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# **Factors Detecting Students' Career Choice in the Ethiopian Higher Education Environment**

By

Asaye Teklu

Faculty of Teacher Education, St. Mary's University College, Ethiopia

## **Abstract**

*Researches indicate that college students who choose field of studies compatible with their personality type will be rewarded with a better academic achievement. The Congruence between person and environment introduced by Holland's Theory of career positively influences College academic success. This relationship is indeed found to be crucial to a scholastic achievement in higher institutions. This study could thus be considered as a pursuit of knowledge regarding the extent to which Holland's Theory of Career choice is applicable to the contemporary freshman field of study choice paradigm reflected in the Ethiopian Higher Education Environment. Questionnaire has been dispatched to Four Higher Education institution students in Addis Ababa in which fourteen departments are included as a sample. Descriptive statistics is used for techniques of data analysis. An interesting pattern that matches with Holland's theory comes out of the findings although in other instances distinct factors have also been found to play a significant role in determining career choice.*

**Key words:** Field of study, Holland's Theory of careers, Personality scale, Person- environment fit

## **Introduction**

### ***Background***

Selecting field of study and preparing for career is perhaps the most challenging task a student faces after high school completion. Making sound field of study choice decision based on the appropriate information and careful consideration of one's strong sides and interests could be the major challenge these students face at the start up of their college life.

One may ask why this challenge prevails and the answer is clear. Career choice has got a long lasting effect in ones professional life. It is not a type of choice that one picks carelessly as a casual routine. For one thing the moment one decides to major a certain field of study in college, he will be exposed to series of interdependent courses which have got lots of elements in common. It will not be as such surprising to see a student developing a particular aversion towards his college education as a whole when forced to study these complementary series of courses against his interest, capability and bent. What is more is, he would be less satisfied at his career because his job is simply the application stage of his collage study, which he didn't like. Less payment, poor salary increment, visible professional dissatisfaction etc. will surely characterize such a worker from which a nation will have a significant lose to incur. All in all, careless inspection of factors which could influence career choice may have a devastating impact on ones professional success which intern may impact dissatisfaction and less productivity at work. Not only do individuals who are victims of spontaneous career choice will be disadvantaged. Nations whose better tomorrow rely on quality professional output will also cost dear as long as their 'would be' professionals keep on picking lifelines in a slapdash fashion.

### ***Significance of the Study***

It is known that there are various factors which may affect career choice in higher education (Ferry et al. 2000). This research will create insight as to what the pattern of career choice in Ethiopian higher education environment looks like and its significance would be immense. First of all, this research may give direction for employers as to what they should perform in line with the majority career trusts prospective professionals have. More importantly, perhaps, is that this research gives students a chance to carefully examine those important career selection processes which can help them choose field of studies which correspond to their inclination and forte .By doing so ,they could seriously consider various field of study alternatives and pick the one which is most relevant to their strength and interest. It can also encourage researchers to investigate various factors such as age, gender, geographical location etc. and their influences on career choice.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this research is to assess how far Holland's Theory of Career Choice is applicable to the current Ethiopian Higher Education students' career choice trend.

### **The followings are the research questions**

- 1) How influential are personality factors in making field of study choice?
- 2) How influential are environmental factors in determining career?
- 3) How influential are factors of opportunity in determining career choice?

- 4) Which factor: personality, environment or opportunity is most influential in determining field of study choice in the Ethiopian higher Education environment?

