

Understanding Career Choice Dilemma in Kenya: Issues of Informed Choices and Course Availability

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors determining Students' career choice in Kenya. The study sought to determine the influence of factors of opportunity and personality on career choice among students in Kenyan universities. The study adopted descriptive survey design and targeted 3,000 students in the faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi. A simple random sampling was used to draw a sample of 500 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires. Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 23). A total of 457 questionnaires were filled by the respondents. The findings showed that opportunity factors influence student's career choices. Such includes perception of ideal job, mentorship opportunities and education opportunity. Personal factors also influenced student's career choices. Such factors included personal interest personal value and personal skills. The study concludes that students require mentorship so as to develop ideas regarding their careers and thus informed choices.

Keywords: Career choice, informed choices, Course

1. Introduction

Career choice is a critical aspects of an individual's life. Career chosen determines the role pattern need to be played by the individual in the society in the future (Patton and McMahon, 2014). Trait and behaviour researchers believe that career choice must be consistent with the desire and interest of an individual (Taber and Blankemeyer, 2015; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999). With focused and consistent career choice, an individual is less likely to develop a tendency of changing jobs in a short period of time (Brown, 2015). According to Ballantine and Hammack (2015), Career selection is an ongoing process which starts from the childhood perception on job up to the school level, higher education and adult perspectives. This therefore implies that students need to create their career pattern through carefully though processes.

However, studies indicate that students are normally faced with a dilemma in making a career choice decision in their lives (Bullock-Yowell, McConnell & Schedin, 2014; Holmegaard, Ulriksen & Madsen, 2014). In some instances, admission boards are faced to apply to choose career subjects for students. According to Wabwoba and Mwakondo (2011), carer choosing is a tiresome process, costly, and prone to bias, errors, or favour, leading to disadvantaging innocent students and recommends use of Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) in a bid to address the said challenges. One major challenge students face is to match their career choices with their abilities and academic performance (Korir and Wafula, 2012). According to (Eick,2002) understanding the reasons 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.

Studies indicate that childhood fantasies, culture, personality types, previous experiences, gender, interests, life roles, skills, abilities and talents as well as social and economic conditions are some of the factors influencing career choice (Bregazzi and Harrison, 2002; Sharf, 2016). A student's career choice may thus be influenced by one or a combination of such factors. That notwithstanding, many people still end up in careers that do not fit them (job mismatch) (Robert, 2014). This study considers opportunity and personality factors as they may influence career choice among university students in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Studies indicate that several factors may influence the career that students find themselves in. In a study conducted by Metheny and McWhirter (2013), family and socio economic background of an individual influenced their career choice. The study demonstrated that the levels of education, economic status, religious status and the general perceptions and values within a family set up determines the amount of information they have regarding career choices. Other studies have also indicated that individual's perceptions of who they are, or their self-concept, influences their career choice (Kerka, 2010).

Several steps or stages are involved in career choice due to the fact that every person is unique, has different personality and characteristics, matures at a different pace, and lives in a specific environment. Career decision in this respect therefore can be seen as a life journey. In some instances, an individual may experience change of career interest. Peterman, Kermish-Allen, Knezek, Christensen & Tyler-Wood (2016), argues that types of work that interest an individual at age 18 might not be necessarily true when they turn 21. This argument therefore

presents the need for students to be flexible and open-minded in choosing career (Sears and Gordon, 2008). The concept of work is different from that of career. Many terms in the career choice field are used interchangeably, although their meaning varies (Sears and Gordon, 2008). Several terms used to refer to career include: job, vocation, occupation and work among many others. According to Kerka (2010), career is a continuous life process consisting of many work experience and life roles. Your career consists of your life history, which not only includes your vocation but the time you spent in school, in your community and with your family. According to a career theorist, Sears and Gordon (2008) career is the imposition of direction in a person's vocational behavior, subject to his or her comprehension and will.

Therefore each decision one makes will have an impact on his or her life in the short run and in the future. According to Hooley (2012), career choice is a complex science with the advent of information technology. 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). 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). Most of the students who are in secondary schools do not have accurate information about occupational opportunities to help them make appropriate career choice, but university students are considered mature enough to be able to make career choice decisions on their own (Hooley, 2012). According to Kerka (2010), career choice is influenced by multiple factors including; (1) personality, (2) interests, (3) self-concept, (4) cultural identity, (5) globalization, (6) socialization, (7) role model, (8) social support and (9) finances. According to Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2008), each individual undertaking career choice decision, the process is influenced by various factors including; (1) the context in which they live in, (2) their personal aptitudes, (3) social contacts and (4) educational attainment. Hewitt (2010), argues that there are several factors that influence career choices and these can either be intrinsic or extrinsic or both. He further argues that most people are influenced by careers favored by their parents whereas others follow the careers that their educational choices have set for them. Several decide to follow their interests and passion irrespective of how much or little they will turn to while others decide on the careers that have very promising income. Perception of students of being appropriate for certain jobs also has been found to be influenced by a number of factors including cultural background, period of schooling, accomplishment level, science subjects' choice, attitudes and variances in job features (Stebleton, 2007).

