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Educational Planning Criteria and Their Influence on Student Choice

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Abstract:

This study examines the impact of educational planning on students' specialization choices. The research was guided by a primary research question and two subsidiary questions, utilizing a descriptive-analytical methodology. The sample consisted of 155 third-year secondary school students from the Martyr Abidi Mohamed and Scholar Hajj Mohamed Ben Mustafa El-Konti secondary schools in ZaouietKonta. Data collection was conducted using a researcher-developed questionnaire. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 26, involving the generation of simple and complex tables pertaining to the study hypotheses. The results indicated that students' personal preferences exert a significant influence on their specialization and study path choices. Furthermore, the guidance counsellor, who represents educational planning within the school environment, was found to have a limited impact on certain academic disciplines.

Keywords: Advisor; school counsellor; educational planning; educational counselling; student preference

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of secondary education, several key factors are used to assess a student's academic path, including their scholastic achievements, educational guidance, and personal goals.

Educational guidance is a teaching method designed to help students choose an appropriate academic track that aligns with their future career aspirations. It also serves to identify students' interests and

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abilities in relation to their environmental opportunities and limitations, or as required by the school system's educational planning.

The Ministry of National Education has established specific criteria to promote fair educational opportunities and balance the needs of various branches within general and technological secondary education. These include academic performance, student preferences, admission tests, and guidance evaluations. School guidance and counselling supervisors use these criteria to align students' aspirations with the recommendations and support provided by the school and vocational guidance advisors while adhering to the pedagogical requirements of different second-year secondary divisions.

Due to the procedures and criteria involved, the school guidance process in the first year of general and technological secondary education is a major concern for many students and their parents. This process includes the involvement of school and vocational guidance counsellors who implement educational planning through ongoing support. The counsellor suggests an initial direction based on the student's results from the first and second semesters, along with the use of a desire study card. This card is a supplementary technical tool designed to advise and prepare students to make informed choices, thereby reducing the likelihood of errors when completing the final desire card.

Nevertheless, despite the implementation of these procedures, numerous students may find themselves unable to secure their preferred institution as indicated in their preference list. This situation arises from the fact that the school assignment process prioritises students' preferences in the top 5% academically during the initial year of secondary education. The remaining 95% of students are subsequently allocated based on the established guidelines set forth by the admission and guidance councils for the fourth intermediate and first year of secondary education (**Ministerial Directive No. 137/6.2.0, 2005**).

School guidance counsellors oversee this process, conducting informational sessions to elucidate admission and guidance procedures for the initial year of secondary common core. Students are apprised of the significance of meeting the criteria established by each academic department.

Based on the theoretical framework, the study's research questions can be articulated as follows:

Does the school guidance criteria utilised in educational planning influence students' major selection? This can be deconstructed into two sub-questions:

- To what extent does a student's personal preference impact their major choice?

- What influence do guidance counsellors' recommendations have on a student's major selection?

To investigate these questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- A student's personal preference influences their major selection.

- Guidance counsellors' recommendations impact a student's major choice.

The study aims to:

- Elucidate school guidance criteria and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of guiding students.

- Establish the significance of a student's personal preference in their academic trajectory.

- Determine the actual impact of school guidance counsellors in informing and directing students.

- Identify the various challenges and obstacles students encounter in their academic journey, particularly those related to their school guidance.

This study derives its significance from the importance of the variables it examines, as it addresses the criteria of school planning and their role in influencing students' decisions regarding their choice of major.

The significance of this study arises from its examination of a critical phase in students' educational trajectories, demonstrating that their guidance is not arbitrary but predicated on established evaluation mechanisms for this sensitive period. Furthermore, the research impacts a crucial demographic: third-year high school students preparing for the baccalaureate examination. Additionally, the study establishes a foundation for future investigations, given the paucity of research specifically addressing this subject matter.

