

## Influence of Career Self-Efficacy on Career Exploration among Senior High School Students in Relation to Gender

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### Abstract

*The study sought to identify the various ways through which senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality explore existing careers. Also, the study sought to find out gender differences in career exploration level and career self-efficacy levels among students. Survey research design was used for the study. Data for the study were collected from 273 (145 male and 128 female) senior high school students, selected from three mixed schools. Two questionnaires were developed for the study to seek information on career exploration practices, students' career exploration level, and career self-efficacy level. Descriptive and correlational statistics were used to analyse the data. Respondents' scores on questionnaire were organized descriptively into frequency counts and percentages. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the main career exploration practice the students engaged in was field trip. Results of correlational statistics indicated that female and male students had a higher career exploration level and higher career self-efficacy level respectively. The study concluded that the students were not exposed to other exploration practices to enable them settle on appropriate career choices. It was recommended that school counsellors should consider other practices that involve when designing career exploration programmes to assist students explore existing careers.*

**Keywords:** Career Choices, Self-Efficacy, Career Exploration, Gender, Senior High School, Students

### Introduction

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to accomplish potential situations (Bandura, 1995). Bandura added that self-efficacy belief is a determinant of how people think, behave, and feel. This implies that one performs and acts to situations according to how one feels and thinks about the event or situation at hand.

Bandura (1977) identified two forms of self-efficacy namely, high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy. He postulated that people with high self-efficacy have the belief that they can handle life issues and event effectively while the reverse is true for people with low self-efficacy. Thus people have different self-efficacy beliefs that influence activities they choose to participate in. One of such activities is career exploration.

Career exploration refers to all of the activities that individuals engage in to understand their strength, values, interest and gather information about existing career (Esters, 2008). The purpose is to collect and analyse career related information in order to enhance an individual's career management process. Esters intimates

that participation in exploratory activities promotes an understanding of self and the environment that enables people to develop realistic career goals and plans. It is perceived however, that only through systematic and thorough career exploration can people adequately gather information that will help them make clear and successful career choices (Nasta, 2007). Although exploration occurs at all ages and stages of development, it is considered to be most prominent during late adolescence (Sharf, 2006).

Self-efficacy is an important variable for career exploration (Nauta, 2007). This is because, without self-efficacy, individuals may fail to strive for success in a chosen career. According to Bandura (1977), one can be employed only if the one has belief and confidence in different possibilities to get employed, which is related to self-efficacy. Thus, self-efficacy has a great impact on career-related activities. Several studies have reported significant relationship between career self-efficacy beliefs and career exploration activities (Betz & Vuyten, 1997; Dawes, Horan, & Hackett, 2000; Foltz & Luzzo, 1998). Past research also claimed that career exploration activities are some of the ways to support students' success in higher education (Blair, 2012).

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In the Ghanaian context, the researcher observed that most SHS students explore their career with external influences disregarding their self-efficacy. That is family members, friends, colleagues and significant others impose their ideas and beliefs on students with regard to their careers. As a result, they end up in wrong careers. An Executive Director of Kinder Foundation, in an interview pointed out that, children who found themselves studying in line with their career path performed better academically and were less truant than children studying outside their career paths (Nunoo, 2016).

In spite of the fact that guidance coordinators in senior high school have been trained to assist students in their career development, there has been a rising concern about the inability of students to make a smooth transition from school to the world of work or for further studies. A review of research reports from 1983 to 1997 in guidance and counselling in schools in Ghana by Essuman (2001) indicates that even though guidance programmes which help in the development of students' career were found in most schools, they were not run effectively. As such, most students did not have the requisite knowledge in the area of career exploration. The purpose of this study was to find out self-efficacy beliefs and career exploration practices of senior high school students from Effutu Municipality. It was also to find out whether these variables are gender-related.

## Research Questions

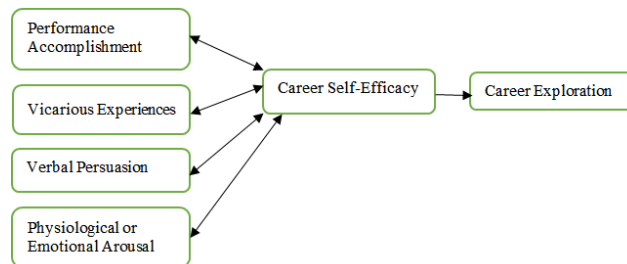
The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are career self-efficacy beliefs and career exploration practices among SHS students in the Effutu Municipality?
2. What are the differences between the career exploration levels and career self-efficacy levels of male and female SHS students in the Effutu Municipality?

