FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET

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Abstract

Career choice is a complex decision for undergraduate students since it determines the kind of profession that a student intends to pursue in life. As students try to make career choices, they face problems of matching their career preferences with their abilities in academic performance. In an attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding career choices amongst students, a study to examine factors that influence career choices among students was undertaken. Factors of interest included were peer influence, gender, parental influence, job opportunities and personal interest. The target population was second, third and fourth year undergraduate students at the University of Eldoret. A convenience sampling technique was used in getting a study sample of 210. The data collection instrument used was a self-administered questionnaire which contained both open and closed ended questions. The study used a descriptive research design. Data was presented in form of percentages, means and tables. Results indicated that multiple factors influence career choices of undergraduate students. It is the expectation of this paper that instructors in learning institutions should find such results useful as they prepare learners for their future.

Key Words: Career choice; Universities; Factors; Correlation; Parents, Higher Education

1.Introduction

Career choice has become a complex science with the advent of information technology, the emergence of post industrial revolution and job competition. It was a common practice in the old days to find feudalism converting it into a family affair where the son of a blacksmith was destined to become a blacksmith and a feudal was born a leader. Industrialization and post industrialization has made it possible for a common person to be richer as long as she or he has due skills and knowledge (Wattles, 2009). Choosing a career is an extremely important decision that impacts on individual's entire future. Career exploration is defined as the extent to which possible careers are researched and considered. Research by (Navin, 2009) has suggested that exploring career options before committing to a career, increases future career success and satisfaction. Thus, variables that influence career exploration in adolescents should be identified and acknowledged.

Today, one has not only to make due career planning but also exhaustive career research before making a career choice so as to adjust with the evolving socio-economic conditions (Wattles, 2009). Each individual undertaking the process is influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment (Bandura *et al.*, 2001; Watson *et al.*, 2010).

In most cases, the choice of careers, subjects, and courses of study and the subsequent career paths to follow are a nightmare for prospective undergraduate students (Issa and Nwalo, 2008). Most often, choosing the right subject combination leading to the right profession can make the difference between enjoying and detesting the career in future. (Sax, 1994) examines students' initial interest in scientific careers, factors influencing career choice during college, and how these factors differ between men and women. Men who abandon career aspirations appear to be driven by financial concerns whereas women who decide not to pursue scientific career appear more concerned with the social good of their career choice. (Ferry, 2006) asserts that adolescent occupational choice is influenced by many factors, including life context, personal aptitudes, and educational attainment. He contends further that whether college-bound or work-bound, meeting the challenge of this developmental milestone is critical in adolescents' lives.

(Muraguri, 2011) states that an individual's choice of career is likely to be influenced by several factors including personal and cultural values, family background, career expectations and career guidance. Some also make career decisions by taking the path of least resistance for example, following a career path advocated by their parents or following in the footsteps of an elder sibling (Carlos et al., 2009). According to (Kerka, 2000), career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and financial. Today, young people face a complex and rapidly changing society. It has been reported that regardless of great effort put forth by families, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, many young people encounter difficulties in the transition from the world of school to that of work (Atchoarena, 2005; Nykanen et al., 2010). The process of choosing a career (Brown, 2002) is described as one of estimating one's ability and skills required for success in a given occupation, and estimating the work values that will be satisfied by the various occupational alternatives available. The essence of who the student is willing to be in future, revolve around what the students wants to do with their life-long work. Parents, teachers, the society and the government as a whole recognize the need for proper career guidance and development. According to (Hewitt, 2010), factors influencing career choice can either be intrinsic or extrinsic or both. Hewitt further states that most people are influenced by careers that their parents favour, others follow the careers that their educational choices have opened for them, some choose to follow their passion regardless of how much or little it will make them succeed while others choose careers that give high income. Students perception of being suitable for particular jobs also has been found to be influenced by a number of factors including ethnic background, year of study, level of achievement, choice of science subjects, attitudes and differences in job characteristics (McQuaid and Bond, 2003).

