# Choice of Final Year Options by Undergraduate Students at the Moi University School of Information Sciences

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**Abstract**. This paper presents the findings of a study that examined career aspirations of Bachelor of Information Science students at the School of Information Science Moi University, Kenya. The population for this study consisted of registered fourth year students at the school during the 2006/2007 academic year. The researchers used the students at the school because of its harmonized degree programme. The research instrument used to collect data from the respondents was a questionnaire specifically designed for this study. Data collected were categorized and presented in tables and percentages.

It was found that most students join the programme without prior knowledge of the other information science professions other than Information Technology. The study further revealed that the major factors which contributed to the choice of career in different professional areas included the availability of diverse job opportunities, and monetary rewards. It was also found that most of the students chose their careers without any proper career guidance and counselling.

The respondents aspired to take up careers in information technology firms, media houses, research institutions, information consultancies, libraries, record centres, archives, systems analysis centres and international organizations.

It is recommended that the programme be publicized properly to create awareness on different professionals areas that are included in the information sciences degree programme at Moi University.

**Introduction**

A career is a sequence of separate but related work activities that provide continuity, order and meaning to a person's life (Flippo 984). It is a sequence of attitudes and behaviour associated with work related activities over the span of a person's life. It represents an organized path taken by an individual across time and space.

Most people develop quite early in life an idea or a mental image of what career they would like to pursue. However, career decisions should not be made in haste. People should take time to understand their abilities, aspirations and interests before they determine a suitable career. Each career requires certain qualities and although people have the potential to adjust to new demand and learn new skills, some people discover when it is already too late that they do not have what it takes to fit in a career .

It is therefore important for a person to know himself/herself well and the type of work a career demands before one decides to take a particular career. Such a person needs to be aware of market and professional trends. Career guidance is the process of assisting students to understand themselves and the world of work in terms of interests, aptitudes and aspirations. This should start early in school where students are helped to select subject combinations that would lead to careers of their choice. By the time students leave basic schooling, whether at primary or secondary school, they should have an idea where to go for further training and in what areas. In view of the foregoing, a need was felt to conduct a study on choice of options by final year undergraduate students at the Moi university School of Information Sciences.

**Aim and objectives of the study**

The aim of the study was to examine the choice of options by final year undergraduate students at the School of Information Sciences, Moi University.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To ascertain whether the students were aware of the different professions that constitute information sciences before joining the programme.
2. To determine the distribution of students in different career options.
3. To establish the reasons for the choice of each career option.
4. To find out if the students were guided in choosing their career options.
5. To suggest ways of empowering students to choose the right career option.

**Background Information**

The School of Information Sciences previously, Faculty of Information Sciences was launched in 1988 on recommendations by the presidential working party on the establishment of the second public University in Kenya (Moi University 1999). The faculty had four departments namely, Archives and Records management, Information and Media Technology, Library and Information Studies and, the Publishing and Book trade (Moi University (1997). But with the implementation of the Moi University 10-year Strategic Plan (2005-15), which also converted faculties into schools, the department of Archives

and Records Management and Library and Information Studies were merged to form the department of Library, Records Management and Information Studies.

The Bachelor of Information Sciences is a four-year broad-based, harmonized undergraduate degree programme. Students take common courses in the first three years, and specialize in one of the information science disciplines in the final year of study.

## Related Studies

There have been several previous attempts to research on the reasons, motivation and factors that affect the career aspirations of the information professionals. Indeed, Ershova (1998), observes that in the information age, the centre of gravity is being transferred from product and money to the human being. Would-be information professionals are faced with pressures of global competition and faster technologies that have to be taken into account when choosing careers. Odini and Amoth (2006) argue that the information professional today is facing fierce economic and technical problems than ever before. They opine that information producers and consumers are rapidly increasing and are being more diversified which in itself creates complex information demands and use patterns on the information. This means that those aspiring to any of the information sciences professions must develop the necessary skills that can enable them to manage change and develop responsive attitude towards their professions.

### Factors that affect the choice of career options in final year of study

Thapisa (1999) notes that career aspirations are directly impacted by the career guidance and counselling, mentoring, background, role modeling etc. on the would-be information professional. Some choose certain specializations depending on their parents' preferences and advice, yet others go by the mass psychology of their peers. Career prospects, progress and benefits have also been found to affect the career choices of information scientists. Adom and Ogbomo (2001) cites several motivations for students choosing careers in the information science at the postgraduate level. These, they note, includes the handling of computers and information technologies, diverse job opportunities in courses that are integrated such as the Bachelor of Science in Information Sciences, and opportunities to move up the ladder. Kail and Cavanaugy (1996) also note that chance factors also play a role in career aspirations and choice in cases where one did not plan to pursue a particular career but does due to inability to get admitted to a course he/she really desired. In the Kenya Institute of Education Report (2003) it is observed that many young people in Kenya today encounter problems in choosing careers. This, the report notes is because the students lack focused knowledge of their own aptitudes and interests. They also do not have the decisiveness, flexibility and willingness to change. Lack of occupational information, problem-solving skills, and gender stereotyping compound the problems further. Young people may choose careers due to the glamour attached to the job, which is portrayed to them by their friends, parents or the media. In so doing, they end up taking careers that do not suit their aptitudes and interests making them low achievers.

