

Factors Influencing Academic Career Choice Among Higher Education Students and Their Implications In the Context of Public Policy in Tanzania

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Abstract

Tanzania faces a growing problem associated with academic career choices among higher education students. Therefore, the present study aims to empirically establish the main intrinsic (personality) and extrinsic (socio-economic) factors considered by students in deciding their academic careers. Besides, it is essential to employ a public policy perspective to reconstruct a broader picture of the findings for deliberate actions to be taken. The study employed a cross-sectional study design and simple random sampling technique to select 392 students from a population of students of the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Data were collected using a questionnaire and a desk review of documents. Study findings show that three main socio-economic and personality factors influenced student's academic career choice: family influence, employment opportunities, and interest in studying a particular academic program. In the context of public policy, the study revealed that existing public policies do not create a supportive environment for students to make informed career choices. Therefore, there is a need to formulate career guidance policies, or review the existing education policy to address career guidance and counselling issues at all levels of education by considering the context of the dynamic and changing world of work.

Keywords: academic career choice, intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, career guidance policy, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Academic career choice as a process can be traced back to the philosophical debates on the conceptions of choice and decision-making on what is good and right, which first arose in the epoch of ancient philosophy and enlightenment with the groundwork of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine of Hippo, and Kant; to name a few (Ferguson, 1950: 6; Mele, 1981: 405–406; Williams, 1993: 8–9; Beck, 1981: 3). The philosophers, as mentioned above, contemplate a human being as a rational and autonomous animal with the freedom and will to choose between bad and good options. Humans often choose the apparent good and ignore those that bring negative consequences. The idea of choice is grounded on determining the right course of action. However, the process may be constrained by a lack and/or inadequate knowledge of what is good so that one may choose the same. Likewise, choosing a good and right academic career is influenced and constrained not only by the level of knowledge one possesses about the available careers and occupations, but also by several other factors and conditions (Lent et al., 2002; Amani, 2013: 185).

In human civilization, the notion of choosing an academic path is generally conceived to have emerged parallel with the establishment of higher learning forms of universities in ancient times in some parts of Asia and Africa; and in the medieval period in some parts of Europe. The choice of academic paths by scholars of that era was primarily influenced by their personal and family lives, religious affiliations, personal interests in comprehending the universe, or the desire to serve a particular social or economic agency. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the dominant growing concern on academic career choice has been the problems and challenges facing youths in selecting their academic area of interest to pursue in higher learning institutions, and the ultimate outcomes of their decisions. For instance, Walsh and Osipow (2013) and Nota et al. (2020) argue that the problem of academic career choice among higher education students is due to irrational beliefs and maladaptive myths; as well as a lack of career learning experience and unsystematic ways of making decisions. Consequently, these anomalies put many students into wrong and unsatisfying academic career paths (Ampofo, 2020: 111).

In academic settings, academic career choice can be conceptualized as determining a field of learning over another in the presence of alternative fields of study. Pursuing the elected academic field of study will result in a certification, degree, or any other award attesting to accomplishment. For so long, this process of determining a professional field of learning among higher education students has been influenced by various factors that cut across social, economic, and personality aspects (Zelick, 2007: 7), leading career counselling professionals to turn their critical gaze towards examining the multidimensional aspects of economic and social-psychological considerations of career choice. These sets of factors are considered universal determinants for academic career choice among higher education students, and were first firmly acknowledged in developed countries through research that came to introduce and frame some competing theories of career choice, such as the social learning theory of career selection developed by Krumboltz et al. (1976), Donald Super's development theory (1981), and the Holland theory of vocational personalities (1985).

In Asian nations such as China, social-related factors were also revealed to influence students' choice of academic careers. For instance, a study by Simon and Gloria (2010) identified that parental career concerns about welfare and prestige, and perceived parental barriers to career choice, as the most significant social-related predictive factors of career choice among hospitality and tourism management students in China. This finding sounds relevant as it was observed that Asian and African nations align more closely with collectivist cultures in which people identify with societal interdependence and communal benefits (Hofstede, 1980; Sinha, 2014). Therefore, individuals find themselves convinced to make career decisions that benefit the community to which they belong.

