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**DETERMINANTS OF CAREER CHOICE AMONG
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE OF KENYATTA
UNIVERSITY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Career choice is a requisite and complicated step for any student in today's world. There are a number of determinants that students consider before selecting a career path. The purpose of the study was to investigate career choice among students. The study sample included Kenyatta University regular program 2018/2019 cohorts pursuing a Bachelor degree in early childhood studies. The study employed a descriptive survey design whereas the sampling technique adapted was stratified random sampling. The researchers ended up selecting 36 respondents for the study. On the influence of significant individuals on career choice among students it was evident that the students mostly rely on their peers when making career decisions compared to their parents. The second variable was the influence of career interest on career choice. This study found out that although the students had an interest in the career path during enrolment this interest. This research recommended the need for tailored career guidance of the university students, provision of mentorship programmes and active involvement of the students in forums such as internships, clubs and in research activities.

Keywords: Determinants of career choice, Bachelor of education Early Childhood students, significant others, interest, Kenya.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Career choice is inevitable for any student in the competitive world we live in that requires one to not just to work but have a career. This concept starts early in life as young children are often asked what professions they would like pick in their future. Moreover, the shift from agrarian to industrialized economies has increased the array of careers. These socioeconomic changes have made young people to compete for work

both locally and internationally hence they have to consider many factors before choosing a career path, making career choice a complicated issue (Nyamwange, 2016).

The teaching career path begins by choosing a course in education with a particular specialty for example in arts, sciences, primary education, special needs education or early childhood studies. Typically, students choose careers that match their interest and academic abilities in order to succeed in life as professionals (Ramanchandran, Abdullah & Asman, 2015). Often, it is after graduation from a secondary school that most students have a clear picture of which career path to pursue. They, therefore, have to embark on a daunting task of weighing various determinants before enrolling for a particular course of study that leads to various career paths. According to Borchet (2002), these determinants range from the environment, personality to opportunity.

Studies have established the influence of family and non-family individuals on career choice of students Hughes and Thomas (2003) this is expected since young students are not yet psychologically mature to make career decisions. Students are often expected to merge their interests to align with family and societal systems (Patton, Dehorty & Shield, 2014). In a study conducted in the USA, students have been found to depend on family, peers, role models and mentors when selecting careers (Slovek, Jacob & Flenoury, 2015). It is therefore common for students to follow career paths chosen by their parents especially if they are from collectivism cultures as observed among Vietnamese students (Mate, McDonald, Morgan, Hoang, Das and Dinh, 2017). In Ethiopia, Kumar (2016) studied the influence of parents on undergraduate students and findings indicated that parents, especially fathers, did have a significant influence on career choice. This finding is similar to that done in India by Gautum (2015) who also found that fathers had more influence on student's career decisions.

Students' interest is yet another determinant of career choice. Researchers have identified personal interest as the best predictor of career choice among students (Almeida, Ahmetoglu & Premuzic, 2013). In a study conducted by James (2007), on Finnish and Portuguese students and findings revealed that interest was the main reason for the choice of career majors among students. In Ghana, students taking library studies indicated that since they did not have prior knowledge about the course, they initially had no interest. However, along with the course of study, the interest developed that helped build positive attitudes and looking forward to completing the course successfully (Adanu and Amekuedee, 2010). In Kenya, Nyamwange's (2016) study, the findings revealed that interest was a major determinant in selecting their career courses in the university.

In Kenya, course selection for most students is done by Kenya University and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS). Students who score highly in their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) are the ones that stand better chances of landing for self-selected courses unlike those with relatively low grades. Since most students cannot afford a self-sponsored program they have no otherwise but to stick to the prescribed course regardless of their passions and aspirations. According to Creed and Hughes (2012) study, university students make a career compromise in not undertaking their ideal university programs and this causes distress. From this background of the study, it is clear that career choice among students is imperative. This study attempts to investigate the determinants of career choice among students taking a Bachelor degree in early childhood education. This paper has seven parts. It starts by outlining the problem statement, followed by the purpose of the study. It further presents literature review, methodology, findings and discussions and concludes with a summary and recommendations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Career choice has been proven to be a daunting task for most students that can lead to frustrations if not well addressed. From the background of the study, most corresponding studies are international, whose focus is mainly on determinants of career choice amongst high school students while those on undergraduates focus on

them as a whole. Moreover, students in the science and mathematics majors are often the ones under study. Notably, there are few local studies that center on the determinants of career choice of Bachelors of Education (Early Childhood Studies) students. However, this study explored the determinants that influence students to choose the Early Childhood Education career path.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to explore determinants of career choice of Bachelors of Education (Early Childhood Studies) students in Kenyatta University in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study objectives were:

- i. To investigate the influence of significant others on career choice among students
- ii. To find out the extent to which personal interest influence career choice among students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family background and family processes are two dimensions on which the family influences career development (Hughes and Thomas, 2003). Families exert external influence, expressing their expectations by highlighting particular values and beliefs. These influences can be felt when students are making choice concerning their career paths. In a USA study, in Biomedical Sciences the dynamism of family influence on the career choices of underrepresented minorities was explored. Results showed that high school students depend on the support of families which lessens when pursuing undergraduate programs and heightens at the post-graduate level (Slovacek, Jacob, and Flenoury, 2015). Family, peers and other education agents persuade students when it comes to career development. In a related study involving Thailand students, the older the Thai student, the less the impact of family influence on their choices of international education and the greater the effect of peers' influence (Pimpa, 2005). These individuals may sometimes discourage students to pursue certain career paths (Maina, 2013). In some cultures, especially collectivistic cultures, families exert more influence on the career development of students than individualistic ones (Ghosh and Fouad, 2016). This has been observed in South Korean college students, a generally collectivist society and similarly among Vietnamese students studying at an Australian university who cited the dominant factor in determining students' career identities and career decision-making was family, which is in accordance with the collectivist cultural values of Vietnam (Mate, McDonald, Morgan, Hoang, Das and Dinh, 2017). It is therefore common for students to actualize their family expectations when it comes to selecting career paths. On the other hand is a study by Maharaj (2008), who did an investigation on what factors influence the career choice of health students in Kwazulu-Natal found out that parents accounted for most of the influence. When selecting courses after high school, students do not have adequate information and hence have to rely on others for information and further guidance (Kochung & Migunde, 2011). According to Murage (2016), the various sources of information identified were experts, peers and the family with Students from rural areas seeking more help from parents than those from urban areas. Additionally, Friends and teachers facilitate the understanding of career paths among generation Y students in Brazil (Pereira & Hsiao, 2016). In a study conducted in Kenya at the University of Eldoret, parents had significant influence when it came to the choice of courses (Koech, Bitok, Rutto, Koech, Okoth, Korir, & Ngala, 2016). Conversely, peers influence the choice of course by acting as role models, this is according to a census survey design study on undergraduate students in public universities in Kenya (Gakurii, 2012).

Assessing interest before choosing a career is both indispensable and critical as it establishes the levels of future life and career happiness (Dobson, Gardner, Metz and Gore, 2013). Possessing this interest propels individuals to actively engage in a related career. Notably, Leuty, Hansen and Speaks (2016) ascertained that career interest leads to outcomes such as job satisfaction, tenure, commitment and performance. In a comparative Finnish and Portuguese study, on student's choice of a diploma program in experimental science,

interest came out as one of the reasons for the choice of the majors (James, 2007). Similarly, Pellowski's (2016), research on the factors that influence a student to choose careers in audiology and speech-language pathology in the USA established interests were among the reasons for the choice. Whereas in Canada, experiences related to a particular career were found to have laid a foundation for creating interest amongst students pursuing psychiatry (Laliberte, Rapoport, Andrew, Davidson, and Rej, 2016). A study in Ghana, on the choice of librarianship, students started off with little liking as most of the students joined the course without having any idea of what it entailed but this developed over time (Adanu and Amekuedee, 2010). On the other side, students could be interested in the benefits the course has to offer in the future. For example, the opportunity to further their education and job opening related to the field. In Kenya, Nyamwange (2016) investigated the influence of interest on career choice among first-year students in the university. The results indicated that interest played an important role in choosing careers.