Several studies show that new students all over the world are usually faced with a dilemma in making a career choice decision in their lives (Issa and Nwalo, 2008). In his study of career choice of Nigerian youths, (Salami, 1999) found that many youths make wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or as a result of prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate guidance and career counseling. In his study, (Garrahy, 2001) noted that schools are social institutions that reinforce gender-appropriate behaviour, interests and occupations. Such constructs including curricular subjects, quality of teaching, student participation in school activities, school practices and policies and learning materials for the student were found to impact on career choice among learners (Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa, 2006).

In most cases, the choice of career subjects and the subsequent career paths to follow are a nightmare for prospective undergraduate students (Issa and Nwalo, 2008). According to (Carlos *et al.*, 2009) understanding factors that lead to the choice of career is important because that decision establishes expectations for one's future and may affect one's satisfaction with the career. By sharing workplace stories, expressing concern for children's future, and modeling work behaviors, parents serve as a context for interpreting the realities of work. Parent child connectedness facilitates risk taking and exploration, which are needed for identity formation (Blustein *et al.*, 1997).

According to (Oyamo and Amoth, 2008), studies in Kenya show that rural students tend to seek help from parents more than urban students and that parents more than teachers play a major role in the career choice of students. Generally, the choice of a career is influenced by parents, friends, and counselors; however variations occur from one population to the other. Investigating and better understanding the myriad factors that contribute to career choice is a topic of recurring interest in higher education. Some studies suggest that the factors that anchor career preferences include parental support (Wims, 1994), gender and socio-economic status (Mathombela, 1997).

However, these findings have not given us a clear picture of the Kenyan context. Despite the available literature to the researchers' knowledge, none has been able to give a comprehensive picture of factors affecting career choice undergraduate students at the University of Eldoret.

2. Statement of Problem

Regardless of great effort put forth by families, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, many young people encounter difficulties in the transition from the world of school to that of work (Atchoarena, 2005; Nykanen *et al.*, 2010). Some students insist on studying courses where they clearly lack basic foundation in academic and attitude preparation (Waudo, 2008). It is further noted that there are cases where students have enrolled in certain programs but later on discover they lack interest in the particular field. Despite the challenges associated with career choice among students in public universities in Kenya, few studies have been done to investigate these factors.

3. Objective of Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To assess how family factors influence career choice among undergraduate students in public universities.
- ii. To examine the influence of peers on career choice among undergraduate students in public universities.
- iii. To establish the influence of role models on career choice among undergraduate students in public universities.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional study design. The target population was undergraduate students from different schools in the University of Eldoret, Kenya. The study considered second, third and fourth year undergraduate students who were in session during the period of January to May, 2015. A convenience sampling technique was used to obtain the sample for the study. Using simple random sampling technique, 72 students were selected from second year, 70 students from third year and 68 students from fourth year respectively to have a total sample size of 210. The questionnaires were assigned randomly to the respondents so as to reduce biasness.

The researchers used questionnaires as an instrument of data collection. The questionnaires had both closed and open ended questions. The open-ended questions permitted a greater depth of response. The closed-ended questions captured personal details and attitude scales.

The questionnaire had 3 sections. Section A gave the general information of the respondents. Section B addressed the specific objectives of the study which included parental, peer and role models influence on career choices. The questions used were in likert scale form which ranged from strongly disagree with a score of 1 to strongly agree with the highest score of 5. Section C provided the respondents with an opportunity to share any additional information relevant to the study.

Questionnaires filled by the respondents were edited for completeness and consistency. Data was checked for coding errors and omissions. Descriptive statistics were generated for both categorical and continuous variables using percentages, means and standard deviation. To test for associations between various career choice factors, Pearson correlation was employed. Data analysis was done using both Microsoft Excel 2010 and STATA version 13.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Demographic information of the respondents

Table 1 below shows gender distribution among the student respondents who were interviewed. 53.8% were male while their female counterparts were 46.2%. It is further noted that of the respondents interviewed 34.3% are in their 2^{nd} Year while those in the 3^{rd} and 4^{th} year represented 33.3% and 32.4% respectively. Majority of the respondents were from the school of science 36.7%, followed by school of education with 20%. Respondents from the schools of business, agriculture, natural resources and engineering were 17.1%, 14.8%, 5.2% and 4.3% respectively. The least proportion was from school of environment which was 1.9%.