2. Key Terms of the Study:

2.1. Educational Planning Standards:

Educational planning standards establish the mechanisms governing the allocation of students to general and technological secondary education tracks. These mechanisms encompass educational planning, input from school guidance counsellors, and students' preferences (**Ministerial Directive No. 137/6.2.0, 2005**).

2.2 Regarding the Methodology: this pertains to the individual's score on the educational planning criteria survey utilised in this study.

2.3 Counselling:

The primary objective of school counselling is to maximise students' potential by fostering their abilities, skills, and interests, thereby preparing them for their future and ensuring academic success.

This educational initiative results from a prolonged and complex process, influenced by various interconnected factors. These factors encompass individual capabilities, competencies, preferences, and aspirations on one side and the requirements of the educational trajectory and its associated challenges on the other (Fourth Scientific Symposium on the Tasks of the School Regulation and Advising

Guidance Counsellor between School Legislation and Actual Sphere, 2017, p.03).

2.4 Technical Definition:

This methodology facilitates students' selection of future academic trajectories that align with their cognitive abilities, aptitudes, competencies, and objectives, while considering their scholastic accomplishments.

3. Theoretical Framework:

3.1. Literature Review:

Among the most pertinent prior research related to this study, the work of Tayebi (2018) is particularly noteworthy. This investigation evaluated the guidance plan implemented in secondary education across various streams and specializations. The research aimed to assess the plan's impact on students' self-actualisation, academic adjustment, and performance efficiency, considering variables such as gender, division, specialisation, and educational level. The study was conducted across four states - Medea, Blida, Tipaza, and Ain Dafla - and encompassed all students from the three secondary education phases, totalling 1920 participants. The primary research question guiding this study was: "Does contentment with the guidance plan contribute to students' self-realisation, improve their academic adaptation, achieve suitable educational adequacy, and reduce academic failure at this educational stage?"

The research findings demonstrated significant differences in the guidance strategy across gender, field of study, and educational level.

Alaoui and Najat (n.d) investigated the implementation of school counselling principles in specific eastern Algerian regions. Their study examined the discrepancy between scientific methodologies and ad hoc practices in the guidance process. The researchers selected their

sample to elucidate the execution of school counselling procedures, addressing the primary research question: What factors have impeded the integration of scientific principles into student counseling methodologies within the organizational protocols governing the school guidance process?

The hypothesis posits that scientific principles are not incorporated into the organizational documents utilized in the school guidance process. A study comprising 90 guidance counselors from high schools in Constantine, Setif, and Mila was conducted.

Results from the participants' responses indicate that the school map plays a predominant role in directing students to various academic disciplines. The guidance counsellor's contribution is primarily confined to providing notes and studies that are archived within the school.

Hamri (2012) examined the guidance culture in Algeria, comparing extant practices with reform efforts. The study aimed to address the following questions: What are the foundations of school guidance considering educational reforms affecting the system, and to what extent are these reforms effective in achieving intended objectives, given the societal preference for certain fields of study over others? The researcher posed the following research questions:

- How does societal cultural context influence the demand for specific academic disciplines?

- What is the impact of recent reform-oriented legislative documents governing school guidance on fulfilling students' academic aspirations, considering national shifts and challenges?

The study involved 180 first-year science and technology students at Oujlida High School in Tlemcen. The investigation yielded the following conclusions:

- Educational institutions now bear additional, multifaceted responsibilities beyond traditional pedagogical roles, necessitating their assistance in modifying familial cultural perspectives on various subjects.

- While the guidance process should consider students' preferences and parental wishes, it must be governed by appropriate measures that align with specific changes in the education system and broader societal trends.

- Choice education constitutes a crucial component of an effective guidance program. However, in Algeria, ultimate guidance decisions depend on student and parental preferences, academic achievement, and the capacity of educational institutions.

3.2.1 Evaluating the Previous Studies:

Prior research has made significant contributions to the field of school guidance, investigating topics such as satisfaction with guidance strategies and personal development. These studies have also examined the current state of school guidance in Algerian educational institutions by analysing official documents about the guidance process. Furthermore, they have explored how the culture of school guidance contributes to achieving broader societal objectives in the context of recent educational reforms.