## Literature Review

### Conceptual framework

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) has been applied to career exploration through Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). According to SCCT, exploration in general, and career exploration in particular is predicted by self-efficacy beliefs and that career self-efficacy plays a mediating role (Brown, Tramayne, Hoxha, Telander, Fan, & Lent, 2007). From Fig1 the sources of self-efficacy can influence career self-efficacy which will eventually lead to career exploration. The figure shows that every individual source of efficacy belief will have an impact on a person's belief in his/her ability to succeed in career issues. These beliefs will influence what career activity/activities the one will want to engage in.



**Fig. 1** Conceptual framework on the influence of the sources of self-efficacy on career self-efficacy and career exploration

### Career self-efficacy

According to Zeldin (2000), self-efficacy was initially used in vocational domains to understand the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated careers and, as such, Betz and Hackett (1997) offered two fundamental assumptions underlying the need for assessing career related self-efficacy beliefs. The first assumption was that self-efficacy beliefs influenced educational and occupational choice as well as performance and persistence in implementing those choices. The second, which was also embedded within career self-efficacy theory, was that differential background experiences associated with gender role in socialization might have led to gender differences in self-efficacy.

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001) investigated how self-efficacy might shape the career aspirations and paths of children. The results showed that socioeconomic status had no direct link to any career variables in children. However, its impact was mediated through its influence on how efficacious parents felt with regard to promoting their child's academic success. Parents of higher socioeconomic statuses felt more efficacious about promoting their child's education and had higher educational aspirations for their children. The results of this study suggested that students' self-efficacy shaped the type of career they would pursue as well as the occupational level they would pursue within a given field.

Rotberg, Brown and Ware (1987) investigated the career self-efficacy expectations and perceived career options in 98 female and 53 male community college students. The results indicated that career interests predicted both perceived career options and career self-efficacy expectations. Career self-efficacy was related to perceived career options. This attests to the fact that for students to explore career options, there is the need to belief in their ability to be successful in accomplishing the task. Sex role orientation predicted career self-efficacy expectations in females.

Also Rogers and Creed (2011) indicated strong support for self-efficacy and goals as predictors of career planning and exploration across all grade levels. These findings suggest that students who are confident with making

career decisions and who are motivated to set goals are likely to do more career planning, and students with high levels of career decision confidence are likely to engage in more career exploration.

### *Gender and Career Self-efficacy*

A number of studies reported a relationship between gender and career self-efficacy and career exploration practices. Betz and Vuyten (1997) examined how career decision-making efficacy and outcome expectations related to career indecision and exploration. Their findings showed that career self-efficacy strongly predicted career exploration for both women and men. For women, career self-efficacy predicted their intentions to engage in career exploration. Thus, the results found a relationship between career self-efficacy and other career variables.

Several studies have indicated that exploration of gender differences and the focus on the career exploration of women have permeated career self-efficacy research, particularly in studies that examine career selection according to career content. Results suggest that gender differences in career self-efficacy are found at the occupational level, educational level, and job task level (Post-Kammer & Smith, 1986; Betz & Hackett, 1997; Hackett, Halloran, & Romac, 1990; Bonnet & Stickel, 1992; Matzeder & Krieschok, 1995). When male and female students were asked to rate their efficacy for accomplishing specific occupational tasks, the results showed that males were more efficacious about mechanical and physical work, whereas female were more efficacious about working with people and tasks that required social interaction (Lucas, Skokowski & Ancis, 2000). Zeldin and Pajares (2000) suggested that, the idea that females form their self-efficacy beliefs as a result of their relational experiences is in keeping with the theoretical assumptions of Gilligan (1982) who argued that females use the relationships in their lives as a foundation on which to ground their behaviour and that the developmental order of identity formation for female may differ from that of males. As the females in Zeldin and Pajares (2000) developed their career exploration competencies, they allowed significant others in their lives to help them appraise these competencies positively.