Table 1. Demographic mormation of the respondents							
Characteristic	N (%)						
Age category (yrs)							
Younger adults	68 (32.4)						
Older adults	142 (67.6)						
Gender							
Male	113 (53.8)						
Female	97 (46.2)						
Year of study							
Second	72 (34.3)						
Third	70 (33.3)						
Fourth	68 (32.4)						
School/faculty type							
Science	77 (36.7)						
Education	42 (20.0)						
Business and management sciences	36 (17.1)						
Agriculture	31 (14.8)						
Natural resource management	11 (5.2)						
Engineering	9 (4.3)						
Environmental science	4 (1.9)						

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

5.2 Distribution of current career choices among respondents

From the table 2 below, majority of the respondents were currently taking education given by 20% followed by applied statistics with 15.2%. However, 9.5%, 6.2%, 5.7% were currently pursuing business studies, actuarial science and computer science respectively. Those taking agricultural education extension and Bsc general tied at 5.2% among other courses.

Table 2: Percent distribution of Current career choice of the respondents							
Current career choice	Frequency	Percentage (%)					
Education	42	20.0					
Applied statistics	32	15.2					
Business management	20	9.5					
Actuarial science	13	6.2					
Computer science	12	5.7					
Agricultural education extension	11	5.2					
Bsc. general	11	5.2					

Table 2: Percent distribution of Current career choice of the respondents

5.3 Initial intended career of choice

From the table 3 below, majority of the respondent's mentioned engineering and medicine as the leading career choices (17.1% vs. 14.3%) respectively while selecting their future careers shortly before finishing high school. 9.5%, 8.6% and 7.6% preferred doing business management, applied statistics and education. The least preferred course was computer science which scored at 5.7%.

Table 3: Career choice respondents intended to pursue								
Intended career choice	Frequency	Percentage (%)						
Engineering	36	17.1						
Medicine	30	14.3						
Business management	20	9.5						
Applied statistics	18	8.6						
Education	16	7.6						
Computer science	12	5.7						

5.4 Influence of family on career choice

Table 4 below depicts findings on how family factors influence career choices among the respondents. Most of the respondents suggested that their career choice was influenced by the advice of their parents having the highest mean of 2.79 followed by siblings' advice, parent's education and parent's income with a mean of 2.29, 2.24 and 2.11 respectively. Parent's career and family pressure had the least mean of 1.95 and 1.73 respectively.

Moreover, 18.46% of the respondents felt that parent's advice had an influence on their career choice. This means that 81.54% of the respondents did not feel that parent's advice had an influence on their career choice. Parent's career, parent's income, parent's education, uncles/ auntie's advice and sibling's advice had 12.91%, 13.96%, 14.82%, 13.24% and 15.16% influence respectively. Family pressure had the least influence indicated by 11.45%.

Table 4: Family factors influence on career choice									
		Low	Moderate	Great					
Description	Not at all	extent	extent	extent	Mean	SDEV	%		
Parents career	99	49	35	27	1.95	1.075	12.91		
Parents income	93	36	45	35	2.11	1.151	13.96		
Parents education	89	30	40	49	2.24	1.231	14.82		
Uncles/ Aunties advice	96	48	32	32	2.00	1.112	13.24		
Parents advice	47	30	54	79	2.79	1.173	18.46		
Siblings advice	81	37	40	51	2.29	1.215	15.16		
Family pressure	117	47	27	17	1.73	0.975	11.45		
AVERAGES	88.85714	39.57143	39	41.42857	2.158571	1.133143	100		

5.5 Correlation between family influence and career choice

Table 5 below shows correlation between family influence and career choice. Parents' career against the parents income, parents education, Parent's advice, and family pressure are at (r=0.397, ** p=0.000), (r=0.341 **, p=0.000), (r=0.307 **, p=0.000), (r=0.245 ** p=0.000). This means there is a positive correlation between career choice and parents' career, parents income, parents education, Parent's advice, Sibling's advice and family pressure (p<0.0001).

