

Extrinsic motivations and choice of program of study among students joining Higher Education in Uganda

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Abstract: *In the modern educational career, a student's choice of higher education program is crucial. Students in Uganda complete academic degrees despite unclear understanding of their employment options. Many university students enroll in programs but later change their minds or drop out due to uncertainty about their chosen field. This study sought to establish extrinsic factors that motivate students' choice of program of study for higher education institutions. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, using mixed methods. Self-administered questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were used for data collection. The study involved 201 students randomly selected who filled out self-administered questionnaires, 10 focus group discussions, and five key informant interviews. Content analysis and SPSS were used for data analysis. The study discovered that the cost of programs, the influence of family, and the possibility of scholarships were key factors that influenced choice. Results further show that 24.5 percent and 28 percent of the respondents were motivated by parents and their siblings, respectively. In comparison, 53 percent of respondents cited scholarship opportunities as a key motivator, while 67 percent indicated that their choice was influenced by their family's financial situation and the ability to cover the tuition fees associated with their programs of study. It is recommended that educational institutions enhance their communication regarding available programs and develop clear frameworks for career guidance. Course content and qualification requirements should be available to support students when choosing the program of study, as these enable students to make informed, fulfilling, and rewarding choices in future.*

Keywords - Extrinsic motivations; choice; program of study; Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a program of study is one of the most important decisions students make as they determine their future aspirations and career paths. Once students have completed secondary education, they find themselves at the crossroads of career choice, requiring these students to decide the program of study they would take up at the undergraduate level. With many professional and academic programs available these days, decision-making becomes difficult. It is a decision that will significantly impact students throughout their lives. The nature of selection for the program of study highly depends on the individual student, and the student selects programs of study with expectations of future career prospects and aspirations.

Higher education represents a critical subsector in innovation and the development of human capital, which plays major part in success and sustainability of the knowledge economy, and proper planning concerning market demands is required (Dill & VanVught, 2010). Higher education has become increasingly important on national agendas. Over the past decades, it has undergone profound mutations and reforms worldwide, as portrayed in an OECD review of tertiary education policies (OECD, 2008).

The higher education institutions in Uganda include 40 licensed Universities (9 public and 31 private) and nine other degree-awarding institutions. The sector has 140 licensed technical institutions, 42 of which are public and 98 private institutions, ranging from national teachers' colleges to colleges of commerce, technical colleges, forestry colleges, cooperative colleges, hotel and tourism institutes, management institutes, health and medical schools, agricultural, animal husbandry and fishery colleges, a meteorological school, and theological colleges (Basheka, 2015; NCHE, 2014).

Students transitioning from Secondary Schools to Higher Institutions of Learning are generally faced with choosing an academic program to pursue higher education that meets their career goals (Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999). The choice of the program of study for higher learning is an essential decision in a student's life because it provides a direct link between the student's choice of the program of study and the program's ability to meet the student's future career demands. Quite a small number of studies have been conducted in this area, and these included Jansson, Bukuluki, & Hojer (2017) that focused on Social Work and Social Administration as an academic discipline and explored the differences according to gender, sponsorship, geographical and socioeconomic background, and parents' educational level. Bukuluki, Höjer, & Jansson (2019) compared the student motivations of

European and Ugandan social work students; no study has studied extrinsic motivations for student's choice of a program of study for higher education in Uganda.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The research study was informed by Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The theory originated from researchers' studies on motivation during the 1970s and 1980s. While it has since evolved, the core principles of the theory were established in Deci and Ryan's influential 1985 book on the subject. The theory was chosen because of its relevance to career choice by emphasizing the role of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors while being sensitive to other influencing aspects. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory that links human motivation, optimal functioning and personality. It posits that there are two major types of motivation; extrinsic and intrinsic and that both are powerful forces that shape who we are and how we behave. **Extrinsic motivation** is a drive to act in specific ways that come from external sources and result in external rewards. Such sources include awards and accolades, employee evaluations, grading systems, and respect and admiration of others (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

Several studies indicate that students worldwide face the dilemma of making the correct decision regarding the choice of course (Issa & Nwalo, 2008; Macgregor, 2007; McMahon & Watson, 2005; Cherian, 1991). These studies argue that students' course choices are influenced by their family background, gender, siblings, peer pressure, friends, and parents' advice. Students, especially those from local schools, are affected by ignorance of the advantages and disadvantages of doing specific courses. Most of these students have limited access to academic career guidance.

