

Gender Differences in Self-Image, Personality Traits, and Career Decision-Making among Senior High School Students in the Effutu Municipality of Ghana

Joshua-Luther Ndoye UPOALKPAJOR¹

Abstract

This study examined gender differences in self-image, personality traits, career counseling knowledge, and career decision-making among senior high school students in Ghana. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 336 students through structured self-report instruments measuring self-image, personality traits, career counseling knowledge, and career choice factors. Pre- and post-program assessments evaluated the effectiveness of a career counseling intervention. Findings revealed significant gender differences: female students reported higher self-image, whereas males demonstrated higher personality trait scores, greater knowledge of career counseling programs, and stronger social influences on career decisions. However, no significant gender differences were found in the overall influence of personal, economic, academic, and institutional factors on career choice. The career counseling intervention significantly improved students' career knowledge and preparedness. The study concludes that gender-sensitive career counseling programs are essential for enhancing students' self-awareness, career preparedness, and informed decision-making among senior high school students in Ghana.

Keywords: Gender differences, Career decision-making, Self-image, Personality traits

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Career decision-making is a critical developmental task for adolescents transitioning from secondary education to higher education or the workforce. Research by Lent and colleagues (2022) points out that choosing a career does not only impact what you do for a living; it actually plays a big role in academic engagement, employability, and life satisfaction, making it a crucial moment in personal and professional growth. Career decision-making is influenced by personal interests, social expectations, economic considerations, and academic performance. Personal interests, abilities, and self-perceptions guide students toward careers aligned with their strengths and values, while economic considerations such as salary potential, job stability, and growth prospects shape decision-making by emphasizing long-term security (Abe & Chikoko, 2020; Fearon et al., 2018; Norahim, Hassim, & Zin, 2025; Popescu, 2021). Also, social influences, including parental guidance, peer expectations and teacher advice, play a crucial role in shaping career choices. Students often find themselves negotiating their own aspirations with what society expects of them (Owusu et al., 2021; Yean & Chin, 2025). Academic performance of students, especially in subjects aligned to career goals, also inform choices by reflecting aptitude and opening pathways to specialized fields (Dzikri, F., & Maknun, 2022; Shi, 2022).

Self-Image and Personality Traits in Career Decision-Making

In making career choices among students, self-image and personality traits really play a central role. Self-image, which explains how students see themselves like their skills, strengths, and even their social value, can either empower them or hold them back from exploring different career paths (Hoxhaj, Xhani, Kapo, & Sinaj, 2023; Shirima, 2018). For instance, students who have a positive view of themselves often feel more confident and motivated, enabling them to bounce back from setbacks better and pursue careers that align with their interest and capacities (Abdolrezapour, Ganjeh, & Ghanbari, 2023). On the contrary, having a negative self-image can really

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negatively affect career decision-making, like causing indecision and making someone avoid opportunities. It is not just about how they see themselves; it can also make them more vulnerable to what others think (Bacanli, 2006; Spitz et al., 2022). Personality traits, particularly through the lenses of the Big Five model and Holland's RIASEC framework can actually influence career choices quite a bit. They affect how interpersonal interactions, cognitive styles, and preferred environment (Fruyt & Mervielde, 1997; Fruyt & Mervielde, 1999; Usslepp et al., 2020). For instance, characteristics like conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience are often linked to making more proactive and well-informed career decisions. But then there is neuroticism, which might hold someone back from taking risks or exploring new paths.

Gender Differences in Career Decision-Making

Gender plays a pivotal role in this whole mix of factors when we talk about careers. Research shows that males and females often see themselves differently. They have different personality traits, motivations, and ways of responding to social influences, all of which can shape what they aspire to and the choices they make (Dekhtyar et al., 2017; Khraban, T., & Khraban, 2025). Females tend to have a bit more self-awareness and are more sensitive to what society expects of them. They often think things through carefully before making career decisions. However, males focus more on personal competence and economic outcomes (Samek, 2019). These differences are reflected in gendered career patterns, such as the underrepresentation of women in STEM and male-dominated professions, influenced by cultural norms, stereotypes, and perceived role expectations (Chaulagain, 2025; Wang & Degol, 2017; Schmader, 2022). Studies by Owusu et al. (2021) and Obi and Balogun (2025) also show that societal and familial influences, including parental encouragement and peer attitudes, may differentially impact male and female students' confidence and occupational interests.

Research Gap and Current Study

Despite the critical influence of gender on career decision-making, few studies have comprehensively examined gender-specific patterns

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among senior high school students, particularly in contexts where cultural expectations, educational structures, and access to career guidance services vary widely (Belousov, Matyushkina, & Rybakov, 2025; Manu, 2025). This gap limits the ability of educators, counselors, and policy makers to design interventions that account for differences in self-image, personality, and responsiveness to career counseling. Understanding these nuances is essential for fostering equitable and informed decision-making, improving career guidance programs, and supporting students in making choices that align with both their personal aspirations and socio-economic realities.