Parent's advice against the uncles/ auntie's advice, siblings advice are at (r=0.117, p=0.93), (r=0.119, p=0.087). The p-value for both uncle's/auntie's advice and siblings advice indicators are above 0.05 thus there is no confidence that there is a strong correlation between career choice and both uncle's/auntie's advice and siblings advice.

Parent's education against the parent's career, parent's income, uncles/ auntie's advice, Parent's advice, Sibling's advice and family pressure shows that there is a positive correlation between career choice and parent's career, parent's income, uncles/ auntie's advice, Parent's advice, Sibling's advice and family pressure (P<0.0001).

Parent's advice against parent's career, parent's income, parent's education, uncles/ auntie's advice, Sibling's advice and family pressure had a significantly positive correlation between career choice and all the above mentioned indicators. Also family pressure against parent's career, parent's income, parent's education, uncles/ auntie's advice, Parent's advice, Sibling's advice had a significantly positive correlation (p<0.002).

Uncle's/aunties advice against parents career, parents income and siblings advice had a p-value greater than 0.05. This likewise shows that there is no correlation between career choice and the indicators mentioned above.

1	able 5 Correla	tion bet	ween la	inny minu	ence and	career	choice	
Indicator		Parent	Parent	Parents		Parent		Family
		S	S	educatio	Uncles/	S	Sibling	pressur
		career	incom	n		advice	s advice	e
			e		Auntie			
					S			
					advice			
	Pearson Correlation	1	.397**	.341**	.117	.307**	.119	.245**
Parents career	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000	.000	.093	.000	.087	.000
	Ν	210	209	208	208	210	209	208
Parents income	Pearson Correlation	.397**	1	.312**	.114	.298**	.152*	.259**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000		.000	.103	.000	.028	.000
	Ν	209	209	207	207	209	208	208
Parents education	Pearson Correlation	.341**	.312**	1	.270**	.412**	.273**	.322**

 Table 5 Correlation between family influence and career choice

	Sig. (2	000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	tailed) N	208	207	208	206	208	207	206
	Pearson Correlation	.117	.114	.270**	1	.218 ^{**}	.114	.216**
Uncles/auntie s advice	Sig. (2 tailed)	093	.103	.000		.002	.101	.002
	Ν	208	207	206	208	208	207	206
Parents	Pearson Correlation	.307**	.298**	.412**	.218**	1	.506**	.357**
advice	Sig. (2 tailed)	000	.000	.000	.002		.000	.000
	Ν	210	209	208	208	210	209	208
Siblings	Pearson Correlation	.119	.152*	.273**	.114	.506**	1	.304**
advice	Sig. (2 tailed)	.087	.028	.000	.101	.000		.000
	Ν	209	208	207	207	209	209	207
Family pressure	Pearson Correlation	.245**	.259**	.322**	.216**	.357**	.304**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000	
	Ń	208	208	206	206	208	207	208
**. Correlation	n is significan	t at the 0.	01 level	(2-tailed).				

•. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

.397 .307 .341** .245** .119 .117

.000 .000 .093 .000 .087 .00

5.6 Peer influence on career choice

Table 6 shows the analyses of responses on peer influence on career. Mentorship of the respondents by their friends had the highest mean of 2.71 followed by friend's advice having a mean of 2.42 and friend's approval of career choice and same career as peer having a mean of 2.28 and 1.79 respectively.

This shows that 29.46% of the respondents felt that mentorship by their friend had an influence on their career choice. This means that 70.54% of the respondents did not feel that mentorship by their friend had an influence on their career choice. Friend's advice, friend's approval and same career as peer were at 26.30, 24.78%, and 19.46% respectively.