**Methodology**

The study population consisted of the 2006/2007 fourth year Information Science degree students. These students were chosen because they take common courses during the first three years of the programme and specialize in the fourth year of study. The whole population of 120 students was studied.

The research instrument used to collect data from the respondents was a questionnaire, specifically designed for this study.

The researchers gave out questionnaires to students in a lecture hall and requested them to complete them as honestly as possible. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately ensure an honest individual opinion of each student without the attendant influence of other factors.

The data obtained were categorized and recorded according to the frequency phrases cited. Relationships between data variable were established and presented in tables, percentages and discussions.

**Findings**

The researchers attempted to find out whether the respondents knew the different professions that constitute information science. This was important because information sciences programme offered in the School of Information Sciences is harmonized although students specialize in the fourth year of study.

**Knowledge of different information science professions before joining the BSc programme**

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents as per their knowledge of different information science professions before joining the program.

**Table 1 Knowledge of different Information Science professions before joining the program (n = 120)**

| Professionals Areas | Respondents | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Information Technology | 82 | 68.3 |
| Publishing and Media Studies | 17 | 14.2 |
| Library and information studies | 13 | 10.8 |
| Archives and Records Management | 8 | 6.7 |

The results in table 1 show that 68.3 per cent of the respondents join the programme with a view to pursuing a career in IT. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that most respondents do not know other information sciences professions prior to joining the programme.

**Choice of career options**

The respondents were asked to indicate their chosen careers. The findings are presented in table 2 .

**Table 2  Distribution of respondents by Career options chosen (n=120)**

| Career Chosen | Respondents | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Information Technology | 56 | 46.7 |
| Archives and Records Management | 28 | 23.3 |
| Publishing and Media Studies | 26 | 21.7 |
| Library and Information Studies | 10 | 8.3 |

From table 2 we note that although IT is the most preferred choice of most of the respondents at 46.7 per cent, there is a substantial reduction in the number of respondents choosing it and hence by inference, the number that could have joined the program because of it. This may be explained by the fact that after going through the programme for three years, some respondents changed their minds to join other professional areas. This finding is significant in that archives and records management which was least known by the respondents before joining the programme ended up having more students. This could be attributed to lack of career information and proper guidance.

**Reasons for the Choice of a particular Career option**

**(a) Information Technology**

Table 3 shows the reasons for the choice of Information Technology option.

**Table 3  Reasons for the Choice of Information Technology option (n=56)**

| Reason | Respondents | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Availability of opportunities | 30 | 53.8 |
| Monetary Rewards | 14 | 25.0 |
| Personal Growth | 6 | 10.7 |
| Aptitude and Interest | 3 | 5.4 |
| Peer Pressure | 1 | 1.8 |
| Perception of Career | 1 | 1.8 |
| Mentor Influence | 1 | 1.8 |
| **Total** | **56** | **100** |

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents 53.8 per cent chose Information Technology because of the perceived availability of opportunities and monetary rewards

and not becauseof their aptitudes and interest. This means that even respondents who did not have the abilities and interest in IT ended up taking it because of the perceived marketability and monetary rewards. This could be attributed to lack of knowledge of the respondents' aptitudes and interests as well as lack of occupational information.

**(b) Archives and Records Management**
Table 4 shows the reasons for choosing Archives and Records management option (n=28).

**Table 4  Reasons for the choice of Archives and Records Management optiont**

| Reasons | Respondents | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Availability of Opportunities | 14 | 50 |
| Monetary rewards | 8 | 28.6 |
| Personal Growth | 4 | 14.3 |
| Ability and Interest | 2 | 7.1 |
| **Total** | **28** | **100** |

The results in Table 4 shows that 28.6% respondents chose Archives and Records management because of the availabilities and monetary rewards. This may imply that the perception of many respondents is that there are many opportunities in the area of Archives and Records management because of the development stage of the career and that monetary reward in this career is higher. Most respondents (92.9 %) did not consider the abilities and interests when choosing this career. This implies that most respondents end up taking jobs which do not suit their aptitudes and interests making them low achievers.

The records management is also perceiveid by many students to be more prestigious and has more opportunities than the archives component which is considered archaic. Indeed some respondents cited some of the former graduates who got good jobs in such places as banks, hospitals, airlines and in public and private sectors as the reason why they chose records management field for specialization. This can also be attributed to the recent heightened interest in records management in both public and private institutions which has resulted into the establishment of the scheme of service for records managers by the government. Other reasons include the need for more accountability and the increasing awareness of the link between proper records keeping and efficiency in management.