### *Career exploration*

Brown, Darden, Shelton and Dipoto (1999) defined career exploration as purposive behaviour and cognitions that afford access to information from the external environment that will assist in decision-making, job entry, and vocational adjustment processes. Career exploration represents a movement towards a systematic, planned, inquiry and analysis of careers that are of interest to students. These procedures cannot be carried out by adolescents who do not have a fairly clear notion of who

they are, their strengths and weaknesses, what they value, their motivations, their psychological characteristics and their interests. Adolescents often approach career exploration and decision making with considerable ambiguity, uncertainty and stress (Essampong, 2010). Skorikov (2007) acknowledges that career exploration is a complex developmental outcome that emerges through direct experiences with work, communication with others, and information gathered from many sources. In this respect, students whose interest in career exploration increases at the adolescent years must be aided to discover both personal and vocational identity which can subsequently be related to the world of work (Patton, Wendy, Bartman, Dee, Creed & Peter, 2004).

Career development is an essential task among adolescents which typically begins in middle school and progresses throughout the lifespan (Stringer, Kerpelman, & Skorikov, 2012). It is during high school that students are expected to begin narrowing down and finalizing their postsecondary options, such as seeking employment versus pursuing higher education, which will ultimately impact their future career plans and goals (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Gushue *et al.*, 2006). Though exploration of various career paths is critical in the adolescent's career developments, most Ghanaian adolescents have little opportunity for exploratory activities.

### *Career exploration practices*

Career exploration is one of the stages in career development and the other stages are self-assessment, gaining professional experience and plan implementation (Prehar & Ignelzi, 2012). According to Jaffe (1998), children start to explore career in the form of play and schooling. During this stage, the child learns rules and acquires skills that will be needed for future success. This implies that the child at this first stage of career exploration has less cognitively developed, critical thinking skills and mastery skill but begins to occur with further education.

In order to make informed career and educational decisions, adolescents need opportunities to participate in a collection of career exploration activities. These activities are experiences at school and in the community that help adolescents to identify how their interests, values, and skills relate to careers of interest and for further studies. Career exploration activities can take many forms including informational interviews with employers, career-related guest speakers, field trip, workplace visits and tours, job shadowing, career fairs and career days, career camps, hands-on career projects, and career-focused mentoring.

Career exploration activities such as informational interviews, career information sessions, field trip and internship, expose graduates to career opportunities and options (Johnston, 2006). A recent study discovered that

a low level of career exploration creates difficulties in search for a career thus many job categories remain unknown for the candidates (Forstenlechner, Selim, Baruch & Madi, 2014).

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study employed a survey research design. The study sample consisted of second year students from mixed senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality. The senior high school students were at the career exploration stage.

### Sample

A sample of 268 students was purposively sampled from three selected mixed schools since the study sought to compare males and females' levels of career self-efficacy and career exploration. The students were grouped into two strata, males and females and proportional random sampling was used to sample 142 male and 126 female students for the study.

### Instruments

Two questionnaires were designed to collect data for the study. School counsellors and students responded to one questionnaire respectively. A self-developed questionnaire, consisting of five test items for school counsellors to identify career exploration practices in the schools and another questionnaire was adapted from two instruments namely, Career Planning and Exploration subscale of the Missouri Guidance Competency Evaluation Survey [MGCES]; (Lapan, Gysbers, Multon, & Pike, 1997) to measure career self-efficacy and Career Exploration Survey [CES] (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983) to measure level of exploration.

The original scale of MGCES composed of 10 items and it assesses career self-efficacy in three areas, including exploring and planning for careers, understanding how being male or female relates to classes and jobs, and learning how to use leisure time. Originally, this was a 7-point Likert type scale.

The reported internal consistency reliability ranged from .78 to .88. The original scale of CES consisted of 16 sub-scales under 3 dimensions (exploration process, reactions to exploration and beliefs). Sub-scales corresponding to career exploration process behaviours were adapted for the study. Stumpf *et al.* (1983) reported internal consistencies ranging from .74 to .83.

### Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

Data for the study was collected using two questionnaires, one on students' career self-efficacy and the other on students' career exploration practices. The

questionnaires were personally administered. This resulted in 100% return rate. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were used to organise respondents' scores on questionnaire into percentages. The results of the analysis were presented as bar graphs. These were used to answer research question one. The cross tabulation was used to analyse the data to answer two. This was to examine career self-efficacy levels and career exploration levels of male and female senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality.