In South Africa, a study by Shumba and Naong (2012) on first and second-year university students found that family (as a social variable) was among the significant predictors of career aspirations of undergraduate students. Likewise,

in Nigeria, Anthony and Bimbo (2012) explored the influence of parental background variables on students' career choices and exposed variables such as parental occupation, level of education, and attitudes as the most influential agents on students' career choices. In Kenya, Mwai (2011) indicated that over 71% of career decisions made by students were based on their academic ability and family influence. Social-related factors are not the only determinant factors; economic ones have also been identified through the literature. For instance, in the UK and Australia, students' and parents' concerns also focus on the economic returns of undergraduate study: securing post-study employment. This trend is intensified with increased global migration, which has softened the graduate labour market (Accenture, 2013), where potential students relocate with high expectations of securing employment opportunities after graduation (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). As such, employment outcomes are now the principal driver for whether an individual will enter higher education and their study destination (International Education Association of Australia, 2012).

Various authors have also noted an apparent connection between personality characteristics and career choice (Holland, 1966; Blau & Duncan, 1987; Peng & Johanson, 2006; Oladokun, 2022). Personality characteristics are the internal variables of an individual that determine their views and how they respond to the surrounding environment. These variables reside in every individual regardless of one's nationality, and they have also been affecting the academic career identity of every youth (Berry, 1997). The current study limited personality variables to personal abilities, interests in pursuing a particular academic programme, attitudes (positive or negative), aptitude, self-awareness, knowledge of available academic programmes, and the career choice process. According to Holland's theory of personality and career choice, people seek environments aligned with their personality types and engage in activities that utilise their abilities (Baridam & Baridam, 2020: 3), which means that students will select academic career programmes compatible with their personality characteristics. It is generally agreed that ability is the most personality factor related to academic success (Busato et al., 2000). Therefore, in selecting academic career paths, a young person tends to assess one's mental and adaptive abilities to the degree programme s/he wishes to pursue. The belief is that the likelihood of completing the programme is high if one is engaged in the academic pursuit of a particular field of knowledge with which s/he has the mental and adaptive abilities to cope. Other personality characteristics, such as 'interest' in a specific career and occupation, are potential attributes students consider when planning their career goals and inspirations.

In Tanzania—as in Western countries, Asia and Africa—socio-economic and personality factors inevitably influenced higher education students in their choices of an academic career ever since the establishment and operation of higher learning education institutions in 1961 (see Resnick, 1967: 121; Omari, 1976: 183; Rwezaura, 1991; Anangisye, 2011: 16; Venant et al., 2021). The same applies to all higher education students in Tanzania, including those at the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, who formed the representative sample for this study. Though there has

not been a solid empirical study to uncover the influencing factors for the academic career choice at this academic institution, through direct observations of the researcher in different sessions involving students—such as orientation to career counselling knowledge, the admission process, and in registering for optional courses—several students have been acknowledging the relationship between socio-economic and personality factors with their choice of academic programmes. Therefore, a range of social-related factors such as family/close relative influence, interactive influence from congruent secondary school teachers, religious beliefs, peer influence, gender stereotyping on particular academic careers and occupations, economic-related factors such as family's financial capacity, availability of employment opportunities, school's financial capacity, job security and compensation benefits, personality-related factors, namely, mental and adaptive abilities, positive attitude and interest on a career, self-awareness, and knowledge of available academic programmes: all these are the critical variables examined to understand those which greatly influence decisions of the higher education students to choose their academic careers. The findings are analysed in the context of public policy in Tanzania.

Since there has been an increase in challenges and problems associated with unsatisfactory academic career choices among higher education students in Tanzania (Amani & Sima, 2015; Maree & Magere, 2023), this translates into the prevalence of inadequate vigorous initiatives by the government in assisting youths to make proper and systematic decision making on academic career choice. Besides, although several global theories, techniques, and computer systems are architected for this purpose, students can still do not apply them, as stated above.

