

**Career choice and satisfaction across ages and rankings in academia:****A review of literature****Eilizabeth Olowookere<sup>1</sup> Simon Umukoro<sup>2</sup> & D.O Omonijo<sup>3</sup>****<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Lagos, Nigeria****<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Nigeria****Abstract**

Effective manpower development is a major requirement for economic sustainability and national development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The academia is saddled with the responsibility of producing a quick-witted and proactive workforce that will help chart the path for advancement in the global economy. However, this can only be achieved through the services of highly committed academics across the ivory towers. In recent times, factors associated with career choice and career satisfaction appear to be strong determinants of commitment among academics in developing countries like Nigeria. Furtherance to this, the current paper argues that high levels of unemployment in the nation accounts for the influx of young academics into academia as a last resort, rather than a vocation. On the contrary, many of the older academics might have chosen this career path out of passion and a need to invest in younger generations. The paper posited that high-quality education will depend greatly on a good person-career match of academic staff in the ivory towers.

**Keywords:** Career, Choice, Satisfaction, Age, Academia, Rankings. Academics, Ivory Towers, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

In this globalised economy, effective manpower development has become a major requirement for economic sustainability and national growth in the 21st century. As science and technology advance, it has become imperative to develop competent manpower to help navigate the new frontiers and chart the paths to progress. Nations of the world are now in dire need of proactive and resourceful manpower for continued survival and relevance in the world market. This is as a result of the constantly evolving world economies and the importance of embracing the new technologies with matching competencies. For instance, the Nigerian government has noted the huge gap between available manpower and the needed skills in the labour market (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, 2017). According to the Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education, Arch. Sonny Echono (Vanguard, November 11, 2021), the reason majority of the youth population is unemployed is simply because they lack needed skills in the labour market.

To bridge this gap, academia, through quality education, has been saddled with the responsibility of producing a qualified workforce that will help chart the path for advancement in the global economy. However, the achievement of this feat requires unparalleled levels of commitment on the part of academics across the ivory towers. In corroboration, Shrestha (2019), noted that teachers' job satisfaction and commitment is a requirement for elevated academic success in schools. Also, Pathardikar, *et al.* (2016) reported a relationship between affective commitment and career satisfaction. Furthermore, Dorasamy and Letoane (2015) suggested that the achievement of organizational goals depends largely on employees' satisfaction.

Committed academics are most likely those who are satisfied with the choices and outcomes of their careers. This may be mostly true of older and late-career academics; they are those who seem to consider the profession to be their calling and life passion. On the contrary, many early and mid-career academics might have joined the academia as a last resort for survival in the face of economic hardship and massive unemployment. In corroboration, Dyrbye, *et al.* (2013) reported that early-career physicians demonstrated the lowest satisfaction with their career choice. Similarly, Ssesanga and Garrett (2005) found that age exerted a significant influence on

teaching satisfaction. Furthermore, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs suggested that the most basic human needs (needs necessary for survival such as physiological, safety, and belongingness needs) might have driven many young people into taking up lecturing jobs just to keep body and soul together. This has serious implications for the level of satisfaction experienced and the commitment demonstrated towards the career. Likewise, older and late-career academics may be considered to be motivated by esteem and self-actualization needs.

In a nutshell, the much-needed high-quality education and manpower development require the services of passionate and committed academics across age groups and rankings. Although, studies have identified some of the factors associated with employees' satisfaction and work attitudes to include recognition, remuneration, opportunities for career growth, training and development, organizational policies, and workload among others (Liebenberg & Barnes, 2004; Dorasamy & Letoane, 2015), not much effort has been made to uncover underlying influences on career choice and the resultant effect on career satisfaction across ages and rankings in the academia.

The motivation to choose the lecturing profession and the satisfaction experienced in the career may be key determinants of pro-social work behaviours and commitment. By implication, academics who chose the profession, because it matches their self-concept, will be more willing to make sacrifices and commit themselves to excellent work performances. Therefore, it is necessary to explore career choices and career satisfaction among the different groups of academics. To this end, this paper explored theories of career choice and development across age groups and rankings within academia. Specifically, this paper explored the concepts of career choice and career satisfaction concerning ages and rankings in academia, and the theories of career development.