Table 6: Peer influence on career choice								
		Low	Moderate	Great				
Description	Not at all	extent	extent	extent	Mean	SDEV	%	
Same career	119	40	25	25	1.79	1.062	19.46	
Friends advice	62	37	71	39	2.42	1.102	26.30	
Mentorship	49	38	47	76	2.71	1.184	29.46	
Friends approval	25	39	76	51	2.28	1.21	24.78	
Averages	63.75	38.5	54.75	47.75	2.3	1.1395	100	

5.7 Correlation between peer influence and career choice

Table 7 below shows correlation between peer influence and career choice. The same career as your peer against the friend's advice, mentorship by your friend and friend's approval of career choice are at (r=0.464, ** p=0.000), r=0.219*, p=0.001), r=0.255*, p=0.000). This means there is a significantly positive correlation between career choice and same career as your peer, friends advice, friends mentorship and friends approval.

Friend's advice against mentorship by a friend and friend's approval of career choice shows that there is a positive correlation between career choice and these indicators as the p values are below 0.05. Mentorship by a friend and friend's approval of career choice shows that there is a significant positive correlation between these indicators as the p value is below 0.05.

Ta	Table 7: Correlation between peer influence and career choice						
Indicators		Same career	Friends	Friends	Friends		
		as peer	advice	mentorship	approval		
q	Pearson Correlation	1	.464**	.219**	.255**		
Same career as peer	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001	.000		
	N	209	208	209	209		
Friends advice	Pearson Correlation	.464**	1	.455**	.340***		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000		
	N	208	209	209	209		
F ' I (I '	Pearson Correlation	.219**	.455**	1	.453**		
Friends mentorship	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000		.000		
	N	209	209	210	210		
Erionda anneval	Pearson Correlation	.255**	.340**	.453**	1		
Friends approval	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	209	209	210	210		
**. Correlation is sig	nificant at the 0.01 l	evel (2-tailed).					

5.8 Influence of role model on career choice

The table 8 below is an indication of the results with respect to the influence of role models in the career choice of the respondents. Factors that had the leading source of influence on the respondents were mentors advice with a mean of 3.03 followed closely by role models advice with a mean of 2.98 respectively. The one with the least mean was high school teacher's advice which had a mean of 2.54. The overall standard deviation of approximately 1.2 was an indication of similar responses across the respondents.

Further the table also shows almost 36% of the respondents felt that the mentors' advice had an influence on their career while high school teacher's advice and role models advice were at 30% and 34% respectively.

Table 8: Role models influence on career choice										
		Low	Moderate	Great						
	Not at all	extent	extent	extent	Mean	SDEV	%			
High school teachers										
advice	64	34	47	65	2.54	1.218	29.707			
Mentors advice	35	30	39	106	3.03	1.149	35.438			
Role models advice	50	18	28	113	2.98	1.261	34.853			
Averages	49.67	27.33	38	94.67	2.85	1.21	100			

Table 8: Role models influence on career choice

5.9 Correlation between role models and career choice

From table 9 below, High school teacher's advice against mentors advice and role models career shows that there is a positive correlation between career choice and these factors, since the p-values are less than 5% level of significance. Mentors advice against role models career shows that there is a positive correlation between career choice and the selected factors.

Correlations				
		high school teachers advice	l mentors advice	role models career
High school teachers advice		1	.252**	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	Ν	210	210	209
	Pearson Correlation	.252**	1	.491**
Mentors advice	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	210	210	209
	Pearson Correlation	.256**	.491**	1
Role models career	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	209	209	209
**. Correlation is signif	icant at the 0.01 lev	el (2-tailed).		

Table 9 Correlation between role models and career choice

5.10 Student perception on changing career after an initial placement on some course

Figure 1 below shows that majority (77.99%) of the respondents would opt for changing their courses they are currently doing when offered another chance. Only 22.01% of the respondents are comfortable with the courses they are doing and will not change to any new course if at all it's offered. This means that quite a large percent of respondents were doing courses they did not intend to pursue.

