

Original Research Article

CAREER CHOICE AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMME AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE ASHANTI MAMPONG MUNICIPALITY, GHANA

Abstract

The study examined career choice and academic programme among senior high school students in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. The study used the descriptive cross-sectional survey design with the quantitative approach. A multi-stage sampling procedures (purposive, proportionate, and simple random sampling) were used to select a sample of 336 respondents for the study. The instrument used to gather data was the questionnaire. The data was analysed using means and standard deviation while hypotheses were tested using independent sample t-test. Results revealed that environmental factors, institutional factors, and personal characteristics influenced student's career choice and academic programme. The study revealed that there was no significant difference in the perception of male and female students regarding their environmental factors that influenced their selection of career choice and academic programme. The study further revealed gender difference in institutional factors when making decisions about their career choice and academic programme. The study again, revealed no gender difference in the mean score of students' perception regarding their personal characteristics that influenced their choice of career and academic programme. Based on these findings, it was recommended that educators and school counsellors should focus on parents' socio-economic status when counselling students on career choice and academic programme.

Keywords: Career choice, academic programme and senior high school students

1. INTRODUCTION

“Choosing a career and academic programme at the senior high school is like choosing a path while at a crossroads. A chosen career and academic programme, is one off the decision, which decides several aspects of a student's professional interests. A chosen career and academic programme can influence a wide range of educational and post-educational goals, leading to academic success, hardships or availability of job opportunities, as well as affecting study continuity, defining academic satisfaction or dissatisfaction and determining appropriate financial return and social status” [1]. “But what factors influenced students' career and academic programme among students are often challenging and rather elusive questions in the senior high school in which academics across various streams have been facing” [1,2].

“Higher education enable individuals to expand their knowledge and skills, express their thoughts clearly, grasp abstract concepts and theories, and increase their understanding of the world and their community” [3]. “The decision to enroll on the courses of a higher educational institutions is extremely important in an individual's life because it is based on acquisition of knowledge and skills. Therefore, when making a decision regarding future university education, individuals evaluate several alternatives offered by the world of market” [3]. “Choosing a university programme is one of the most important decisions students make” [4].

Career refers to “the activities and positions involved in vocations, occupation and job as well as related activities associated with an individual's life time of work” [5]. A career is a job or profession in which an individual has been trained over a long period of time. Similarly, Okobiah and Okorodudu [6] suggested that a career entails a wide range of job and non-job-

related tasks that cover a person's whole life. Career is frequently linked to a system of choice, transition, and changes that impact an individual's position in work, education, family, and social progress [6]. A career is a series of jobs, professions, or vocations that a person holds over the course of his or her life.

“Today, making career choice becomes difficult because of the many available careers, the staggering array of jobs, the continual changes in the economy and job market, fear of making mistakes, and the misery that is likely to happen when people get into the wrong work” [7]. “Assessing the factors that influence career choice of students is very imperative, because it helps students in the Senior High Schools (SHS) to acquire the skills and knowledge to realistically plan for their future in the world of work” [8]. “Many students often are faced with uncertainty and stress as they make career choices” [9]. Most of them are not aware of what goes into career choice [9].

Many young people enter inappropriate occupations owing to lack of vocational guidance and career coaching, as well as ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, recommendations from friends, parents, and instructors, or the prestige associated with specific jobs [10]. Evidence from Hemelt et al. [8] whose research on the effectiveness of career guidance in senior secondary schools in the Kumasi Metropolitan District revealed that the majority of students were unaware of major occupational groups in Ghana, which supported the assertion made by Kabil et al. [10]. Furthermore, students lacked awareness about the training and qualifications required for employment in various industries, as well as working conditions, pay, and other benefits. This demonstrated that the bulk of them were unconcerned about their future employment prospects [8]. Making program of study selections for incoming senior high school students can be difficult. This is because it is expected that students' education choices would influence their job pathways to a large extent [11]. Judgments made during the undergraduate years have a significant impact on adult work happiness. As a result, students at this level should be helped to build appropriate career plans.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In my personal experience in the Mampong Municipality, placement of students in the tertiary education programme are generally based on student's choice with particular reference to their background knowledge. However, in selecting what programme of study to pursue in the tertiary institutions, aside from background knowledge, applicants also take into account other factors such as interest, peer influence, and parental influence without adequate guidance and counselling. Most of these students who are admitted to the universities faced problems of having to decide on the choice of programme to pursue which is critical decision they have to make due to its career implications. There seems to be a problem since by implication, there are number of factors that come into play when individuals are making decisions on what programme of study to pursue at the tertiary institutions.