2.1 Selecting a Template Institutional Reputation/Public opinion on motivation for the choice of the program of study

Dimitrios (1980) identified that institutional reputation determines a student's choice. Bajsh & Hoyt (2001) and Bradshaw, Espinoza and Hausman (2001) identified factors such as quality and responsiveness of staff, social opportunities, economic considerations, research activities, and the size of the institution as having a significant impact on student's choice of courses in higher institutions. Students prefer courses from higher institutions that have a high reputation in terms of research activities. Also, courses that provide basic social amenities such as shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and psychosocial services are highly preferred. This implies that students will quickly look out for institutions with high reputations in terms of quality of health and educational services like research, thus determining the choice of courses in higher institutions.

According to Poku and Fosu (2014), higher education in Ghana has been characterized by privatization and competition. These changes have affected higher education

operations, and they are seen as the driving forces for marketing higher education. As a result, the motivating factors behind students' choice of a university have become a key issue, and the marketing role in enrolment numbers has also been given keen attention recently.

2.2 Influence of family background on career choice

In a study carried out in China, it was established that the choice of the institution of higher learning is determined by the family background and student academic abilities (Hung, Chung, & Ho, 2000). In the United Kingdom, research reveals that students' choice of a higher institution of learning is determined by the social class of the families where students come from (Raey, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). In essence, access to higher education is highly dependent on the social class from which students hail; for example, students from low-income families, students only access class education through scholarships, unlike well-to-do families that are assured of class education.

According to García & Weiss (2017), higher education access still depends on the student's family background. The same authors add that family background is essential to access prestigious universities, and lower-class families only access diploma education. As Van de Werfhost & Luijckx (2006) assert, the choice of higher education course is primarily dependent on family factors such as parental influence, preference of parental professions and other environmental factors in the exposure of the student during their lifespan in secondary education, however, other critical underlying factors play a vital role including personal motivation and ambition, perceptions and attitudes, peer influences, career guidance, knowledge about some courses and institutions.

It was also reported that women in academics are majorly concentrated in what is perceived as traditional female education disciplines (Ramani, 2004). This indicates that enrolment in courses leading to certain careers like engineering, architecture, and technology in higher education is more concentrated among male students than female students. Males dominate most courses, especially sciences. Women highly dominate education courses.

2.3 Parental influence on motivation for the choice of the program

McQuerrey (2007) states that positive or negative parental influence shapes one's career. Many students grow up idealizing the professions taught by their parents. Suppose one looks up to their parents and likes their profession, influencing one to pursue the same career in higher education. Most parents also intentionally or unintentionally push their children into a particular career path, especially in cases where parents expect their children to inherit the professions. College students are faced with the need to choose an academic major and develop career goals for the future (Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999). Students tend to emulate the respective courses of their siblings for reasons ranging from a challenge to superiority. These students make wrong

career choices that do not meet the demands of the job market. Kraus (2009) contends that family structure and parental authority are being eroded, leading to diminished family influence on children concerning values, boundaries, education and morality.

2.4 Peer influence on motivation for the choice of the program of study

Karl (2015) argues that "peer-group socialization tends to play a significant part in reinforcing and further shaping gender identity throughout a child's school career. Adkintomide (2011) found out that in Nigeria, many student's choices of courses are highly influenced by peer pressure and advice from friends. Consequently, many students find themselves unsuited for their careers as they usually find themselves in jobs where they cannot satisfy their future needs. Hellmann (2014) also examined the role of peer relationships in career development in individuals and found that attachment to peers was positively associated with environmental exploration and progress in committing to career choices. Also, students find themselves doing courses that close friends and peers have done for purposes of company, respect and prestige. According to Korir (2012), students try to make career choices; they face problems matching their career choices with their abilities and academic performance. In most cases, choice of careers, subjects, courses of study, and subsequent career paths is a nightmare for prospective students (Issa & Nwalo, 2008).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, providing a data collection and analysis framework. This design enabled the researchers to collect quantitative and qualitative data on different variables. This design used different groups of people who differed in the variable of interest but shared other remarkable characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and educational background (Richie et al., 2013). The study employed qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (Johnson et al., 2007).

