

## The Effect of Provision of Career Guidance Information in Secondary Schools on Choice of Degree Programme

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the selection of undergraduate students' in degree programs in Moi University, Kenya. It explored the attitudes and perceptions of the participants on what determines the choice of undergraduate degree programmes. A mixture of Quantitative and Qualitative methodologies and Case Study research design was used. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 11 schools out of 15 and stratified random sampling to select 754 respondents to constitute the sample. A questionnaire was administered to 742 students respondents in order to measure their perceptions, attitudes, values and behaviour on the subject of study and also to identify key research themes that were probed further. Three Focus Group Discussions and ten face-to-face interviews were conducted with selected respondents who were believed to be more knowledgeable about the selection of students' in undergraduate degree programs. Document analysis of the archival documents was also done. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to determine and explain proportions. In the light of findings, the study concluded that the level of career guidance and counseling provided in secondary schools was neither well planned nor organized. In addition, there were no clear policies within which the service is provided. Students' degree programme decisions were guided by other factors rather than interest. Universities do not sufficiently market degree programmes in secondary schools. JAB places a high number of students in degree programmes they do not choose or have a passion for. Therefore, career guidance and counseling provided in schools is inadequate to enable students make informed choices of degree programs. Consequently, the study made the following recommendations. There is need for career guidance and counseling to be mainstreamed in the education system within clear policies and be monitored. The freedom to choose should be complimented by adequate career information. Universities should actively market degree programmes to students. In view of these findings, it can be noted that the successes of students making informed degree programs choices will depend on the level of career guidance and counseling given in schools and marketing of degree programs offered by universities.*

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**Keywords:** career, choice, guidance, programme, planning, development

### INTRODUCTION

The decision of which degree programme to pursue at university is very important to secondary school students, their teachers and parents. This importance is underscored by the fact that often, this decision determines the career that the students will take for the rest of their working lives. It is therefore, important that the proper decision is made, or if the wrong one is initially made, opportunity is availed to enable the student correct any mistakes in this important decision making process. At secondary school level, career guidance and counseling services are provided to students. The Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of these services by observing that, deciding on the future career is not quite easy. It is even more difficult when you lack the necessary information on the different types of careers. In an ideal situation the process of career development stretches throughout one's lifetime with a greater emphasis during the secondary and tertiary years (Ministry of Education, 2007). The Joint Admissions Board, (JAB) places students in the degree programmes in the Public Universities based

on their capacity and the cut-off points for the respective programmes. Those who qualified to join Public universities under JAB cut off but failed to meet the cut-off points for the chosen degree programmes. In either case, JAB usually allows all candidates to revise their degree programmes made earlier before they sat the national examinations. This scenario then divides the students between those who chose degree programmes, qualified for them and got admitted, those who otherwise qualified for degree programmes but were not admitted because of not making them the first choice, and those who chose degree programmes for which they did not qualify and hence have to be placed in any available degree programmes.

The last category of students are admitted through the individual universities parallel programs which at Moi University is referred to as Privately Sponsored Students Programmes or module two (11) in university of Nairobi and Kenyatta university. Here, students get admitted on the basis of senate approved cut -off points and fees payable. The students also

make their choices after the results are out. Usually, the number of students on this programmes who wish to change degree programme in inter school transfer is limited because their admission is based on vacancies available.

According to the New Zealand Education Review office report (1999), schools have the responsibility to provide appropriate career information and counseling to all students, but special attention is recommended to be paid to those who are nearing the completion of their education cycle. They have to be provided with specific career guidance and counseling to enable them to make informed decisions on further education. Similarly, Hoyt et al, (1974), stressed the importance of comprehensive career information that should be organized into instructional programs offered to all students. Requirements for a variety of jobs are changing as new jobs are emerging while others become obsolete.