Nevertheless, the government in Tanzania recognizes the importance of career counselling services, and has expressed the desire to improve it through two national education policies: the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995, and of 2014 (URT, 2014: 34; URT, 1995: 49) However, the policies are unclear on how career counselling services must be provided to the needed community (Aroko, 2016: 40), which translates into the absence of clear strategies for implementing policy statements concerning career counselling provision, a phenomenon reported by Kinyota (2013: 52) and Aman and Sima (2015: 26). Such anomalies imply that education policymakers give minimal credence to the importance of career counselling services and are yet to formulate a national career guidance and counselling policy, robust implementation strategies, and legislation that would ensure the effective delivery of career counselling services to young people. Doing the above would enable students to not only choose their academic careers, but also construct their careers during the learning process and at the workplace.

Therefore, unlike several studies cited in the literature—for instance, Amani (2013), Amani and Mkumbo (2014), Gwelo (2019) and Mwantimwa (2021)—the current study opted for the cross-sectional study design and used a mixed methods approach in data collection to identify, describe and compare the main socio-economic and personality determinants of academic career choice among

higher education students in Tanzania. Besides, data are interpreted in the context of public policy to observe how they determine the need for career guidance and counselling policy, and how such a policy should be constructed and put into the implementation process to create a wide range of opportunities for students to make informed career choice decisions.

2. Theoretical framework

The influence of socio-economic and personality factors on academic career choice among higher education students is best examined and described by the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) propounded by Lent, Brown and Hackett, and anchored in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Potgieter et al., 2019: 192); which assumes an equally impacting association between persons and the environment (Leung, 2008). That is, while humans are shaped by their environments (for example, socio-economic factors and outcomes), at the same time humans impact the environment as well (Kelly, 2009: 29). The SCCT is based on three essential variables: personal goals, self-efficacy, and outcomes expectancies. For the concept of personal goals, the theory presumes that individuals are more likely to plan their career goals and ultimately make choices based on their interest in a particular career (Lent, 2020: 129). In the current study, this is relevant as it translates that personality factors—such as interest in pursuing a particular academic career—will drive an individual's decision to select the academic path s/he is interested in pursuing. The notion of self-efficacy in SCCT is defined by Bandura (1977) as the judgments individuals make about their abilities to perform specific actions. This notion construes that a student's decision to select an academic career depends mainly on one's level of personal ability to accomplish the career to be pursued.

It is argued that self-efficacy expectancies impact the development of a particular behaviour, and the maintenance of such a behaviour in reaction to obstacles and problems (Potgieter et al., 2019: 192). Therefore, the likelihood of a student being assured of accomplishing the programme s/he wishes to engage in is high. Outcome expectancies involve beliefs about external rewards for exhibiting the aimed behaviour or results obtained from task performance (Leung, 2008). This SCCT theme is also relevant to the current study as it entails that what drives a student to choose a particular academic career might be an assurance of getting employment or gaining a special social status through the chosen academic programme. According to the SCCT, employment and social status here are seen as socio-economic rewards from the external environment obtained by pursuing a selected academic programme.

The SCCT has been relevant to the current study because it accounts for intrinsic (personal goals and self-efficacy) and extrinsic factors (outcome expectancies and environments) influencing academic career choice. Likewise, in this study, intrinsic factors represent personality characteristics; and extrinsic ones correspond to socio-economic factors, for example, peer influence and family's financial capacity. In this regard, the SCCT helped to guide the literature review on the role of personality

characteristics and socioeconomic conditions in academic career choice, identifying personality and socio-economic study variables, and discussing findings about the variables studied.

3. Methodology

Identifying and describing the main socio-economic and personality factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students obligated the use of cross-sectional study design, and specifically quantitative descriptive, which was informed by positivist philosophical orientations. One of the orientations stresses the adoption of empirical methods of investigation, such as statistical analysis, which was the dominant method of inquiry. A cross-sectional quantitative descriptive research design was used to systematically describe facts based on data about the roles of personality and socio-economic factors in academic career choice. The study was conducted at the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy (MNMA), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The MNMA was chosen as a representative case because many students at this institution are from different locations in Tanzania, and possess different knowledge and cultural backgrounds. Also, through direct researcher's observations, academic career choice determinant factors-cum-problems in the educational programme selection process were observed among the students during students-instructors' interaction in class and consultation hours, in the admission process, and in times when they register for an optional course amid their studies.