## **2. Career Choice and Career Satisfaction**

Maslow (1970) classified human needs into five major categories in the order of priorities, from basic survival needs to growth and esteem needs. The tension created by these needs drives individuals to engage in different economic activities, known as jobs. A job is a set of activities routinely carried out in exchange for payment. It is often referred to as one's trade, occupation,

profession, vocation, or career. While an individual's job may either be a trade (a line of business), an occupation (an economic activity one engages in most of the time), a vocation (a calling or passion), or a profession (an occupation requiring specialised skills or training), they all qualify to be called a career based on years of engagement, training, and developments made in that field.

A career is defined as a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievements, especially in public, professional, or business life (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2002). It may be deemed as a description of a person's job history, including the series of jobs done and the progress made to date. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs Theory, everyone seeks survival and progresses through the needs hierarchy to achieve self-actualization. The urgency of the needs may influence individuals' career choices, as they mostly end up choosing the available and not the desirable. The concept of career choice refers to an individual's selected field of endeavour out of available alternatives. The more these individuals progress towards self-actualization, the more they are satisfied with their choice of career.

Career satisfaction is a positive emotion and sense of fulfillment that stems from one's economic engagements over the years. People who are satisfied with their careers experience a positive feeling of happiness and fulfillment and vice versa. These feelings are usually occasioned by attributes of the person, the job/career, and those of the organisations. According to Locke (1976) cited in Tatar (2020), work context, compensation and benefit, awards and recognition, and key aspects of organizational climate are aspects of jobs that influence career satisfaction. Similarly, Khaleque and Chowdhury (1984) found that the job/career satisfaction of the top managers was mostly determined by the characteristics of the work.

Beyond the characteristics of the jobs and the organisations' contributing to employees' work-related feelings and attitudes, attributes of the employees such as their values, interests, and capabilities are also strong determinants of career satisfaction and work behaviours. According to Ginsberg's (1951) early assumptions about career development, while people seek to match their interests, capabilities, and values to aspects of the jobs under consideration, they are often driven to make compromises as a result of the realities of the labour market. For instance, the

high levels of unemployment in many developing nations of the world might explain the massive influx of young people into the lecturing career as a last resort, rather than a vocation. Thus, the motive behind career choices may provide valid explanations for individuals' career experiences and attitudes.

### **Ginsberg's Theory on Career Development**

Career development may be described as the entire activities that make up a person's career exploration, establishment, progress, and fulfillment throughout their working lives. One of the earliest theories on career development was propounded by Ginzberg, *et al.*(1951).They investigated the motives behind career choices among privileged children, who had the free will to choose their careers. It was assumed that while children of lower-class families might be forced into certain professions by their life chances and realities, the children of upper-middle-class families are mostly insulated from such interferences and are at liberty to make their career choices.

This theory affirmed that individuals' career choices are determined by their values, emotions, level, and kind of education, and environmental pressures. At the initial stage of the theory, Ginzberg *et al.* (1951) opined that persons seek to match their values, interests, and capabilities to their career choices, and when this is not feasible, they are willing to make compromises. They identified the three stages of occupational choice to include: fantasy, tentative, and realistic stages. The first stage is the fantasy stage, where the person is still a child between the ages of 0 to 11 years old. This child through observational learning begins to imagine himself/herself in different occupations available in his/her environment; his/her play becomes work-oriented and he/she begins to fantasize about work life.

The second stage is the tentative stage, which begins at the onset of adolescence and spans this period (12-17 years). Individuals, at this stage, become conversant with the requirements of work and begin to find their footing in the world of work. There are four sub-stages attached to this period, and these are interests (individuals determine their preferences); capacity (individuals ensure that their interests match their capabilities); values (starts around age 15 when individuals begin to appreciate jobs that allow them to express and live out their values); and transition

(there is a fusion of values, interests, and capabilities as the individuals demonstrate their freedom of choice and take responsibilities for decisions made).

The third and last stage is the realistic stage, which starts at 18 years and runs into the early 20s. At this stage, individuals become abreast of available job opportunities, develop personal values, and try to fit themselves into the most suited option among many alternatives. This takes a three-staged process that includes: exploration, crystallisation, and specification. The exploration is the period after secondary school, when individuals make career choices from available alternatives, but keep an open mind for better opportunities like further training and job openings. Crystallisation was regarded as the crux of the decision-making process. It is the stage, where individuals achieve clarity in their career paths and demonstrate commitment to a particular career. The climax of the realistic stage is specification, the stage when individuals decide to specialize in an aspect of their chosen careers.