According to Basavage (2007), Career choice is one of many important choices students will make in determining future plans and that this decision will impact them throughout their lives. The essence of who the student is or want to become will revolve around what the student wants to do with their life-long work. She went ahead to ask what really influences university students in one way or another. According to Rosenstock and Steinberg (cited in O'Brien, 2009, p.21), "Work is one of our highest consecrations, and that everybody should have a honest occupation". She argues that each student possess the unique background and this determines how they perceive the world and this explains why we perceive similar things in different ways. On the other hand, Splaver (2011) is of the belief that, that history is created, in part by the Students' environment, personality, and opportunity, determines how students make career choices. It then follows that student never perceives their environment, personality, and opportunity the same and this explains the different career choices students make. The first factor in choosing a career is the environment factors that influence students' career choice. Students tend to choose career that is directly linked to the surrounding environment and try as much as possible to solve the existing challenges in the surrounding (Splaver (2011). For example, students who have lived their entire lives on an island will most likely choose a career dealing with the environment around them which is mostly to do with water, or alternatively choose to have nothing to do with the island, on no occasion to have anything to do with the environment around water again (Perrone, 2011). Maybe someone in the Students' life has made a significant impact or impression, leading to a certain choice of career (Hewitt, 2010).

Parents' educational background may also influence Students' views on whether or not to continue their education. Media influence also play a role in the process of career choices among student, a student may see some prominent media personalities on television who may have influenced them to either make or alter a similar career choice to those personality or parents may have demanded that their Career Choice Factors assume a family business (Splaver, 2011). There are various environmental factors that would lead a student to a chosen career (Stebleton, 2007). How students have seen themselves in a role in which personality is a determining factor may influence a chosen career (Hewitt, 2010). Some careers demand that you have the personality to match the qualities of the occupation (Bassali, 2008).

According to the study carried out by Perrone (2011) on the opportunity of college students having a role model influence on the career influences the career choices one take, it was clearly discovered that role model supportiveness, and quality of relationship have an influence on the career choice a student pursues. In same study it was found that a great percentage of students selected same gender role models. There is also research on the role of spirituality and religion in growth of career, even though inadequate in possibility has suggested that such factors relate positively to desirable career development outcomes such as career decisions (Stebleton,

2007). For a majority of people with spiritual or religious commitment faith plays a critical role in the career decision making process (Duffy and Dick, 2009).

A Study carried out on career choice in Ethiopia by Stebleton (2007) shows that the students had an external locus of control and believes that there are various external factors which influence their career choices. These external factors include; (1) previous work experience, (2) political and economic considerations and (3) the influence of key individuals in a person's life. Pummel, Harwood and Lavallee (2008) explain that external influences that helps to shape an individual's career choice are also influenced by significant others through social support from peers. Natalie (2009), suggests that young adults through interaction with the context of family, school and community learn about and explore careers which ultimately lead to their career choice. One consistent finding in research suggests that adolescents' own aspirations are influenced by their parent's aspirations or expectations (Stebleton, 2007).

Parental support and encouragement are important factors that have been found to influence career choice. Children may choose what their parents desire simply to please them. This clearly shows that environmental, opportunities and personality factors play a great role in the universities students' career choices. Students in colleges and universities will made career choice based on either the environmental, opportunities or personalities or a combination of two or all the three factors (Stebleton, 2007). This study aims to find out how these factors influences students' career choices in the Kenyan universities.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) model of career choice to conceptualise the process of individuals' career decision-making and factors influencing their choices. Figure 1 shows how individuals develop their career interest through the interaction of their learning experiences, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations, and these subsequently influence their career interests and choices.