Research findings by Redmond, Quin, Devitt and Archbold [12] suggested that students find themselves deviating from their academic needs, aspirations and aim in life. This is because in the Mampong Municipality students' choice of careers and choice of academic programmes are characterised by their immaturity to be aware of the implication of some of the choices they make in respect to their tertiary education programmes and careers. Students have no valid educational and vocational information to guide their decisions with regards to career and academic programmes. The proper educational counseling that may also guide students towards making intelligent and informed decisions are somewhat not sought after and this may lead to problems of coping with a course of study, lack of interest, lack of motivation and subsequently

withdrawal [12]. “Also, the problem of career choice among senior high school students has generated a lot of questions and different answers among scholars” [13,14]. “It has been a delicate issue that has to be approached with caution. Senior high school students should have the opportunity to explore all the choices available to them in order to make a logical educated plan when choosing a career” [14].

Making career choice and academic programme compels one to ask whether students are given the needed guidance on available careers relating to the programmes they are pursuing. Are they aware of what goes into career choice? This therefore is the essence of this research as it sought to investigate the factors that influence career choice and academic programme of study among public senior high school students in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. Specifically, the study (1) examined the perceived environmental factors that influenced students’ selection of career and academic programme in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality, (2) explored the perceived institutional factors that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programme in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality, (3) assessed the perceived personal characteristics that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programme in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality, (4) examined gender difference in the perceived environmental factors that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programme in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality, (5) examined gender difference in the perceived institutional factors that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programmes in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality and (6) explored gender difference in the perceived personal characteristics that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programme in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)

“Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasises the bidirectional interactions between three elements, namely person, environment and behaviour” [15]. “All the three elements operate interactively as determinants of one another. Bandura’s SCT theorized that a person’s confidence that he/she can successfully perform a task, has a mutual relation with the outcome expectations, or the consequences people anticipate resulting from a particular behaviour. These two constructs (self-efficiency and outcome expectations) then influence a person’s level and type of interests. Many different activities are attempted through a person’s educational career, but generally a persistent interest is only developed in activities in which the person expects that he/she will be successful and in which a positive outcome is anticipated” [16].

Consequently, individuals do not solely react to environmental events; they construct their own environments and do well to alter them. Cognitive events define which environmental measures will be observed and how they will be inferred, structured, and acted on. Cattell and Dual [17] asserted that “either positive or negative feedback from behaviour, impacts people’s thinking and the ways in which they act to change the environment”. “However, one of the main criticisms of the social-cognitive theory is that it is not a unified theory. This means that the different aspects of the theory may not be connected. The theory is so broad that not all of its component parts are fully understood and integrated into a single explanation of learning and personality” [18].

“Although Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) can explain some quite complex behaviour, it cannot adequately account for how individuals develop a whole range of behaviour including thoughts and feelings. There are a number of cognitive controls over our behaviour and just

because we have had experiences of violence does not mean we have to reproduce such behaviour. It is for this reason that Bandura modified his social learning theory in 1986 and renamed it Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), as a better description of how we learn from our social experiences". [19]

"Some criticisms of Social Cognitive theory arise from their commitment to the environment as the chief influence on behaviour" [19]. "It is limiting to describe behaviour solely in terms of either nature or nurture and attempts to do this underestimate the complexity of human behaviour. It is more likely that behaviour is due to an interaction between nature (biology) and nurture (environment)" [20].

Irrespective of this criticism the theory however, is very relevant to this study because it posits that the bidirectional interactions between three elements, namely person, environment and behaviour determines individual decisions. Again, social cognitive theory has a significant role to play in this study in that it helps students to make the right choice of their career and academic programmes because as they take many courses at the Senior High school level, the students are able to examine his or her own interest and make the right selection of programme he or she thinks would help him or her to be successful so that a positive outcome of getting a good job is achieved.

Social cognitive theory is relevant to this study because individuals choose a programme of study at the tertiary level and career which they have the full efficacy or confidence to pursue. Students critically consider their personality, environment and behaviour since these are the key to achieving success in any academic programme and career path. In the context of social cognitive theory, the personality of the individual in a particular subject area enable him or her to remain focused since he or she expects a positive outcome such as getting good grades and securing a job. For success to be achieved it behooves on the individual students to adopt a behaviour which would foster his or her academic and career choice. Once thought of feelings, beliefs about a programme, personal motivation have an impact on student's outcome and expectation can help foster positive adjustment to their respective learning environments which would eliminate behaviours such as withdrawal, low motivation and loss of interest in a particular academic programme and career. This is in line with Bandura statement which states that personality, behaviour and the environment interact to determine one's personality choice.

