Influence of Student's Interest on Career Choice among First Year University Students in Public and Private Universities in Kisii County, Kenya

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Abstract

Career choice has lately become a very complicated science, considering that the decision is influenced by numerous factors. Yet, choosing the right career is important in ensuring that individuals lead rewarding lives, are motivated at their jobs and can achieve remarkable productivity, thus setting the stage for organizational success and sustainability. Given the importance of making the right career choice, it is imperative that individuals are aware of the factors that influence such weighty decisions and do so from a point of knowledge. The present study sought to examine the influence of interest on career choice decisions among first year university students. To address this objective, the study utilised two hundred and ninety six (296) first year students selected from six universities. The Respondents were selected using purposive as well as systematic sampling approaches within the descriptive survey design. They responded to a specially designed questionnaire and the data collected were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences as the main tool of analysis. The study concludes that student interest is significant in determining career choice decisions for an individual's career.

Keywords: Career, career choice, influence, interest, motivation.

Background to the Study

Every individual must, at one time or another, be confronted by the problem of occupational choice and many, encounter this problem when as students they are required to choose study programmes leading to their future careers, as parents helping their children select careers, as teachers, career officers or psychologists, who as part of their daily work, offer career guidance to students (Ferreira, Santos, Fonseca, & Haase, 2006). Perhaps, the significance of career choice can be underscored by the influence careers have on an individual's income, standard of living, status in society, social contacts, as well as emotional health and feelings of self-worth. Therefore, making suitable career decisions implies less wastage of resources in education and training (Audit Commission, 1993). Furthermore, careers once chosen will probably affect an individual throughout their lives. It is in this connection therefore that Sharf (2010) contends that clarity and meaning of life are expressed in ones career. Consequently, it is by being armed with better information and proper guidance that individuals are able to make appropriate career decisions.

Due to need for specialization at the work place, choosing a career is not an easy and straight forward undertaking. It is a complicated and daunting task because the decision is influenced by various factors – extrinsic, intrinsic or a combination of both (Hewitt, 2010). Studies have shown that the main intrinsic factors responsible for influencing career choice decisions include an individual's personality, interests, self concept, attitudes and cultural identity. On the other hand, the main extrinsic factors include social contacts, role models; availability of resources such as information and finances, globalization, ethnic background, level of educational attainment, choice of subjects of study and differences in job characteristics (Kerka, 2000; Bandura, .Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001; McQuaid & Bond, 2003).

Hewit (2010) notes that most people are heavily influenced either by professions that their parents favour; or the ones that their educational achievements have opened for them. Yet, other individuals are influenced by careers that offer prospects of higher benefits including salary, allowances and holidays. However; there are also those who choose to follow careers that they have a passion for regardless of the prospects of the benefits; for the reason that a career is a critical element in determining an individual's daily routine, life activities, standard of living; and the spiritual and social aspects of life. In fact a career affects the ordering of one's entire life. Although there are differences among various population groups, generally extrinsic influences on career choice decisions are mostly influenced by parents, peers, friends, relatives, role models, and teachers especially career counsellors. This is possible through social support or interaction (Pummel, Harwood & Lavallee, 2008). However, the extent to which each of them influences career choice decisions varies from one population to the other.

Before making career choices, students are often provided with a list of careers from which they are supposed to make choices. However, most students lack adequate information regarding various careers hence the choices they make are embedded in their perception of the ideal job and the subjects they study in secondary school. Perhaps the only support students get within the school system is from career masters or counsellors who

are expected to support students in their career choice. When the final examination results are released, and depending on the grades obtained, students are allowed to revise their choices. Then, the Joint Universities' Admission Board selects students for admission to various courses on the basis of these choices.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design in which a questionnaire was utilized to survey 296 first year University students to determine how interest influences career choice decisions. The use of a descriptive design is an extremely effective way of collecting information more cost effectively from a large number of Respondents and in a relatively short time. Another advantage of the design is that Respondents are more truthful while responding to the questionnaires especially regarding sensitive personal data since the responses are anonymous. However, the main disadvantage with this method is the challenge of notably low questionnaire returns to the extent that in most cases, it may affect the representativeness of the originally selected sample (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). To mitigate against low return rates, the researcher made sure that Respondents were allowed adequate time to complete the questionnaires and thereafter collected them.