By integrating insights from self-image, personality traits, career choice factors, and gender studies, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how male and female senior high school students navigate career decisions. Such knowledge can guide the development of targeted, gender-sensitive interventions, enhancing students' self-efficacy, career preparedness, and ability to make well-informed, autonomous career choices.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded primarily in Social Cognitive Career Theory, which posits that career decision-making is influenced by the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and environmental supports or barriers (Lent et al., 2022). The theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding how self-image, personality traits, gender, and social influences shape students' career choices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationships among gender, self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and career choice factors in influencing career decision-making among senior high school students. The framework further demonstrates the role of career counseling interventions in enhancing students' career knowledge and informed decision-making.

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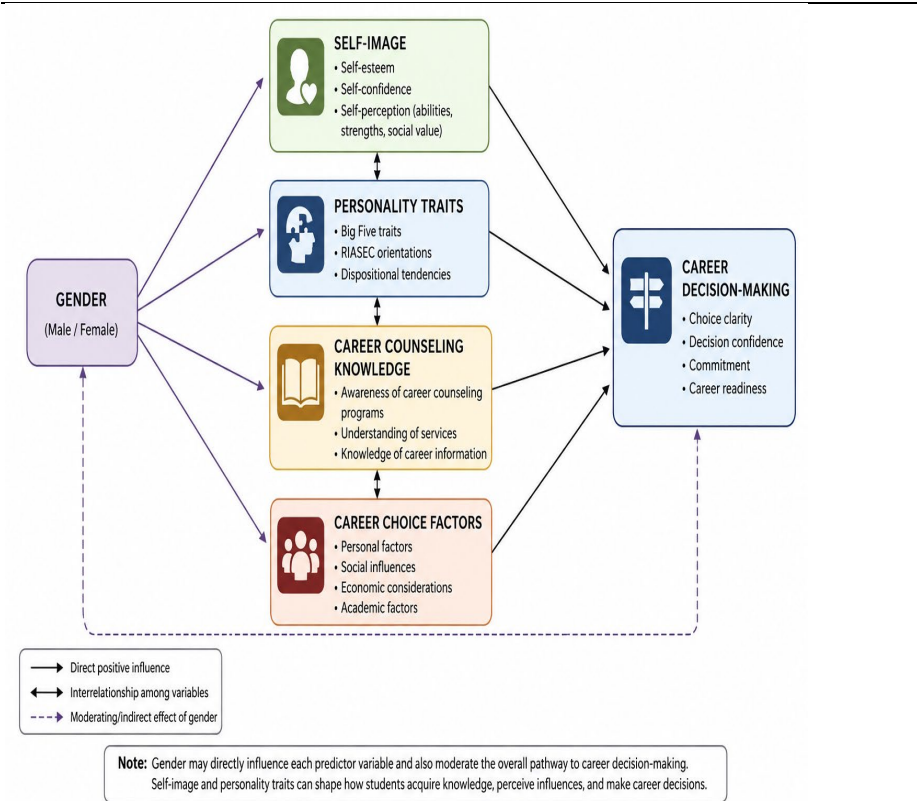


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Gender Differences in Career Decision-Making

The framework of Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model that will guide this study. According to the proposed model, gender may affect one's career decision-making process either directly or indirectly through an individual's self-image, their personality traits, knowledge of career counseling, and the factors affecting the individual's choice of career. A positive self-image, along with adaptable personality traits, is predicted to increase the student's perception of available career opportunities as well as increase their confidence in making the decision about which career to pursue. The knowledge gained from participating in career counseling, and access to other forms of career-related information, are expected to help students make more informed decisions regarding their chosen career paths, while the student's personal, social, economic, and educational characteristics will influence what careers the student prefers and aspires to attain.

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Lastly, it is assumed that the gender of the student is moderating the manner in which these various factors will influence an individual's career decision-making process.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the critical role of career decision-making in shaping future academic and professional trajectories, limited research has explored how gender specifically influences this process in senior high school students. Existing studies often focus on general factors affecting career choices, such as personal interests, social influences, and economic considerations, without distinguishing between male and female perspectives (Hadiyati & Astuti, 2023; Joy & Prakash, 2025). This gap leaves a limited understanding of whether and how males and females differ in confidence, motivations, or susceptibility to social pressures when making career-related decisions.

Moreover, gender-specific patterns in career decision-making are underexplored in many educational contexts, particularly in regions where cultural expectations and societal norms may differently shape male and female students' career aspirations (Angwaomaodoko, 2023; Monde, Kalinda, & Thankian, 2025). For senior high school students, this gap is particularly critical, as they are at a developmental stage where self-awareness, academic exposure, and career guidance converge to influence their choices. Without gender-sensitive insights, career counseling programs may fail to address distinct needs, potentially limiting the effectiveness of guidance interventions and reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes in career paths (Chan, 2022; Stoet & Geary, 2022). In lieu of this, addressing this gap can inform targeted strategies to support equitable, informed, and confident career decision-making among adolescents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine gender differences in career decision-making among senior high school students, focusing on the influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

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1. To examine gender differences in self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and career choice factors.
2. To determine whether males and females differ in the overall impact of personal, social, economic, and academic factors on career choice.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between gender and self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of career choice factors among senior high school students?
2. Do males and females differ in the overall impact of personal, social, economic, and academic factors on their career choice?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

H₁: There are significant gender differences in self-image, personality traits, and knowledge of career counseling programs.