This study has utilised previous research to inform its methodology, define its objectives, emphasise its significance, develop its research instruments, and select appropriate statistical techniques to ensure accurate and reliable results.

The present investigation examines educational planning at the secondary school level and its influence on students' preferences in selecting their academic fields of study.

3.2 Understanding School Counselling:

3.2.1 Guidance in Language and Terminology

3.2.1.1 Language Considerations:

According to *the Al-Monjid Dictionary of Language and Media*, guidance entails direct interaction, involving transformation from one aspect to another, with a source and destination. The dictionary elucidates that a saying possesses an "aspect," a point of origin for deriving intent. It further explicates that the "aspect" denotes the apparent purpose or direction an individual pursues in their work and other endeavours (**A Group of Professors, 1991, p.889**).

3.2.1.2 Mentoring Terminologically:

The definitions exhibited variation in accordance with their diverse origins and fields, some of which are attributable to the theoretical framework to which the scholar adheres or due to the specific requirements of the individual. The concepts and connotations differed, and this variance may be explicated by the breadth of the guidance field and each researcher's perspective on it. The most salient definitions can be presented as follows:

Mustafa Benhabiles described it in (The Yearbook, 2010) as "A comprehensive array of services designed to facilitate individuals' self-understanding and problem-solving capabilities, optimizing their inherent potential in terms of abilities, skills, aptitudes, and inclinations. These services assist individuals in leveraging their environmental resources, establishing goals congruent with their capabilities and environmental possibilities, and selecting appropriate methods to achieve these goals. This process enables individuals to formulate practical solutions to their problems, leading to enhanced adaptation to themselves and society, ultimately facilitating their personality's maximal growth and integration" (**p. 56**).

Abdelhamid Morsi characterises it as "A humanitarian process encompassing diverse services offered to individuals to enhance self-understanding, recognise their issues, and utilise their abilities and

talents to overcome challenges. This process aims to achieve harmony between individuals and their environment, enabling them to attain maximum personal growth and integration" (**Razooqi, 2008, p. 14**).

Within Algeria's educational system, particularly in the legislative documents of the Secondary Education Reform Project, school guidance is characterised as "the technical educational means that enable the efficient and economical attainment of quantitative and qualitative development objectives" (**Official Bulletin of Education, 1984, p.01; Official Bulletin of Education, 1984, p. 39**).

Ben Bouzid (**2009, p. 220**) defines guidance as a fundamental educational process that aims to achieve equilibrium between the requirements of the standard curriculum and specialized training tracks while considering the student's background and individual objectives.

An analysis of these definitions reveals that school guidance encompasses the following aspects:

1- Assist individuals in understanding themselves and utilising the opportunities within their environment, thereby enabling them to address their own challenges and achieve psychological growth and integration.

2- Facilitating individuals' self-understanding about their abilities, inclinations, talents, and personal characteristics.

3- Aiding individuals in self-awareness, recognising their issues and conflicts, and providing guidance in accordance with their potential.

4- Supporting individuals in selecting educational pathways aligned with their aptitudes and aspirations.

3.3 School Guidance and Counselling Mechanisms in Algerian Schools:

The Ministry of National Education (**Ministerial Directive 168/0.0.3, 2012**) has implemented several significant mechanisms, which include the following:

3.3.1 Pupil's Yearly Average: The highest-performing students in the common streams will be encouraged to select their preferred streams, which will recognise and encourage their academic efforts.

3.3.2 Pupil's Educational Profile: Each pupil is assigned to mentoring groups based on the following criteria:

The average of the first semester in the course plus the average of the second semester in the course divided by two:

Course average= (first semester average + second semester average + third semester average)**/3**

Each division has a directive set comprising the fundamental subjects that lead to a specific division.