### ***Scope of the Study***

The issue of college major choice could be perceived from multiple angles such as gender, age, information types, peer pressure, racial background, financial capability, type of school attended; cultural factors and etc (Sukovieff 1989; Chuenyane 1983; Makhubu 2000). Accordingly, studies could revolve around various aspects which could positively or negatively affect their field of study choice in the higher education environment. Pointing out these areas as fertile grounds for scholarly endeavors, this research would limit itself to investigating to what extent students' social background affects their field of study choices and to assess how far Holland's Theory of Career Choice is applicable to field of study choice made by Ethiopian higher education students.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

#### ***Researches in the area of factors affecting higher education field of choice***

Predicators which correspond to field of study choices in the higher education environment have always attracted researchers' attention. This pursuit of knowledge however couldn't culminate itself into the discovery of a comprehensive theory. According to & Kotter (1980), almost all career researches of the contemporary age which are believed to influence career outcomes have centered on individual and environmental factors. Yet, these research endeavors are not immune from major criticisms. Of course, some

researchers have criticized this trend of focusing on individual and environmental factors to be lacking comprehensiveness, William et al (1984)

Although researchers have failed to put together theories to provide a comprehensive examination of college major choice, they have developed an extensive body of literature on its predictors, Peter and Umbach (2006). One of the most important figure in the area of career choice research who have contributed a lot with this regard is Holland.

### **Overview of Holland's Theory**

Holland, (1966) has developed a famous theory named *Theory of Vocational Choice*, which suggest that congruent person environment relations do generally promote stability, job satisfaction as well as achievement. Holland and et al (1962) alludes to evidences from various research findings to stress on the argument that individuals tend to choose environments consistent with their personal orientations. In order to sort out data reflecting the relationship that lies between person and environment fit in career selection path ,Holland (1965) has come up with a record named *The Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI)* which he prescribed it as a means of sorting out those factors which predict students field of choice.

Holland's (1965) argument goes as students who are enrolled in educational programs which are incongruent with their VPI scores or who are in an indecisive state as to what their career should be in the future may differ on self-concept and vocational maturity variables compared to students whose field of study satisfies with that of their VPI scores. Here we can witness a clear positive relationship between students' actual interest of field of study and their academic success in the field of study they belong to. That

implies, more than what commonsense has to suggest regarding the need to pursue field of study congruent to ones interest, strength and personality type, researchers have also found these factors to be determinant for academic and career success in general.

Holland's theory which gives general description of six personality types along with their corresponding career choice environments essentially has three major components: person, their environment, and interaction between person and environment. When it comes to the specific context of higher education, the three components would be students, their academic majors and the fit or interaction between students and their major. (Smart, Feldman, and Ethington 2000).

### **Artistic**

As Pike (2006) puts it, the six fundamental premise of Holland's theory are-realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.

- ***Realistic types*** favor activities that involve manipulating machines and tools, while they dislike educational and social activities. They perceive themselves more practical, conservative and persistent.
- ***Investigative types*** like activities that involve exploration, understanding and predication. They dislike activities that involve exploration, understanding and prediction. They also avoid activities that involve persuasion and sales. They value the acquisition of knowledge and scholarly achievements in science and technology and see themselves as critical, intelligent, and skeptical, but lacking interpersonal skills.
- ***Artistic types*** go for artistic, literary, and musical actions. They tend to avoid activities that establish hard and fast rules and prefer activities

which have aesthetic and creative qualities. Artistic types see themselves as lacking clerical and office skills.

- ***Social types*** prefer to teach and help others through personal interaction and they usually avoid mechanical tasks. They give more value to educational and social services and see themselves as empathetic, helpful, and understanding.
- ***Enterprising types*** prefer to persuade and direct others to attain organizational and personal goals. They avoid scientific and intellectual topics. Enterprising types value political and economic achievements, and see themselves as self confident, sociable and possessing leadership ability
- ***Conventional types*** prefer to attain organizational and personal goals by establishing and maintaining orderly routines. They avoid ambiguous or unstructured activities. They value material or finical accomplishment and they see themselves as conforming, orderly, and methodical.