Methodologically, the most crucial case selection methods (Gerring, 2008: 16–28) were used to select the MNMA as the case for the present study. The probability, particularly the simple random sampling technique, was used to select the respondents. The simple random sampling technique was applied in the following manner. Research ethics were considered by requesting data collection permit from the higher authority of the MNMA. Then, the student register was collected from the academy's admissions office. The register indicated a total number of 11,184 students in the 2021/2022 academic year, which was the population of this study. Yamane's statistical formula (1967: 886) was employed because it is simple, fits well with the available parameter N , and provides an accurate sample size. The formula was applied in the following manner:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

N (population size) = 11,184; n (calculated sample size); e (margin error) = 0.005.

Therefore, $n = 386$.

After obtaining the sample size, a questionnaire with closed-ended questions was constructed. It required the respondents to indicate the only main factor from each set of factors (social, economic, and personality factors) that influenced the choice of their academic programmes. Four hundred sixty-two (462) questionnaires copies were distributed face-to-face to the Bachelor's degree

students who were randomly picked in classrooms. The number of distributed questionnaires exceeded the 386 calculated sample size by the Yamane formula. It appeared so because dropout questionnaires were estimated to be 76. However, because the data collection was well administered, 392 questionnaires were obtained as a result of non-response and data cleaning. Based on the basic rule that the larger the sample size, the more accurate the results are, the 392 sample size was applied in the present study.

Data collected from the respondents were analysed using the SPSS version 20, and outputs were presented in percentages and tables. By comparing the percentages of outputs, it was possible to identify the main socio-economic and personality factors determining academic career choice among higher education students. Secondary data collected through the documentary review method supported the systematic analysis of the implications of the study findings in the context of public policy in Tanzania. Such data were analysed using the thematic method of data analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data were about the influence of family, availability of employment, and personality factors on academic career choice among the youths; adoption of career choice and counselling policies in a few African countries; how education and employment policies consider academic career choice and counselling issues in Tanzania, and how proper should these policies be designed and to address issues of family, employment and personality factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students.

2. Results and Discussions

3.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents by sex and age

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents by sex and age. The total number of respondents was 392 Bachelor’s degree students. The results show that both male and female students participated in the study; however, females were many as they constituted 55.6% of the total respondents, and males constituted 44.4%. Almost all students (98%) were between 18 and 33 years old, and a few (2%) were above 34 years. This indicates that the majority enrolled at the higher learning institution for a first-degree programme are between 18 and 33.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents by sex and age

Group	N	%	
Sex	Male	174	44.4
	Female	218	55.6
Age	18-33	384	98
	34- above	8	2

3.2 Social-related factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students

The study findings in Table 2 show that family/close relative relationship with a student is the major factor that influences many students in choosing what academic career to pursue at a higher learning institution; and this was reported

by about half (46%) of the respondents. Similarly, Amani and Mkumbo (2014) and Ryder and Harter (2002: 136) reported the influence of family on academic career choice among higher education students. According to the above-cited literature, families and close relatives are good sources of information about many careers to be pursued by the youth. Moreover, parental supporting activities, their expectations, and the professions they favour can influence their children's choice of career (Ryder & Harter, 2002). However, despite a fair evidence base expressed on the positive role played by parents in supporting the youth in choosing their careers, some studies have revealed that some students found themselves in an academic program which was not of their choice, only being selected due to forces from their parents, especially the father (Amani & Mkumbo, 2014: 4).