H₂: Gender does not significantly affect the combined influence of career choice factors.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant for educators, school counselors, and policy makers involved in career guidance and adolescent development. By examining gender differences in career decision-making, the research provides insight into how male and female students perceive their self-image, personality traits, and the influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors. Such information enables educators to tailor guidance programs that address the distinct needs of both genders, fostering greater engagement and more informed decision-making among senior high school students.

For career counselors, the study highlights areas where interventions can be strategically applied, including the promotion of self-confidence, awareness of personal strengths, and the integration of

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gender-sensitive approaches in counseling sessions. Counselors can use these findings to develop programs that enhance students' knowledge of career options, provide realistic information about the labor market, and support students in navigating social and familial influences effectively. Policy makers can leverage the results to design or revise educational policies that ensure equitable access to career counseling resources and incorporate gender-responsive strategies in career development programs. Overall, this study contributes to the improvement of career guidance initiatives, ensuring that students are better equipped to make informed, autonomous, and contextually relevant career choices.

METHODOLOGY

The research design, the study area and population, the sample and sampling procedure, the data collection instrument, the data collection protocol, the data processing and analysis, and ethical issues were all covered in the methods chapter.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design to examine gender differences in career decision-making and the influence of various factors on career choice. The descriptive-correlational approach enabled the researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and differences between gender and key variables, including self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). To measure the impact of career counseling programs, pre- and post-program assessments were conducted, allowing for the evaluation of changes in students' knowledge about available career guidance resources. This design facilitated the identification of gender-specific trends and enabled a rigorous comparison of scores across time points, highlighting the effectiveness of the interventions in shaping career awareness and decision-making processes. The use of quantitative measures ensures objectivity and reliability in capturing data relevant to the study's objectives.

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Participants

The study involved a total of 336 senior high school students who participated as respondents, providing a representative sample for examining gender differences in career decision-making. Of the total sample, 230 students were male, accounting for 68.5% of the participants, while 106 students were female, representing 31.5% of the respondents. This gender distribution reflects the demographic composition of the school population and allows for meaningful comparisons between male and female students regarding self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of various factors on career choice. The study was conducted among senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. Inclusion criteria required that students be enrolled in the senior high school program and have sufficient exposure to school-based career counseling activities, ensuring that their responses regarding career decision-making and program knowledge were informed and relevant. The balanced representation of both genders, though skewed toward males, provided an opportunity to investigate gender-specific patterns in career-related attitudes and behaviors, which is central to the objectives of this study.

Instruments

The study employed structured instruments to collect quantitative data on career decision-making among senior high school students, focusing on self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of career choice factors. Each instrument was selected for its ability to capture the targeted constructs accurately and reliably.

The self-image inventory scale measured participants' perceptions of their abilities, confidence, and self-worth through ten statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Items included statements about personal strengths, pride in achievements, and confidence in handling future challenges. Negatively worded items were reverse-scored to ensure accurate assessment of self-image.

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Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to evaluate the internal consistency of the instruments developed for use in this study. The self-image scale has an alpha coefficient of .87 which shows that it has strong internal consistency and is a reliable measure of self-image. The personality traits inventory has an alpha coefficient of .81 which indicates acceptable internal consistency, while the career choice inventory has an alpha coefficient of .85 indicating that it also has strong internal consistency and is a reliable measure of career choice. All three instruments have consistently high internal consistency based on their respective scores and therefore are suitable for use when assessing each construct that is being investigated.

The personality trait inventory assessment consisted of ten items evaluating traits such as sociability, conscientiousness, adaptability, and reflective thinking. Participants indicated their agreement using the same 5-point Likert scale. The inventory allowed the study to examine how individual personality differences may interact with career choice, providing a framework to explore gender-related patterns in personality characteristics relevant to vocational decision-making. This career choice and decision-making inventory instrument focused on students' career planning knowledge, decision-making confidence, and alignment of career choices with personal interests. The ten items addressed clarity of career goals, understanding of educational requirements, and awareness of available career options, including pressures from social influences. The responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale.

Together, these instruments offered a comprehensive evaluation of the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions influencing career decisions. They also provided the basis for pre- and post-program comparisons to assess the impact of career counseling knowledge on decision-making confidence.

Procedures

Data for this study were collected using a structured, multi-step process designed to examine gender differences in career decision-making and the effectiveness of career counseling programs. Initially, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from both students and, where applicable, their

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parents or guardians. Surveys were administered to all 336 senior high school students prior to the career counseling program to assess baseline measures of self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors on career choice.

Following the pre-program assessment, participants engaged in a structured career counseling program, which included activities such as goal-setting workshops, career exploration exercises, discussions on vocational interests, and informational sessions about educational and occupational opportunities. Upon completion of the program, post-program surveys were administered to the same participants to evaluate changes in knowledge and decision-making confidence.