In later developments, this theory stated that occupational decision-making is a lifelong process in the pursuit of self-actualization. This may sometimes warrant individuals to change careers in mid-life or start a new career even after retirement. Although, pupils in elementary schools are introduced to a variety of careers during career day programmes, lecturing is not a career that is very familiar to children at this early stage of career development. They are more familiar with the teaching profession and this is not also a prominent choice among them, when asked about their preferences. Due to societal and parental influences, many often choose high-profile professions like medicine, pharmacy, law, engineering, and accounting among others. But at the tentative stage (the period of adolescence), their self-concept and the demands of work become clearer and they become concerned with the synergy between aspects of themselves (their interests, values, and capabilities) and the requirements of work. Many young graduates seek lucrative jobs in industries and multinational companies, but the realities of the labour market often force them into making a compromise.

Faced with unemployment and the need to cater for their basic needs, many young people have opted for academia as a compromise. These are brilliant minds in their respective disciplines and so, to make ends meet, they have turned to lecturing. After their college education and maybe an initial job placement, they sought further studies to avail themselves of the opportunity to join academia as a last resort. However, the so much needed passion and commitment to achieve the

goals of academia will naturally flow from persons, who choose to join a career of volition and not out of necessity.

### **Super's Self-concept Theory**

Super (1953) propounded the self-concept approach to occupational choice with emphasis on the role of the self-concept in career decision-making. He claimed that occupational decision-making is an ongoing process that spans a lifetime. The term self-concept refers to people's understanding of their personal attributes, needs, values, and preferences. People choose occupations that match their self-concept with the hope of attaining self-actualization in their careers.

The assumption is that certain self-concepts are perfect matches for specific occupations; and that people should endeavour to find their match before making career decisions. Everyone is a blend of unique abilities, interests, and personalities that qualify him/her for several occupations. Super (1953) further suggested that vocational interests, values, and capabilities change over time, causing corresponding changes and adjustments in occupational choices; and that this process continues throughout the working life.

According to this theory, work satisfaction is dependent on the extent to which individuals can adequately express their interests, capabilities, values, and personality characteristics through work. This implies that self-concept implementation is central to work satisfaction. Super (1953) also identified the five developmental stages of career choice to include: Growth (4 to 13), Exploratory (14-24); Establishment (25-44); Maintenance (45-64), and Decline (65+). It was stated that people recycle these five stages over and again throughout their life span.

At the growth stage, the development of abilities, attitudes, interests, needs, and general perception of the world of work occurs. Children are exposed to different occupations through career day programmes and they begin to understand their attributes. The exploratory stage is marked by attempts to understand oneself and find a perfect placement in the world of work. Individuals try to understand their self-concept through learning and matching with different occupations in search of a perfect fit. They may try out different occupations and eventually

settle on one. Three career development tasks associated with this stage are crystallisation, specification, and implementation. The establishment stage occurs after the individual has settled into a profession. He/she then begins to work towards job security and pursue career advancement. The three developmental tasks involved in this stage are: job security, consolidation of one's position through positive work attitudes, and career advancement.

The maintenance stage is marked by continuous learning and improvement on the chosen job/career; and the associated career development tasks are: stability, being abreast of best practices, and innovating for improved work outcomes. Finally, the decline stage is a period individuals begin to plan their exit from the workforce; and developmental tasks are losing speed, retirement planning, and retirement living.

According to this theory, career satisfaction in academia can only be achieved, when the career choice is based on a careful match between the self-concept and the profession. Those who chose the academic profession because it matches who and what they want to be, are those who will likely demonstrate the required passion and commitment to the ultimate goals of academia. Therefore, an investigation into the career choice and satisfaction of academics at all levels is necessary for the pursuit of sustainable development and economic growth.

### **3. Ages, Rankings, and Career Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is often used interchangeably with career satisfaction based on the relationship between the two concepts and there has been a dearth of literature on career satisfaction in connection with ages and rankings. Among the existing studies, there have been inconsistent findings on the associations linking age and job satisfaction (Obimpeh, 2014). While some studies have revealed that job satisfaction is a positive correlate of age (Rhodes, 1983; Crossman & Harris, 2006; Mello, 2006; Keeton, *et al.*, 2007), others found that no associations exist between both constructs (Bernal, *et al.*, 1998; Oshagbemi, 2003).

DeVaney and Chen (2003) noted the possibility of higher job satisfaction among older workers than their younger colleagues. Likewise, Shrestha (2019) reported that senior age group teachers were more satisfied and committed to their jobs than those of other age categories. Also, Kume



(2020) found that age and job satisfaction are positively associated. However, Bernal, *et al* (1998) and Oshagbemi (2003) found no connection between age and job satisfaction.