In his contribution, Schmidt (2001) explained that career guidance and counseling is an important avenue through which students acquire the ability to make rational career decisions, and by extension, programmes for study at universities that impact on their future working lives. This understanding is based on the fact that during the career counseling process, all aspects of an individual's life are considered as an integral part of the career making and planning. After orientation into their degree programmes, a significant percentage of students come wishing to revise their degree programmes, citing dislike for some aspects thereof. Secondly, others come to change, from degree programmes they were admitted into after choosing them as first choice and meeting the degree programme requirements, to others degree programmes they perceive to be better. The inter school transfer process carried out during orientation period assists this category of students. The number transferred thus is however, very small and it leaves a large group of students dissatisfied. This study has investigated the extent to which these needs are known and addressed by the Public Universities.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study was to;

1. Examine the level of provision of career guidance information in secondary schools to create awareness of the various careers and their requirements.
2. Examine the level of provision of career counseling provided in secondary schools, specifically to the form four students to enable them make informed degree programmes choices in preparation for university education.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This Study is based on the theory of planning. In a publication issued in 1951, the United Nations

Department of Economic Affairs (UNDEA) distinguished four types of planning undertaken by developing Countries. First [Planning] refers only to the making of a program of public expenditure, extending over from one to say ten years. Second, it refers sometimes to the setting of production targets, whether for private or for public enterprises, in terms of the input of manpower, capital or of other scarce resources, or use in terms of output. Thirdly the word may be used to describe a statement which sets targets for the economy as a whole purporting to allocate all scarce resources among the various branches of the economy. And fourthly, the word is sometimes used to describe the means which the government uses to try to enforce upon private enterprise the targets which had been previously determined. [UN, 1951]

Planning in this study was used in the context of the second and third meanings, that is to say, the setting of production targets and allocation of scarce public resources, both for the whole nation and for the education sector. As a developing country, Kenya's government recognized the importance of education in economic development first through the adoption of the Ominde Educational Report (1965) which observed that education was to be used as an instrument for conscious change of attitudes and relationships in order to serve the needs of national development. In other words education was seen as a soft-ware to development.

The Mackay Report on the Establishment of a Second University (1981) in Kenya, which also ushered in the 8-4-4 education system, envisaged an education system, which had the lower phases of schools feeding the higher phases. In other words, the pre-primary/nursery phase would take the early childhood pupils as inputs, process them through the early childhood phase and then release them as outputs to the Primary school education phase of eight years

As Koontz and Wehrich, (1990) observe, decision-making is the selection of a course of action from among alternatives, they recognized it as a major part of planning. For the decision reached to be rational, the decision maker must have a clear understanding of alternative courses by which a goal can be reached under existing circumstances and limitations. They must also have the information and ability to analyses and evaluate the alternatives in the light of the goal sought. For students, the goal here refers to the future careers, and choosing relevant degree programmes prepares them for the desired end. Lastly they must have the desire to come to the best solution by selecting the alternative that must effectively satisfy goal achievement (Cole, 1996, Koontz et al, 1990). In relying on the manpower planning theory therefore (Herbert, 1962) it is necessary to align educational opportunities to economic needs and

aspirations. Otherwise it may lead to oversupply of manpower in some areas which may lead to wastage in their training and impose a heavy opportunity cost or failing to train manpower in the other critical but supposedly unpopular areas.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to maximise on the strength of both (Best and Kahn, 1983).

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study adapted a case study design in order to examine the process of students selection of undergraduate degree programmes in Public Universities in its natural setting; It employed multiple methods of data collection to gather rich information (Cohen et al, 2000). This included questionnaire, interviews, Focus group discussions, and document analysis

#### **Target Population**

In this study, the research population consisted of all second year undergraduate students, all the Deans of Schools and the Admission office staff in Moi University. The rationale for the selection of Moi University was guided by the fact that it is among the earliest Public institutions of higher learning to be established in Kenya, and the availability of the necessary facilities to undertake the study there which included the accessibility of the necessary information about the students' admission. At the time of the study the researcher worked as a careers and placement officer in the Dean of students department, and interacted with students in the process of inter-school transfers.

#### **Sampling Technique**

A sample is a smaller group that is obtained from the target population (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999). It constitutes selected elements from a population which is used to make statements about the whole population. Simple random sampling was used to select 11 schools out of 15 in Moi University. The inclusion of this number gave a good representative number of respondents' and reduced bias and effect reliable data collection. Stratified random sampling was used to select seven hundred fifty four (754) respondents' that included nine (9) deans of the selected schools, three (3) staff in admission of office and seven hundred forty two (742) second year undergraduate students' to constitute a unit of analysis.