Throughout the data collection process, strict ethical standards were observed. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning codes to participants' responses and securely storing all data. These procedures were intended to maintain the integrity of the study while protecting participants' rights and privacy.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using quantitative statistical techniques to examine gender differences in career decision-making and the impact of career counseling programs on students' knowledge. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarize participants' self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors on career choice. These measures provided an overview of central tendencies and variability across the sample. To assess the effectiveness of the career counseling program, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-program knowledge scores. This analysis determined whether participation in the program resulted in statistically significant improvements in students' understanding of career guidance resources. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between pre- and post-program measures, ensuring that changes were consistent and reliable across participants. Furthermore, independent samples t-tests were used to

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investigate gender differences in self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of career choice factors. These analyses allowed for the identification of significant variations between male and female students, providing insight into gender-specific patterns in career decision-making. All analyses were conducted using standard statistical software, with significance levels set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

This section presents findings on gender differences in career decision-making among senior high school students. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and t-tests examine self-image, personality traits, career counseling knowledge, and influencing factors, highlighting significant gender variations and areas of similarity to inform career guidance practices and interventions.

Table 1 Sex of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	230	68.5
Female	106	31.5
Total	336	100.0

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were male (68.5%), while females represented 31.5% of the sample. This indicates that the number of male respondents was more than twice that of females, reflecting a notable gender imbalance within the study sample. Consequently, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings, particularly when examining gender-related differences in self-image, personality traits, and career choice, as the disproportionate representation may influence the overall results. The unequal gender distribution may also have affected statistical power and the comparability of male and female subgroup analyses.

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Table 2 Perception of Respondents on Self-Image Factors Influencing Career Choice

Statements	Mean	S.D.	Decision
Overall, I feel good about who I am	3.55	.544	Strongly Agree
At times I think I am pretty darn good.	3.52	.500	Strongly Agree
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	3.31	.513	Strongly Agree
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	3.26	.539	Strongly Agree
I feel I do have much to be proud of.	3.22	.522	Agree
I have moments where I clearly see my own usefulness	3.43	.624	Strongly Agree
I recognize my inherent worth and see myself as fully equal to others.	3.27	.585	Strongly Agree
I trust myself.	3.38	.486	Strongly Agree
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am not a failure.	3.33	.472	Strongly Agree
I am very positive myself.	3.19	.531	Agree
I feel of equal value to other people	3.32	.714	Strongly Agree
I take responsibility for my feelings and actions	3.36	.481	Strongly Agree
I learn and grow from my mistakes	3.34	.522	Strongly Agree
I nurture myself with kind, supportive self-talk.	3.34	.474	Strongly Agree
I know I am a person of worth	3.35	.557	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.35	.202	High Self-Image

The research demonstrates that respondents generally held a very positive view of themselves, indicating that most students thought of themselves as competent, worthwhile, and self-assured. Participants indicated high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and resilience as important psychological characteristics that can support successful career development. Therefore, the findings suggest that students may approach career planning with a sense of security in their capabilities and with a positive outlook on their future. Overall, the trend of responding positively to the survey suggests that holding a positive view of themselves may be an excellent launching point for informed and purposeful career selection for senior level students in high school.

Table 3 Perception of Respondents on Personality Traits Influencing Career Choice

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Statements	Mean	S.D.	Decision
I see myself as someone who is a talkative	3.06	.965	Agree
I have a habit of focusing on the negatives in people	1.93	.829	Disagree
I see myself as someone who does a thorough job	3.16	.550	Agree
I see myself as someone living with depression	1.93	.809	Disagree
I am an idea generator	3.22	.560	Agree
I see myself as someone who is reserved	1.68	.537	Strongly Disagree
I consider myself to be a helpful and selfless person	3.29	.528	Strongly Agree
I have a tendency to be a little reckless.	2.22	.881	Disagree
I consider myself to be highly effective at managing stress	3.13	.455	Agree
I see myself as someone who is curious about many different things	3.28	.603	Strongly Agree
I see myself as someone who is full of energy	2.98	.506	Agree
I tend to be the one who initiates conflicts	2.67	.762	Agree
I pride myself on being someone others can count on	2.67	.785	Agree
I hold a lot of tension in my body/mind	1.99	.515	Disagree
I consider myself an inventive person and a deep thinker.	3.40	.526	Strongly Agree
I tend to spark enthusiasm wherever I go	3.09	.421	Agree
I consider myself a forgiving person	3.25	.650	Agree
Organization is an area I'm actively working to improve	2.68	.727	Agree

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Statements	Mean	S.D.	Decision
I have a tendency to worry excessively	2.62	.698	Agree
I possess a highly creative and imaginative mind	3.14	.506	Agree
Overall	2.77	.135	High Level

Respondents tended to view themselves as having good, adaptive personality traits that provide opportunities for developing their careers. The majority of traits related to curiosity, creativity, being responsible, working together, and problem-solving were prevalent; therefore, students seemed to be oriented toward the future and taking the next steps in their career planning. However, the existence of negative emotional tendencies, such as feeling depressed or being excessively anxious or negative about things, appeared to be less commonly reported by respondents. In general, these results indicate that students may possess a broad range of balanced personality traits that will enable them to be more adaptable in the work environment, more effective in communicating with others, and more confident in making decisions regarding their careers.