Table 2: Social-related factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students

Social Factors	Frequency Percentage	
1 Family/other close relatives influence to study the programme	184	46.9
2 Interactive influence from congruent secondary school teachers	36	9.2
3 Gender stereotyping - the notion that this is a masculine/feminine related academic programme and a job I should pursue	51	13.0
4 Peer influence	26	6.6
5 Social media as agents of socialization and provide academic career information	86	21.9
6 The influence of religious beliefs	9	2.3

Moreover, the results in Table 2 show that social media, as agents of socialization, are the second among the presented social factors in terms of the extent they influence academic career choice among higher education students, as reported by about a fifth (21.9%) of the respondents. Social media tools—such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and others—facilitate many students' making informed decisions about their career aspirations and future occupations through circulating meaningful information and data about available academic programmes and labour markets. The above-presented finding aligns with the observations of Zamroni et al. (2019: 3), who found that 61% of vocational high school students in the Kudus Regency in Indonesia use social media to consider higher education and employment opportunities. Social media provide forums that can stimulate student debates on the best academic career paths, considerations and goals. However, for students to reap the benefits of such tools, they should thoroughly consider valid and relevant information and its sources to avoid invalid and irrelevant ones.

Also, Table 2 further shows gender stereotyping as the third social phenomenon that influenced the students' decision-making over what academic program they should pursue, as reported by over a tenth (13%) of the respondents. In the context of academic career choice, gender stereotyping may be defined as a socially constructed phenomenon based on the general belief that a particular academic program has to be pursued by a particular sex, for example, a woman and not a

man, while in the real sense that is not the case. Other social factors reported by the students were interactive influence from congruent secondary school teachers to select a particular program, peer influence, and religious beliefs, which were reported by 9.2%, 6.6%, and 2.3% of the respondents, respectively.

3.3 Economic-related factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students

The study findings in Table 3 show that the availability of employment opportunities was the first and most important economic factor influencing students' decisions to choose their academic programs, and this was reported by over two-fifths (44.6%) of the respondents. The finding is in line with what has been reported in the literature (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000; Kanyingi-Maina, 2020; Sanusi et al., 2020): that employment and unemployment in the labour market can influence how students select careers to pursue. Therefore, this study found that most students choose an academic career that will ensure employment opportunities. A study by Pascual (2014) observed that students' first consideration in choosing a course to pursue in college was the possible availability of jobs. However, after graduation, a student may flounder in economic hardship for months or even years (Super, 1957). Hence, even though the availability of employment opportunities is the most important economic factor influencing students' decisions to choose their academic programs, employment accessibility and vocational interest appear to be less predictive career exploration variables than personality traits in almost all cultural settings (Fan et al., 2012).

Table 3: Economic-related factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students

Economic Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1 My family's financial capacity is adequate only for studying the current program, not for others with high fees.	49	12.5
2 The low financial capacity of the secondary schools I studied affected my secondary education performance and the selection of a university program	26	6.6
3 The programme I am pursuing assures employment opportunities.	175	44.6
4 Increased demands of graduates of my program to work in industrial firms and companies.	63	16.1
5 The programme I am pursuing assures job security in times of economic hardship.	79	20.2

Also, the study findings in Table 3 show that job security was the second most important factor that influenced academic career choice among higher education students, as reported by a fifth (20.2%) of the respondents. From social and economic perspectives, job security is linked to job satisfaction and increased employee productivity. The present findings conform to what was reported by Wüst and Leko (2017): that German youth identified job security as a crucial determinant for their academic career endeavours. One of the reasons for job security to be among the determinants for the choice of one's academic program

to study at a higher learning institution is that the past economic and social development patterns in both industrialized and developing countries have been perceived to contribute to the increase in the numbers of workers who are in less secure employment positions, both in the formal and informal sectors (International Labour Organization, 2001: 3). The lack of job security also leads to anxiety, low morale among workers, and low performance, to mention a few. These anomalies may persuade students to envision the future of the world of work and the fate of their socio-economic well-being by considering employment positions with high job security.

Besides, Table 3 presents the increase in the demand for graduates of the programme to work in industrial firms and companies as the third most important factor influencing students' choice of what academic programmes to study. The finding was reported by over a fifth (16.1%) of the respondents. Other economic-related factors reported to influence the students' choices were the financial capacity of the family/household income and the inadequate financial capacity of the secondary schools to provide quality education, reported by 12.5% and 6.6% of the respondents, respectively. The lack of financial capacity by schools can affect students' learning, consequently limiting their academic career choices. Nonetheless, it was mentioned by only a few respondents, suggesting its effect on career choice is not high.