3.2 Study Population

The researchers purposely selected the second-year undergraduate students of Makerere University who were admitted in the 2015/2016 in-take. The population of the admitted students was 13,098, and the number was distributed into 10 colleges, 33 schools, and 112 departments. The researchers selected five (5) Key Informants, including three admissions and career guidance resource persons from Makerere University and 2 Head Teachers of Secondary Schools who are well-versed in career guidance roles in various institutions. The study used a 5% level of precision and adopted the formula (Triola & Iossi, 2008), as seen below.

$$n = \frac{z_{\alpha/2}^2 pq}{e^2} = (1.96) \times (1.96) \times 0.5 \times 0.5 / (0.069 \times 0.069)$$

n-sample size = (201), z-level of confidence (95%), p-chance of selecting a female student q=p-1-chance of selecting a male student, e-level of precision

Two hundred one structured questionnaires were administered to 2nd-year students of Makerere University. The questionnaires consisted of sections about socio-demographic characteristics of students' intrinsic factors that influenced student's choice of programs of study for higher education across the 10 colleges. The researchers made sure that the research questions were made clear and easy to understand in an easy to follow sequence (Kumar, 2014).

3.3 Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, Desk Reviews

10 focus group discussions in total were conducted. In each FGD, seven participants were selected, with a mixture of 4 male and three female students from every college. Purposive sampling was used to get to known contacts, and later, convenience sampling was employed to identify the other available respondents. Five (5) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted. These were purposively sampled as in-depth interviews targeting resource persons charged with career guidance roles in various institutions who shared first-hand information on motivations of choice of programs of study while enrolling for higher education.

3.4 Data Quality Control

Ethical approval from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) was obtained. The researchers also received an introduction letter from the department, which was presented to the selected students to help the researchers collect data.

3.5 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. A data entry screen was developed to enable data entry into the computer. Data cleaning and editing were done to check for consistency. Data analysis was done using SPSS by generating frequency tables, graphs, and pie charts using univariate analysis to establish relationships between variables.

3.6 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data was collected through FGDs and KIIs, and all discussions were recorded and later transcribed. After data collection and transcription, the researchers revised the data by conducting content analysis and creating themes related to the study objectives for easy analysis. Data interpretation, identification of patterns and trends, and explanations were part of this phase; content analysis was employed as a technique of objective, systematic, and quantitative content description (Abbas & Charles, 1998).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Extrinsic factors motivate higher education students to choose their program of study

In this section, the researchers endeavored to present the extrinsic factors that motivate students to choose a particular program of study. These factors can be categorized into family influences, peer influences, tuition fees, and career guidance. Table 7 below depicts students' responses, which are discussed with other findings.

Table 1: Extrinsic Factors that motivate the choice of the program of study among interviewed students

Variable	Not Motivated	Least Motivated	Almost Motivated	Moderately Motivated	Motivated	Strongly Motivated
Tuition fees	76(38%)	28(14%)	30(15%)	24(12%)	12(6%)	30(15%)
My Parents did this course	88(44%)	27(13.5%)	36(18%)	10(5%)	15(7.5%)	24(12%)
Siblings did this course	77(38.5%)	33(16.5%)	32(16%)	23(11.5%)	20(10%)	15(7.5%)
Friends did this course	75(37.5%)	24(12%)	39(19.5%)	20(10%)	17(8.5%)	25(12.5%)
Financial aspects like assistance or affordability	67(33.5%)	34(17.5%)	41(20.5%)	19(9.5%)	23(11.5%)	16(8%)
Career Guidance	52(26%)	42(21.5%)	40(20%)	25(12.5%)	20(10%)	21(10.5%)

4.2 How the choice of program of study is motivated by the cost of the program

Table 1 above reflects that 30% of respondents asserted that tuition fees strongly influenced their choice of Program of study. One respondent in the qualitative interviews gave clear

details concerning the scholarships the Government of Uganda offers for higher education.