The outcome is derived from calculating each course average multiplied by the corresponding course coefficient within the steering group. The supervision group quotients are aggregated and subsequently divided by the total coefficients in the group. The highest average score across the various supervision groups determines the student's educational profile.

3.3.3 Admission and Orientation Council:

The Admission and Supervision Council comprises the high school principal, the headmaster, the professors of the two common streams, the guidance counsellor, school and vocational counselling, and a representative of the Parents' Association serving as an observer. The council's function is to evaluate each student's academic performance and compare it with their stated preferences. The top 5% of students admitted to each institution are allocated according to their primary

preferences. In comparison, the remaining 95% of admitted students are assigned according to their order of preference in orientation groups, considering their expressed preferences, academic achievements, and available pedagogical placements.

3.3.4 The pupil's preference:

Students constitute one of the fundamental elements in any educational system and are central to the educational process as the objective of any educational system is the students, as it aims to educate them and develop their abilities, qualities, knowledge, and skills (**Hadi, 2007, p. 54**).

Students are provided with a preference card on which they indicate their desired division of study, enabling them to express their preferences freely.

- The student should select a division that aligns with his/her abilities and be aware of the division's extensions at the university level (**Ministerial Directive 41/6.0.0.0/27, 2005**).

5.3.3 Guiding Counsellor Observations:

The School and Vocational Guidance Counsellor systematically evaluates student performance, conducts an initial orientation following the first semester results, and subsequently performs a second semi-final orientation based on the outcomes of both the first and second semesters (**Ministerial Directive 41/6.0.0.0/27, 2005).**

4. The Applied Framework of the Study:

1.4 Study Procedures:

1.1.4 Study Methodology

This study employed the analytical descriptive methodology, which enables researchers to characterise the phenomenon under study and subsequently acquire, analyse, and interpret data and information pertinent to the phenomenon, given the nature of the current research.

4.1.2 Study Limits:

4.1.2.1 Population: The study is confined to third-year students at both Zaouiet Kounta Secondary Schools.

4.1.2.2Time: March 2024.

4.1.2.3 Place and Location: Sheikh Konti and Martyr Abidi Mohamed High schools Zaouiet Kounta, town center.

4.1.3 Study sample:

Due to the heterogeneity of the study population, this research employed stratified random sampling, wherein students were categorized into strata according to their third-year academic streams at the secondary school level. Based on the Kirgisi and Morgan table, a sample size of 155 participants was determined to be appropriate (**Um Al-Ghaith; Wadji, 2019**).

To calculate the sample size for each stream, the following formula was applied:
(number of students stream) / (total number of students) x (required number of participants sample (**Omira, 2018; p.34**). The results are presented in **(Table 1)** as follows:

Table.01: The Distribution of the Sample Individuals according to School and Stream.

Institutions / **Streams**	El-KontiSecondarySchool		Abidi Med SecondarySchool		**Total**	
	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	**frequency**	**ratio**
Maths (Exact Sciences)	/	/	05	100%	**05**	**3.22%**
Experimental Sciences	21	48.84%	22	51.16 %	**43**	**27.74 %**
Technical Maths	11	100%	/	/	**11**	**7.09%**

Economy& Management	11	47.83%	12	52.17 %	**23**	**14.83 %**
Literature&Philosophy	30	49.18%	31	50.81 %	**61**	**39.35 %**
ForeignLanguages	/	/	12	100%	**12**	**7.74%**
Total	**73**	**47.10%**	**82**	**52.90 %**	**155**	**100%**

Source: by the Authors (March 2024)

4.1.4 Materials:

The researchers utilised the questionnaire as an instrument to ascertain the educational planning criteria that influence students' preferences in selecting their specializations, as represented by the Educational Planning Criteria Questionnaire. This instrument was developed by the researchers in the current study to construct the content of the study and fulfil its objectives.

4.1.4.1 Description of the Questionnaire:

The questionnaire aims to assess the extent to which educational planning influences students' decisions regarding their choice of major to propose potential solutions. The instrument comprises 21 items distributed across three dimensions, as illustrated in the **(Table 2)** as follows:

Table 2. The Distribution of the Questionnaire's Items across its Respective Topics.