The study was located in Kisii Municipality which is the cradle of the Kisii community but also serves as a confluence of the Luo community of south Nyanza, the Kalenjin of South Rift and the Masais of the Mara. The choice of Kisii town as the area to conduct the study was motivated by a number of reasons: (i) the town is host to number of Universities (17 as of the time of conducting this study) operate campuses; (ii) there is an increasing number of individuals who having graduated from Universities don't fit into the job market and living in the town; (iii) the researcher, having been born and educated here is interested in finding out how to resolve the career choice problems, (iv) the location is easily accessible and 'the researcher can quickly develop rapport with the Respondents' (Shi, 2007 p.151); (v) finally, the researcher is familiar with this location which helped to contextualise the responses given by Respondents (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

The tool the study employed for data collection consisted of two sections: section 'One' with 8 items focussing on probing Respondent demographics and section 'Two' concentrated on probing the study variables. Piloting testing of the research tool was conducted at Kabianga University which is located outside the study location. It is easily accessible from Kisii town where the researcher is based.

To enhance validity of the instrument, the researcher established both content and criterion related validities by subjecting it to the scrutiny of two experts. They assessed the concepts the instrument purported to measure and whether the intended measurement scales were adequate to measure the concepts. In addition and to minimise or eliminate threats to reliability, the researcher subjected the instrument to evaluation by a language expert to determine the clarity and meaningfulness of items and instructions to Respondents. As a result, ambiguous, inconsistent, illogical, unclear and invalid questions were identified. Unclear items were rephrased and ambiguous ones were either replaced by alternative ones or eliminated altogether; inconsistence and invalid items were eliminated; and, illogical as well as unclear ones were worked on. To establish the reliability of the instrument, the researcher went on to assess the coefficient of reliability by administering the instrument twice to 20 first year students (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003 A period of two week interval was allowed between the first and second administration of the questionnaire. The coefficient of correlation between the first and second scores was calculated to determine the relationship between the two measurements. The calculations resulted in a correlation coefficient, $\alpha = .77$ which according McLeord (2003), is more than sufficient for a scale to be regarded as reliable enough to be employed in research.

Prior to collecting data, the researcher sought a permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Using the permit, permission was sought from University administration to carry out research. To prepare for the study, the researcher visited each participating University thrice. Taking advantage of the first visit, the researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of the visit, sought permission to conduct the research and indicated the role of the University as well as information required in order to undertake the study satisfactorily. In this regard, the researcher request for an electronic file containing names, cell phone numbers and email addressed of all first year students. The list was used to select students to participate in the study. The second visit which was arranged by phone was utilized to make logistical arrangements for the survey. The researcher was shown the halls to be used, the lecturers to assist during the actual administration of the questionnaires. During the last visit, the researcher and a research assistant arrived at the designated venues where there were assigned Lecturers to assist in identifying the students. Once they were admitted to the hall, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the benefits that will accrue from the study, the importance of providing truthful data and reiterated that participation was voluntary. One could decline participation at any time or decline to answer any question. Also, participants were informed that response was not timed and therefore they could take as much time as they needed. More importantly, participants were re-assured that the information was to be treated confidentially and that if disclosed, it will be in a way that does not identify them uniquely. Therefore, they were asked not to write their names or phone numbers or any mark on the questionnaire that can be used to identify them. The questionnaires were then

administered and participants responded. On average, most participants took 45 minutes to complete it and immediately thereafter, the questionnaires were collected.

FINDINGS
Although, 350 students out of 370 selected students, indicated willingness, only 296 finally complete the questionnaire giving a participation rate of 80%. Creswell (2013) notes that anything above 50% response rate is good in educational research. From a gender perspective, the sample consisted of 176 (59.5%) Males compared to 117 (39.5%) females while 3 (1%) did not indicate their gender. Most Respondents 294 (99.3%) were of the Christian faith. However, two (2) respondents did not indicate their religious affiliation. This means that the student population share basic principles which all Christians share notwithstanding the depth and diversity inherent in Christianity.

Respondents were of varying ages: 50 (16.9%) were aged above 25 years; 93 (31.4%) were aged between 22 and 25 years; , 222 (75%) were aged between 19 and 25 years; 129 (43.6%) were aged between 19 and 21 years while those aged below 18 years were 19 (6.4%). Their family backgrounds were also diverse. For instance, 244 (82.4%) of the Respondents were from families that have both parents compared to 29 (9.8%) who come from single parent families. At the same time, 9 (3.0%) come from families without both parents and 4 (1.4%) have been adopted. However, 10 (3.4%) did not indicate their family background. Family backgrounds may be indicative of the resources available for respondents to pursue their education. In situations where individuals come from backgrounds with both parents alive, they are expected to have adequate financial resources for education and that parental involvement in career direction is higher than in other family backgrounds. The worst background is where the Respondents are total orphans without being adopted.