"It is important to note that the government of Uganda has a scholarship scheme that targets about 4000 students each academic year spread across all public universities. Government admissions have three levels, i.e., national merit, district quarter, and talented sports and persons with a disability; the Ministry of Education regulates these scholarships, but due to the STEM policy framework, it favours science disciplines." (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

Most models divide the student decision-making process into three phases: aspirations development and alternative evaluation, options consideration, and evaluation of the remaining options and final decision (Jackson, 1982). Zimmerman et al. (2000) have identified "push and pull" factors that operate along the student decision-making process at different levels.

During qualitative interviews, some respondents expressed views on how they think the cost of pursuing Program of study motivated their choice of programs. To some, the cost of programs of study was significant consideration, given their family financial situation, while to others, it was never a matter of concern.

"Every parent would love to take their children to such universities, but fees can be problematic. Had it not been the sponsorship from the Carnegie foundation, my parents would not have managed" (A female University student).

"My being here is premised on the ability of my parents to afford the fees for this course. I did not qualify for a government scholarship; the only option was private sponsorship, and I cannot imagine what would have happened supposing my parents could not support me." (A male University student)

"My family wanted me to do Law. I even had the scholarship to do Social Work and Social Administration, but my parents declined it and encouraged me to apply for Law on private sponsorship; money was not their concern, all they wanted was for me to do law" (A female University student)

A respondent in one of the Key Informant Interviews had this to say.

"Choice, of course, can also be informed by the issue of resources at home; I know of a student who qualified for Law but ended up doing education because it seemed affordable to their family; they could not afford the cost of doing law; it is difficult to generalize, but the most important thing is performance, peers and family especially when it comes to the resource envelope, it is an important factor while choosing the program of study." (Focal person Gender mainstreaming division, Makerere University)

Depending on the financial capacity of the guardian or parents, the choice of program study largely depends on how much the parents or guardians are willing to commit to enabling the student to study at the institution. Therefore,

some students' motivation for programs of study is informed by whether these programs are affordable by the parents due to the resource requirements even when they qualify for other courses that may be considered expensive but attractive.

4.3 Career guidance influences motivation of students' choice of programs of study

Career guidance plays a key motivating factor in providing direction to students while still in high school. Career guidance may be provided by teachers, parents, higher institutions of learning outreach programs, or key people in student life to motivate the student to study hard and obtain a program of study perceived to lead to significant exploitation after completion. Several factors were investigated to establish the level of career guidance received by students, as presented below.

Table 2: Did you receive career guidance while choosing the program of study?

Received Career Guidance	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	142	71.0
No	58	29.0
Total	200	100.0

As observed in Table 2 above, findings indicate that seventy-one (71%) of students were career-guided while choosing the program of study, which indicates that some students (29%) who do specific programs of study are never guided. They lacked basic information about particular courses that are offered in higher institutions, which calls for adjustment by the government to include a program where different institutions get time to visit secondary schools and explain to candidates the different programs availed and the relevant professional development, they lead so that students make informed decisions while choosing the programs of study to undertake in higher education.

The Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate, gives details to it as seen below,

"Career guidance is in 4 perspectives: 1. The Ministry of Education has a whole department charged with counselling and guidance; 2. The other routes are the universities; the universities should not sit and wait for students; they should instead go out there and find students in schools and talk to them and guide them; 3 The schools: These schools have offices for career guidance, so these career guidance offices should organize more sessions both for staff and students by sourcing some people who are more knowledgeable and orient students on the courses available and how they are related to the labour market, and 4. The students are lucky in this generation; information is available.