Topic	Paragraphs
Personal data	From 01 to 05
Pupil's desire	From 06 to 13
The guiding counsellor's role	From 14 to 21

Source: by the authors (March 2024)

4.1.4.2 Psychometric properties of the instrument:

4.1.4.2.1 Validity and Reliability: The questionnaires were evaluated by 07 professors in the field of sociology. Subsequently, after revising and ensuring the appropriateness of their questions in terms of wording and measurement, they were distributed to the respondents commencing on 02/03/2024 in the two high schools of the study. The data collection process spanned three days, concluding on 04/16/2024. The process of transcription and analysis of the data began on 04/19/2024. The reliability of the educational planning criteria questionnaire was assessed through a test-retest method, with the instrument reapplied 10 days after its initial application to the exploratory sample, consisting of (07) professors. The application was conducted individually, and the researchers instructed the participants that there were no correct or incorrect answers, encouraging them to express their opinions candidly. During the transcription process, the researchers observed that all questionnaires were completed in full, which supports the instrument's validity.

4.1.4.3 Statistical Methods of the Study:

Simple and compound frequency tables. These were generated using the statistical program SPSS 26.

5. Results and Discussion:

5.1 Hypothesis 01: This hypothesis posits that a student's desire influences their choice of major. To evaluate this hypothesis, the researchers calculated frequency ratios.

Table.03 Considering the First-Year Secondary School Students' Academic Preferences Based on Specialty.

Phrases	**Yes**		**No**		**Total**	
Streams	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	**frequency**	**ratio**
Maths (Exact Sciences)	04	80%	01	20%	**05**	**3.22%**
Experimental Sciences	41	95.35%	02	4.65%	**43**	**27.74%**
Technical Maths	11	100%	00	00%	**11**	**7.09%**
Economy& Management	17	73.91%	06	26.09%	**23**	**14.83%**
Literature&Philosophy	59	96.72%	02	3.28%	**61**	**39.35%**
ForeignLanguages	12	100%	00	00%	**12**	**7.74%**
Total	**144**	**92.90%**	**11**	**7.10 %**	**155**	**100 %**

Source: by the Authors (March 2024)

The data presented in **(Table.03)** indicates that students selecting the Mathematical and Foreign Languages streams experienced complete accommodation of their preferences, with a 100% acceptance rate. This high acceptance rate can be attributed to the low popularity of these streams and the institution's objective to increase enrollment in these disciplines. Consequently, applications for these streams are approved without additional evaluation. The Literature and Philosophy stream demonstrates a similarly high acceptance rate, with 96.72% of student preferences accommodated, while the Experimental Sciences stream fulfilled 95.35% of student choices. The Mathematics stream, another less popular option being promoted, accommodated 80% of student preferences. In the Management and Economics stream, 73.91% of students had their preferences met, while 26.09% were not granted their chosen stream. As a result, this latter group was involuntarily redirected to alternative academic paths.

The study revealed statistically significant differences in students' preferences across various specialities. These findings align with those of Al-Tayebi (2018), which indicated variations in guidance plans based on the speciality variable.

Table 04 Respondent Distribution Based on Satisfaction with Specialty

Specialty	Satisfaction with Specialty				**Total**	
	Yes		No			
	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	**frequency**	**ratio**
Maths (Exact Sciences)	04	80%	01	20%	**05**	**3.20%**
Experimental Sciences	40	93%	03	07%	**43**	**27.70%**
Technical Maths	11	100%	00	00%	**11**	**7.10%**
Economy& Management	20	87%	03	13%	**23**	**14.80%**
Literature&Philosophy	58	95.10%	03	4.90%	**61**	**39.40%**
ForeignLanguages	12	100%	00	00%	**12**	**7.70%**
Total	**145**	**93.50%**	**10**	**6.50 %**	**155**	**100 %**

Source: by the Authors (March 2024)

According to **(Table. 04)**, a substantial 93.50% of students expressed satisfaction with their chosen academic streams. This satisfaction varied across disciplines, with Foreign Languages exhibiting the highest rate at 100%.