#### **Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used. The adoption of a multi-methodology strategy was used in the interpretation and understanding of the key research issues. Quantitative data was used to put figures on what

existed and what was representative and provided a context for the cases. Qualitative data facilitated in answering the "how and why" questions by providing explanations to the variations captured in the quantitative data, thus providing a richer analysis.

#### **Career Guidance and Counseling and Degree Programme Decision making**

The study aimed at finding out whether career guidance and counseling is provided from primary to secondary schools. Furthermore, the study purposed to establish how often respondents sought the information. The response showed that majority of the respondents 468(75.5%) agreed that they either rarely or never sought career information at all in primary and 372(58.5%) and in secondary schools in Form one. In Form two, the response showed a lot of improvement, many participants 372(50.2%), went for the information. Students at this level of education choose subjects from applied, humanities or sciences, which they are good at and which lay a foundation for their future careers.

The improvement at this level may point to the fact that students needed teachers' advice on which subjects to choose. There was also marked improvement at the rate at which students received career guidance and counseling, majority in Form three and Four 460 (62.0%) and 550 (63.2%) respectively, indicated that they sought the information more often than in primary or in Forms one and Two. The study also sought to establish the regularity with which career guidance and counseling information was provided in Private and Public schools. The response showed that majority of the participants 298(64.2%) and 62(50.8%) from Public and Private respectively sought the service either very often or often. The study also sought to find out at what stage of the education the respondents settled on the degree programme to pursue. From the findings, majority 406 (54.7%) indicated that it was at Form Four level while few 50 (6.7%) indicated that it was at the primary level. This probably shows that students rarely receive career guidance at the primary school level. Therefore, the decision to settle for a particular area of study may not be an informed one. The findings also indicated that Participants are keen on career guidance and counseling only towards the final year of education.

The Ominde Education Report (1965) recommended the establishment of a well-developed guidance and counseling services in secondary schools, to ensure that students choose degree programmes best fitted to their needs. The recommendation has never been fully implemented to date. This has resulted into increased number of students who end up studying degree programmes they neither like nor have passion for.

The study intended to find out whether the participants were prepared to make degree programme decision. The outcome on this item showed that majority of the respondents 332(44.7%) felt mildly prepared and 73(9.2%) agreed that they were very prepared to make degree decisions. This was an indication most students, especially the group that felt mildly prepared, if given a chance would change to another different programme of study. Table 3 overleaf shows the response at which stage of education the participants decided the degree programme to pursue.

Table 1: The stage when the respondents decided on which degree programme to study

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
At Primary	50	6.7
In form 1	40	5.4
In form 2	58	7.0
In form 3	152	20.5
In form 4	406	54.7
None response	36	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>742</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**The Levels of Influence by Various Factors in the Degree Programme Decision Making**

The study sought to find out if the respondents had major interest in the degree programme they chose. The response showed that majority 226(64.5%) and 158(59.3%) of the male and female respondents who attended Public schools had interest in the degree programme they chose. Among those who attended Private institutions, their response was that 28 (43.7%) and 24(42.6%) of the male and female respondents agreed that they had interest in the choice of the degree programme they were admitted to. There was no significant difference between respondents in relation to gender or category of schools attended when it came to interest in the choice of degree programmes to pursue.

The general response indicated that a significant number of students take degree studies which they

have an interest in, but at the same time we have students who pursue degree programmes they did not choose. This kind of a situation wastes educational resources and leads to brain – drain, undermining the purpose of education. Hebert (1960) observed that provision of education is a good investment in human capital, which improves production leading to growth and development.

The study sought to find out the reason for the choice of degree programme. The response showed that majority 178 (51.4%) and 122 (45.8%) of the male and female respondents from Public schools were influenced by the marketability of the degree programme. The response from those who attended Private schools indicated that 32 (50.0%) and 30 (53.5%) of the males from both Public and Private Schools were also similarly influenced. The findings in generally showed that marketability of the degree programme is a major influence among the respondents regardless of the gender or the category of the school one attended.