A closely related finding by Lee and Chatfield (2009) claimed that parents are deeply involved and influential in their high-achieving children's college choices. The report also found that open houses, dialogue with college friends and alums, and admitted-student programs are highly influential to students. Below are some views expressed during interviews with guidance and educationist experts.

"Career education in this school begins as early as senior one. Sometimes, they are not even aware that they are doing career guidance, but when they step into S1, they start on these simple concepts like self-awareness. A-level is critical; we have a dean or a director of studies in other schools. It is part of his portfolio to ensure that these students get adequate knowledge, information, and guidance, but the choice is left for the child; our role is to ensure that they are adequately informed, and our structures allow for information." (Deputy Head Teacher, Makerere College School)

"If I were to put career guidance on a scale of 0-10, I would give career guidance four and then give one's motivations a 3 to make it 7, and the other factors three, which may include the environment where the student lives, i.e., peers, family, and general mentorship and cost considerations. (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

"Career guidance process helps to tell the students about possible career choices that if you are doing this combination, these are the courses and programs that we have, and they tell you what subjects and courses to offer if you want to take a particular career path" (Focal person Gender mainstreaming division, Makerere University."

A respondent commented on the relevance of career guidance in motivating student's decision-making processes for programs of study, and some proposed possible approaches to be considered while guiding and mentoring students.

"The schools and the parents need to work hand in hand and of course together with these pupils and it should start from as early as primary so that there is always a day that is put aside for careers talk, so that both parents, children as well as the teachers in these schools can have a platform where they can share about what is happening in the lives of the learners, their challenges and opportunities that they encounter." (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

The other respondent discussed utilizing all available platforms to source career guidance solutions, especially for rural schools.

"There are so many lessons to learn from within our communities; I think there is no village you can go to and you do not find a graduate, so we could use such resources at the village level and forums like places of worship, youth camps where these ideas

could be shared with a view of shaping the views and aspirations of these young people, so it should start from that lower level upwards." (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

Some were apt in identifying the dangers that follow students when they are not adequately career-guided in line with the challenges that hinder proper career growth.

"We have government schools competing against private schools. Some government schools are still competing, but I think they are gradually relaxing. I know several traditional schools that no longer emphasize career guidance. Then there are these other schools, which are marginal and at the periphery. They do not have the resources, they do not have enough teachers, and they lack access to information, yet these schools should be on the first line in providing guidance; there is a need to re-think about what kind of product they want to produce, and how they want to profile and shape the students' careers." (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

One respondent talked about the process output, their observations and experiences with students during the application and admission processes.

"The feedback from the applications and admissions processes and the career guidance sessions we conduct is mixed. You find people who know a limited scope of fields of study, like only 4 of them. There are even those who do not know anything in terms of what they want to pursue in higher education. However, some are very knowledgeable about courses and career paths, depending on their levels of exposure. (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

Some respondents in FGDs intimated how career guidance motivated them to make informed choices and how relevant career guidance was to them when choosing their program of study.

"Career guidance was crucial for me; we used to have career days at school where our parents would come, and they discussed our grades and future aspirations, especially in line with our performances and passions. At first, I did not like it. When I got to A-level, I was made the chief editor of the school newsletter and the information minister, and I picked up an interest in journalism from there. In our career guidance sessions, I remember telling our careers master and my dad that I wanted to be a journalist, and I assured them how it was my passion, and they gave me the go-ahead, and here I am." (A female University student)

For some other students, career guidance was a rare commodity in some schools, especially rural ones, to the extent that even their teachers were not competent enough to guide them.

"The teachers did not know about most courses at my school; they only knew the most common courses like Law, education, social sciences, and commerce. That school only taught arts subjects at A-level. What saved me was that I passed and got a district quarter scholarship for a Bachelor of Education because it is what I had applied for, but I would have qualified for better courses if I had known". (A female University student)

Some other students commended the role of career guidance in positively motivating students to make the right choices for programs of study but also indicated that some factors beyond guidance can easily take a toll on students and force them to make choices.