**(c) Publishing and Media Studies**
Table 5 shows the reasons for choosing publishing and media studies option.

**Table 5  Reasons for choosing Library and Information studies option**

| Reasons | Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Availability of opportunities | 22 | 84.6 |
| Monetary rewards | 2 | 7.7 |
| Ability and interest | 2 | 7.7 |
| **Total** | **26** | **100** |

Table 5 shows that most respondents (84.6 per cent) chose this career because of the availability of the opportunities and monetary rewards. This can be explained by the fact that there are many media houses that are employing graduates of Information Science with specialization in publishing and Media studies. Some of these Information Science graduates under being in the broadcasting journalism hence increased visibility influences students to take up this specialization regardless of their abilities and interest.

**(d) Library and Information Studies**
Table 6 shows the reasons cited by the respondents for choosing library and Information Studies option.

**Table 6  Reasons for the choice of Library and Information studies option**

| Reasons | Respondents | Percentages % |
|---|---|---|
| Ability and Interest | 8 | 80% |
| Personal Growth | 2 | 20% |

Most respondents (80 per cent) chose Library and Information studies because of their ability and interest while 20 per cent chose it because of the availability of opportunities. This means that there is a perception in the minds of the respondents that Library profession does not have monetary rewards and that there are no opportunities available. The difficulties in distinguishing between a librarian and library attendant could be the major contributor to the state of affairs. The kind of jobs done in the library are general, manual and lack intellectual challenges that the library profession requires.

Respondents were also asked to state whether they were guided in the process of choosing their careers or not. 75 per cent respondents stated that they were not guided while 25 per cent stated that they were guided. This finding is significant in that most respondents chose careers without considering their aptitudes and interests. There is need not only to guide the students on career choice but also to provide them with occupational information to enable them to know their aptitude and interests.

**Career Aspirations After Graduation**

The respondents were to state the specific areas where they preferred to work after graduation and the results were as indicated in table 7 below:

**Table 7 Specific employers preferred by students**

| Specific work areas | Respondents | Percentages % |
|---|---|---|
| Information Technology Firms | 84 | 70 |
| Media Houses | 60 | 50 |
| Record Centres | 51 | 42.5 |
| Libraries | 20 | 16.7 |
| Archival Institutions | 15 | 12.5 |
| Publishing Firms | 8 | 6.7 |
| Any of the above areas | 107* | 89.2* |

The respondents aspired to take up careers in IT firms, media houses, libraries, records centres, archives and publishing firms. As can be seen from table 7, it was found that majority of the respondents did not mind working in any of the major areas of the information science professions. This can be attributed to the fact that they are taught courses in all these areas in the first three years hence they acquire enough skills to enable them operate effectively in any of the information science professions.

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that majority of students join Information Sciences programme without prior knowledge of the various professions that constitute information sciences. We also concluded from the research that many students join the programme because of the misconception that it is purely an IT course which is generally popular with the students for various reasons one of which is the fact that there are availability of opportunities and the prestige associated with it.

Overall, most information sciences students choose their careers on the basis of the perceived availability of jobs and monetary reward. Perhaps this happens because of lack of career guidance and counselling as well career information.

**Recommendations**

From the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

**1. Marketing of the programme**

Since the degree programme is a broad-based, and harmonized, consisting of four different professional areas, there is need to market different professional areas to enable students make informed decisions before joining the programme This can be done by

sending brochures to secondary schools or distributing them to students during agricultural shows, exhibitions, drama fesrivals, etc. The lecturers may also visit secondary schools and address the students especially during career days. This will enable form four students make informed decisions on whether or not to join the programme.

**2. Distribution of Students in different Information Science Professions**
The study established that most students join different professional areas because of the perceived availability of opportunities as well as monetary rewards. This means that some students specialize in areas where they are generally weak and leave areas where they are strong. This creates imbalance in the distribution of students in different professional areas.

For example IT option is over-crowed while Library and Information Studies get very few students. There is need to come up with a method to direct students to specialized in areas where they are strong. This can be done by pegging admission on cut off points on particular subjects. This will discourage the students from specializing in areas where they are weak and therefore have little chance of excelling on the job.

**3. Career guidance**
It was found that most students were not guided when selecting the options. There is need therefore to appoint a coordinator in the school to oversee the provision of guidance and counselling.

This is important because students are today faced with so many challenges and choices such as family breakdowns, media influence and academic unlike in the past when things were much simpler and straightforward. Guidance in particular should help the students to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in subject areas and career choices. Further, guidance will facilitate positive relationships between the students and the lecturers as well as among the students themselves.

**4. Provision of resources on various Information Science professions**
There is need to provide books and other information resources on different professional areas. There is also a need to invite speakers on different professional areas to talk about the careers. This will enable students to make informed decisions when selecting their areas of specialization.

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