3.4 Personality-related factors that influence academic career choice among higher education students

The findings in Table 4 show that a student's interest in a particular academic programme was the most important personality factor determining his/her academic pathway choice, and this was pointed out by over a third (36.5%) of the respondents. The finding conforms to what has been reported in the literature (Warne et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2020): that students tend to choose academic careers that interest them. Similarly, the social cognitive theory presumes that individuals are more likely to plan their career goals and ultimately make choices based on their interests (Lent, 2020: 129). Thus, it is not common for a student to choose career studies that are not of one's interest (Li et al., 2021). One will pursue an academic program s/he is fully motivated, willing, and energetic to pursue, with a strong assumption and expectation that s/he will complete it successfully.

Table 4: Personality-related factors that influence academic career choice among the higher education students

Personality Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1 Thinking and adaption ability to study selected academic program	63	16.1
2 High interest in studying selected academic program	143	36.5
3 Positive attitudes toward the academic program selected	50	12.8
4 Good aptitude for studying selected academic program	3	0.8
5 Adequate self-awareness and knowledge of available academic programs	133	33.9

The findings in Table 4 further show that adequate self-awareness and knowledge of available academic programs at higher learning institutions is the second most important factor that influences students' choice of the appropriate academic career to pursue as reported by about a third (33.9%) of the respondents. Self-awareness or self-conception is the disposition to evaluate oneself, which is learned during the socialization process when a person becomes aware of the functional value of self-evaluation from the perspective of others (Stets & Turner, 2007: 232). It evokes self-evaluations that, in turn, stimulate self-feelings and self-understanding of the inner qualities (talents and weaknesses), and the external environment (social and economic) (Jackson, 2017; Boes, 2019). Therefore, a clear understanding of all these variables makes an individual student choose or not to choose a particular career program to study. Therefore, the probability is that, first, a student gets awareness and knowledge of available academic programs offered by an institution; second, the student evaluates one's secondary education background, performance, ability and skills against the qualifications and requirements of the institution's academic programme the student is interested in; and then, third, the student selects the program if it is compatible with her/his prior education background, performance, ability and skills.

Table 4 further shows thinking and adaption as the third personality factor that influences students' choice of what academic programme to pursue, as reported by under a fifth (63) of the respondents. This finding is supported by Tabibzadeh et al. (2020: 6), who argue that students' self-awareness largely contributes to their academic career choices to avoid getting lower grades or being discontinued from studies. According to Ryder and Harter (2002: 135), everyone is born with particular abilities and potential for unique talents. Therefore, if an individual develops one's abilities wisely, s/he can make a successful academic career choice (Wakely, 2021: 12). Other personality factors confirmed to influence students decisions in choosing academic careers were 'positive attitudes on the available academic programmes' and 'good aptitude to study the academic programme offered by the university' as mentioned by 12.8% and 0.8% of the respondents, respectively; with the latter's influence on academic career choice being minimal.

4. Implications of the main study findings in the context of Tanzania's education and employment policies

Based on the study findings, it is clear that family influence, employment opportunities, and interest in studying a particular academic program are the main factors that influence students' academic career choice. These findings have implications in the context of public policy, meaning that students are influenced by those factors either as a result of the unsupportive environment created by existing public policies, and the absence or failure of current public policies to address key institutions and systems that facilitate the provision of career guidance and counselling services to students. In recognizing such anomalies, together with their impacts, some African countries, including Botswana, developed an

independent public policy for supporting career choice and development for its people so that they can live up to the demands of a challenging and changing world, life and career paths (Mekgwe & Kok 2017: 1).