"We were career guided. I wanted to be a lawyer, and given my academic performance and subject combination, I had qualified for Law. Nevertheless, for some reason, my dad forced me into doing a business course because he is a businessman and wants me to take on his business after my studies. I am unhappy about that choice and do not see how useful that career guidance was." (A male University Student)

Given the different perspectives explained above, career guidance is a vital motivator for students' choice of program study because it is empowering and informative.

4.4 Parental influence as a motivation for the choice of the program of study

Parents are believed to be key in determining the extent to which students can attain education. Many factors directly related to parents may also affect the student's program of study, including the parent's economic status, level of education, exposure, and social status. This section presents several factors directly related to parental influence on the student's choice of the Program of study.

Table 3: Parental motivations for the choice of the program of study

Effect of parental influences on course selection	Frequency	Percent (%)
Parent influences on the choice of the program of study	45	22.5
They Influenced me	59	29.0
Not applicable	55	27.5
It affected me positively	42	21.0
Total	201	100.0

Among those that were interviewed, 29% said that they were motivated by their parents to get the program of study of their choice, whereas 22.5% were made to quickly understand the program of study by their parents, while 21% believe that their parents had a positive impact on their choice of the program of study they are doing in the university.

In essence, parental guidance determines a lot in a student's choice of program for higher education, implying that the students receiving parental guidance are more likely to do a suitable program of study. The family influences, i.e., the siblings and relatives are probably doing specific programs that attract them, the parents have particular preferences, the family desires and needs specific courses come in as well, for example, some families think there is prestige in being a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer, so having a doctor in a family adds on the family prestige.

Qualitative interviews expressed views in line with the above analysis, and some respondents indicated how their parents motivated them to pursue the same career as them.

"My father is a medical doctor; he wanted me to do medicine from childhood. He would ask me to go with him to his clinic whenever I would be on holiday, and I eventually got attracted to medicine. I must admit that my dad motivated me and wants me to continue his legacy." (A female University student)

During key informant interviews, respondents elaborated on the challenges that usually accrue from parents who try to impose their preferred choices for programs of study on their children and how they are affected simply because some students don't invest time in researching the available programs of study and the opportunities they offer.

"Quite a time, there could be a conflict between a child and a parent. Parents often think that if I am a doctor, their child must be a doctor, yet their interests may differ. The child's inclination to a certain field might differ from a parent. So, we consider such factors, and we never dictate what students should do; we inform them, and then they make their choices." (Deputy Head Teacher, Makerere College School)

Another respondent expressed another view of how their parents' preferences affect children, especially those in rural areas. Because they do not invest time in researching the available programs of study and the opportunities they offer, they instead depend on their parents' guidance while making choices.

"About 90% of students in rural areas are doing courses that they have not sat and thought carefully about. Someone will come and say that my dad said that when I finish s.6, I should do Law. You find the parent wants a lawyer in their family, so you ask them why did you do such a course, and they will say; my father wanted me to do Law," yet the father may not be fully informed about the field of law

(Focal person Gender mainstreaming division, Makerere University).

Some respondents identified the challenges associated with parents choosing or dictating terms on which programs to choose and how dynamic the programs of study have become in terms of the number of study programs now on the market and how diverse they are in terms of scope compared to how they were in the past few years,

"Sometimes the kid will say that I want to do education, but the parent will say you must do Law, so you find a kid dropping what they feel is the best choice for them and going for what the parents have chosen. You find a professor in Makerere not encouraging his child to do a course in real estate business even when it is marketable because they want them to be professors in similar fields. It is a weakness in career guidance; even successful people can fail to guide their children to make clear choices." (Focal person Gender mainstreaming division, Makerere University)

"We always get complaints from parents who come and tell us that my son is good at sciences but he does not want to do medicine because the father might have done medicine many years ago, and it was lucrative and a big deal; trend have changed and course preference is very dynamic now, now there are quite several courses in universities in engineering, IT, economics and marketing that are more attractive than the traditional courses, I am not saying that students do not go to them, but they seem so flashy and to give immediate results, and they get excited about them." (Head-teacher Makerere College)

The above scenarios indicate how parental influences motivate students either positively or negatively and how they affect their choices for programs of study while enrolling in higher education.