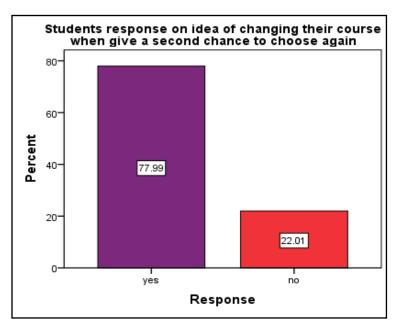


Figure 1: Students idea of changing the current course of study when offered a chance

5.11 Career benefit influence on career choice

From table 10 below, it is clear that 83.3% of the respondents said that economic stability influenced their career choice compared to 12.4% who felt like they were not influenced by economic stability in selecting their career. A higher proportion, 89.5% of the undergraduate students felt that availability of job opportunities was important in determining their career choice while 6.2% said that job opportunity was not an important factor. More than 70% of the respondents said that image of profession, training and development, career growth prospects and job satisfaction were important factors in determining their choice of career. 40.5% of the respondents said that travel opportunities was not an important factor in their career choice while 48.6% felt that travel opportunities was an important factor.

	N	No		sure	Yes	
Variable on career benefit	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Economic stability	26	12.4	7	3.3	175	83.3
Job opportunities	13	6.2	9	43	188	89.3
Profession image	38	18.1	20	9.5	149	71.0
Working hours/ conditions	61	29.0	19	9.0	129	61.4
Training and development	35	16.7	20	9.5	155	73.8

Travel opportunities	85	40.5	22	10.5	102	48.6
Socio-cultural benefits	71	33.8	28	13.3	108	51.4
Career growth	20	9.5	14	6.7	173	82.4
Job satisfaction	16	7.6	8	3.8	186	88.6

6. Discussion

This study has shown that career benefit factors had the highest influence on career choice. This is because more that 80% of the respondents agreed that career benefit factors such as economic stability, availability of job opportunities, career growth prospects and job satisfaction influenced their career choice decision. Travel opportunities had the lowest influence one's career choice. This therefore enables the researcher to conclude that amongst all career benefits, travel opportunities offered by any given career do not attract students to pursue that career.

A study by (Berndt *et al.*, 1990) indicated that the best friend exerts strong influence on individuals and their choices. The finding led him to conclude that peer influence leads to an increase in friends' similarity of decisions. The results of this study concur with the one in the study since mentorship of the respondents by their friends, friend's approval of career choice and friend's advice were proved to have a great influence on their choice of career.

The research study is in line with (Perrone *et al.*, 2001) which showed that students tend to be influenced most by the role model's career, followed by the mentor's advice and the least influence being high school teachers. These results are in line with the current study which also revealed that the leading factors that had the greatest source of influence on role models were similarly mentors advice, role models advice and high school teachers' advice. The leading sources of influence on family factors were mainly parent's advice and sibling's advice which was indicated by 18.5% and 15.2% respectively.

Peers influenced each other in their choice of career. This study shows that among the peer influence, factors that had a great influence included mentorship of the respondents by their friends and friend's advice which accounted for 29.46% and 26.3% of the peer factors influence on career choice respectively. The same career as one's peers had the lowest contribution of 19.46%.

7. Conclusion

The government employs and as well trains counsellors as one of its human resource, the counsellor's take up the role of career guidance in different high schools country wide. The results of this study have shown that mentor's advice has the least influence on career choice This study therefore recommends that the ministry of education should change its strategy on the dissemination of information. Since from the research, parents' advice, mentors advice and mentorship by fellow peers positively influenced the majority of the respondents. This is a clear indication that interaction at all social set ups has influence over ones career choice, however the interaction at an academic level has least influence as indicated by the least influence by the high school teachers advice and more influence arising from peers and parents.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

HN, OO, JK and DR led the development of the manuscript. JK and BK performed the statistical analysis. SK, JK & JB conceived, designed and supervised the study. DR, JK & BK assisted in writing the manuscript and DR & JK contributed to the study design. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.