

## Sources of Student Academic Department Choice in Higher Learning Institutions: The Case of Bahir Dar University

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**Abstract:** The purposes of this study were to investigate whether interest, ability, perceived job prestige, family and peer influence affected on students' academic department choice; to examine mean score differences between male and female students' scores in the variables compared, and to see whether relationships exist between interests, ability, perceived job prestige, family and peer influence and academic department choice. The data used in the study was obtained through questionnaire from 4<sup>th</sup> year students of Bahir Dar University. A total of 247 participants (185 males and 62 females) participated in the study. The data were analyzed using Regression, t-test and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The correlational analysis revealed that there were significant relationships among interest, ability, perceived job prestige and academic department choice. t-statistic also revealed that there were no mean score differences between male and female students on the variables compared, except ability which was found to be in favor of male students ( $t=1.699, \alpha = 0.02, df = 245$ ). Results obtained through multiple regression and beta weights depicted that interest had a statistically significant direct effect on academic department choice ( $\beta = 0.230, t = 6.800, P < 0.05$ ). However, ability, perceived job prestige, family and peer influence had no direct effect on students' academic department choice. Based on the findings obtained, implications were discussed and recommendations were forwarded.

### Introduction

Super as cited in Steinberg (1993), asserted that between the age of 14 and 18 adolescents first begin to crystallize a vocational choice. They begin to formulate ideas about appropriate work and occupational conceptions, which guide subsequent educational decisions. Their conceptions of learning in some area of education are explicitly or implicitly guided by occupational choice. In support of this as Silvery as cited in Wober (1975), suggested an emphasis on viewing education as an essential step to enter a job market rather than as an end in itself. Consistent with this, Hurlock (1967) stated that Education is a means to several ends. Both Wober and Hurlock argued that education is not usually wanted principally as an end in itself but as a means of making a living.

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When we talk about factors that affect career choice, we are also simultaneously talking about the factors that affect educational field choice. In other words, unless adolescents make specific educational choice that makes them competent in some area of work, they will not be qualified to do the job.

According to Feldman (2000) our academic and professional careers are propelled by many forces. Makinde (1988) stressed the vitality of the problem by saying choice is a problem encountered by students all over the world. Choice of career, of subjects and courses in school and of subsequent paths to follow is always a difficult problem. In line with this, one can argue that making a decision to successfully choose an academic field that fits one's needs best is not a simple task. This happens because of the involvement of decisive variables in the choice. The factors can also affect the achievement of the students if they are placed into department in which they are not interested.

In connection with the variables that involve making decision about department choice, Wosen (1990) suggested that the educational stream each student chooses for specialization at school level is the outcome of complex processes of interaction between the characteristics of the students and of the society in which they live. Supporting this, Super as cited in Steinberg (1993) stated that although adolescents settle on a particular choice of career at the period of crystallization, they begin to narrow to the specific area according to their interest, ability, peer influence and availability of markets for their preferences. Academic field choice, therefore, depends upon the student's hierarchy of choices by considering his/her interest, ability, prestige of the job. Other various factors related to peers, parents and other people around them also influence choices of field of study. Moreover, often it has been observed that boys and girls are not engaging in the same department in a similar ratio. That is, most of the time girls decide to go into a field of study that enables them to join an occupation which is traditionally feminine. Girls are expected to be housewives, nurses, social workers, elementary school teachers, low paraprofessionals, dental assistants, secretaries, clerks, and bank tellers, while boys are expected to assume the roles of auto mechanics, electrician, construction worker, high school math teacher, lawyer, dentist, or bank manager (Borich and Tombari, 1995).

Dembo (1988) reported also 30% of college bound high school women, compared with 50% of comparable men in USA, planned to study science and engineering in college. At the doctoral level, the differences were even greater; only 25% of the doctoral degrees in science and engineering were awarded to women.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educational and occupational choices are basic to one's lifestyle and reflect developmental experience, personality and goals. According to Herr and Cremer as cited in George and Cristini (1995), career choice can be an essentially rational process if the person knows how to select and obtain appropriate information and then apply the decision-making process to it. Similarly, Frank as cited in Hayes and Hopson (1981) argued that for a wise choice of vocation, a person should have knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensations, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work. The same is true for students; they have to know how to obtain appropriate information and important factors to be considered to be able to make appropriate choice.