4.5 Preference of program of study as a motivation for the choice of programs of study for higher education

Preference for programs of study attracts several motivations, and these vary among students. The study results indicate several reasons why choosing a program of study for higher education is dependent on several factors, as presented below.

Table 1: Programs of study that students in high school most prefer

Popular programs in high school	Frequency	Percent (%)
Science-based	149	74.5
Arts-based	51	25.5

Total	200	100.0
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The study established that most programs of study that were talked about at high school were mainly science-based courses, as ascertained by 74.5% compared to only 25.5% that were hearing about arts-based programs of study.

Government-sponsored programs attract the brightest students who prioritize those opportunities and get scholarships. Education policy encourages science programs at a lower level of education in high school, influencing most students' choices later in life. These findings align with the East African country's long-term plans of more than 20 years to supplement science-based studies (Rwanda Higher Education Policy 2008, National Planning Authority Uganda, 2009; and the Republic of Kenya, 2017). Although this is evident even in secondary schools, the government has failed to link the students to direct employment or centres of excellence, which hardly exist. A key informant interviewed also complemented the above analysis as quoted below:

"What informs attraction towards sciences is a combination of factors: when the government promised to sponsor people who are doing sciences, people initially thought that all students who were doing sciences were to be sponsored. They only learnt later that for you to be sponsored, you must have performed extremely well, too. So many of them who had insisted on doing sciences courses with a promise of getting a scholarship eventually relaxed and considered other options due to the uncertainty of government scholarships." (Deputy Head Teacher, Makerere College School)

Some had different views about motivations for choosing programs of study versus the availability of many options, and they expressed their views as seen below.

"The government has in most cases emphasized sciences, and a few urban schools, their biggest populations comprise of sciences students, especially urban first-world schools; you find most advancing their aspirations in areas of medicine, pharmacy, dentistry etc., the physical scientists it is usual engineering, petroleum etc., then there are those business students whether in arts or sciences but think in terms of accounting, statistics, procurement, and even those in arts. In the other liberal arts, the appetite has gone down probably because the scholarships have reduced, yet the competition is very high, and in the employment field, the jobs are scarce." (Career and Admissions Desk Officer, Makerere University Senate)

Some respondents raised concerns about how the relevant higher learning institutions disseminate information about new programs of study; this seemed more of a gap and, thus, a recommendation.

"Not very long ago, I was at a workshop where they talked about this new actuarial sciences course at the university. When it was introduced, there was not

enough information about it that was disseminated, people did not know what it was all about, and students may never apply for it simply because they do not know it". (Deputy Head Teacher, Makerere College School)

If a new program of study is officially introduced, the universities should ensure that details about such programs are available to all schools. Schools need to learn about courses provided on leaflet course codes. The universities should provide prospectus pamphlets with precise details about the courses offered, available job opportunities, and possible links to the industry, especially in the private sector.

Table 5: Reasons for preferring these programs of study

Reasons for course preference	Frequency	Percent (%)
Better courses	36	18.0
Government emphasis	107	53.5
Capacity to pay	36	18.0
Practical and marketable	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0

More than half of the students (53.5%) asserted that it was due to government emphasis on some programs, like the science-based programs, that they made these choices, whereas 18% stated that it was because they are better courses. This again points to the government's policy that encourages science courses right from the secondary level, as was stated in various government reports in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, which have some common education policy objectives. This was emphasized by a response from qualitative interviews, which the deputy head-teacher of Makerere College School had this to say.