Table 4 Knowledge on Career Counseling Programs in Senior High Schools of Respondents

Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
Existing career counseling programs adequately address the specific needs of Senior High School students	3.51	0.59	Strongly Agree
The career counseling services offered to Senior High School students effectively help them make informed career choices	3.42	0.54	Strongly Agree
Existing career counseling programs provide practical advice and support that meets the needs of Senior High School students	3.27	0.50	Strongly Agree
I believe that the career counseling programs have improved my self-awareness regarding career goals	3.53	0.63	Strongly Agree

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Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
Career counseling services offer valuable resources and tools for helping Senior High School students explore various career options	3.46	0.59	Strongly Agree
I feel that the existing career counseling programs contribute positively to my self-image and self-confidence	3.26	0.72	Strongly Agree
Career counseling programs effectively address the unique challenges faced by graduate students in career planning	3.01	0.57	Agree
Senior High School students find that the career counseling programs help them overcome self-doubt when making career decisions	3.30	0.71	Strongly Agree
Strategies such as goal-setting and action planning are emphasized in existing career counseling programs for Senior High School students	3.38	0.62	Strongly Agree
Technology and online resources are integrated well into existing programs for modernized career counseling for Senior High School students	3.34	0.72	Strongly Agree
Assessments and evaluations are used effectively to track the progress of Senior High School students	3.20	0.66	Agree
Soliciting feedback and continuous improvement methods are in place for existing career counseling programs to enhance effectiveness for Senior High School students	3.23	0.71	Agree
Overall	3.32	0.39	Very High Extent of Knowledge

The study confirmed that participants had good, broad understanding and good awareness of the content of available school-based career support services. Additionally, the majority of participant students believed that the programmes improved their ability to understand themselves, plan their future careers and make informed decisions related to careers. Furthermore, participants viewed school-based career counselling services as being useful and supportive to their

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ability to investigate various options for careers and develop confidence in their choice of careers; and therefore school-based career counselling is crucial for helping students become prepared to make informed choices about their future careers.

Table 5 Pre- and Post-Program Knowledge of Career Counseling Programs: Paired-Samples Statistics

Measure	Pre-Program Mean	Post-Program Mean	Pre SD	Post SD	Pre SE Mean	Post SE Mean
Knowledge on Career Programs	40.32	41.74	4.89	4.25	0.46	0.40

The results of this study demonstrate that students who participated in this intervention developed an increased understanding of what career counseling interventions are all about, as well as how they can assist students in developing their career plan and finding jobs. Additionally, The increased knowledge of students after completing the program indicates that this intervention has had a very positive impact on student awareness of the various types of resources available to help in their decision making and obtain information regarding career and job options. Finally, the results indicate that students who participated in a structured counseling intervention will continue to be better prepared to make informed decisions regarding their future careers.

Table 6 Pre- and Post-Program Knowledge of Career Counseling Programs: Correlation

Measure	N	r
Knowledge on Career Programs	115	0.652

According to this study's results, there is an evident link demonstrating a high degree of correlation between students' levels of knowledge prior to participating in a career counselling intervention versus their corresponding knowledge levels after completing the same intervention. This demonstrates relatively stable patterns of

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individual student learning as they progressed through the activities associated with the career counselling programme. Therefore, these findings indicate that students who possessed greater levels of prior knowledge about career counselling concepts tended to have maintained higher levels of understanding following completion of the career counselling intervention as well. As such, these results affirmed the validity of the career counselling interventions' (career counselling programme outcomes) and validated the fact that the career counselling programme had a substantial positive effect on the amount of knowledge students obtained regarding various subjects associated with careers.

Table 7 Pre- and Post-Program Knowledge of Career Counseling Programs: T-Test

Measure	Mean Differen ce	SD	SE Mean	95% CI	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Knowledge on Career Programs	1.42	3.86	0.36	[-2.13, - 0.70]	3.94	114	< .001

Through a statistical analysis of these collected data sets, it was determined that Career Intervention improved the Student's Knowledge about Career counseling programs. In addition, by participating in structured activities, the student became aware of Career counseling; increased their understanding of Career counseling and improved their preparedness for making a Career decision. This study's results support the effectiveness of School-based Career Counseling Intervention to promote senior high school students' capacity to make informed Career Planning decisions.

Table 8 Comparison on Career Choice of Respondents when Grouped According to Gender

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Factor	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Self-Image	Male	3.32	0.202	-4.054	<0.001
	Female	3.41	0.186		
Personality Traits	Male	3.04	0.278	4.501	<0.001
	Female	2.90	0.279		
Knowledge on Career Counseling Program	Male	3.35	0.399	2.001	0.046
	Female	3.26	0.378		
Personal Factors	Male	3.43	0.731	0.564	0.573
	Female	3.38	0.806		
Economic/Environmental Factors	Male	2.94	0.556	0.082	0.935
	Female	2.93	0.645		
Social/Influential Factors	Male	2.50	0.824	2.077	0.039
	Female	2.30	0.804		
Academic/Institutional Factors	Male	2.74	0.727	0.500	0.617
	Female	2.70	0.805		
Overall	Male	2.90	0.555	1.116	0.265
	Female	2.83	0.604		

The magnitude of gender-related differences across factors was calculated using Cohan's *d* (effect size). Results showed a moderate effect size for self-image ($d=0.46$) and personality ($d=0.50$) as this indicates a statistically significant difference between men and women regarding their self-image and personality. The effect sizes on the other hand were lower in the areas of knowledge of career counselling programs ($d=0.23$) and social/influential factors regarding career choice ($d=0.24$). This would describe a smaller degree of difference between men and women. An effect size that is negligible would describe the areas of personal factors ($d=0.07$), economic/environmental factors ($d=0.02$), academic/institutional factors ($d=0.05$), and total influence on career choice factors ($d=0.12$). This indicates very little differences between men and women in these areas. The results indicate that gender-related differences occur with respect to career decision-making variables. Female students tend to

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have a higher degree of self-perception and confidence compared to male students, while male students tend to exhibit a significantly higher level of perceived competence in personality traits and also exhibit a greater tendency to engage with career counseling resources. Male students were influenced by social factors such as parents, peers, and teachers to a larger extent than female students. However, while gender defines some aspects of career development for both genders, a similar pattern of influences will exist across both genders in terms of personal, economic, academic, and institutional influences on their overall career decision-making.