2.2 Related Studies

"Some studies reported that parents' encouragement and support are the primary factors in career choice and academic programme" [21,22). Hossler and Scales-Love [23] claim that "parental expectation was the best predictor of the predisposition to attend college". Payne [24] reported that "parents' role was probably the most important factor in post school choices". Walck and Hensby [25], and Kern [26] postulates that "family have a significant support in decision-making". "It is showed that 90% of respondents claimed that they had consulted their parents about career and programme choices" [26]. "The Institute for Employment Studies [27] also showed that 73% of parents were keen for them to go to university". "Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa [28] also revealed that parents were the major influences on their wards decision-making"

AjÖbola, Emeghe, OluwumÖ, and OnÖ [29] examined "the choice of programme that students' offered in the University. Questionnaire was administered on level 100 students. A total of 136 participated in the study. The study revealed that 79.4% were in the University based on their parents' choice while 90% were responsible for the choice of course (programme) based on personal interest".

Tsikati [30] examined “factors influencing the choice of subject specialisation by prospective Primary Teachers’. Data collection involved a triangulation of modified Delphi technique and survey questionnaire. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis while the quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that student interest, attitude and impression, related exposure, and the nature of subject specialisation were the factors that influenced prospective students’ choice of specialisation”.

Fizer [31] examined “factors that affect agriculture students’ choice of career path. A questionnaire was developed to examine areas of interest and attributes that may have influenced students when choosing a career path. Chi-square tests were used to examine the relationships among variables. According to the survey, students are most influenced by family when choosing a major; 22% chose family as the most important factor influencing their choice of major. However, 21% of the students chose “a career that is personally rewarding” and 20% chose “experience” as the most important factors affecting their choice”.

Adinkrah, and Ayarkwah [32] examined “factors influencing career choices of students in the senior high schools in Ghana. Using a quantitative approach, questionnaires were distributed to 322 students in four different schools. The study also examined the temperament type self-concept theory and the impact on choosing a career. The findings of the study indicated that students consult all relevant persons including counsellors to enable them choose their perceived careers. Also, factors such as personal ambitions in life, academic standards, the possibility of getting jobs after school and level of job security influenced the career choice of students”.

Gyimah, Sam-Tagoe, Arhin, Brown, Arthur, Buadu, Anyagre, Laryea, Ampofo, Dankyi, Ankomah-Sey, Minadzi, Kumedzro, Arko, Bansah, Wie-Addo, Senyamator, Akuamoah-Boateng [33] examined “the factors influencing students’ choice of programme of study at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast. The study adopted the pragmatist’s approach from the positivist perspective. Specifically, the study used descriptive research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 2,324 students at all levels from 63 study centers (those offering education programmes) across all regions of Ghana. Data collection instrument was self-administered questionnaire. Survey data was analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically, frequencies and percentages. The study discovered that students’ personal interest for a particular programme, ambition or aspiration in life and credibility of the institutional certificate influence their choice of selection of a programme of study”.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

Taking into account the type of variables involved in the study, the descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used. Descriptive survey design involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of study [34]. According to McKenney and Reeves [35], descriptive survey research design seeks to find factors associated with certain occurrences, outcomes, condition or types of behaviour. The design was seen appropriate because large amounts of data can be gathered within a short period of time. This study was descriptive in nature because it was carried out to investigate the factors that influence students’ career choice and academic programme of study among senior high school students in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. It simply specified the nature of the given phenomena with a description of the situation using a specified population.

3.2 Population

There are four (4) public Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. The study however targeted all the students in the four Senior High Schools in the Municipality as its target population. Records from the Mampong Municipal Education Directorate showed that the entire Senior High Schools students' population in the Municipality was 8,215 students. The accessible population for the study consisted of third-year students in the four public senior high schools in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality which amounted to 2,642. The choice for this year group was because the third-year students have stayed longer at the school and thus, have gained some level of experience. The sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Accessible Population

Name of Schools	Number of Students	Male	Female
St. Monica's SHS	724	-	724
St. Joseph SHS	684	461	323
Amaniampong SHS	768	405	363
Kofiase SHS	466	265	201
Total	2,642	1,131	1,611

Source: Ashanti Mampong Municipality GES, (2019)