Sociologists are also in a position to agree that no one can live without being influenced by the society of which he is a member. The attitude the society has towards a certain educational stream may influence a student in choosing fields of study. Concerning this, Hurlock (1967) revealed that boys who decide to go into a traditionally feminine occupations, such as nursing, or elementary school teaching, often find their self-esteem and prestige suffer because of the unfavorable social attitudes towards their choice of feminine occupations.

Students may abandon their real preferences and may intentionally either depress or set goals beyond their ability in order not to be out of the approvals of their peers. In connection with this, Morgan et al. (1986) contended that as an individual grows older he/she meets more and more people outside his/her family group, and becomes increasingly independent of his/her parents for the satisfaction of needs. This means people outside family members are important in shaping one's choice of field of study. Therefore, the interaction of peers is one of the main factors that may influence the students' educational stream choice.

Students' beliefs about their parents' interest matters in their academic field choice. They tend to model themselves on their parents as they see them. Most parents also want to be a model for their children; they want their children to choose the type of education and occupations that they themselves do. With regard to this, Elliott et al. (2000) revealed that families exercise different effects on a child's development, they have a profound influence on the way their children view school and learning.

In addition to the influence of job prestige, family and peers, the students' level of decision making on their academic department choice is also determined by the individual's interest and ability to engage in a certain field of study. The influence in nature of interest on students' choice of field of study has been explained by Warters (1964) as interest is just one factor in influencing choice or decision. Frandson (1967) also said that the choice students make, the course they select, the extra-curricular activity in which they participate and the occupation they later enter are all closely related to their patterns of interest. Hence, the interest students show and develop towards specific academic field of study enables them in choosing a particular field of study they are best comfortable with.

In higher learning institutions some departments also demand a high level of achievement in certain subjects other than those preferred by the learners to facilitate good performance in the major area. Supporting this view, Furnham's (1999) study showed that because there are individual differences in the demands individuals make in terms of personal attributes and skills, people will do better in jobs for which their abilities are appropriate than in the areas where their ability is incongruous. It is apparent that if the choice is on the basis of ability individuals can become interested in the subjects they can perform well.

In this regard, in higher learning context of Ethiopia what factors could affect students' academic choice is not well documented. Research conducted in this area seems to be very scanty. Hence, the need to know the factors students consider in choosing fields of academic department in Bahir Dar University and further in their life initiated the writers of this study. To this end the following leading research questions were formulated.

1. Do interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence predict students' department choice?

2. Do male and female students differ in interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence on department choice?
3. Are there significant relationships among interest, ability, job prestige, family influence, peer influence, and department choice?

### **Significance of the Study**

The finding of this study is expected to:

- help students, counselors and administrators in indicating how students can be affected by various factors in choosing their major areas;
- resolve the conflict that exists between students learning situation and their future career choice; and
- help to counselors in indicating factors to focus on when they consult students concerning departmental choice.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of the study was to indicate sources of students' academic field choice in higher learning institutions with particular reference to Bahir Dar University. The specific objectives were:

- To investigate whether the independent variables such as interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence strongly and significantly predict students' department choice.
- To examine whether mean score differences exist between male and female students' scores on the variables compared.
- To see whether relationships exist between interest, ability, job prestige, family influence, peer influence and department choice.

### **Delimitation**

Though there are multitudes of factors that influence students' academic department choice in higher learning institutions, the study was delimited to selected factors that can affect students' department choice. These factors include interest, ability, job prestige, family and peer influence. Bahir Dar University was selected as research site because of the researchers' access to students and academic staff members. This facilitated data gathering and administration processes.

## Definition of Terms

**Academic Department Choice:** - refers to field of study selected by students of Bahir Dar University. The terms academic field, major area and academic stream are used interchangeably with academic department choice.

**Interest:** A tendency to like or seek to engage in a certain kind of academic department.

**Ability:** The capacity or level of achievement that the students had in high school and the potential they have to succeed in certain academic department at University.

**Job Prestige:** Refers to the respect the society has for a given job in terms of its financial rewards, degree of authority and autonomy.