Table 9 Influence of the Factors in Respondents Career Choice

Factors	Mean	S.D.	Decision
My personal interests and hobbies	3.57	.822	Highly Influential
My natural skills and talents.	3.44	.963	Highly Influential
My personality type	3.24	.889	Moderately influential
The desire for a fulfilling career.	3.39	.843	Highly Influential
Personal Factors	3.41	.755	Highly Influential
The potential for a high salary.	3.27	.977	Highly Influential
Job security and stability.	3.33	.872	Highly Influential
Availability of jobs.	3.12	.929	Moderately influential
Future earning potential and growth.	3.30	.800	Highly Influential
Availability of financial aid.	2.57	.901	Moderately influential
The prestige and social status of the career.	2.53	.949	Moderately influential
Work-life balance offered by the career.	2.79	.866	Moderately influential

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Factors	Mean	S.D.	Decision
Opportunities for travel and relocation.	2.63	1.079	Moderately influential
The overall work environment.	2.89	.994	Moderately influential
Economic/Environmental Factors	2.94	.584	Moderately influential
Influence from my parents/guardians.	2.09	1.054	Slightly Influential
Influence from friends and peers.	2.12	.895	Slightly Influential
Influence from teachers.	2.62	1.105	Moderately influential
Success stories of role models.	2.91	1.023	Moderately influential
Social/Influential Factors	2.44	.822	Slightly Influential
My academic performance in specific subjects.	2.97	.928	Moderately influential
Career counseling received at school.	2.60	.984	Moderately influential
Work experience.	2.60	1.063	Moderately influential
Academic/Institutional Factors	2.73	.751	Moderately influential
Overall	2.88	.571	Moderately influential

According to the findings, intrinsic motivations appear to be the main reason influencing students in deciding which careers to follow, especially those related to their interests and abilities that allow them to have a rewarding and fulfilling career. While factors such as job security and future job opportunities are also relevant, they rank second in priority after personal interests or drives. Factors such as families (i.e., parents), friendships, and teachers did not have as strong an influence on students' career choice determining what to do with their education; instead, the emphasis appears to have shifted from following the wishes of their parents or peers toward pursuing one's own career aspirations. Students' academic experiences, along with the support they receive at the institution, are important to their decision-making about which career path to take but play a moderate role in influencing students' choice of careers, thereby serving a

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supportive but complementary role in the process of choosing a career. Thus, it appears that the process of selecting or choosing a career among high school students consists mainly of a combination of self-directed aspirations and realistic considerations for career advancement.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted significant gender differences in self-image, personality traits, and knowledge of career counseling programs. Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences for self-image ($t(334) = -4.05, p < .001$), personality traits ($t(334) = 4.50, p < .001$), and knowledge of career counseling programs ($t(334) = 2.00, p = .046$), indicating that females reported higher self-image, while males rated their personality traits and program knowledge higher. Thus, H_1 was supported. Additionally, hypothesis 2 proposed that gender would not significantly affect the combined influence of career choice factors. The overall comparison showed no significant difference ($t(334) = 1.12, p = .265$), suggesting that although individual factors differ by gender, the aggregate influence of personal, social, economic, and academic factors on career decisions is similar for males and females. Therefore, H_2 was also supported.

Summary

The analysis of career decision-making among senior high school students revealed both significant gender differences and areas of similarity across key variables. Hypothesis 1, which predicted significant gender differences in self-image, personality traits, and knowledge of career counseling programs, was supported. Female respondents reported significantly higher self-image ($M = 3.41, SD = 0.19$) compared to males ($M = 3.32, SD = 0.20; t(334) = -4.05, p < .001$), indicating greater confidence and positive self-perception in evaluating career options. In contrast, males rated their personality traits higher ($M = 3.04, SD = 0.28$) than females ($M = 2.90, SD = 0.28; t(334) = 4.50, p < .001$, reflecting a perception of stronger

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personal characteristics relevant to career success. Males also demonstrated higher knowledge of career counseling programs ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.40$) than females ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.38$; $t(334) = 2.00$, $p = .046$) and reported greater influence from social factors, including parents, peers, teachers, and role models ($M = 2.50$ vs. 2.30 ; $t(334) = 2.08$, $p = .039$).

Hypothesis 2, which posited that gender would not significantly affect the combined influence of career choice factors, was also supported. No statistically significant gender differences were observed for personal factors, economic/environmental factors, academic/institutional factors, or the overall influence of career choice factors, suggesting that both males and females similarly weigh intrinsic motivations, financial prospects, academic experiences, and institutional support when making career decisions.