3.3 Sampling Procedures

A multi-stage sampling procedures were used in the sampling process. With the Krejcie and Morgan [36] sample size determination table, for a population of 2,642 it was recommended that a sample size of 336 was selected. Hence, 336 was the sample size. Purposive sampling procedure was used in selecting the schools for the study. Purposive sampling procedure was used because the researcher wanted to choose subjects that are relevant to the research topic. There are four (4) public Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. Purposively, the researcher selected all the schools that were within the centre of the Municipality. Hence four schools were selected in the process. Further, the proportional sampling procedure was used to obtain the total number of students to select from each of the four senior high schools in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality. Following that the simple random sampling procedure was then used to select the students in the various senior high schools for the study. In the simple random sampling, the table of random numbers were used in selecting the students. The names of all the students in the various schools were coded on pieces of paper. The sample distribution is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: The Sample Size for the selected Senior High schools in the Mampong Municipality

Name of Schools	Population	Sample Size	Male (%)	Female (%)
St. Monica's SHS	724	93	-	93
St. Joseph SHS	684	87	52(60)	35(40)
Amaniampong SHS	768	97	68(70)	29(30)
Kofiase SHS	466	59	41(70)	18(30)
Total	2,642	336	161	175

Source: Ashanti Mampong Municipality GES, (2019)

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

The main instrument used for the data collection was a questionnaire. Educational Career Questionnaire (ECQ) by Schleicher [37] was adapted and used to assess students' career choice and academic programme. The original scale had 77 items. Institutional factors as a component in the scale was adapted by the researcher and used in the study. This section was adapted

because the items reflected the objectives of the study. The Institutional factors had 9 items which was used in the study. The reliability co-efficient for Educational Career Questionnaire was 0.85 [37]. The questionnaire was structured along the Likert Scale Format. In the Likert scale, the respondents were asked to respond to each item on four degrees of agreement or disagreement. The score point ranged from 1-4 namely; Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Agree-3, and Strongly Agree-4.

Career choice questionnaire by Eremie and Ibifari [38] was also adapted for the study. The original instrument had 15 items which measured both personal characteristics and environmental factors. For the purpose of this study, 14 items were developed for environmental factors and 10 items were also developed for student characteristics. The reliability co-efficient for career choice questionnaire was 0.725 [38]. The questionnaire was structured along the Likert scale format. In the Likert scale, the respondents were asked to respond to each item on four degrees of agreement or disagreement. The score point ranged from 1-4 namely; Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Agree-3, and Strongly Agree-4.

3.5 Validation of the Instrument

Fifty (50) senior high school students at the Nsutaman Catholic senior high school in the Ashanti Mampong was used in piloting the instrument. The scales were finally validated to determine whether the items on the questionnaire portrayed the intended meanings by the original researchers in the Ghanaian context. Items with factor loadings below .30 were to be discarded before the main data collection. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Factor Loadings, Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	Sig.	Reliability (α)	AVE
Environmental factors	q10	.710	.000	.709	.501
	q11	.628	.000		
	q12	.690	.000		
	q13	.773	.004		
	q14	.822	.000		
	q15	.671	.000		
	q16	.635	.000		
	q17	.734	.000		
	q18	.618	.000		
	q19	.594			
	q20	.498			
	q21	.673			
	q22	.599			
	q23	.746			
Institutional factors	q1	.621	.000	.791	.521
	q2	.723	.000		
	q3	.564	.002		
	q4	.740	.000		
	q5	.843	.000		
	q6	.664	.000		
	q7	.742	.000		
	q8	.761	.000		
	q9	.572			

Personal characteristics	q24	.527	.000	.828	.547
Factors	q25	.832	.000		
	q26	.706	.000		
	q27	.815	.000		
	q28	.691	.000		
	q29	.731	.000		
	q30	.613	.000		
	q31	.511	.000		
	q32	.712	.000		
	q33	.601	.003		

Source: Field survey (2019); q1 – q33= Questionnaire items

A confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS software was performed to determine which items loaded onto the various dimensions of the scale. From Table 3, the factor loadings for all the items on the various dimension ranged from .50 to .84. These loadings indicated that the items were higher .30 [39,40]. These authors recommend a minimum factor loading of .30 as a good indicator. Based on this, all the 33 items on the various scales were considered as measuring students' perception regarding the factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programme. In addition, the reliability coefficients of the various dimensions were assessed. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .71 to .83 According to Pallant [40], a reliability coefficient of .70 or above is appropriate, hence the coefficients obtained for this instrument was within the accepted range.

3.6 Construct validity

Construct validity was determined by checking for both discriminant and convergent validity. In checking for convergent validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was considered for all the three dimensions of the factors that influenced students' career choice and academic programme. An Average Variance Extraction (AVE) value of .50 or higher indicated that, on average, the construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators. Conversely, an AVE of less than .50 indicated that, on average, more error remains in the items than the variance explained by the construct. The AVEs were all above .50, which implied that the instrument did not lack convergent validity [41] as shown in Table 3. In determining discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations was used.