The study sought to find out whether performance in national examination (KCSE) was a determinant factor in choice of degree programmes. The response from Public schools shows that majority 76 (50.2%) males and 142 (53.7%) females acknowledged this factor. Similarly, findings from Private schools also indicated that majority of the Participants 32 (55.0%) males and 32(57.1%) females were in agreement

The study intended to measure the influence of career guidance and counseling in schools on degree choices of students. The general response on this item showed that although this service is available in schools, the majority of the participants 126(36.0%) males and 88(33.0%) females from Public and 30 (46.8%) males and 18(32.1%) from Private schools agreed that career services had minor influence in their decisions. One of the participants summarized the level of career services by saying that,

*.. I was surprised that there were many courses when i made my application after the KCSE results were out, which teachers were not aware of, I cant blame them, there is a lot of pressure on them to ensure that their subject are well performed in the national examinations .They have less time for career counseling to research for career information. Geography was my favorite subject, therefore I chose this course that required geography, (Respondent, 2008).*

The study also sought to find out other sources of career information for students. The response showed that 92 (29.2%) and (48.3%) of the males and female respectively in Public schools agreed that they were influenced by newspaper stories in chosen fields. Similarly, response from participants in Private

institutions also showed that majority 22 (35.4%) males and 16 (28.5%) females were also influenced. This also shows that majority of the respondents went out of their way to get career information on their own. The interviews with the Deans of Schools differed with the response of the students on this item. Majority 07 (77.8%) indicated that students are not adequately informed on degree programmes at the point of admission. There is need to encourage students to widen career information base by collecting and comparing information on degree programmes of interest to them, this can make a basis for degree programme choices. The study sought to find out the influence of university on degree choices of the participants. The response on university publications showed that majority 370(49.9%) respondents agreed that such publications did have any major influence on their degree decisions.

One of the international recognized ways of providing such services is through a structured career guidance and counseling service. These offices should be adequately funded by the government as a necessary compliment to academic studies. Work placements should be arranged to enable students understand the realities of the careers they intend to choose. There are no mechanisms put in place to motivate students to seek career information. Therefore, most of them remain uninformed and experience many problems in degree programme decision making.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **Career Guidance and Counseling in Secondary Schools**

The findings indicated that there was career guidance and counseling in most secondary schools, however, not all of them were active. Students in schools without or with inactive career offices were likely to be disadvantaged in degree programme decision making. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission have no modalities put in place to monitor the provision of career guidance and counseling in secondary schools, it is always assumed that all students are provided with career information. The study also established that in most schools, career guidance and counseling was included in general counseling services dealing with cases that included drug abuse, alcohol, HIV/AIDS and any other problems.

Therefore, a number of students tended to associate the offices with places where students with problems would report, and therefore, avoided them. In doing so, they missed out on career information required on degree decision making. The response also indicated that there was lack of interest on the part of some of the respondents to seek for this information since it is on voluntary basis. In addition, the Focused Group Discussion established that most students did not

understand the importance of career guidance and counseling. Furthermore, the provision of career guidance and counseling has no curriculum or clear policies on how it should be done, each schools provides in its own way. Generally, it is not taken seriously by the government, schools and students. When participants were asked to indicate how often they sought career guidance and counseling in Primary and Secondary schools, the response showed that a significant number of students 374(50.4%) in Primary and 308(32.9%) in Form one, Form two 280 (37.7%), and Form three 240(32.3%) rarely sought career counseling services.

Career guidance and counseling services are also enhanced by various activities. The study, therefore, sought to find out how regularly activities like, career tours, career days and visits by professionals were organized and provided by schools. The response indicated that these activities were organized by schools on yearly basis than any other time. For career guidance and counseling to equip students with decision-making skills, it should be provided more regularly in a year than the current practice. These activities would give respondents a chance to understand the realities of various professions, the challenges, and the social skills like emotional maturity, time management, and confidence among others that are required to cope in work places. Therefore, the provision of the said activities to support career guidance and counseling, according to the study are not adequate I secondary schools. The study also established that the major factors that influenced degree decisions of participants beside family were marketability of the programme, performance in KCSE, potential earnings, personal interest and peers. Majority of the respondents 478(64.4%) agreed that they did not have adequate information to make a degree programme decisions. When asked to rate their satisfaction with career guidance and counseling services in secondary schools, 244(32.9%) were neutral while 224(31.1%) were either dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the level of Career guidance and counseling presently provided in secondary schools need to be strengthened through funding, resource materials and training of more career teachers.