Tanzania also recognizes the importance of career counselling services. It expressed the desire to improve it through its two national education policies: the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995, and the ETP of 2014. Despite its desire to offer and improve career counselling services to students, these policies are unclear on how career counselling services must be provided to those in need (Aroko, 2016: 40) at all levels of education. This situation translates into the absence of clear strategies for implementing policy statements concerning the aspect of career counselling provision, a phenomenon that has also been reported by Kinyota (2013: 52), and Amani and Sima (2015: 26). These anomalies imply that education policymakers and other stakeholders give minimal credence to the importance of career counselling services. This why they are yet to formulate national career guidance and counselling policies in line with robust implementation strategies and legislation that would ensure an effective delivery of career counselling services to young people to help them not only to choose their academic careers, but also to construct careers while in the learning process, and at workplaces.

A national career guidance policy has several benefits at the macro level. For instance, Watts and Fretwell (2004: 1) state that it: (i) supports economic efficiency by making the labour market operate more effectively; (ii) reduces some of its market failures, e.g., dropouts from education and training, or mismatches between supply and demands; and (iii) promotes social equality, inclusion and access to educational and labour market opportunities. Therefore, the absence of a career guidance policy and inadequate career counselling services affects the lifelong development of an individual's career and associated benefits, and deters national building efforts and social and economic growth.

Furthermore, a well-formulated career guidance policy covers an extensive network of stakeholders. Values, decisions and actions of each of these stakeholders, including parents, potentially affect the selection process of academic career programs and lifelong career development among the youth and adults. For instance, Table 2 in this study indicated family/parental influence as the most important social factor in choosing academic career programs among higher education students because family is considered a good source of information about many careers. Moreover, parental supporting activities, including psychological expectations and the professions parents favour, can influence their children into a particular career (Ryder & Harter, 2002: 136). However, a poor career decision-making process can also be caused by inappropriate family influence. According to Sweet and Watts (2004: 84), this may happen when a family has partial information about education, occupations, and the labour market; and hence it may fail to open up new possibilities for exploration, confining children to known and familiar careers.

Therefore, in recognizing the role of family influence and its effects on academic career decision-making among the youth and adults, education policymakers must incorporate the family influence aspect of career choice among the youth in Tanzania's prospective career guidance policy. This effort would be a way of activating family as an essential source of career-giving information. Specifically, the policy can provide family career counselling models to enhance the realisation of youths' career prospects. In attaining this goal, policy implementers—including education officials at local government levels, career counselling educators, career counsellors, and teachers—will be required to make regular meetings with parents to offer guidance on how to guide and counsel their youth who are in career transition or are entering the workforce.

In addition, the prospective policy should recommend strategies for capacitating the family with relevant career counselling information, which can help adolescents and workers in career decision-making matters. It is hoped that the recommended strategies will also motivate and bring a sense of buoyancy to the parents themselves. In this study, the finding concerning family's financial capacity in Table 3, as one of the economic factors influencing career decision-making among higher education students, can be difficult to address within the context of prospective Tanzania's career guidance policy. This is because many factors almost certainly determine the financial capacity of the family; thus, no single policy can by itself address all the issues. Since it has been revealed that students from low-income families cannot choose academic careers, its accomplishment requires more expenditure (Delaney & Devereux, 2020: 770; Walker & Mathebula, 2020: 48), especially if private colleges and universities offer the program. Indeed, such students have been forsaken by these institutions (Makulilo, 2014), a phenomenon that has altered the career aspirations of many youths and adults in Tanzania.

Following the foregoing observations, Tanzania's Higher Education Students' Loan Board should review and improve its criteria and means tests to identify bonafide students who need financial assistance, and increase efforts in collecting funds from individuals who have already benefited through the Board's schemes. Such collected funds will assist needy students. In this way, the challenges facing students in selecting their academic careers due to the financial instability of their families will be minimal. Hence, it is hoped that through this way many students will pursue careers of their interest, and fulfil their life expectations.