Overall, these findings indicate nuanced gender-specific patterns: females exhibit higher self-perception, males perceive stronger personality traits and social influence, yet both genders approach career decision-making with comparable attention to the aggregate set of influencing factors, confirming the importance of gender-sensitive interventions without assuming differential overall engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how personal, social, economic, and academic factors influence career decision-making among senior high school students, with particular attention to gender differences. Consistent with prior research, personal factors emerged as the most influential domain in shaping career decisions, with participants identifying personal interests, natural talents, and the desire for a fulfilling career as primary motivators (Abe & Chikoko, 2020; Nadaan, 2022). This aligns with the social cognitive career theory, which emphasizes that self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and personal values are central to occupational choice. The findings may also reflect the increasing emphasis on individual autonomy and self-development among Ghanaian adolescents, particularly within rapidly changing educational and economic contexts. Participants' high ratings for personal factors

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suggest that students exercise agency in aligning career aspirations with their strengths and goals, reflecting proactive decision-making. Economic and environmental factors, including job security, future earning potential, and salary considerations, were moderately influential, corroborating earlier studies that highlight adolescents' awareness of the practical implications of career choices (Atangongo, Teye-Kwadjo, & Larry-Afutu, 2024; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). While these factors are important, they were secondary to personal motivations, suggesting that students prioritize intrinsic satisfaction alongside financial stability. Academic and institutional factors were also moderately influential, indicating that school-based resources, academic performance, and exposure to experiential learning contribute to informed decision-making, though they are supplementary to intrinsic and economic considerations (Mwantimwa, 2021). Social and influential factors, including parental, peer, and teacher guidance, were rated as slightly influential overall, reflecting a more limited role compared to personal and economic factors. However, gender analysis revealed that males perceived social influences as more impactful than females, supporting studies that suggest males may rely more on external guidance or view social networks as integral to career decision-making (Mansour, 2025; Samek, 2019).

Significant gender differences were observed in self-image, personality traits, and knowledge of career counseling programs. Females reported higher self-image than males, indicating stronger confidence and positive self-perception in evaluating career options, consistent with findings that adolescent girls often exhibit heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to personal and social expectations (Lv et al., 2022; Ramaci et al., 2017). In contrast, males rated their personality traits higher, including attributes such as creativity, enthusiasm, and reliability, suggesting greater self-perceived capability in traits linked to career success (Fernández, Ryan, & Begeny, 2023). Additionally, males demonstrated slightly higher knowledge of career counseling programs, which may reflect greater exposure or active engagement in school-based guidance activities. These gender-specific patterns underscore the importance of tailoring

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career guidance interventions to address both self-perception and skill awareness across genders.

Overall, the findings highlight that while intrinsic motivations dominate career choice, gender differences in self-image, personality traits, and career counseling knowledge influence how students interpret and utilize these factors. Integrating these insights can inform gender-sensitive counseling strategies, ensuring that both male and female students receive targeted support to make informed and confident career decisions.

Comparison with Previous Studies

This research demonstrates that factors influencing adolescents' career choices are similar to those found in the literature. Adolescents' own motivational beliefs, their environment and social networks all play a role in shaping career decisions. Based on Social Cognitive Theory of Career Development, the strongest predictor of career choice for the participants in this study was their own interests, abilities, and desire to be fulfilled in their career. As part of this process, self-efficacy and personal agency were major components of their vocational development (Lent, Christian, & Boucher, 2022). Similar findings were documented by Abe and Chikoko (2020) and Nadaan (2022) in their studies that indicate that adolescents pursue careers that align with their objectives based on their perceived strengths and values.

Additionally, participants' consideration of economic factors (e.g., salary potential and job security) corroborates findings by Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) and Santos, Oliveira, and Ferreira (2023), who state that adolescents consider intrinsic career interests in conjunction with socioeconomic realities. Consistent with previous studies (Lv et al., 2022; Ramaci et al., 2017), female participants reported having a more positive self-image than their male counterparts and have greater reflexive and self-aware decision-making skills. Conversely, male students indicated having greater knowledge about career guidance programs and reported a greater understanding of career development than did the females, consistent with the findings of Sharma (2024) and Fernández, Ryan, and Begeny (2023), who noted that males view themselves as more competent in regard to careers and are more likely to pursue vocational guidance.

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Although males perceived social influences as having a greater impact than females, this study found no significant gender differences in terms of overarching decision-making processes. Therefore, it appears that while gender continues to shape adolescents' perceptions and responses to career-related influences, it does not appear to have an impact on the overall structure of decision-making related to career choice (e.g., factors contributing to decision making, and what constitutes career success).

Furthermore, the finding that parents, peers, and teachers were perceived as having a lower level of influence compared to intrinsic motivation suggests that adolescents are gradually moving toward an individualized model for career planning rather than a model prescribed by social institutions. This finding is somewhat contradictory to the findings of Owusu et al. (2021) and Solbes-Canales, Valverde-Montesino, and Herranz-Hernández (2022), both of whom found a strong influence from parents and peers on adolescents in regard to their careers. Nevertheless, the finding that females view social influences less favorably than males reaffirms the influence of gender on vocational développement among different groups. Overall, this study supports previous research by highlighting both gender differences and similarities in the decision-making process for career choices and provides an opportunity for developing gender-sensitive and student-centred career counselling interventions.