### **Environment and opportunity factors determining career choice**

Apart from the personality types influencing career choice in higher education, we also find environment and opportunity factors to be worth emphasizing, (Borchert 2002). When we see factors of environment in relation to career choice, we usually find individuals picking field of study that can accommodate an environment fit to their goal while at the same time being incorporated into the environment (Kroll, Dinklage, Lee, Morley, & Wilson, 1970). They extend their argument by emphasizing that much of the Knowledge we have is provided through our society and environment and that knowledge contributes a lot in acquisition, retention, and utilization of information pertaining to the world.



According to Borchert (2002), opportunity could be expressed in terms of students' expectation of what the career might hold for them in the future. The quest students have with regard to the financial promise the career could hold in the future might be a prominent factor in dictating their career choice, and that represents one aspect of opportunity. Of course we could also have other opportunity variables such as academic settings, technical schools, entry level, job openings, job shadowing, vocational guidance, job placement and an industry contact (Super 1957). Pointing out these factors, Super underscores that the critical factor in field of study choice has not been personal interest or environmental pressure but whether that field of study has got a promising job opportunity or not according to his investigation.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The research design, the research sample, data collection and data analysis procedures are presented in this chapter. Data was collected randomly from four higher institutions: Addis Ababa University (Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science, and Faculty of business and Economics), Kotebe College of Teacher Education, St. Mary's University College (Faculty of Informatics, Secretarial Science and office management, Faculty of Business and Faculty of Teacher Education) and Catering and Tourism Institute (Tour Operation, Tour guide and Front Office departments). All the research participants are enrolled in the regular program and the researcher choose these groups in order to find relevant information representing young learners' trend of field of study choices in the higher education environment.

## **Instruments**

Descriptive statistics method and correlation statistics has been used as instruments for data analysis. The tabulated data has been set in percentiles to allow suitable analysis.

## **Population and Sampling**

Total of three hundred forty two students are randomly taken from four higher institutions in Addis Ababa. Purposive sampling is employed as the researcher is limited to confine his population in Addis Ababa due to time and financial constraint. The most important variables influencing career choice in this study are environment, opportunity, and personality. The main data collecting instrument, questionnaire, has been designed in such a way that it could show the type and extent of interrelationship these variables have with students career choice. The questionnaire has open-ended and close -ended items and administered to subjects with close supervision of the researcher in order to avoid respondent confusion while filling up the responses.

## **Data analysis and Interpretation**

Data has been sorted out on the bases of the variables indicated above for suitable analysis. Information obtained from respondents has been filled up in SPSS. Then, systematized information has been tabulated, and interpreted.

### ***Data analysis and Interpretation***

Data analysis and Interpretation regarding the extent to which personality factors determine field of study choice

### *Department of business and economics*

As we can see in the table, the majority respondents in the department of business and economics had an ambition of creating artistic work which matches with Holland's classification of Artistic personality. As per Holland's classification, this department (business and economics) typically belongs to students with *Conventional type of personality*. This trait mainly involves establishing and maintaining orderly routines especially in the area of finance and business. When we observe the response rate that goes with Conventional personality Type, it would be evident that there exists a major mismatch between personality type and field of study choice. Only 10 out of 86 respondents in the department of Business and Economics have had career ambitions corresponding to their career choice-establishing and maintaining orderly duty and avoiding ambiguity in duties.

### *Department of Teacher Education*

When it comes to the other department, Teacher education, once again we find artistic personality to be the dominant trait. When we categorize the field of Teacher education under its most appropriate group of Holland's taxonomy of personality it falls under social type-to teach and help others through personal interaction.

The three representative predicators of social personality type-to perform volunteer work, to help others who are in **difficulty**, and to influence social values all together comprise 12 out of 71 respondents in this department. Although the fit between personality and career selection appears to be better in this department compared with the one we have in the business and economics department, it still proves to be visibly deficient.

### *Department of Engineering*

When we come to the third category, Department of Engineering, we find such an interesting personality career selection match. Holland labels students who join this department out of their interest under Investigative personality category. Although the majority respondents in this department have Enterprising personality type- seeking for recognition for their excelling performance from their colleagues, the second majority treat, 'to have a good math self concept' is found to be an ideal career choice and personality type matches investigative personality treat. Perhaps, as students who are joining these departments have the best result in national and other examinations, their majority personality group, Enterprising, might be something which is naturally expected.