Moreover, the study findings in Table 2 shows the interactive influence of congruent secondary school teachers in the form of student-teacher consultation as one of the social-related factors that influence students' decisions on the kind of academic career to pursue at higher learning institutions. However, some students enter wrong career paths that are not of interest because of various factors, including the lack of academic qualifications to join the desired programs (Amani, 2016: 760). Other factors include the level of self-awareness, as indicated in Table 4,

and the lack of adequate awareness about career paths and the demands of the labour market. These situations arise due to inadequate professional school counsellors, inadequate library services, and the shortage of counselling materials (Onditi, 2016; Aroko, 2016: 42). These anomalies would be minimal if there were clear education policies on the provision of career counselling services, sound implementation strategies coupled with adequate resources, and precise coordination of activities at all levels of education provision. The finding implies reviewing existing education policies with key stakeholders to identify gaps in education provision, and the level and types of resources needed to run programs. Also, there is a need to formulate an independent career guidance policy that should also state the kind of career guidance to be provided, at what level of education it should be offered, how it should be delivered, the kind of training and necessary competencies for career guidance workers, as well as tools and instruments for implementing such a policy.

Another important finding that prompted the need to develop the present policy debate is the availability of employment opportunities in some career occupations, as presented in Table 3. It was revealed that the majority (44.6%) of respondents decided to pursue academic careers that have a wide range of employment opportunities, and this is because the majority of students are from low-income families. These are probably advised to select academic programs that will enable them secure employment after graduation. Generally, parents/guardians seem not to understand that getting employed requires much more than academics. Furthermore, youth unemployment may be exacerbated by the absence of institutional career counselling at all education levels.

Moreover, youths who lack adequate career counselling services are incapable of making informed decisions on academic career programmes consistent with their self-images. Most often, this hinders their academic performance and minimizes their employability. In addition, poor training systems and programmes, coupled with the inability to integrate fresh graduates into the labour market, result in a mismatch between the output of the education system and labour market requirements (UN, 2006: 222), hence, higher unemployment rates.

This mismatch between career training and labour market needs can be interpreted in three major ways. First, existing education systems, policies and strategies have failed to meet some goals, including providing quality education and highly knowledgeable and skilled human resources that employers demand, which is a common observation in most African countries (Wiseman & Collins, 2012: 344; Musau, 2017; Winthrop, 2022). Second, there is a lack of comprehensive career guidance policies, and where available, they are of low quality. Third, is the inability of national employment policies to state clearly the aspects of career counselling services and career choices. For example, section 3.19 of Tanzania's 2008 national employment policy promises job seekers the provision of advisory services on employment issues; a career counselling activity. However, contrary to the policy's objective, only graduates of higher learning institutions benefit

from the such services provided. Therefore, the youth undergoing studies miss out such opportunities as currently there is no formal national policy to guide the provision of such services to them at all education levels.

Consequently, this anomaly affects the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling services, thus exacerbating the country's unemployment rate. Therefore, future national employment policies should expand the scope of providing career counselling services to youths on studies, which could also complement the functioning of other policies. These policy efforts will minimize the extent of unemployment contributed by inadequate and low-quality career counselling services.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

By examining the socio-economic and personality factors influencing academic career choice among higher education students, it can be noted that family influence, employment opportunities, and interest in studying a particular academic program are the main factors that influence many students in choosing their academic programmes at higher learning institutions. These findings capture the following interpretations. Family/close relatives are viewed as good sources of information about many careers to be pursued by youths. Parental activities, expectations, and the professions they favour can also influence their children's choice of careers. However, students from low-income families may be unable to choose academic programmes that require much expenditure, especially if such programmes are only offered by private higher learning institutions. Also, students' decision to choose academic programmes due to the influence of available employment opportunities is only feasible in times of full employment opportunities, which is currently not the case. Additionally, although a student's interest in a particular academic programme is an intrinsic personality factor determining the choice of academic pathways, socio-economic factors shape it positively or negatively.

In the public policy context, the study was found that student's academic career choice is less informed by the outcomes of the practices of existing government education and employment policies. Such a phenomenon may affect the lifelong development of an individual's career and national-building efforts. Therefore, there is a need to construct an independent career guidance public policy, or further modify the current education and training policy to include specific policy objectives for guiding the provision of career counselling services while considering the context of the dynamic and changing world of work. Notwithstanding, there should also be a sound implementation strategy supported with adequate resources (funds and trained personnel), precise coordination of activities, legislation, and regulatory authorities at all levels of education.

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