Matching what one likes to do (interest) with what she or he does well (skill) to a Career choice can make the all important difference between liking a job and resenting it. On the individual level, it can lead to a personal sense of purpose and emotional well-being that comes with working in a field of interest. To employers, it means retaining well-trained and motivated employees, who are more productive with a reduction of staff turn-over expenses (Raj, 2010)

The study found that 272 (91.9%) of all respondents indicated that having prior knowledge of what a career entails is important to developing interest in a career. In fact having prior knowledge prepares an individual to what one is about to enter and therefore a decision will be made while well aware of what one is to expect, what work habits are expected of them and the potential earnings. In addition, prior knowledge acts as a lens through which we view and absorb new information (Kettlewell & Henry, 2009). It is like knowing where one wants to go before the start of a journey. Individual goals and interest produce motivation, that is, a person is directed towards a particular activity which is aimed at accomplishing goals or exploring interest. In this regard, motivation has two functions, one qualitative and the other quantitative. Qualitatively, motivation directs the individual toward selecting activities that will accomplish their goals and at the same time satisfy interests. Quantitatively, motivation serves an energizing function by providing the effort and persistence required to accomplish a goal or pursue an interest (Vosh & Schauble, 2014)

The reasons for acquiring knowledge prior to making a career choice, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Acquisition of Career Knowledge

Means	No. Respondents	Percentage
Doing Research & Consultations	79	61.7
Training, exposure & industrial attachment	38	29.7
Mentoring	6	4.7
Commitment and Motivation	4	3.1
Socializing with people you share a Career with	1	0.8
	128	**100.0**

In a general context, doing research is important in order to get a better understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon; to communicate the knowledge gained, to improve the situation of a practice, to have a voice and to make a difference (Lerner, 2001). The study found that having prior knowledge of what a career entails is important to developing and nurturing interest in the career. In fact having prior knowledge prepares an individual to what one is about to enter and therefore influences positively career choice decisions. The decision is made knowingly of what to expect, what work habits are involved and how is expected of them as well as potential earnings. Majority of those surveyed indicated that individuals acquire knowledge prior to joining a career through doing research and consultations; training, exposure and industrial attachment. Other avenues through which individuals receive prior knowledge for their careers include mentorship, commitment and motivation as well as socializing with people in a career of interest. This finding agrees with Gillie and Gillie (2003) who argued that making informed and considered career decisions has benefits that include making committed and productive workers who: (i) have greater ownership of their work roles; (ii) persist in the face of

adversity; and, (iii) take initiative and invest in their ongoing professional development. In addition, they are better collaborators, more likely to get along with their co-workers and supervisors, and, more likely to add value to whatever enterprise they are engaged in. Apart from making informed decision, another important factor that influences Career choice decisions is the possibility of progression in work hierarchy.

The study found that 274 (92.5%) of all respondents indicated that individuals attach a lot of importance to their careers. This demonstrates the importance of careers to individuals in leading rewarding lives. Careers are important in a number of ways which include:- authenticating oneself in terms of interests, temperament, personality, values, skills, talents, hopes, and dreams; influencing the types of activities, situations, and people with which one is one is interested in, and is most comfortable, happy and fulfilled; influencing the type of subjects one learns, their most effective and learning styles with which one is comfortable; influencing the type of extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports, pastimes one may be engaged in; influencing the types of work, paid or unpaid, one might do which align with one's talents, preferences and aspirations and which, are congruent with one's values, sense of meaning, and purpose; influencing the type of knowledge to develop in order to meet personal goals and objectives, and to adjust them with changing circumstances and emerging opportunities; and, influencing how an individual balances work and other life activities to become independent but yet resilient citizens who contribute to the prosperity of one's family and community.

Goulet and Singh (2002), studied three variables: job involvement or career attachment; organizational commitment; and job satisfaction as predictors of job productivity. They found that the three variables are positively related to career commitment, which means that if an individual is attached to his job and organization, and he likes what he does in that position, he is more likely to present a high level of career commitment. They also concluded that the need for an achievement variable, which is defined as striving to attain goals within their social environment, will influence career commitment because while the individual is more focused on need and goal achievement, he/she will have a long-term work orientation and plan and be committed to his or her career. The emotional attachment to a career may provide the driving force to spur productivity and focus.