In most of the studies under review they focus mostly on parents, therefore, this study intends to focus on significant individuals as a whole to include the influence of peers, mentors and siblings. Unlike the studies under review which incorporate cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs the researcher employed a descriptive survey design. Moreover, most studies tend to elaborate on the nature of career interests this study investigated the extent to which personal interest influence career choice among students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted at Kenyatta University located along Thika superhighway in Nairobi County. The target populace were students undertaking a Bachelors of Education (Early childhood Education) in the academic year 2018/2019. The study therefore obtained 30% of the target population as the sample size. The sample size for the study therefore comprised of 36 students. A structured questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. It contained items to enable investigate the influence of significant individuals and personal interest on career choice. The instrument was pre-tested in a pilot study to ensure its validity and reliability. Eight students were sampled during the pilot study and were not included in the actual data collection. The collected raw data was cleaned, edited and coded. Quantitative data from the research instrument were analyzed through descriptive statistics and presented in frequency distribution tables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Influence of Significant Others on Career Choice of Students

The people in an individual's life play an important role of influence meaning students are no exception. Studies reviewed have indicated a correlation between students career choice and significant others. The study set out to investigate the influence of significant individuals on career choice of student pursuing a Bachelor degree in early childhood studies. The results on the influence of significant others on career choice are shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Influence of Significant Others on Career Choice of Students

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
My father/male guardian encouraged me to choose this course	36	13.9	11.1	13.9	25	36
my mother/female guardian encouraged me to choose this course	37.1	22.9	8.6	17.1	14.3	36
my family members support my choice of this course	32.4	45.9	10.8	5.4	5.4	36

information from my peers pushed me to choose this course	11.4	17.1	14.3	14.3	42.9	36
I have an access to a mentor who is in the ECD field	36.1	16.7	8.3	25	16.7	36
my mentor encourages me to love this course	36.1	19.4	11.1	19.4	13.9	36
I depend on my peer for information regarding this course	16.2	21.6	10.8	13.5	37.8	36
I depend on my family for information regarding this course	27.8	16.7	16.7	11.1	27.8	36
I did a career research before enrolling for this course	37.8	24.3	13.5	8.1	16.2	36

The findings reveal that about half of the students (49.9%) disagree that their father/male guardian encouraged them to pursue their course whereas 38.9% agreed while 11.1% were neutral. On the other hand, 60% of the students disagreed that their mothers had encouraged them to pursue the course whereas 31.4% agreed while 8.6% remained neutral. Students were required to indicate whether their family members support their choice of the course. The findings reveal that almost three quarters disagreed indicated by 78.3% those while 10.8% whereas 10.8% were neutral. When asked whether the information they received from their peers encouraged them to pursue the course, 28.5% disagreed, 28.6% were neutral while a majority of them agreed indicated by 57.2%. Majority of the students disagreed (52.8%) to having a mentor in the ECE field, 41.7% agreed while 8.3% were neutral. Further, they were asked to indicate if their mentor encourages them to like the course the results show that 55% disagreed, 33.3% agreed while 11.1% were neutral. More than half of the students agree that they depend on their peers for information regarding the course indicated by 50.5% whereas 37.8% disagree while 10.8% were neutral. When they were asked whether they depend on their family member for information regarding their course, majority disagreed (44.5%), 16.7% were neutral while 38.9% agreed. Students were required to indicate whether they had done a career research before enrolling for the course, the findings reveal that more than half (62.1%) did not, 24.2% did while 13.5% were neutral. From the above analyses, it is evident that majority of the students do not receive much needed encouragement from the parents or rather guardians and family members to pursue the course. Interestingly, it is the fathers/male guardians who are seen to be more actively engaged in encouraging the students to pursue the career path compared to their female counterparts. The findings also indicate that the students depend on their families majorly for information regarding the career choice. It is further revealed that majority of the students rely their peers when choosing career paths and for information regarding the course. Lastly, majority of the students do not engage in career research before embarking on pursuing it.

Studies have asserted the influence of significant others on career choice of students and students will more often than not find themselves aligning their career decisions with familial expectations (Mate et al, 2017). These findings are coherent with those of Mwai (2010) who found out that the career choices among students especially those in high school are majorly influenced by peers. The study finding on the students receiving more support on their career choice from fathers/male guardians concurs with Kumar's (2016) study done in Ethiopia where fathers influences on career choice was found to be significant. However, in terms of relying on family for support the study findings differ from those of Slovacek, Jacob and Flenoury (2015) who found out that, biomedical students attending community colleges relied heavily on their families for support.