Literature and Philosophy followed closely at 95.10%, while Experimental Sciences achieved 93%. The Management and Economics stream demonstrated a lower satisfaction rate of 87%, and Mathematics exhibited the lowest at 80%. These disparities may be attributed to the varying difficulty levels among streams, with Mathematics requiring considerable effort and the potentially arbitrary nature of guidance in Management and Economics, which could impose psychological stress on students.

5.2 Hypothesis 02: Academic advisors' recommendations can significantly influence students' decision-making process when selecting their field of study.

Table.05 The Influence of Guidance Counselors on Students' Selection of Academic Majors

Choices	**Yes**		**No**		**Total**	
Streams	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	**frequency**	**ratio**
Maths (Exact Sciences)	04	80%	01	20%	**05**	**3.22%**
Experimental Sciences	41	95.35%	02	4.65%	**43**	**27.74%**
Technical Maths	11	100%	00	00%	**11**	**7.09%**
Economy& Management	17	73.91%	06	26.09%	**23**	**14.83%**
Literature&Philosophy	59	96.72%	02	3.28%	**61**	**39.35%**
ForeignLanguages	12	100%	00	00%	**12**	**7.74%**
Total	**144**	**92.90%**	**11**	**7.10 %**	**155**	**100 %**

Source: by the Authors (March 2024)

The data presented in **(Table 05)** delineates the categorisation of respondents based on their selected fields of study and the influence of guidance counsellors on those selections. The findings indicate that the majority of participants, 57.42% or 89 individuals from the study cohort, reported that guidance counsellor had no impact on their major selection. Conversely, 42.58% of the respondents, equivalent to 66 individuals, indicated that guidance counsellors influenced the determination of their academic focus.

The proximity of these ratios demonstrates the substantial impact of the guidance counsellor's interventions, including informational sessions and psychological support for students. This influence aims to maintain a balanced distribution of streams as stipulated by the educational map, particularly in the Mathematics unit, which attained 60%. The counsellor's role also encompasses evaluating

students' actual abilities, as determined by their academic performance. Based on these results, students are encouraged to reassess their desired fields if they do not align with their aptitudes and potential. The study identified statistically significant differences related to the guidance counselor's role in influencing students' choices. These findings corroborate those of the study by Alawi and NajahAlaoui and Najat (n.d), which emphasised the involvement of educational planning in student guidance.

06. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that students' preferences significantly influence their choice of academic major, with 93.50% of surveyed students expressing satisfaction with their selected fields. The study also reveals that guidance counsellors play a moderate role in shaping students' decisions, as 42.58% of counsellors indicated.

These findings align with the expectation that secondary school students possess sufficient maturity and self-awareness to make informed choices about their educational paths based on their abilities and potential. The guidance counsellor, tasked with educational planning, effectively fulfils their role by advising and supporting students through close interaction, interviews, and assistance in overcoming obstacles.

The study concludes that current educational planning mechanisms consider both student preferences and the guidance provided by school counsellors. To enhance this system, counsellors should improve their skills, knowledge, and familiarity with strategies to assist students and encourage them to consider less popular specialisations. This approach aims to balance student desires with the educational planning requirements as dictated by the school curriculum.

Based on the study's objectives and results, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

1. Honoring students' preferences for academic study fields of interest, as this can lead to improved performance and better utilisation of their abilities throughout their educational careers.

2. Increasing awareness and guidance initiatives for teachers, enabling them to contribute effectively to student counselling through media campaigns.

3. Reducing pressure on school guidance counsellors by allowing more flexibility in student placement ratios, considering academic performance and individual educational needs.

4. Re-evaluating the materials used in school guidance programs for certain technical specialisations.

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