

Choice of major



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Timon Igeria UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY IS AS A RESULT OF STUDENTS BASING THEIR CHOICE OF PROGRAM ON PRESTIGE. Introduction "

There is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking, gut wrenching and rest-of-your life oriented--or disoriented--than the choice of a major. " (St. John, 2000, p. 22) The impact of a wrong or right choice transcends beyond the learning satisfaction because it is correlated with job stability and job satisfaction.

One would expect a scholar to choose a university program through extensive research, cognitive decision making and employment of heuristics (pike 200) but unfortunately anecdotal evidence has showed this is not the case. Most students employ tactics of indecision as opposed to cognitive decision making and many times end up in the wrong program (Beggs , Banthon, Taylor 2008). It is not surprising then that Roese and Summerville (2005) cite meta-analytical evidence that the most frequently identified life regret for Americans involve their educational choices.

The problem is not only confined to America but also to Kenya and the rest of the world. Pressure to choose a particular program in university may be intrinsic or extrinsic . One of the most salient reasons why university scholars chose the wrong program is because of prestige which manifests itself in multifarious ways. Prestige is the respect and admiration that something or somebody has because of the social status or that which is admired and respected because it looks expensive and important. Which role does prestige play in the selection of wrong university majors?

How does this lead to underachievement? Effect of prestige on the choice of college program Before classifying most of the choices made by students on their university programs as “ wrong”, it is only fair that we elucidate on which parameters we are using to do so. The distinction between a right and wrong program can be explained using Holland’s theory (Holland, 1985). Holland’s theory links psychological factors (student personalities) with sociological factors (characteristics) of academic disciplines to create a model of personal-environmental fit.

According to Holland’s theory, individuals can be classified by personality types which can be paralleled to model environments (which in our case are the academic programs) . For example, a realist -a person who prefers activities involving manipulating machines- is best suited for a realistic environment like engineering. Another component of Holland’s theory shows that when there is congruity between a person’s traits and the environment, he/she is likely to flourish. From the information above we can infer that scholars whose personality types don’t match with their programs are in the “ wrong” programs.

How does prestige contribute to this? Social prestige Social prestige plays a profound role in the selection of university majors. Top performers in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K. C. S. E) are faced with a conundrum while making decisions on which program to study for in the university. A student who performs well in the K. C. S. E may be swayed to choose a science-related program despite his/her artistic personality type. Artistic careers like arts, English, music, drama and theater (Smart, Feldman and Ethington, 2000) are ranked lowly by the society.

Research indicates that most of the top performing students in the Kenya Certificate of secondary school education end up in science related majors . Does this mean that none of the students has an artistic, enterprising, social or conventional personality type? Many of the disillusioned students end up changing their university majors after lacking interest. In one careerfare organized by Equity Bank, a student revealed how she chose to pursue medicine because of social prestige (she had emerged as the second student nationally in K.

C. S. E) but ended up leaving the program for Business Communication after one year because that was where her passion was. Family prestige A research by Jeri Mullins Beggs, John H. Bantham, Steven Taylor (2008) on the factors affecting choice of college major showed that very few students use career planning tools and information research when choosing a program. Where do students get career information to choose programs from? Many students rely on personal sources which are prejudiced by prestige for information especially parents.

In addition, a significant number of parents would want their children to pursue prestigious programs which they wanted to pursue but did not have the chance to do so . Parents, unlike students, often view education as an investment in which they expect huge returns (Nabeel, Conaty and To 1989, p. 252). To them, when their child performs well in K. CSE, he/she should undertake a prestigious major like medicine, engineering and law. This will enable them to have successful careers and return the investments that were made.

In the same breath, the parents will be proud about the courses selected because society reveres the family. Most students who follow their parents' choice end up being dissatisfied with their programs and some even discontinue and join other programs (often of a lesser societal rank). Career and institutional prestige Career prestige is another factor that affects the students' career choice. The choice of a college major plays a critical role in determining the expected future earnings of the college students. (Arcidiano, Hotz, Kang 2011). Many students choose a career based on the future earning streams associated with it.

Prestigious careers like medicine, engineering, law, actuarial science and financial engineering are associated with higher future income streams hence more preferred. A student might choose a prestigious career which is not in line with his/her abilities because it has a higher potential for financial success. Job security and job stability are also critical factors in the choice of the college program. The following was the response by a student in regard to her major choice, " In choosing a major, I considered how marketable the degree would be, and what city or area I wanted to be in.

I wanted a degree that I could go most anywhere and find a job" (College Student Journal, 2008). In Kenya, a significant number of the top students choose Medicine because it has been associated with job security and stability over engineering which is mostly contractual. The problem is worse in South Korea where the university chosen is predicted as the highest determinant of the income that one is going to receive (Changui Khan, 2004). In Kenya some students compromise programs which fit their personality types just because they don't " like" the university or campus.

Students would want to be associated with the best ranked universities. Most students who pursue majors because of career financial security end up disappointed: there is no match with their personalities. Conclusion Kenya needs the right scholars to develop it as it endeavors to achieve its Vision 2030 goals. Scholars who are not only academically apt, but can also create pragmatic solutions and innovations able to progress the country. The practice of basing the choice of university program on prestige is apocryphal and should be discouraged .

Students should choose programs based on their interest after intensive research and outsourcing. References 1. British Educational Research Journal published by Taylor & Francis Limited, Vol 33, No2 Apr 2007 2. Research in Higher Education Vol 47, No7 (Nov, 2006) pp801-822 published by springs. 3. College Student Journal, June 2008, Distinguishing the Factors Influencing College Student Choice of Major Jeri Mullins Beggs, John H Banthon, Steven Taylor (www. findarticles. com) 4. Tapscott, D. (1998). Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation. New York: McGraw-Hill. 5. Roese, N. J. , & Summerville, A. (2005). What we regret most ... and why. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31 (9, September), 1273-85. 6. Smart, J. C, and Feldman, K. A. (1998). " Accentuation effects" of dissimilar academic departments: An application and exploration of Holland's theory. Research in Higher Education 39: 385-418. 7. Howard, J. A. (2005). Why should we care about student expectations? In: Miller, T. E. , Bender, B. E. , and Schuh, J. H. ; Associates (eds.), Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 10-33.