### *Department of Medicine*

The other department, Medicine does also have somehow similar pattern as that of the department of Engineering. According to Holland, this career choice best goes with social type like that of the department of Teacher Education. Here we could see that the majority respondents 9 out of 31 belong to conventional personality type prioritizing financial success in their career. However the second majority respondents,(7) are found in a personality category that matches with their career choice –helping others. Once again given the high respect usually associated with the medical career it would be natural to assume that candidates would assume substantial financial success upon completing their study.

### *Departments of Music art and Theater*

We could see the fittest personality -career choice profile in the department of Music art and Theater. The Majority respondents are in favor of their personality- Artistic. According to Holland, individuals with Artistic personality type mainly appreciate literary and artistic exercises and tend to avoid activities which involve strict rules and regulations.

Out of the 27 respondents in the department of Music and art, 12 of them have had the aspiration of achieving in performing art, creating artistic work and obtaining recognition from the society. Of course it would be important to note that two of the respondents out of the 17 have had the aspiration of obtaining recognition from the society which is an Enterprising personality trait In point of fact, it wouldn't be unusual to find out that artists could naturally anticipate such a social credit given all those fames and eminences which are naturally associated with the creation and performance of great art and the production of masterpieces.

In the contrary, respondents' interest to involve in strict and rule confined environment appears to be clearly minimal. For instance there are only two respondents whose aspiration has been establishing and maintaining orderly duty and having good math concepts- personality indicators which are conventional and realistic traits respectively. The fact that these respondents have given a majority response which matches with Holland's personality taxonomy might indicate that there exists an interesting personality -career selection fit in this area and this match intern could suggest such a promising professional output in the area of art and music.

#### *Departments of Catering and Tourism*

Let us now move on to what the data has to talk regarding personality -career choice match in another department Catering and Tourism. The fittest

personality trait that matches tour operators, tour guides and front office professionals in the tourism discipline will have to be equipped with the basic skills of socialization and persuasion. This characteristics label the tourism learners under the category of enterprising personality type. When we look into the data we have with this regard the personality –career choice match appears to be quite minimal. The top three factors that push tourism students into this field of study are financial promise(20 out of 86 respondents) .This personality type is typical to *Conventional personality types* .Not only is this, the second majority personality indicator ‘to avoid ambiguity in self concept is also something remote to enterprising personality- personality type related to tourism and hospitality industry. All in all, we can clearly observe that students’ personality factors coming to the tourism sector are not very much related to what their career actually expects from them.

#### *Departments of Sociology, Politics and Law*

The person environment fit we observe in the other department of sociology, politics and law displays such a remarkable match. In all the fields stated above it is natural to expect imperatives which are related to social service, governance and justice. As a result it would be fair to label these disciplines as areas where enterprising personality trait would be dominant. What is being observed here is not far from this expectation. The majority respondents reported to aspire to get recognition from the society and to be elected to honor the society (15 out of 26 respondents). This shows that students are joining this department listening to their passions and interests which matches with their personality.

#### **Situational Influences on Career Choice**

### *Across Departments*

In this section attempt shall be made to look into situational aspects as push factors of field of study choice in the higher education. Accordingly the following student questionnaire aims at gathering information as to whether students have been in any way influenced by situations before choosing their fields of studies.

The influence of situations in determining field of study choices has been observed to be quite visible. Half of the respondents are of the opinion that situations have instigated them into choosing the field they are currently pursuing. At this point, it would be important to note that in the cases of the majority fields of studies discussed in the first section, there existed mismatch between personality and career choice.