**Family Influence:** An influence that the family of the student exerts on a student.

**Peer Influence:** An influence that friends put on the student on matters related to choice of field of study.

## Review of Related Literature

### Choice of Academic Study Area

Students have to be aware of the various factors that can affect their academic field choice before they formulate the decision to be effective in their learning and future life plan.

Cicero as cited in Hoppock (1967), suggested that we must decide what manner of individuals we wish to be and what selection in life we would follow; and this is the most difficult problem in the world. So, in order to reduce the problem, take maximum advantage of educational situations and make realistic plan for the future. In addition, adequate information about different fields of studies will enable students to choose the type of department which best suits them. There are a number of factors that interfere with student academic department choice and academic achievement in higher learning institutions. Of these, interest, ability, job prestige, family and peer influences are the major ones (Evans, 1972; Kelly, 1980; Hurlock, 1967; Hopson, 1981; Borich and Tombari, Borich and Tombari, 1995).

According to Tobias (1994) individual interest refers to people's relatively enduring preferences for different topics, tasks or contexts and how these influence learning. Evans (1971) contended that interest determines what man will do, or say in a particular situation or what he will enjoy or dislike, his approach to other people and his reaction to events in his own life in the world around. From the above arguments one can infer that interest is an individual's decision on the way he or she likes to engage.

Even though interest is the result of the interaction between heredity and environment at large, it can be developed and shaped through experience. In line with this Morrison and Mesntyre (1971) stated that as a child matures, his interest develops and becomes more differentiated in his widening variety of explorations in school hobbies and work. In this experience each individual tends to develop academic, work and play interest based on his particular talent, success and performance.

Many educators have explained the importance of interest in learning process. Hurlock (1967) for example contended that on the whole, students in high school and college show greater interest in subjects they believe will be of most value to them vocationally and in other areas of adult life. In support of Hurlock's idea, Evans (1971), pointed out that students would be more interested in subjects that bring forth satisfaction than subjects that are less satisfying. She further generalized that success is unlikely where interest is lacking. Wilson (1971) also noted the importance of interest, emphasizing that children learn quickly what they are interested in. Similarly, Wiusliody, cited in Wilson (1971), asserted that to be successful, pupils should be as interested and there should be continued attention. Aggarwal (1998) argued that interest is the mother of attention and attention is the mother of learning. Thus to secure learning one must first catch the mother and then the grandmother. From this, one can understand that interest can play an important role to influence student's choice of academic field of study.

Since interest is an influential and important factor to be successful in education and throughout one's life, it must be identified as the focus of educational attention. According to Feldman (2000) we need to take a long look inwards, paying attention to what our interests are through, for example, asking questions such as the following. What do you like to accomplish in life? What are your strength and weaknesses? What do you want to get out

of life? The more you know about yourself, the easier it will become to narrow down the choices.

In the above claim it is clearly seen that the primary basis for the department choice of a student mainly lies in the interest of the learner. Consistent with the idea of Feldman, Strong as cited in Super (1967), explained interest as something that affects the situation. Forcing a student to choose what he/she is not interested in may hamper what he or she actually is disposed to do.

The presence of interest enables individuals to get the most out of the subject matter and attain the intended objectives. It is, therefore, possible to say that interest makes a marked influence and a strong appeal to students in making their academic department choice.

Different educators also put forth the important ability one can demonstrate in academic achievement. With regard to ability, Super (1962) defined the term ability operationally as “the capacity or power to succeed in school or college.” Similarly, Petrovsky and Yaroshevsky (1987) defined ability as individuals’ psychological features that allow them to successfully perform specific activities. The writers emphasize that ability is a means to achieve success. If an individual is successful in a particular activity he or she will be encouraged to demonstrate continued ability in that and in other similar activities. Bernard (1972) noted that pupils who succeed typically well set next goals that call for exertion, but which promises victory as a result of that effort. Students who score better on particular area of course will be encouraged and continue in specializing in it.

Ability of students in certain subjects is closely related with field of specialization. Concerning this Kelly (1980) noted that pupil will be grouped according to their previous abilities in the subjects concerned and can then be pushed on at the rate that is right for their level of attainment in a group with others whose pace of working is roughly similar. Kathy as cited in Worell and William (1981) also stressed the importance of ability in school achievement. Students who have effective achievement skill in school can be described as masters of a problem. They attempt to do well in most of the tasks assigned to them. Sorenson (1971) also indicated that in choosing a job or a course of study or a vocation, it is wise to know one’s ability.



