely given up and new ones were selected or there was a hesitation to give up the original choice, though alternatives were suggested along with the original. Fig.1 shows the change in the choices at the three stages.

Fig. 1



O=Original choice

OA=Original + Alternative (partially changed choice)

A=Changed choice at intermediate stage

B=Changed choice at final stage

The figure shows that a majority of the childhood choices (85%) changed at the final stage, whereas only 12 per cent choices remained completely unchanged over the stages. These four were choices of medical doctor, clerk, teacher, engineer and are depicted in the figure as 000.

Considering the number of respondents who changed their choices, it was interesting to study the direction of the change on the scale of occupations. Table 4 depicts the direction of change as measured in the final stage with reference to the childhood and intermediate choices.

Table 4

Direction of Change of Final Choices As Compared to Intermediate and Childhood Choices

Direction of Change	Of final choices as compared to Intermediate	Of final choices as compared to Childhood
Upwards	9	7
Horizontal	32	21
Downwards	59	71

Table 4 depicts that the change in the choices shows a downward trend. Majority of the childhood choices (71%) and intermediate choices (59%), which changed in the final stage, were changed for choices lower than those held initially.

The lowering of the choices can be demonstrated in yet another way. Table 5 depicts the scale of occupations and the corresponding choices made in the three stages.

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Table 5

Occupations chosen by Respondents in the Three Stages

Percentage of Respondents' Choices

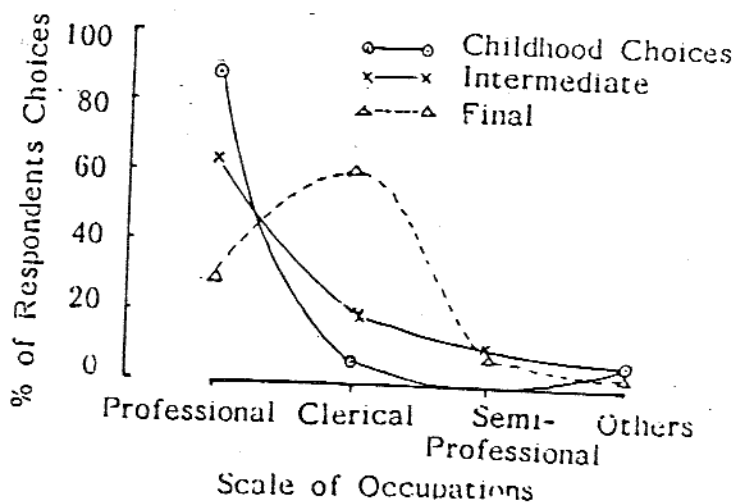
Scale of Occupations	Childhood	Intermediate	Final
Professional	88	63	29
Clerical	6	20	60
Semi-professional	-	11	9
Others	6	6	3
Total	100	100	101

The above table indicates that professional choices decreased, steadily over the three stages, while clerical choices have steadily increased. Thus choices from the top portion of the hierarchical scale (Table 1) were given up in favour of choices belonging to the lower part of this scale.

However, another way to see the same data is through Fig.2 . Fig.2 depicts that the choices in the final stage are spread over all the occupational categories, almost resembling a normal curve, whereas the childhood choices are all concentrated at one end of the scale.

Fig. 2

Respondents choices at three stages
according to the scale of occupation



This lowering of career choices was somewhat unexpected in view of their excellent performance in the S.S.C. examination in mathematics. Table 6 presents the academic performance of project students in comparison with the general population of the students studying in BMC schools. All the three batches of project students, including the third batch which has been studied for career aspirations, have done much better than the general population. It was thus disappointing that the project students should lower their aspirations in spite of their good performance.

Table 6

Comparison of Performance of Students of Batch I, Batch II and Batch III with B.M.C. General Population.

		Percentage of students obtaining			
SUBJECT	GROUP	First Class	Second Class	Third Class	Fail-ures
SCIENCE	Batch I	81 (9)	19(36)	0(24)	0(21)
	Batch II	83(19)	14(36)	3(24)	0(21)
	Batch III	62(14)	27(29)	11(36)	0(21)
MATHS	Batch I	59(10)	22(14)	14(16)	6(59)
	Batch II	67(10)	19(14)	8(16)	6(59)
	Batch III	24 (5)	35 (9)	30(19)	11(67)
ENGLISH	Batch I	31(6)	28(10)	31(31)	9(54)
	Batch II	19(6)	25(10)	50(31)	6(54)
	Batch III	27(7)	21(10)	45(26)	5(57)

(Figures in brackets show % of all the BMC students for comparison).

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Students were asked to enumerate those factors which they considered as influential in changing their career choices. Table 7 gives a list of all the reasons mentioned by the respondents as important in bringing about a change in their choice.

Table 7
Reasons stated by Respondents as having led to a
change in Career Choices

Reasons for change	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Increased awareness	2	9
Family	6	27
Interest in something else	1	5
Failure	4	18
Low marks	1	5
Low marks + family	3	14
High marks	1	5
Finance	1	5
Others	3	14
Total	22	102

The above table reveals that finance, which one would consider a likely barrier to career aspirations, has not been stated by students as an important factor leading to changed choices. In fact, only one student has stated that his career choice had to be changed due to financial reasons. On the other hand, the reasons cited most often by the respondents are the family (41%) and academic performance (41%).

Respondents were also asked to state those influences which had been effective in the selection of the choice at the final stage. Table 8 presents these influences on the career decisions at the final stage.

Table 8

Influences on Career Selection at the Final Stage

Influences	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Family	8	23
Financial Circumstances	2	6
Self decision	9	26
Teachers and Peers	1	3
Family and Peers	3	9
Info + guarantee of job	1	3
Self decision + family	2	6
Self decision + family + teachers	1	3
Self decision + Increased marks	1	3
Family + guarantee of job	2	6
Self decision + guarantee of job	2	6
Failure	1	3
Greater awareness	1	3
Self decision + HBCSE	1	3
Self decision + decreased marks	1	3
Total	35	103

Table 8 also shows the same trend, namely, that finance is mentioned by very few respondents (6% of the sample) as an influence on the final choice. On the other hand, the influences stated most often are that of the family (44% of the sample) and self decision (50% of the sample).

Self-decision and family being the main factors influencing career choices, it was interesting to see how much information the respondents possessed about various career options and the requirements of the careers chosen by them. In this study, it was found that a majority of the respondents (51%) had inadequate information about the careers chosen by them. In fact 39 per cent of the sample suggested that HBCSE should provide, in addition to academic inputs, information about various career options and, if possible, career guidance.

Implications and Conclusions :

The above study revealed that the aspirations held by the family and the self decisions regarding occupations as well as the academic performance of the student are important determinants in occupational selection. An important factor in this regard is the information held by an individual about the academic preparations required for entering a profession, the nature of competence needed to complete a course and the financial backing needed for establishing oneself in a profession (along with information about resources available in a welfare state). This information is seen to be badly needed and in the absence of this input, career choices are often aimed at the safe or the known. Provision of this input to respondents and their families could possibly change this situation.

HBCSE is planning to undertake, with the collaboration of the Government of Maharashtra, a large-scale try-out of this experiment to nurture talent. This experiment will be conducted in a tribal district and will cover more than a thousand students. It is planned to make at the same time systematic attempts to improve the awareness of career opportunities both among the students and their families. This study itself can then be extended to a larger sample with relevant data collected from the parents of respondents also.

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