## Results

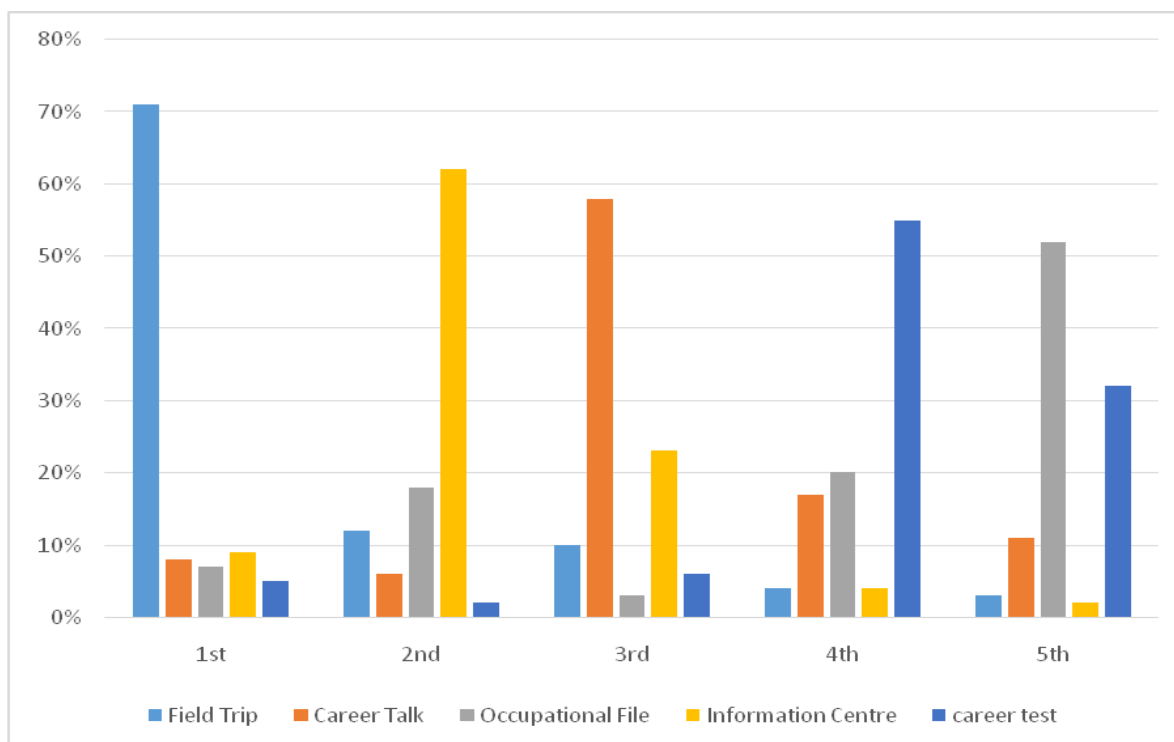
### Demographic characteristics of respondents

A sample of 268 students from three senior high schools in the Effutu Municipal and 3 responded to the questionnaire. About 53% (142) were males while 47% (126) were females. This shows that most of the students that took part in the research were males. Fifty-seven of the senior high school students that took part in the study were between age 15 and 17 years. Thirty-eight percent of the sample was between 18 and 20 years while the remaining 5% of respondents were over 20 years. This indicates that most of the students were in the initial stage of career exploration while 38% of them were in the transitional stage of career exploration. The remaining 5% of respondents can be said to be at the trial stage of career exploration.