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations

		1	2	3
1.	Institutional factors			
2.	Environmental factors	.367		
3.	Personal characteristics	.574	.473	-

Source: Field survey (2019)

In using the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), if the HTMT value is greater than .90, then there is a problem of discriminant validity [42]. In the case of this instrument, all the HTMT values for all the dimensions of the factors that influenced students' career choice and academic programmes were below .95, hence discriminant validity was achieved (see Table 4). It can, therefore, be concluded that discriminant validity was achieved. Hence all the 33 items were retained for the final data collection.

3.8 Data Processing and Analysis

The data were structured in different phases based on the objectives of the study. The first objective, which sought to examine the perceived environmental factors that influence students' selection of career choice and academic programmes was addressed by performing mean and standard deviation. For objectives two (i.e., assess the perceived institutional factors that influence students' selection of career and academic programmes) mean and standard deviation was performed. Objectives three which sought to examine the perceived students' characteristics that influence their selection of career and academic programmes was also addressed by performing mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses one, two and three were all tested using independent sample t-test.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Information of the respondents

This study explored the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Table 5 presents details of the demographic characteristics.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Male	161	34.8
Female	175	65.2
Age range		
19 years and above	38	11.3
16-18 years	209	62.2
Below 16 years	89	26.5

Source: Field survey (2019)

Results from Table 5 revealed that majority of the respondents 175(65.25%) were males. Predominant of the respondents 209(62.2%) were within the age range of 16 and 18 years.

4.2 What are the environmental factors that influence student's selection of career choice and academic programme?

This research question sought to find out students' perception of the environmental factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the data gathered for the study. Based on the scale used a mean cut off point of 2.50 was used. That is, mean value above 2.5 indicated that most of the respondents were in agreement to the statement. Conversely, a mean value less than 2.5 showed that most of the respondents were in disagreement to the statement. Details of the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Perceived environmental factors that influence students' choice of career and academic programmes

Influencing Factors	Mean	SD
I like the prestige that comes with the profession	2.83	1.04
The programme is in line with my family's interest	2.35	0.97
Adults and relatives wished it for me.	2.66	1.15

The success of my family members in their academic pursuit influenced my career choice	2.49	0.99
My current career choice will enable to be self-employed	1.98	0.89
My career choices are in line with availability of job opportunities	2.18	0.90
My mother influenced my career decision	1.01	0.71
My friends have greater influence on my career choice.	3.11	1.52
My parent's record of economic success influenced my career decision.	1.21	0.81
I am interested in the programme because my friends are also interested in it	2.54	1.09
My parents can afford the cost of pursuing the programmes.	2.36	1.13
My father influenced my career decision and academic programme	2.92	0.98
The achievement of my friends in their various courses influenced my decision to choose my programme of study at the tertiary level	3.31	1.53
My parent's socio-economic status influenced my career decision and academic programme	2.61	1.18
Overall Mean	2.40	1.06

Source: Field survey (2019)

The results in Table 6 shows that, the most predominant environmental factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programme were as follows: “The achievement of my friends in their various courses influenced my decision to choose my programme of study” (M=3.31, SD=1.53), “My friends have greater influence on my career choice” (M=3.11, SD=1.52), “My father influenced my career decision and academic programme” (M=2.92, SD=0.98), “I like the prestige that comes with the profession” (M=2.83, SD= 1.04), “Adults and relatives wished my career paths for me” (M=2.66, SD= 1.15), “My parents’ socio-economic status influenced my career decision and academic programme” (M=2.61, SD= 1.18).

Similarly, most of the respondents disagreed to the following statements: “My mother influenced my career decision” (M= 1.01, SD= 0.71), “My parent’s record of economic success influenced my career decision” (M = 1.21, SD= 0.81), “My current career choice will enable to be self-employed” (M = 1.98, SD= 0.89).