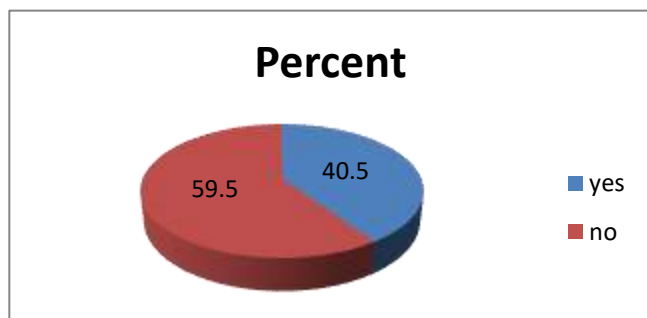
"It is difficult to influence someone's destiny, which is wrong because things are dynamic daily. Programs that were lucrative in those days may not be lucrative anymore. In my days, students doing arts would either go for Law or social work, but several other courses have come up these days. There was no procurement during our days; people would do BCOM and end up in finance and banking jobs. However, now many courses are being offered on the market."

It is essential, therefore, to guide and inform students about the available opportunities, not bias them, and encourage them in whatever decision they make in life because both the programs of study and the students are many and varied, each, aware that people will succeed in different ways in the diverse fields.

4.6 Peer influence on motivation for the choice of the program of study

Peers play a significant role in influencing the choices made by youth, especially among teenagers. This study assessed the extent to which peers influenced the students' motivation to choose their current programs of study, as presented below.

Figure 1. Did your peers influence you?



When students were asked whether they were motivated by their peers, more than half (59.5%) asserted that they were not motivated by their peers, although 40% admitted that they were motivated by their peers while choosing a program of study. A relevant example can be extracted from a case in Tanzania, where most students finish their secondary school education without adequate knowledge of career choice due to a lack of proper career guidance and counselling (Puja, 2001; Mvungi, 2009).

This was emphasized by a response from qualitative interviews, where a student said, "I want to do this course," and the colleagues also applied for it.

"Some students choose based on peer influence because most do not get people to speak to them. Some teachers do not even follow or try to know their students' choices about their careers. Have you ever asked yourself why we go in the family and find that all of them did education, the first graduate education, the second, the third, you find that that the third one excelled in physics and chemistry and would have done a different course but because the family knows education, they end up doing education? This is common in rural areas; you find that all the children study in the same school, yet some kids have the potential to study and excel in a better school. There is a thread that all of them are following, and you find that the whole clan is following the same paths" (Focal person Gender mainstreaming division, Makerere University).

Such incidences may consequently lead students to pursue any program of study offered to them for higher education based on peer motivation, not personal motivation or knowledge, leaving their futures to fate or in the hands of a government-designed education system.

5 SUMMARY , CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that students' choice is highly dependent on the ability of students to receive relevant career guidance, influences from peers who did or applied for the same programs, peer influences, family background, cost of the program and parental guidance. Qualitative respondents further recommended more grounded career guidance, especially for A-level students in the form of apprenticeship. This impacts additional practical approaches in the education system to equip them with survival skills.

It is essential to understand that most students' choice is motivated by factors outside the student's personal preferences, such as family background, motivation from their peers and siblings who did or are applying for similar programs of study, and financial considerations, especially at the family level. Some students quickly go in for programs of study that their relatives have done, as well as parents, and this motivates their choices. The study found that most parents encouraged their students to attend courses that would add prestige to their families. The study also found that students who take up other options, if not well-guided, go to the university to obtain a degree, not a skill, which is a weakness in our education system. It is a blindfold for students to follow a blind guide to their career epitome.

Career education and guidance in secondary schools should begin as early as senior one; they start with simple concepts like self-awareness, like "Who am I?" What are my skills?" Things like that in a slow, guided, gradual process as the children discover who they are and the world around them. The government should set up a platform that ensures that career guidance is integrated into the secondary education curriculum to ensure that students make the most relevant choices for courses while enrolling on institutions of higher learning, which should include vocational institutions, universities, and colleges to enable students to make informed decisions about the courses well knowing the likely outcome. Schools should actively engage local resources, such as alumni, recent graduates, places of worship, and youth camps, to share ideas aimed at shaping the aspirations and career paths of young people. Rather than leaving them to chance, it is essential to provide these individuals with comprehensive information about available programs of study and their respective course content. This approach will enable students to make informed decisions. Furthermore, establishing a platform for extensive consultations and guidance prior to selecting a Program of study will be beneficial.

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