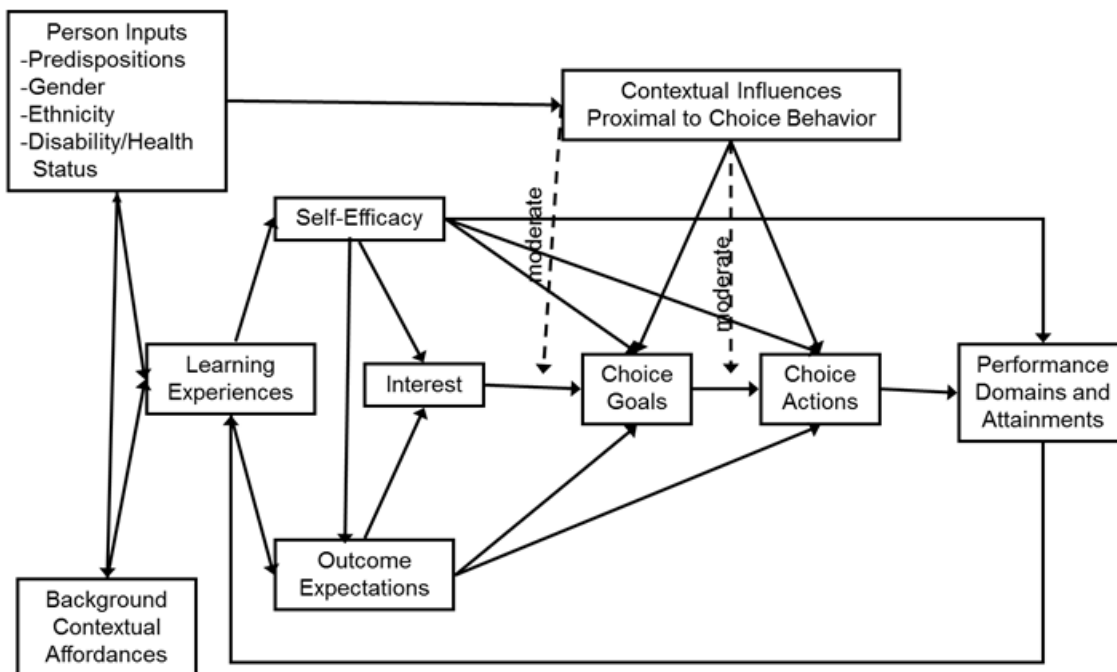


Figure 1: Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) model of career choice, adopted from Adapted from Lent, Brown and Hackett 1994

The model is based on the social cognitive theories and has three primary tenets i.e. self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals; self-efficacy refers to the beliefs people have about their ability to successfully complete the steps required for a given task. Individuals develop their sense of self-efficacy from personal performance, learning by example, social interactions, and how they feel in a situation. Outcome expectations are the beliefs related to the consequences of performing a specific behavior. Typically, outcome expectations are formed through past experiences, either direct or vicarious, and the perceived results of these experiences. Goals are seen as playing a primary role in behavior. A goal is defined as the decisions to begin a particular activity or future plan. Behavior is organized or sustained based on these previously set goals (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994)

4. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target population for the study as 3,000 regular students enrolled in the faculty of Arts at the University of Nairobi. A simple random sampling was used to draw a sample of 500 respondents. Structured questionnaire was administered to the sampled students in their halls of residence. Filled questionnaires were collected at the end of the exercise, cleaned and analysed using SPSS (version 23). A total of 457 questionnaires were filled by the respondents representing a return rate of 91.4%.

5. Findings

General Information

Table 1 below represents the demographic information of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Age	above 50	14	3.1
	41-50	23	5.0
	31-40	46	10.1
	18-30	375	82.1
	Total	457	100
Gender	Male	250	54.7
	Female	207	45.3
	Total	457	100
Father's education	Post University	68	14.9
	University	112	24.6
	Collage	175	38.3
	High school	88	19.3
	primary school	10	2.1
	No formal schooling	4	0.8
	Total	457	100
Mothers education	Post University	12	2.6
	University	103	22.5
	Collage	177	38.8
	High school	103	22.5
	primary school	29	6.4
	No formal schooling	33	7.2
	Total	457	100

About 57.2% of the sampled students were male, with a majority, 82.1% indicating that they were aged between 18 and 30 years. About 38.3% of the students indicated that their fathers had achieved college education with another 24.6% indicating that their father had university education. Only 0.8% of the students indicated that their fathers had No formal schooling. Of the sampled students, 38.8% indicated that their mothers had college education. Those who indicated university education for their mothers were 22.5%.

Opportunity Factors influencing career choice

The factors considered included perception of ideal job, mentorship opportunities and education opportunities. Students were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with the statements. Table 2 below presents the opportunity factors influencing student's career choice.