4.3 What are the perceived institutional factors that influence students’ selection of career and academic programmes?

The aim of this research question was to find out the perceived institutional factors that influenced students’ selection of career choice and academic programme. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the data gathered. In using a four-point scale (Strongly Agree-4, Agree-3, Disagree-2, Strongly Disagree-1), a mid-point of 2.5 was used as the baseline for comparison. That is, mean values above 2.5 indicated that most of the respondents were in agreement to the statement. Conversely, a mean value less than 2.5 showed that most of the respondents were in disagreement to the statement. A mean of 2.5 however depicts that, the greater proportion of the respondents were neutral about the statement. Details of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: perceived institutional factors that influence students’ selection of career and academic programmes

Institutional Factors	Mean	SD
My programme of choice offers international opportunity for the future	3.57	1.03
Contact with students offering my programme of interest	1.63	0.92

Availability of good and modern facilities for teaching and learning	1.75	0.94
Confident staff are always available to help students.	2.37	0.72
The name of the institution influenced my choice	2.41	0.77
I prefer the location of the institution	2.00	0.80
The accurate information available, I had about the occupational opportunities will help me make a sound career choice.	3.78	1.87
Students have good support from the institutional authorities	2.64	1.05
There are scholarship opportunities for the programme within and from outside the institution.	2.36	1.09
Overall Mean	2.50	1.02

Source: Field survey (2019)

As shown in Table 7, respondents generally indicated the institutional factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes (M = 2.50, SD= 1.02). Specifically, most of the respondents agreed to the following statements: “The accurate information available to me regarding occupational opportunities helped me make a sound career choice” (M = 3.78, SD= 1.87), “My programme of choice offered me international opportunity for the future” (M = 3.57, SD= 1.03), “Students have good support from the institutional authorities as far as their career choices and academic programmes are concerned” (M = 2.64, SD= 1.05).

The respondents however disagreed to the following statements regarding the perceived factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes: “Contact with students offering my programme of interest” (M = 1.63, SD= 0.92), “Availability of good and modern facilities for teaching and learning” (M = 1.75, SD= 0.94), “I prefer the location of the institution” (M = 2.00, SD= 0.80).

4.4 What are the perceived personal characteristics that influence students’ choice of career and academic programme?

The intent of this research question was to examine students’ perception regarding the personal characteristics that influence their choice of career and academic programmes. Data collected on the research question was analysed using means and standard deviations. This was because the items were measured on a four-point scale (Strongly Agree-4, Agree-3, Disagree-2, and Strongly Disagree-1), a mid-point of 2.5 was used as the baseline for comparison. That is, mean values above 2.5 indicated that most of the respondents are in agreement to the statement. Conversely, a mean value less than 2.5 showed that most of the respondents were in disagreement to the statement. Details of the analysis are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Perceived personal characteristics that influence students’ choice of career and academic programme

Personal Characteristics	Mean	SD
Opportunity to major in area of interest	2.76	1.18
Naturally I am very good at my programme of interest	2.86	1.12
My personal interest will influence my choice of career and programme	1.65	0.13
My values and aspirations will influence my career choice	2.56	1.03

My excellent academic performance will influence my choice of programme and career	2.04	0.99
My current career choice is in line with my personal goals	1.04	0.96
I want to feel a sense of accomplishment in my choice	2.64	0.93
My current career choices will help me to apply skills and knowledge	2.51	1.15
My career choice will be driven by my intellectual skills and ability	1.33	0.16
I prefer careers that are very flexible	2.40	1.14
Overall Mean	2.17	1.60

Source: Field survey (2019)

As shown in Table 8, respondents generally disagreed that personal characteristics influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. Reporting on the specifics however, most of the respondents reported that, “being naturally good at a programme of interest” (M = 2.86, SD= 1.12), “Opportunity to major in their area of interest” (M = 2.76, SD= 1.18), “feeling a sense of accomplishment in a particular career choice” (M = 2.64, SD= 0.93), often influenced their choice of career and academic programmes.

From Table 8, the respondents further reported that “their values and aspiration in a particular career” (M = 2.56, SD= 1.03) also influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. The respondents however disagreed to the following statements regarding the influence of personal characteristics on their career choice and academic programmes: “My career choice will be driven by my intellectual skills and ability” (M = 1.33, SD= 0.16), “I prefer careers that are very flexible” (M = 2.40, SD= 1.14).

4.5 Gender difference in the perceived environmental factors that influence students’ selection of career and academic programmes.

This hypothesis sought to examine whether gender difference existed in students’ perception of environmental factors that influence their selection of career and academic programmes. An independent sample t-test was conducted to test this hypothesis.

Results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances revealed that the equality of variance assumption was not violated (F=.825, p =.364). Table 9 further presented the actual analysis.