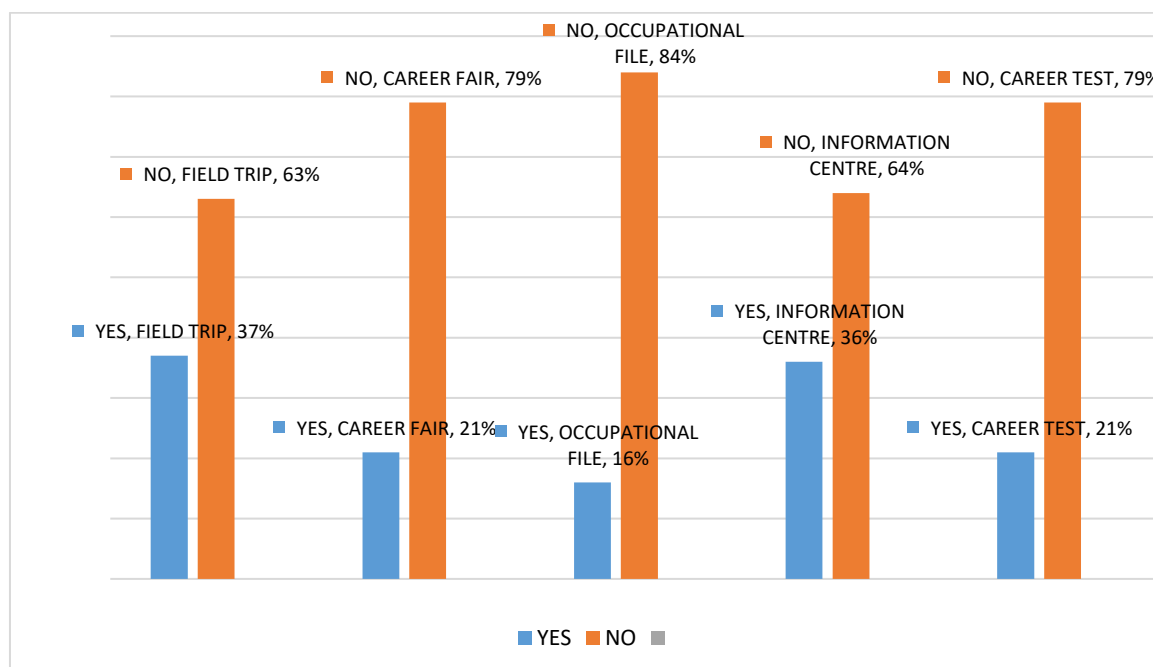
### Research question 1: What are the career exploration practices among SHS students in the Effutu Municipality?

The research question sought to identify the career exploration practices that school counsellors frequently introduce to senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality to. On a scale of 1-5, the respondents ranked the career exploration practices with which they had been introduced to by their school counsellor over the last academic year. Fig. 1 presents the students' ranking of the career exploration practices that were presented to them.

Fig. 1 reveals that field trip was the career exploration practice that respondents were often introduced to by their school counsellors. This is because, (71%) of respondents highly ranked field trip. The second highest exploration activity was linked to career information centres (62%). In order of merit, career fair, career test and occupational file ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> practices respectively. In order to find out the percentage of students that engaged in the career exploration practices, students were asked to indicate their participation in career exploration practices over the last academic year in school.



**Fig. 1** Ranking of career exploration practices by respondents



**Fig. 2** Percentage of students that engaged in career exploration practices

From Fig. 2, 37% of the students that they went on a field trip during the past academic year while 63% neither took part in any field trip nor information centres. Close to 80% of respondents did not participate in career fair and career test while over 80% did not file occupational file.

*Research Question 2: What are the differences between career exploration levels and career self-efficacy levels of*

*male and female senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality?*

Descriptive statistics of the respondents' career exploration levels by gender are presented in Table 1. The table indicates that male students had lower career exploration level as compared to their female counterparts in the Effutu Municipal. Though

comparatively female senior high school students (21%) counterparts, (17%), on the whole most students (62%) in had high career exploration level than their male the Effutu Municipality had low career exploration level.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of respondents' career exploration levels by gender

		Career Exploration Level of Students		
		Low Exploration Level	High Exploration Level	Total
Sex of Respondents	Male	36%	17%	53%
	Female	26%	21%	47%
Total		62%	38%	100%

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of respondents' self-efficacy level by gender

		Career Self-Efficacy Level of Students		
		Low Career Self-Efficacy Level	High Career Self-Efficacy Level	Total
Sex of Respondent	Male	47%	6%	53%
	Female	43%	4%	47%
Total		90%	10%	100%

Second part of research question 2 sought to identify the career self-efficacy levels of senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality. The Career Planning and Exploration subscale of the Missouri Guidance Competency Evaluation Survey [MGCES]; (Lapan, Gysbers, Multon, & Pike, 1997) was used to collect the data. Table 2 presents the results of the career self-efficacy level of the respondents.

Table 2 indicates that less than half of both male (47%) and female students (43%) reported a lower career self-efficacy level with the female students indicating slightly higher self-efficacy level than their male counterparts. In general, most students (90%) in the Effutu Municipal had low career self-efficacy level.

## Discussion

### *Demographic characteristics of respondents*

The study comprised senior high school students in the Effutu Municipal. It was realised that most of the respondents (53%) were males. This indicates that there are more males than females in the senior high schools in Effutu Municipal. This may be as a result of females dropping out from school after basic school due to factors such as low academic performance, teenage pregnancy and low socio-economic status of their parents.