### *Within Departments*

Let us now see the influence of situational factors into determining field of study choice within departments. When we see students' response regarding whether their field of study choices have been in anyway influenced by situational factors against their departments, we could see that School of medicine takes up the biggest proportion. Likewise, the findings we have here is something that consolidates the argument that most of the field of study choices are not mostly dictated by personality factors. As we can see here, situations or external factors have got vivid influence to impose on career selection in higher education.

On the other hand, students in the faculty of business and economics have the smallest response proportion although it is still the majority in its

domain. It is interesting to see that neither personality factors nor situational factors dominantly influence the field of study choices in these departments.

With the intention of acquiring more detailed information regarding the extent to which situational variables influence field of study choices in higher education, variables which represent external situational pressures are analyzed in relation to students' career choice tendency.

### ***The Extent to Which Market Influences Field of Study Choices***

According to the responses we have regarding to what extent one of the external factor of career selection, market, is influential in determining field of study choice we find this situational factor to have such an influential role. According to the information we have, the overwhelming majority respondents, more than 87 % either strongly agree or agree with the idea that market is the major factor in determining career choice in higher education. More than 90 % medical students are of the opinion that market is the most essential factor that determines field of study choice, taking up the biggest share in the category.

An interesting finding that matches with the information we have in the first section about students' response belonging to Medical school has come out here. There, we have seen that prioritizing financial success has become the foremost derive that dictated field of study choice followed by helping others. What we can conclude at this point is that, the external factor, financial success, is serving as the most important derive in determining field of study choices in higher education by far more than personality does.



## **Students' Responses If Their Field of Study Choice Has Been Their First Choices**

Let us now get the general picture of whether students' field of studies has been their first and prior choices aligned with the institution they belong to. Almost equal percentage of response taking up the bigger share has been acquired from Catering and Tourism Center and St. Mary's University College with regard to students' first field of study choice. It has also been interesting to see that once again almost the same percentage of students have reported "yes" to the question if the field of study they are pursuing has been their prior choice. In this table another interesting figure comes out-sizeable amount of students in Addis Ababa University (30.2%) are found to be ambivalent about whether the field of study they are pursuing has been their first choice or not. Of course 25% of the total response reported to have not been sure about what the field of study they are pursuing should have been before joining their current departments.

The majority respondents across the departments (57%) are found to be of either ambivalent or reported 'no' to the question if the department they currently belong to is their first choice. This should really be a major cause for concern as it reflects either a major disregard to the need to consider interests while making field of study choices or a fundamental mismatch between field of study choice and the departments students are joining.

## **Conclusion**

Although factors of personality do have a determinant role in straitening the field of study choice in higher education, the data we have does not reflect an interesting match especially in some of the department in the

Ethiopian higher education context. This problem has proved to be dominant especially in Accounting and, Teacher Education Departments .On the other hand data revealing an interesting match between personality and career choice comes out in departments such as medicine, tourism and engineering as well as sociology, politics and law.

These findings could mean a lot. For one thing, the fittest personality career choice match appears to be virtually inaccessible in especially in some of the departments which are dominantly expected to be taken by individuals with social personality stratum, which is Teacher Education. This sizable mismatch will practically affect the generation as the ‘would be’ teachers are taking up the most demanding profession which appeals an immense level of dedication and sense of responsibility against their personality and interest. In short, many of the teachers are not much interested in the field of study they belong to. So are prospective professional in the field of finance-accounting, economics and business.

All in all, it has been difficult to witness a perfect personality career choice match in any of the departments treated in this study except one field-Music and art. This implies that although the level of mismatch between personality and career choice varies from department to department, it is beyond ambiguity that career choice in higher education is universally far from student’s trend to choose field of studies fittest to the personality –career fit introduced by Holland. When we come to the determinant factors dictating field of study in higher education, we can easily witness that situational factors have got by far more influencing power compared with those of personality factors. Among the dominant situational factors ,financial promise of fields of studies have been found to be visibly dominant and more

influential in determining field of study choices in the context of the Ethiopian education system.

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