Implications for Career Counseling

The findings of this study carry significant implications for educators, career counselors, and policy makers seeking to enhance career decision-making among senior high school students. The observed gender differences in self-image, personality traits, and knowledge of career counseling programs suggest that interventions must be tailored to address the unique needs of male and female students. Female students' higher self-image indicates strong confidence in their abilities, which can be leveraged by educators to encourage engagement in non-traditional career fields, such as STEM and leadership roles, where societal stereotypes may limit participation (Amponsah & Mohammed, 2019; Ertl, Luttenberger, & Paechter, 2017; Wrigley-Asante, 2022). Conversely, male students' higher

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ratings in personality traits and career counseling knowledge highlight the importance of reinforcing self-awareness and reflective practices to ensure that career decisions align with personal interests and intrinsic motivations rather than social conformity (Fernández et al., 2023).

For career counselors, these findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive approaches. Programs should integrate activities that enhance self-image and confidence for both genders while providing targeted interventions that strengthen underdeveloped areas, such as encouraging females to engage more actively with counseling resources and helping males recognize the value of reflective career planning (Ansong et al., 2019). Counseling strategies could include mentorship programs, workshops on self-efficacy, goal-setting exercises, and personality assessments that guide students in understanding how their traits align with potential career paths.

Policy makers can use these insights to ensure that career guidance policies are equitable and inclusive. Investment in school-based career counseling programs should prioritize accessibility, integration of technology, and ongoing training for counselors to address gender-specific needs. Policies should encourage programs that provide experiential learning opportunities, career fairs, and exposure to role models across a range of professions, mitigating the impact of traditional gender norms and promoting informed decision-making for all students (Amoah et al., 2020; Awoniyi & Jokotagba, 2025).

Overall, the study suggests that structured, gender-responsive interventions can enhance the effectiveness of career guidance by supporting students' self-awareness, informed decision-making, and alignment of career choices with both personal strengths and socio-economic opportunities. Such approaches can foster equitable access to career development resources, enabling adolescents to make autonomous, confident, and well-informed decisions about their professional futures.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into gender differences in career decision-making among senior high school students, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of 336

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students from a specific set of schools, with males comprising 68.5% of the respondents. This gender imbalance and the limited geographic and institutional scope may reduce the generalizability of the findings to all senior high school students in Ghana or other contexts.

Second, the study relied on self-report measures for assessing self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and the influence of career choice factors. Self-reported data may be affected by social desirability bias, with participants potentially overestimating positive attributes or career readiness. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of most analyses limits causal interpretation of the relationships among study variables. This could influence the accuracy of the reported gender differences and the perceived effectiveness of counseling interventions.

Lastly, the study's pre- and post-program design provides only short-term insight into changes in knowledge and perceptions. Limited longitudinal data restricts understanding of how these factors translate into actual career outcomes over time. Longitudinal follow-ups would be necessary to evaluate the sustained impact of career counseling programs and gender-specific decision-making patterns (Fernández et al., 2023).

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following are recommended:

1. Educational institutions should implement gender-responsive career counseling interventions tailored to differences in self-image, personality traits, and career preparedness. For example, programs for female students could emphasize self-efficacy, confidence-building, and exposure to non-traditional career paths, while programs for male students could focus on reflective decision-making and aligning personality traits with career goals.
2. Given that males reported higher knowledge of career counseling programs than females, schools should increase access and awareness of available career guidance services for all students. Strategies may include workshops, career fairs, online resources, and mentorship programs to ensure both genders actively engage with counseling interventions,

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promoting informed decision-making and alignment of career choices with personal interests and competencies.

3. Schools should link career counseling with academic performance and experiential learning opportunities such as internships, project-based learning, and subject-specific career workshops in order to complement intrinsic motivations and economic considerations. This approach helps students contextualize their skills and interests in real-world scenarios, fostering better decision-making while addressing gaps in knowledge and self-awareness across genders.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was on gender-based differences between senior high school students in career choices. The areas explored were self-image, personality traits, knowledge of career counseling services, and factors associated with career choices. The results indicate that there are clear gender differences. Females had higher self-image scores than males did, while males had higher scores on personality traits, knowledge of career counseling programs, and perceived social influences on their career choice. Despite these differences, the same patterns were found for both genders in terms of the four components that they considered when making their career choice. Participation in the career counseling initiative significantly increased the students' knowledge and readiness for making their career decisions.

From a theoretical perspective, the results support Social Cognitive Career Theory, in that they demonstrate how the individual's perceptions about him/herself, his/her personal characteristics, the environment in which he/she lives, and the availability of career guidance all interact to influence the individual's choice of a career. Further, this study indicates that gender is a significant moderator of these influences, supporting the need for career development research and practice to consider the experiences of individuals based on gender.

From a practical standpoint, this study highlights the necessity for gender-sensitive career counseling programs in senior high schools. Educators and counselors can assist students by providing support for

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self-awareness and developing confidence through the provision of access to accurate career information and promoting informed and autonomous decision making. The addition of mentorship, experiential learning opportunities, and inclusive guidance interventions will better prepare students to align their career goals with their skills, interests, and socio-economic realities.

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