Also, most of the students (57%) were at the initial stage of career exploration. This means that most respondents are uncertain about career exploration task. During this stage of career exploration, the individual is developing awareness that work offers more than a means of satisfying personal needs. For example, an individual who was initially attracted to a career in law because of the prestige enjoyed by law practitioners now begin to consider the humanitarian aspects of the profession. This expanded view of occupations ultimately leads adolescents to a consideration of their personal values and the implications of those for their vocational

choices. They do not make decisive decisions but rather take delight in knowing about occupation by evaluating one interest, values, needs and opportunity (Bedu-Addo, 2016).

### *Career exploration practices among SHS students in the Effutu Municipal*

Findings indicated that the few (37%) students that had explored career did so through participation in field trip with the least explored practice being the development of occupational file (See Table 1). The students indicated that aside field trip they were not mostly engaged in other career exploration practices because of financial constraints and inadequate resources. However, the students are the major financiers of the field trips. Even though other practices such as occupational file and information centre involve less or no funds, counsellors did not often engage students in these practices. Perhaps personal factors such as inadequate motivation and technical know how could be limitations of school counsellors not engaging students in these practices. This could limit students from getting adequate information about their careers of interest, limitation to career exploration skills such as self-assessment, interviewing skills and rules to follow to succeed on the job. Findings from the study are in contrast to other research findings that field trips are increasingly threatened since it is seen as a deviation from the normal curriculum (Anderson, Kisel, Storksdieck, 2006; Schatz, 2004).

### *Career exploration level of male and female SHS students in the Effutu Municipality*

The results indicated that female students engaged in exploring careers more than their male counterparts (See Table 1). According to Super's (1957) at life stage of exploration (ages 15 to 25), people clarify what they want to do. They learn about entry-level jobs that may be

appropriate for them, and they learn what skills are required by the jobs that interest them (Sharf, 2006). Research has established that adolescent females show greater concern for their future vocation than males. Although both sexes developmentally share similar interests and concerns, the forces of feminism in the contemporary world, demanding equality between males and females could be responsible for making the girls more radical than their male counterparts in their vocational aspiration. They are therefore more concerned for career guidance to assist them achieve their desires (Koomson, Brown, Dawson-Brew, Ahiatrogah & Dramanu; 2012). It is also not surprising that females recorded a higher level of exploration than males because 84% of females participate in career clubs in schools than males. At this stage the females are keener in searching for where they fit in with peers, career and society at large than males. Thus, female's natural tendency is to rely on the intimacy of the relationships in their lives, and they are interlinked with those whose existence is interdependent on them. On the other hand males' Ego at this stage of life begins to grow so they feel proud as a result it hinders them from exploring career paths as females do Erikson (1968).

#### *Career self-efficacy level of male and female SHS students in the Effutu Municipality*

From the research findings, though majority (90%) of the respondents had lower level of career self-efficacy, more male respondents (6%) had a higher level of career self-efficacy than their female counterpart (40%) (See Table 2). School counsellors rarely took students through various exploration practices that existed, while majority of the students rarely engaged in career exploration practices that were introduced to them by their school counsellors. This explained why most of the students had a low career self-efficacy level. This is because career self-efficacy is enhanced through sources such as performance attainment. Individual's own accomplishment experiences have a great impact on one's behaviour since it is based on authentic personal experiences. Despite this low self-efficacy, the males had slightly higher self-efficacy than females' senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality. This seems to suggest that the male students may have experienced verbal persuasion from parents. This is supported by Prah (2002) who states that traditionally, males are seen to be the sole providers of the family and hence they are verbally persuaded to believe in their capabilities to pursue career related task than their female counterparts. Through parents' verbal persuasion of their male children, they feel encouraged and have a high sense of belief in their capability of successfully completing a task, especially regarding mastery in difficult situations. This is in agreement with Bandura (1997) who reported that guidance and positive suggestions from others can assist in correcting performance in areas needing improvement.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The male senior high school students in the Effutu Municipal had a higher career exploration and career self-efficacy levels than their female counterparts. It is recommended that school counsellors should be mindful of the influence of career self-efficacy on career exploration during career guidance and career counselling. It is suggested that factors that account for the gender differences in career exploration and career self-efficacy levels should be investigated so that proper interventions are indicated to bring parity among the students.

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