In the same vein, studies have supported the relationship between position/rank and job satisfaction. For instance, Hickson and Osahgbemi (1999) associated high job satisfaction with high rankings. By implication, the higher the rankings, the higher the job satisfaction. Furthermore, Oshagbemi (2003) linked the job position/rank of faculty members to their job satisfaction. In congruence, Amarasena, *et al.* (2015) found academic positions of faculty members exert a significant influence on job satisfaction. Conversely, Eyupoglu and Saner (2009) showed that academic rankings and job satisfaction were not significantly related.

Although, some studies found no significant differences in workers' job satisfaction across ages and rankings, several studies have implicated ages and rankings in the expression of job satisfaction among different groups of employees including faculty members.

#### **4. Discussion**

Education has been considered the most important tool for skill supply and manpower development in all nations of the world (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, 2017) and the role of the academia cannot be over-estimated. According to Eyupoglu and Saner (2009), goal achievement in academia depends on how satisfied faculty members are with their jobs and careers in general.

The academia can be likened to a skill manufacturing factory for manpower development and capacity building. A feat that can only be accomplished by satisfied and committed academics, who would give their best performance to ensure the actualization of set goals. In contrast, academia appears currently flooded with many brilliant minds that would rather be in the industry, but for the challenge of unemployment. The unemployment and economic crisis in the country have driven many into academia as the available occupation and not because they desired it. This has serious implications for career satisfaction and commitment.

The circumstances that surround career decision-making may affect one's involvement and experience of job satisfaction in the chosen profession. Accordingly, Kunnen, (2013), cited in Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey, and Malau-Aduli (2018) suggested that when youths' career decision-making process is carefully managed, the resultant effects include: job satisfaction, stability, and psychological well-being. This implies that when the youths desire and voluntarily choose academia, they will naturally experience job satisfaction and exude commitment to work. Interestingly, many older and senior cadre academics seemed to be much more satisfied and committed to the profession, mainly because they chose the profession in alignment with their self-concept. The observation made by Eichar *et al.* (1991), as cited in Hickson and Oshagbemi (1999) validated this assertion. It was noted that the older workers made important contributions to the workforce. Similarly, Kume (2020) reported that older teachers tended to be more satisfied with their jobs than younger teachers. Consequently, the older teachers were more likely to demonstrate positive work attitudes and behaviours than the younger teachers.

There seemed to be a connection between ages and rankings, and that connection may be referred to as maturity. Maturity is attained through knowledge and experiences in the course of career development, which is greatly influenced by the circumstances that surround the choice of one's career, that is, the motivation behind the career decisions made. This may determine the speed of progress made in that career and consequently, the satisfaction experienced. by implication, highly-ranked employees tend to experience higher job satisfaction than their low-ranked colleagues. This standpoint was supported by Hickson and Oshagbemi (1999), Oshagbemi (2003), and Amarasena, *et al* (2015), who found a positive relationship between job positions and job satisfaction. Also, Mgaiwa (2023), found that academics in the professorship cadre expressed higher job satisfaction than their counterparts in the lower cadre. This means that as the rankings increased, the level of job satisfaction also increased.

Although, some studies did not find significant differences in job satisfaction of workers based on ages (Bernal, *et al*, 1998; Oshagbemi, 2003) and rankings (Eyupoglu & Saner, 2009), others suggested a link among these variables, indicated the need for further studies to validate these claims.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

Academia needs satisfied and committed academics to achieve its set goals. These are persons who desire to be in academics and are willing to give all it takes to see to their personal development and the achievement of the shared goals. It should be noted that the matching of careers to a person's interests, capabilities, values, and personalities affects the individuals' dispositions to their professions, and consequently, the pace of development and overall satisfaction.

Therefore, this study concluded that high-quality education will depend greatly on a good person-career match of academic staff in the ivory towers. It was recommended that careers should be chosen based on the match between persons' attributes or self-concept and the attributes of the profession. Finally, this study suggested that empirical research be conducted to validate the differences in career choice and satisfaction across age groups and rankings.