Although, career attachment is important in increasing interest, the study found that some individuals do not attach a lot of importance to their careers. As a result, they lack adequate knowledge and skills in the career they are engaged in, lack positive attitudes probably due to wrong career choice and personality conflicts. Table 2 tabulates the reasons why some individuals do not attach a lot of importance to their careers.

Table 2

Attaching value to careers

Reason	No. Respondents	Percentage
Lack of knowledge and information	74	61.2
Wrong Career Choice or Coercion	21	17.4
Lack of Positive attitude	8	6.6
Personality	4	3.3
	121	**100.0**

Table 2 shows that 74 (61.2%) of the 121 Respondents think that individuals who do not attach importance to their careers lack knowledge and information. Also, 21 (17.4%) believe that wrong career choice or coercion to join a career contributes to individuals not attaching a lot of importance to their careers. Other less significant reasons advanced by respondents for individuals not attaching a lot of importance to their careers are lack of positive attitudes and the type of personality. Individuals who make career choices from a point of ignorance and lack of information are likely to undervalue the importance of their careers. In any event, ignorance breeds contempt; permitting an individual to make wrong career choices or being coerced to enter a career one is not suited. Lastly some personalities may not be suited for certain careers and therefore are likely to enter wrong careers.

Nowadays, Careers have intangible benefits that rival the profit motive in importance. These include proving one's worthiness; ennobling the self and giving a genuine estimate of one's value as a person. In addition, an idea of virtue has become attached to certain types of careers, and this is why a spectrum of careers ranging from the honourable to the dishonourable has come into being. Labour for profit brings all work down to the level of the earth. Labour for honour makes some jobs seem almost semi-divine.

Thirdly, the study found that 162 (88.5%) of all those surveyed reported that making inquiries about a career was critical for an individual to develop interest in the career. Making inquiries may be looked at as an informal way of conducting career research. As already noted, it is the foundation for developing prior knowledge which will contribute to strengthening interest in the career. Further, the study investigated into the reasons why making inquiries is necessary for developing interest in a career. The results of that the investigation are tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3
Making Inquiries on Careers

Reason	No. Respondents	Percentage
To know the Remuneration potential of the Career	73	55.7
To understand the marketability of the career	31	23.7
To understand the work habits of the career	15	11.5
To know the importance of the career	12	9.2
	131	**100.0**

Table 5 shows that 73 (55.7%) of the participants felt that making inquires about a career was motivated by the desire to get more information on the potential remuneration of the career. Also, 31 (23.7%) of the participants thought that the really reason for making inquiries about a career was motivated by the need to understand the marketability of the career. In addition 15 (11.5%) of the Respondents thought that the reason for making inquiries was to understand the work habits of the career. Another less significant reason advanced by respondents why individuals make inquiries about a career was to know the importance of the career.

The reasons for making inquiries are varied, ranging from getting more information on remuneration to attempting to find out the importance of the career. The issues prompting the making of inquiries are common employment concerns such as remuneration, working habits and marketability of the career. These issues are external factors that enhance job security and motivation. Making inquiries on a career is critical for an individual to develop interest in the career. The more one understands about a career, will whet the appetite of an individual to want to know more and more. This is because knowing the potential earnings associated with the career, the work habits, the market demand or job opportunities, and to know the importance of the career and other issues contributes immensely to not only the knowledge base but also to wanting to develop skills that will assist the employee to effectively perform his duties.

The fourth finding was that 275 (92.9%) of those surveyed reported that liking a career was critical for an individual to develop interest in their careers. The factors that enhance the liking of a career are tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4
Liking a Career

Reason	No. Respondents	Percentage
Satisfaction, Security & Motivation	63	48.1
Exploration, advancement & Knowledge	41	31.3
Employment opportunities, information & exposure	15	11.5
Achievement, excelling	6	4.6
Influence from friends, role models	5	3.8
Difficult to change	1	0.8
	131	**100.0**

Table 4 shows that the satisfaction, security and motivation were indicated as the highly ranked factors that influence the liking of a career by 63 (48.1%). Also, a significant number of respondents, 41 (31.3%) of all those surveyed indicated that exploration, advancement and knowledge are responsible for influencing the liking of a career. In addition, 15 (11.5%) of those surveyed attributed the liking of a career to employment opportunities, information and exposure. Otherwise, other less significant factors advanced by respondents for influencing career liking are achievement or excelling, influence from friends and role models and the fact that it may be difficult to the career.