Concerning the relationship between interest and ability writers have shown that ability sometimes determines the level at which an interest may function rather than the choice of interest. Evan (1971) argued that if there is a relationship between interest and ability, it is more likely to be found in specialized field, not in those in which most people are interested. This confirms the evidence that scientific, mathematical and engineering interests require related abilities, whereas social and business interests do not. Social interest is probably much more evenly spread throughout the population than are intellectual interests.

Super (1967) discussed the nature of prestige as reputation that derives from status that appears to be a need more of personal in the higher level and in the lower level occupations. This means that prestige is the result of social feeling towards a certain job in different ranks or orders according to the level of occupations.

Hicks as cited in Wober (1975) found that prestige consists of several attributes including pay, responsibility, intelligence needed, service rendered to others, working conditions, and power wielded. Hurlock (1967) indicated that adolescents judge the prestige of jobs in terms of the degree of authority and autonomy the worker has, the financial rewards he receives, and the title he or she possesses on the job. Therefore, it is inevitable that these images have an influence on students in making their academic field choice that enables them to enter a prestigious job market in the future.

It has been noted in some studies that some occupations were more prestigious than others. For instance, Brown as cited in Abay (1982) pointed out that science, government and professionals were the most prestigious jobs while education and agriculture came to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the list. Agriculture and semi-skilled labors occupied the 3<sup>rd</sup> positions. The main reasons in ranking were power or authority and public service. According to Havighust and Neugarten (1967) teachers as a group have been awarded somewhat less social status than other professional groups. In America for example, in rankings of occupations according to social prestige, teaching was ranked lower than the other professions. Accordingly, students' academic field choice and occupations can be affected by whether or not the kind of job they want to engage in is prestigious. With regard to this a study which was, conducted by Walsh and Osipow (1983) revealed that esteem or social status that the general population confers on occupations is an important factor affecting vocational choice. The occupation that people opt

for has a critical psychological and sociological impact not only on them but also on their family.

Another factor that plays an essential role in the interaction between academic field choice and achievement is family influence. Family is a social organization. Super as cited in Hayes and Hopson (1981), described the family as social, psychological and an economic entity. Super also argues that there are social, psychological and economic interactions in the family, which shape its members, making life more pleasurable. Leslie (1973) noted that the child can learn his family's behavior and behaves like them. This shows how a family can exert an influence on one's choice.

The family is in most cases, the significant aspect in determining children's choice. Worell (1981) argued that parents control, structure, model, reinforce, punish, and teach their children not only observable behavior patterns but also many values, attitudes, and beliefs that will pervade the child's academic arena.

Borich and Tombari (1995) noted that parents could play a variety of imperative roles in schools as receivers of information, as learners and teachers, and as decision makers. In connection to this, Venables (1968) emphasized that not only does the family environment set limits to the area of choice, but attitudes to work and to social status are greatly influenced by the immediate family circles. Thus, parents or other members of the family, either by their experience or achievement, can exert pressure on their young people.

The influence of family environment on students' academic field choice and academic achievement can be seen on the results obtained by researchers like Vaughan (1970) who reported that children are highly influenced to have choices already assumed by their families. Furthermore, Vaughna investigated engineering apprentices taking an advanced training course, and reported that over half had fathers or relatives in engineering jobs. Consistent with this, Lovell and White (1958) reported that students choosing to study science were significantly more likely to have fathers who had scientific interests and who had tried to impart to their sons technical knowledge and skills.

When children move out from the family into child care centers, school, and the community at large, they begin to form attachments, and real friendships emerge later through their play. These relationships contribute to share their sharing experience with each other. Borich and Tombari (1995) indicated that as learners enter adolescence and move to school, we expect them to add to their friendship schema: a willingness to share feelings and secrets with others, knowledge about feelings of others, a commitment to loyalty and faithfulness, a concern for the norms and expectations of peer group.

This research concerned itself with the influence of peers on students' choice of academic field of study choice in school Hurlock (1967) studied the influential power of peers and reported that the adolescent's values are greatly influenced by those with whom he or she is most closely identified or by those whose acceptance is most anxious to have, the group in school or college which he or she is identified with have more pressure on his attitudes toward education than the school or college group as a whole.