Consequently, it was concluded that the level of career guidance and counseling provided in secondary schools to facilitate informed degree programme decision making by students was low, therefore, inadequate. Appropriate degree decision making by students should be accompanied by comprehensive career information to enable them exercise the freedom of decision-making.

### **The Role Played by the Admission Office in the Degree Programme Decisions of Prospective Undergraduate Students**

The study sought to establish which measures have been put in place by Moi University to market degree programmes for prospective undergraduates. The response from the Admission office indicated that students are informed of degree programmes on offer through regular production of prospectus, Calendars, organization of seminars for career guidance and counseling teachers and visitation to schools. When asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with provision of career information by the university, majority of the respondents showed that they were either neutral 198(26.7%) or dissatisfied 186(25.1 %) respectively by the services. This position was further confirmed by majority 07(77.8%) of the Deans of Schools agreed that most students are not informed at the point of admission. This indicated the marketing process by the Admission staff do not appear to reach majority of potential undergraduates.

The benefit of this information is yet to reach majority of students who appear still uninformed. In relation to the findings, it was concluded that Public universities must do more than the current practice to educate the potential undergraduates on the various degree programmes on offer and the importance of making informed decisions. Measures should be put in place to ensure that information from university fairs or exhibitions is disseminated to secondary schools to achieve the intended results.

### **Procedures That the Joint Admission Board Can Embrace to Improve Admission of Prospective Students to Degree Programmes in a Manner That Minimizes the Current Prevalent Need to Change Afterwards.**

Admission to Public universities is instituted by the Joint Admission Board (JAB). Students are send application forms and booklets that comprise Guide Notes to the KCSE Examination Candidates on application procedures. It is always assumed career teachers and students understand instructions given which may not always be the case. Most respondents agreed during the Focused Group Discussion that they did not understand how to calculate cut off points required for each degree programme. In schools where admission forms arrive long after students have cleared out of schools, teachers fill forms for students on the strength of their academic performance. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the services provided by the Joint Admission Board, majority 322(50.2%) showed that they were neutral or dissatisfied with the time of degree programme choices, similarly, majority 521(63.3%) were also neutral or dissatisfied with the admission process by JAB.

This response indicates that the respondents have not been enabled to exercise the freedom of choosing degree programmes. The study concluded that measures should be put in place by the government to facilitate degree programme decision making by the students. Degree preferences by students ought to be respected; otherwise, they may be no point in having the Joint Admissions Board. Majority of students who are called to revise by JAB never succeed, therefore, they pursue programmes they do not like.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Career guidance and counseling in secondary schools**

The findings of the study have indicated the need for mainstreaming career guidance and counseling in the education system. This should begin at pre-primary, primary through secondary up to university levels. It would help create awareness of the various careers available in the job market and the various requirements. Students would be able to plan their future careers by pursuing relevant subjects at secondary school and degree programmes at university level. There is need for students to invest in individual career information by use of various sources.

The government requires providing clear policies to guide career guidance and counseling provision in schools. To compliment the current services in schools, there is need for funding these offices to ensure they do have the relevant resources that should include books, newspapers, journals, internet services among others. The service providers should be relieved of some of their academic duties to enable them deal with career needs of individual students, as opposed to the current practice of group counseling. To remain relevant, career guidance and counseling teachers should be facilitated to attend training, seminars, and workshops and engage in Action research to share and improve their services. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should support career services in schools by relaxing their hiring policy on teachers who cannot be employed when they have guidance and counseling as their second subject. In view of the current policy by TSC, there is need to have counseling services included in school curriculum and be examinable.

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