Developing a positive attitude toward science may be described as enhancing or altering the way an individual values or feels about science disciplines, science issues, or responses about science phenomenon. Studies by Farenga and Joyce (1998, 1999) suggest that the reason why students do not do well in science is because of declining positive attitudes. Their research indicates that positive feelings and perceptions of science translate into greater interest in science classes. The study also showed a strong correlation between the number of science courses selected by students and their science attitude with both variables influencing early career interest in science and future participation in science. Studies by Reynolds (1991) indicate that middle school achievement in mathematics and science determines high school course selection and further influence access to postsecondary and occupational opportunities. Similarly, when positive attitudes in a career decline, the individual's career interest decline.

Subject interest and self-confidence have emerged as some of the major predictors for achievement in science and mathematics. Motivation affects engagement in academic tasks (i.e., active involvement, attention, commitment), and in turn, task engagement enhances interest and motivation (Singh, Granville & Dika, 2002). A learner's motivation, attitude, and subject-related interests consistently emerge as influential and key variables

for enhancing academic engagement and achievement. Likewise motivation, attitude, and career-related interests consistently emerge as influential and key variables for enhancing career engagement and development.

Lastly, the study found that 277 (93.6%) concurred that keenness was important in enhancing interest in career choice decisions. Keenness is the state of being alert on whatever is happening. In terms of career choice decisions, keenness can come from either a state of insecurity where an individual is looking for the slightest opportunity to jump ship or from the fact that one is seeking advancement. Further, the study investigated the reasons that make individuals to be interested in advancing their careers. The results of that probe are tabulated in Table 5.

Table 5

Keen in career Advancement

Reason	No. Respondents	Percentage
Improve earnings	17	48.6
Timely opportunities	7	20.0
Gain experience	3	8.6
The career is marketable	3	8.6
Take up new challenges and risks	2	5.7
To better ones future	2	5.7
Expand ones knowledge	1	2.9
	35	**100.0**

Table 5 shows that there are many reasons why individuals get interested in advancing their careers. They range from getting better earnings up to expanding their knowledge of their careers. However, the main reason is to improve their earnings. Also there are some significant reasons such as timely opportunities, gaining experience, because the career is marketable, to take up new challenges and risks and to better ones future. Another less significant reason for being interested in advancing their careers is to expand ones knowledge.

Conclusion

Arising from the study findings, the study concludes that having prior knowledge about a career is important to developing and nurturing interest in the career. In fact prior knowledge prepares an individual on the conditions obtaining for a career and one will decide to enter a career from a point of knowledge. Knowledge on a career can be acquired through doing research and consultations; training, exposure as well as industrial attachment. Other avenues through which individuals receive prior knowledge for their careers include mentorship, commitment, motivation and socializing with people in the career of interest. Making informed and considered career decisions accrue various benefits to the employer and the individual. Another important factor that influences Career choice decisions is the possibility of progression in work hierarchy.

Recommendations

Arising out of the study findings and conclusions drawn, the study recommends the following: -
    (a) Individuals considering to make career choice decisions should carefully evaluate available career opportunities against their interests. They should opt for a career in which they have interest. Individuals who have already entered careers which do not rhyme with their interest should consider enhancing their careers pathways by enrolling in courses that will eventually shift or move them into areas of their interest. All individual should be encouraged to make career choice decisions in areas they have or can acquire knowledge easily, skills and interest as this is likely to promote productivity when someone is doing what they are interested in.
    (b) Skills development should be matched with individual interest as well as self efficacy. Interest and self efficacy can be identified through employment of psychological which should be administered to every student joining institutions of higher learning. Before students are counselled on what careers they are suitable, career guidance and counselling staff should have endeavour to procure as much data as possible on a student's interests and self efficacy.
    (c) To improve productivity, employers should match skills and interest. This is seems to be key to unlocking the potential imprisoned in a human being.

Suggested Areas for Further Research

The study recommends a triangulation of data by mounting a longitudinal study where the same participants are surveyed at first, second and fourth years in University. The purpose will be to measure if by gaining experience, ones attitudes change.

The study looked at limited factors, whereas there are many factors that influence career choice decisions. It is therefore recommended that a similar study be conducted in which many factors affecting career choice decisions can be explored.

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