Adolescents can be more influenced by their intimate peer groups than they can be influenced by the whole members of their classmates or groups. So peers have a great say in the decision of their friends on the educational activities like choice of course of study while they are at school.

A research conducted by Hartup as cited in Barbour and Chandler (1997) suggested that the peer group can influence what the child values, knows, wears, eats, and learns. The extent of this influence, however, depends on other situational constraints, such as the age and personality of children and the nature of the group. Similarly, Hurlock (1967) stated that the vocational aspirations of friends affect the vocational plans of the adolescents, and this in turn, affects their attitude toward education.

In general, many educators agree that people influence each other. So the attitude, interest and values of peers towards a certain educational stream may have enormous control on a students' choice of academic fields of study.

## Methods

### Participants

The target populations of this study were Bahir Dar University students who were in their 4<sup>th</sup> year education in 2005. From the total population of 741 students, 247 were selected from 13 departments as the sample of the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to determine the sample. Of the total, 185 were males and 62 were females.

### Instruments

Questionnaire was used as a major tool for data collection. A five point Likert type scale questionnaire that contained 21 items was adapted and developed from the available literature by the investigators. The questionnaire was administered to a small group (25 students) to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the items before it was administered to the main respondents.

All the independent variables interest, ability, job prestige, family influence, and peer influence were measured using four items each. The items in the questionnaire were assumed to assess students' interest, ability, and their perception of the job prestige; and the degree of family and peer influence. Four items measured student interest e.g. "I have chosen the present academic department because it gives me higher satisfaction." Chronbach alpha for these items is 0.84. Four items measured student ability e.g. "I have joined the present department because I am influenced by my ability ". Chronbach alpha for the item is 0.78. Four items measured job prestige; e.g., "I have chosen the present department because I was influenced by the opportunity to earn a better income in the future" Chronbach alpha for the items is 0.72. Four items measured family influence e.g., "I have chosen the present department because my families were very much eager to see me join that department". The Chornbach alpha for these items is 0.77. Four items measured peer influence e.g., "I have chosen the present department because I was influenced by my friends' opinion". Chronbach alpha is 0.72. The items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) for positively worded items. Strongly agree (1) strongly disagree (5) were used with the items that were negatively phrased.

The dependent variable was student's academic department choice. For this variable one item was designed to measure the rank order of academic department preferences that the student chose during his initial selection of the field of study.

### **Procedures of Data Collection**

The questionnaire was administered during class hours to 247 students selected from 13 departments. The researchers themselves administered the questionnaire. Adequate explanation of the purpose of the study was given before the respondents completed the questionnaire. The respondents were also given enough time to complete the questionnaires.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Following data collection through questionnaire, organization of the responses obtained from the sample group was made. Then the following statistical methods were employed for analysis.

1. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviations were calculated for general discussion and comparison purposes.
2. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to see whether there existed relationships between interest, ability, job prestige, family and peer influence, and academic department choice.
3. Multiple regressions were utilized to see whether the score of the independent variables predicted strongly and significantly students' academic department choice.
4. T-test was also utilized to compare the mean score of male and female students on the variables treated and the obtained correlation values between variables. The level of significance was determined at 0.05.

### **Results**

The first concern of this study was to examine the relationships between the variables. The second concern was to determine mean score differences of the variables between male and female students on the variables compared and the third was to see whether the scores of the independent variables predict strongly and significantly student's academic department choice. To

achieve this, the means, standard deviations, multiple regressions, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and t-test were employed.

**Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation and Correlation of the Variables**

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlation Coefficients							
			Sex	Interest	Ability	Job Prestige	Family Influence	Peer Influence	Department Choice	
Interest	14.12	3.83	0.06	1.00						
Ability	12.60	3.11	0.19*	0.43*	1.00					
job Prestige	12.28	3.34	0.11	0.20*	0.16*	1.00				
Family influence	8.36	3.20	0.09	0.003	0.09	0.07	1.00			
Peer influence	9.01	2.75	0.04	-0.08	0.03	0.01	0.003	1.00		
Department Choice	4.12	1.29	0.07	0.43*	0.15*	0.37*	-0.009	-0.01	1.00	