Table 9: Gender Differences in Students' Perception of environmental factors that influence their selection of career and academic programmes.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
Male	219	37.041	5.517	334	.699	.485
Female	117	36.598	5.557			

Source: Field survey (2019); *significant, p >.05

Results from Table 9 revealed a non-significant difference in the perception of male and female students regarding the environmental factors that influenced their selection of career and programmes, t(334) =.699, p = .485. The results suggested that male and female students of public Senior High Schools had the same perception of environmental factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. The effect size was .080. Based on this, the magnitude of the difference in the perception of male and female students regarding the environmental factors that influenced their selection of career and programmes was small.

4.6 Gender difference in the perceived institutional factors that influence students’ selection of career and academic programmes

This hypothesis was sought to find out whether gender difference existed in students' perception of institutional factors that influenced their student's selection of career and academic programmes. In order to achieve this aim, an independent sample t-test was conducted to test this hypothesis. Results from the Levene's test for equality of variances revealed that the equality of variance assumption was not violated ($F= 2.074$, $p = .150$). Table 10 further presented the actual analysis testing the difference between the two groups with regards to the dependent variable.

Table 10: Gender Differences in Students' Perception of institutional factors that influence their selection of career and academic programmes.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
Male	219	20.849	3.800	334	-2.338	.020
Female	117	22.000	5.105			

Source: Field survey (2019); *significant, $p < .05$

From Table 10, there was a statistically significance difference in the mean score of institutional factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes, ($M = 20.85$; $SD = 3.80$) and female students [$M = 22.00$; $SD = 5.11$; $t(334) = -2.338$, $p = .020$]. This result indicated that male and female students in the Ashanti Mampong Municipality have different perceptions regarding the institutional factors that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. Thus, it can be said that female students had a higher perception about the fact that, institutional factors influenced their choice of career and academic programmes as compared to their male counterparts. The calculated effect size was .25 indicating a medium effect.

4.7 Gender difference in the perceived personal characteristics that influence students' selection of career and academic programmes.

This hypothesis sought to determine whether gender difference existed in students' perception of personal characteristics that influenced their selection of career and academic programmes. An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis.

Results from the Levene's test for equality of variances revealed that the equality of variance assumption was not violated ($F= .259$, $p= .611$). Table 11 presented the analysis.

Table 11: Gender difference in students' perception of personal characteristics that influence their selection of career and academic programmes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Male	219	18.406	3.939			
Female	117	19.059	3.835	334	-1.462	.145

Source: Field survey (2019); *significant, $p > .05$

The results from Table 11 revealed no significant gender difference in the mean score of students' perception regarding the personal characteristics that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes for male students ($M = 18.41$; $SD = 3.94$) and female students [$M = 19.06$; $SD = 3.84$, $t(334) = -1.462$, $p = .145$]. The results suggested that male and female students did not differ in terms of the personal characteristics that influenced their choice of career and academic programmes. The calculated effect size obtained was .16 which indicated a small effect size.

5. Discussion

The results of the current study are in line with the findings of Payne [34] who reported that, the roles parents play are the most important factor in post school choices. The findings of the current study also affirmed that of Walck and Hensby [25] who indicated that the family gave significant support in decision-making as far as the academic choices of their wards were

concerned. The findings of the current study also agree with the findings of Mortimer [43] and Gostein [44] who opined that parents of low socio-economic status were not able to influence their children's choice of careers. Similarly, the findings of the current study affirmed the findings of Taylor, Harris, and Taylor [45] that parental support and encouragement were important factors that have been found to influence career choice. It has been revealed that children may choose their career with influence of their parent [46]. Smith [47] also noted that mothers with educational background are more likely to influence career choice of their children than mothers without educational background. The findings of the current study however, contradicted with the studies by [48,49,50,51]. For instance, in their study, Gostein [50], and Gofflich and Moses [51] found that irrespective of children's interactions with their peers, ultimately, it was the parents who significantly influenced their children's career choices and programme of study.

Generally, the results of the current study are consistent with the findings of several studies [52,49,53]. For instance, Martinez and Munday [52] discovered that institutional factors such as accurate dissemination of occupational opportunities by school authorities influenced students' career choice and academic programmes. Similarly, Boyd and MacDowall [53] found that good support from institutional authorities such as dissemination of career information informed students' choice of career and academic programmes. Boyd and MacDowall [53] explained that at the second cycle institution for instance, school teachers and career counsellors are considered to have the most influence regarding students' knowledge on available career choices.

The findings of the current study however, contradicted with the findings of a number of studies [54,55]. The aforementioned authors discovered that the reputation and prestige of an institution influenced students' choice of career and academic programmes. The authors further noted that the availability of resources for academic and professional services in terms of equipments and facilities also accounted greatly for students showing interest in enrolling in an institution. This finding contradicts the findings of this current study, in that, most of the respondents disagreed to the fact that availability of good and modern facilities for teaching and learning influenced their choice of career and academic programmes.