Table 2 : Opportunity factors influencing students' career choice

	Responses(%)					Mean	Regression analysis	
	SA	A	N	D	SD		Pearson's Co. eff	p
My perception of an ideal job played or will play a role in my career choice	44.6	39	7.8	5.4	3.2	1.836389	0.112	0.011
Mentorship opportunity played or will play a role in my career choice	22.3	41.6	23.7	11.1	1.3	2.275195	-0.604	0.09
Education opportunity played or will play a role in my career choice	39.9	44.3	4.3	3.9	7.6	1.257123	-1.450	0.01

Most respondents agreed that the perception of ideal job played a role in their career choices (M=1.836389). A positive correlation was established between respondents' career choice and the perception of an ideal job factor. A pearson's correlation value of 0.112 in the test at the level of significance (p value) lower than 0.05, this indicated that there is a statistical significance between the two variables. Similarly, mentorship opportunity also played a role in career choice (M= 2.275195). Regression analysis revealed a negative correlation coefficient of -0.604 obtained with a level of significance (P value) of 0.01 in Pearson test. This indicates a statistical significant relationship between the two variable. This was also true of education opportunity (M=1.257123) with a negative Pearson's correlation coefficient of -0.145 and a level of significance (P value) of 0.01. This indicates a statistical significant relationship between the two variable. Mentorship opportunity did not however play a role in career choice (p=0.09)

The findings of the study thus indicates that opportunity factors (education opportunity and perception of ideal job) plays a role in career choice among university students in that order and that mentorship opportunity did not play a role. According to Heyde and Jordaan, (1979), the location and timing as opportunities are very significant in gratifying ambitions. Students have shown all the desire, ability, and skill required for a certain careers, but if the student has not fully exploited the right setting at the right idea in period, his optimism for that productive career are condensed or nothing. Similarly Sear and Gordon (2002) posits that insight of the perfect job turns as a screen for job suitability and inspires the choice process. A student must thus be having an idea of what the perfect job is in his or her head, precisely what one desires to get up and go do every day. Further, mentorship, as revealed in this study also play a role in career choice. Education opportunities includes the type of school attended, education system and age at which one accesses these opportunity (Sear and Gordon, 2002).

A study conducted by Hin, et al (2007) indicated that students who were mentored on career choice at an early stage made their career choices earlier in their life and actually made informed career choice as compared to their counterparts with no mentorship opportunities. The insignificant role played by mentorship as revealed in this study thus points to a glaring gap in career development among university students sampled. According to a study conducted by Koech, Bitok, Rutto, Koech, Okoth, Korir & Ngala (2016), learners seems to be in a dilemma when it comes to career choice. This find therefore points to an understanding that lack of career mentorship could be one of the factors attributable to career dilemma among students in Kenyan universities.

Personality Factors

These factors to play a vital role in influencing career choices that students make. Factors considered included interest, values and skills. Table 3 below represents the personal factors influencing career choice.

Table 3. Personal factors influencing career choice

	Responses(%)					Mean	Regression analysis	
	SA	A	N	D	SD		Pearson Co. eff.	p
My interest played or will play a role in my career choice	56.2	32.3	11.1	0.4	0	1.557363	0.011	0.001
My values played or will play a role in my career choice	39.4	40.1	16.8	3.7	0	1.847873	-0.064	0.001
My skills played or will play a role in my career choice.	56.7	37	4.6	1.1	0.6	1.51874	-0.074	0.001

Most of the students agreed that their interest played a role in their career choice (Mean= 1.557363) with a majority of them strongly agreeing (56.2%). A positive correlation was established between respondents' career choice and the interest with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.011 in the test at the level of significance (p value) lower than 0.05, this indicated that there is a statistical significance between the two variables. The study also established that students' values played a role in their career choices (M=1.847873). Regression analysis revealed a negative correlation (-0.064) between career choice and skills personality factor a P value of 0.01 indicating significant relationship. This was also true of the student's skills (M=1.51874). Regression analysis revealed Pearson's correlation coefficient of -0.074 obtained with a level of significance (P value) of 0.01. This

indicates a statistical significant relationship between the two variable.

The findings indicate that students' skills, interests and values respectively played major roles in determining their career choices. According to Hewitt (2010), student's interest greatly determine occupational selection. Going by this finding, students, will have to show interest for them to enroll in a given discipline in their career. Sear and Gordon (2002) postulates that conflicts will always be experienced in every stage of life. One is therefore required to rank his values when making a decision. Hooley (2012) also established personal skills have a significant influence on ones' career choices and that students pick careers based on their skills and what they feel they can do better. A student will thus employ their skills, interest and values in coming up with their career choices.

6. Summary and recommendations

The study established that opportunity factors are significant in influencing the career choices that students make. This was also true of the personality factors. While mentorship is considered as fundamental in informing career choice, this study established that lack of mentorship opportunities could be one of the greatest factors responsible for career dilemma among students in Kenya. It is thus recommended that opportunity factors should be created to the Students at an earlier stage to prepare them make informed decisions on their career choices at an earlier stage of their life. The government through the ministry of education should develop policies to create the opportunity factors for all students. Further, students should be allowed to make informed choices regarding their career and this should put into place their personal factors.

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