(N= 230: Sex Codes were 0= Female, 1 = male,  $P < 0.05$ )

As shown in Table 1, There was no statistically significant relationship between sex and interest ( $r= 0.06$ ); sex and job prestige. ( $r= 0.11$ ); sex and family and peer influence ( $r= 0.09$  and  $0.04$ ) and sex and department choice ( $r=0.067$ ) except sex and ability which was found to be statistically significant ( $r=0.19$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Similarly, there was a statistically significant relationship between interest and ability ( $r=0.43$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) which suggests that interested students were more likely to have the knowledge and the potential to perform higher in subjects that they liked to join than those in which they had less interest. In addition, interest and job prestige and interest and department choice had a statistically significant relationship ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ); ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $P < 0.03$ )

It was also found that ability had a statistically significant relationship with job prestige and department choice ( $r = 0.16$ ,  $0.15$ ,  $P < 0, 05$ ) respectively. This result indicates that students who have high ability to achieve in a certain field of study had more chance to go for the academic department they wished. Moreover, students who think the academic department is the most prestigious chose the department first. In addition, academic department choice had a statistically significant relationship with job prestige ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, family influence and peer influence did not correlate significantly with any of the variables compared.

The other purpose of the study was to compare the mean scores of male and female students among all the variables treated. To this end, t-test was computed and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sex difference in Mean Scores on the Variables**

Variables	Male (n = 178)		Female (n = 52)		t-test
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Interest	14.34	3.73	13.83	4.51	0.85
Ability	12.79	3.03	11.96	3.35	1.70
Job prestige	12.61	3.22	11.14	3.51	2.86
Family influence	8.51	3.13	7.85	3.42	1.32
Peer influence	9.07	2.75	8.81	2.77	0.60
Department choice	4.17	1.28	3.96	1.31	1.02

\*  $df=228$ 

As indicated in Table 2, male students scored a relatively higher mean than female students in all the variables compared. But the t-values show no significant mean score differences among the variables. Interest, family and Peer influence and academic department choice between male and female students. Ability, and job prestige however, was found to be significant in favor of males ( $t = 1.699$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

The major purpose of the study was to investigate whether interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence predict significantly students' department choice. Table 3 indicates the composite contributions of these variables to department choice.

**Table 3: Regression Statistics of Interest, Ability, Job Prestige, Family Influence and Peer Influence on Department Choice**

Variables		Coefficients	t-Statistic
Interest		0.15	6.80
Ability		-0.02	-0.70
Job Prestige		-0.03	-1.11
Family influence	0.20*	0.01	0.23
Peer influence		0.02	0.56

\* ( $F = 8.932$  and  $P < 0.05$ )

The regression analysis results indicated that there was a significant contribution of interest, family influence, and peer influence to academic department choice ( $R^2 = 0.20$ ,  $F = 8.93$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The contribution of ability and job prestige was found to be negative.

Furthermore, the direct effects of the variables on department choice were determined by using path coefficients. The effects on academic department choice of interest ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $t = 6.80$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) were statistically significant and found to be strong predictor of student's academic department choice. This implies that the more students were interested in particular department, the more chance they would get to join that department. In short, interest was a strong predictor of department choice. On the other hand, ability ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $t = -0.73$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), job prestige ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $t = -1.11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), family influence ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $t = 0.23$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ), and peer influence ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $t = 0.56$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) were not statistically significant predictors of department choice for this sample group.

The independent contribution of interest to the total variance of department choice was found to be 18.49%, which is 95% of the total  $R^2$ , which was 19.5%. This means the composite contribution of interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence was 19.5%. The sole contribution of interest was 18.49%.  $t$  and the contributions of ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence to the total variance of academic department choice was 1.01%, which was 5% of the total  $R^2$ .

## Discussion

The correlational analysis indicated that there were no significant relationship between sex, interest, job prestige, family influence, peer influence and academic department choice. The only significant correlation found was between sex and ability.

Regarding the variables, interest ability and job prestige had high positive relationship with students' department choice. This implies that students who have high interest, ability and prestigious job had a better likelihood to join the academic departments they wanted than students with low interest, ability and perceived job prestige. In addition, interest, ability and job prestige were highly interrelated with each other.