Career Interest and Career Choice of BED (ECS) Students

The second objective of the study was to assess the influence of career interest on career choice among bachelor of education in ECDE students at Kenyatta University. The study sought to assess the role played by personal interest on choice of careers by the students. Developing a positive attitude towards a career may be

described as enhancing or altering the way an individual values or feels about the career disciplines, issues, or responses about the career participation. The findings are as presented in table below.

Table 2: Career Interest and Career Choice of BED (ECS) Students

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
I had an initial interest to pursue my career in this course	30.6	16.7	5.6	19.4	27.8	36
I currently find this course interesting	44.4	41.7	8.3	-	2.6	36
though I joined this course interested, I now find it uninteresting	17.1	-	8.6	34.3	40	36
I want to continue further in this course	63.9	22.2	11.1	-	2.8	36
As I love children, I chose this course as my career choice	55.5	13.9		25	5.6	5.6

From the above responses it shows that subjects had an initial interests before pursuing the course half of the students that is 50.3% disagreed, 5.6% were neutral while 47.2% agreed. On whether they currently find the course interesting more than half of the students disagreed that is 86.1%, 8.3% were neutral whereas 2.6% agreed. Furthermore they were asked to indicate whether they find the course uninteresting though they had initially thought it was interesting. The results indicate a majority of them that is 74.3% agreed, 8.6% were neutral while 17.1% disagreed. They were asked if they would consider pursuing further in the course 86.1% disagreed, 11.1% were neutral while 2.8% agreed. On whether their love for children probed them to choose the course findings indicate 69.4% disagreed, 30.6% agreed. Students were probed on whether they were active members of early childhood studies and the results reveal that 50% were not, 33.3% were neutral while 16.6% were. From the analyses it is clear that almost half found the course interesting initially before joining the course but currently they find it uninteresting and that it was not their love for children that prompted them to join the course. Furthermore, the results show that most students do not engage actively in early childhood activities from example clubs. The interest a student has in a particular course indeed determines their success and eventual completion of a course. Gaffner and Hazler (2002) state that career interests form the basis of the career values, attitudes, competencies and behaviors that one uses in choosing a suitable career. These career interests can be expressed as preferences for activities or options such as school subjects, occupational titles, roles, and other career-related stimuli. The findings from this study coincide with those of Adanu and Amekuedee (2010) who conducted a study in Ghana among undergraduate students and found out they began their courses with little interest. This discrepancy could be due to the fact that majority of them had their career paths preselected from them by the KUCCPS.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings revealed that parents' influence and families did not have much influence on the student's career choice. An overwhelming majority disagreed to having a mentor in the ECE field. However, peers were observed to have had a significant influence on the choice of career among the students. The findings portrayed that majority of the students found the course interesting when they were first enrolling for the course for the first time. They further revealed that their interest in the course has lowered and that they do not always participate actively in ECE related activities such as clubs. Majority of the respondents further indicated that they had no intentions to further their career paths in their current courses. The findings imply that the student's career interest is at a critical low as far as career choice is concerned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the research results, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The management of School of Education Department of Early Childhood Studies should put a lot of emphases and develop a well-nurtured career guidance programme; this is due to the findings that students need information on careers they finally settle on to pursue. University management should carry out a lot of career awareness to the students on the first week of reporting at the university so that students do not change the courses they are admitted to do at the university through training, workshops, and dialogue.
- ii. KUCCPS needs to avail more information to students in their platform concerning ECS. As it stands, the only information availed includes courses, cluster points requirements, and institutions offering various courses. It is important to have this information enhanced to offer more explanation to the students. Alternatively, they can set a section where students can seek guidance on various courses not just how to apply.

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Authors' Biography

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Lilian khwaga kisiangani is a graduate in Early Childhood Education at Kenyatta University in the department of Early Childhood Studies. Her current research focuses on determinants of career choice among university students. She is currently devoting more time to child pedagogy community development and research.

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Ong'ang'a H.M Ouko is currently a senior lecture of early childhood and special needs education at Kenyatta university. He holds a doctorate degree in early childhood education with biases on early literacy and numeracy acquisition, early grade curriculum, research in family and child studies and child-advocacy. He coordinates digital programme for the department and lately has been appointed to coordinate examinations at the refugee camp (Dadaab) for refugee students. He has authored a number of articles in the area of early childhood education and development.