The results of the current study are in consistent with the findings of [56] that academic ability has a powerful effect and has a statistically significant effect on students' choice of career and academic programmes. The findings of this study also corroborate the findings of several authors [57,58]. The aforementioned authors noted that most students did not just consider their academic strength to choose their programme of study or career, however, they also considered their interest and future desires as well when deciding on a career or an academic programme.

The finding of this current study are also in line with the findings of [28] and [49] that personal interest was a primary motivator for making choices on career and programme of study among students. Similarly, the findings of this study agree with, [57] who noted that students who believed in themselves had more confidence and were more likely to go for what they wanted instead of settling for something that was comfortable, as a result, were more likely to select a career or programme of study based on the confidence they had in themselves.

The findings of this current study contradicted that of [59] who asserted that environment factors such as counselling from teachers and parents on career choices often reflect a gender bias when directing girls towards traditional careers and boys towards non-traditional careers. Grates [59] explained that most traditional societies have placed gender roles to the children and children often grow up knowing that some responsibilities, duties, careers are preserved for

certain genders. The findings also disagree with [60] who explained that in many African civilizations, there are careers that are believed to be male or female fields and society attempts to train this attitude in boys and girls during socialization. For instance, due to the influence of environmental factors in career choices, females are less likely to be employed in engineering or science related jobs since such fields are traditionally considered to be men's occupations. In the event that females are employed in the aforementioned fields, the remuneration is often biased with women earning less than what men earn [61].

The findings of the current study agrees with the findings of [62] that the gender differences existed in the institutional factors that influenced students' choice of career and academic programmes. The finding of this study is also consistent with the findings of [63] that significant gender differences existed in the instructional factors that influence students' choice of career and academic programmes. James [63] explained that female students unlike male students were more interested in the prestige and reputation of an institution when selection a programme of study in a particular institution. The finding of the current study however disagrees with the findings of [64] that no significant gender difference existed in the institutional factors that influenced students' choice of career and academic programmes.

The findings of this current study are inconsistent with the findings of [65] who discovered a significant gender difference in the personal characteristics that influenced students' choice of career and academic programmes. Hewitt [65] explained that, unlike males, females were often inclined to career paths that were foreseeable, inferior and less financially productive, with low pressure levels, and these females rarely aim to occupy leadership position and decision-making positions. Hewitt [65] further explained that females chose occupations that had steady hours of work to allow them to accomplish some domestic duties. The preceding argument also supports the fact that career choices are usually a product of one's socialization since society's gender role socialization regulates what roles men and women should aim at [66].

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that environmental factors, influenced students' career choice and choice of academic programme. Parent and peers have a greater influence in determining the career and academic programme choice of students. The study again revealed that institutional factors also influence students' career and academic programme choice. This is because international and occupational opportunities offered by the institutions influenced student's career and academic programme choice. The study showed that personal characteristics of student's influenced students' career choice and programme. The outcome of this result stem from the fact that some students are very good in specific subject area, therefore there is the possibility of such students to choose a programme to study at the tertiary level in line with their interest, accomplishment and future aspirations. The study further revealed that there is no gender difference with regards to environmental factors. It can be concluded that both male and female students had similar environmental factors that influenced their career and academic programme choice. With respect to institutional factors there was a significant gender difference. It can be concluded that male and female students differ in terms of institutional factors where female students dominated more than the male students. The study also showed that there was no gender difference with respect to personal characteristics. Thus, both male and female students do not differ with regards to personal characteristics. This may be because of individual difference and both are from different background, therefore, their decisions about their aspirations may differ from each other.

The study recommended that parents should not choose career for their wards but allow them to look within themselves and choose a career that best fits them. This can be achieved by educating parents through the mass media and other channels on the importance of allowing their wards to choose their career themselves. The study also recommended that the school management and counsellors should ensure that students get accurate and reliable information about the tertiary institutions they are interested in, especially reliable information on the programme of they wish to pursue. Further, it was recommended that more career guidance seminars should be organized for senior high school students in the Mampong municipality to know the right factors to consider when choosing career and academic programme.

Ethical Approval and consent

An ethical approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. The approval from the Faculty Ethics Committee enabled the researcher to follow the universities laid down principles regarding research ethics. Another ethical issue that was considered in this study was the consent of the participants. The consent of the participants were sought first. The researcher explained to the participants the aims, nature, and duration of the research. The researcher again informed the participants how the results of the study would be disseminated.

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