This finding probably indicates that students choose their field of study only when they are interested and when they are sure that they have the capability in the area or when they think they have the potential to do well in the future. This result is consistent with the results of Evan (1971) who stated that students would be more interested in subjects that bring forth



satisfaction than those that are less satisfying. On the other hand, Sorenson (1971) maintained that in choosing a course of study, it is wise to know one's ability and to make choices that emphasize one's capability. Santrock (1994) reported that youths prefer to be trained to join in work force that offers good payment. A work that traditionally has high social status also attracts the youth.

The other purpose of this study was to compare the mean scores of the two sexes. To this end t-test was computed. The t-statistics revealed that there was no significant difference between the variables treated except ability, which was found to be significant in favor of males. Research conducted by Sadker and Klein as cited in Dembo (1988) reported that females compared to males tend to enter learning situation with lower expectation for success and with a lack of self-confidence in their ability. The present study seems to be in agreement with the above findings reported by Sadker and Klein. However, societal expectation can impose limits on their self-confidence about their achievement in a certain field of study. Borich and Tombari (1995) suggested that for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century girls were assumed to be born with less mathematical ability than boys. Maccoby and Jacklin as cited in Sprinthall et al (1994) showed that academically, females outperformed males, especially in the elementary school grades. By the time they got to high school and college, however, the males moved ahead of the females in virtually every area like arts, science, corporate life and professions.

The other purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence on academic department choice. To do this, multiple regression analysis was employed.

The path coefficients displayed that except interest, which was the strongest predictor of students' department choices, the other variables treated in the study were not statically significant. This implies that interest was the most determinant and important factor in influencing students to choose academic department or field of study. This result is in agreement with the findings of Hurlock (1967), Frandson (1967) and Feldman (2000) Moreover, Deci and Ryan (1991) revealed that because people enjoy tasks that interest them, whether they lead to the attainment of rewards and other goals or not, studies of the impact of interest are central to an understanding of the effects of intrinsic motivation. They emphasized that intrinsically motivated behaviors are those the person undertakes out of interest. Seen from this perspective, interest and intrinsic motivation are virtually synonymous.

Similarly, Tobias (1994) showed that interest is stable and long lasting among adults and may have positive motivational characteristics for long periods of time. Scholarly activities have become an important concern for students. It has long been assumed that people work harder and learn more tasks related to their interests than others. Therefore, the findings reviewed above suggest that interest may have an energizing effect on learning and lead students to use deep comprehension processes. Finally, the independent contribution of the variables to the variability of department choice was assessed. The independent contribution of interest exceeded significantly all the other variables.

Finally, as indicated in the results, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence had no predicting effect on students' academic choice. This may show that there are variables other these that are more responsible for students' department choice in higher learning institutions in our context.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study was designed to investigate the effects of interest, ability, job prestige, family influence and peer influence on student academic department choice. It was designed to investigate whether all the independent variables had direct impact or not on student department choice. Moreover, the study tried to look into which variables predicted most students' department choice.

Based on the analysis, the following were the results and conclusions:

As shown by correlation statistics, there were significant interrelationships among interest, ability, job prestige and department choice. Family and peer influence however did not correlate with any variables that were treated in the study.

T-test results revealed that in all the variables treated, male students scored relatively higher means than female students. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between males and females on the variables compared, except ability and, which were found to be significant in favor of males.

The regression analysis results indicated that the contribution of interest to students' department choice was significant. The contribution of other variables was, on the other hand found to be not significant. Hence, interest should be seen as an outcome of the interactive process between an individual and his or her environment.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations could be forwarded:

- The result of this study showed that there were relationships between interest, ability and job prestige with academic department choice. Because of this students who want to choose their preferred field of academic study should be given due consideration in their department choice;
- Male students had better perception of their own abilities than female students. This may suggest that all responsible persons like administrators, counselors, department heads, etc should provide appropriate counseling and empowerment for females. This might enable them to improve their conception about their own capabilities;
- Interest was the most influential factor in one's choice of academic department. So, students' academic department choice should be given due emphasis and their choice needs to be respected;
- Counselors should give great emphasis to students' interest when they consult students for their academic department choice in colleges and universities; and
- Future research is also recommended to find other factors than those considered in the present study that influence students' choice of field of study.

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