## References

- Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T. I., Lindsay, D., Tsey, K. & Malau-Aduli, B. S. (2018). A Systematic Review of Factors That Influence Youths Career Choices—the Role of Culture. *Frontiers in Education*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00058>
- Amarasena, T. S. M; Ajward, A. R. & Ahasanul Haque, A. K. M. (2015). The effects of demographic factors on job satisfaction of university faculty members in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 3(4), 89-106. <https://www.idpublications.org/>
- Bernal, D., Snyder, D., & McDaniel, M. (1998). The Age and Job Satisfaction Relationship: Does its Shape and Strength Still Evade Us? *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 53B (5), 287–293. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/53B.5.P287>
- Crossman, A., & Harris, P. (2006). Job satisfaction of secondary school teachers. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 34(1), 29-46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143206059538>
- DeVaney, S. A., & Chen, Z. S. (2003). Job Satisfaction of recent graduates in Financial Services, US Department of Labour. Bureau of Labour Statistics Compensation and Working Conditions  
Online. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/cwc/job-satisfaction-of-recent-graduates-in-financial-services.pdf>
- Dorasamy, N. & Letoane, M.K. (2015). Job and career satisfaction in higher education institutions: A case study of the university “A” in South Africa. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 13(4), 259-270.
- Dyrbye, L. N. Varkey, P., Boone, S.L., Satele, D. V., Sloan, J. A. & Shanafelt, T. D. (2013). Physician Satisfaction and Burnout at Different Career Stages. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 88(12), 1358-1367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2013.07.016>
- Echono, S. (2021). Why millions of Nigerian graduates are unemployed. Vanguard Newspaper. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/11/why-millions-of-nigerian-graduates-are-unemployed-fg/>

- Eyupoglu, S. Z., & Saner, T. (2009). Job satisfaction: Does rank make a difference? *African Journal of Business Management*, 3(10), 609- 615. <http://doi: 10.5897/AJBM09.157>
- Ginzberg, E., Ginsburg, S. W., Axelrad, S., & Herma, J. L. (1951). *Occupational choice: An approach to general theory*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Hickson, C., & Oshagbemi, T. (1999). The effect of age on the satisfaction of academics with teaching and research. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 26(4), 537-544.
- Keeton, K., Fenner, D.E, Johnson, T. R. B, Hayward, R.A. (2007). Predictors of Physician Career Satisfaction, Work–Life Balance, and Burnout. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 109(4), 949-955 doi: 10.1097/01.AOG.0000258299.45979.37.
- Khaleque, A. & Chowdhury, N. (1984). Job facets and overall job satisfaction of industrial managers. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 20(1), 55-64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27768798>
- Kume, E. (2020). Demographic Factors and Job Satisfaction among Teachers in Lower Secondary Schools in Albania. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2020.1.1.8>
- Liebenberg J. & Barnes, N. (2004). Factors influencing a customer-service culture in a higher education environment. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2 (2), 1-10. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8b4b/a8666d2890903f4bedf537b38c7cf8b3111f.pdf>
- Mgaiwa, S. J. (2023). Job satisfaction among university academics: Do academic rank and age make a difference? *Cogent Education*, 10(2), 1 – 18. <https://doi:10.1080/2331186X.2023.2230395>
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mello, J. (2006). *Strategic Human Resources Management* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Ohio: Thompson South Western.
- Obimpeh, M. O. (2014). Gender and Age Differences in Job Satisfaction among Junior and Senior Staff in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 6(21), 91-104.

- Oshagbemi, T. (2003). Personal correlates of job satisfaction: empirical evidence from UK universities. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 30(12), 1210-1232.
- Pathardikar, A.D., Sahu, S. & Jaiswal, N.K. (2016), "Assessing organizational ethics and career satisfaction through career commitment". *South Asian Journal of Global Business Research*, 5 (1), 104-124. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAJGBR-02-2015-0017>
- Rhodes, S. R. (1983). Age-related differences in work attitudes and behavior: A review and conceptual analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 93(2), 328–367. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.93.2.328>
- Shrestha, M. (2019). Influence of Age Group on Job Satisfaction in Academia. *SEISENSE Journal of Management*, 2(3), 30-41. <https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v2i3.141>.
- Ssesanga, K., & Garrett, R. (2005). Job satisfaction of University academics: *Perspectives from Uganda. Higher Education*, 50(1), 33-56.
- Super, D.E. (1953). A theory of vocational development. *American Psychologist*, 8, 185-190.
- Tatar, A. (2020). Impact of Job Satisfaction on Organizational Commitment. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339401568\\_Impact\\_of\\_Job\\_Satisfaction\\_on\\_Organizational\\_Commitment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339401568_Impact_of_Job_Satisfaction_on_Organizational_Commitment)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, (2017). Skills gap assessment in six priority sectors of the Nigerian economy. [https://www.itf.gov.ng/ftp/Skills\\_Gap\\_Assessment.pdf](https://www.itf.gov.ng/ftp/Skills_Gap_Assessment.pdf)