



**FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE DEGREE PROGRAMME CHOICE BY WORKING CLASS STUDENTS – A CASE FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED WITH UNIVERSITIES IN MASVINGO.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper sought to assess the factors that influence the choice of degree programme by students already employed. The study was prompted by some awkward programme choices that some students were enrolling for as they had no relation with the jobs they were doing. Some students even settled for programmes that they were struggling to complete beside not being relevant to the jobs held. The study used a descriptive design narrative and a qualitative discourse. The descriptive survey design was preferred for its suitability and simplicity as well as its focus on analyzing data gathered for purpose of describing attitudes and behaviours that influence and shape how the population under study feel and understand things around them. The descriptive study has the power to describe the phenomena / characteristics associated with the subject population, estimate the proportions of the population with the characteristics of interest as well discovering the association between variables. The data for the study was mainly collected through use of questionnaires. Questionnaires were chosen for its advantage of collecting data in a form that makes it easy to present and analyze. The targeted population comprised all undergraduate students enrolled with the universities in Masvingo . The study used convenient stratified random sampling to come up with forty (40) students in employment drawn from all the undergraduate students across faculties. The study revealed that choosing a degree programme is a complex issue for some working class students. Despite enjoying some independence associated with age and gainful employment, the students still faced multiple and competing factors which result in them making some mistakes in the choices they make. Internal influences such as enhancing skills for advancement in a career already chosen, correcting wrong choices made in the past, utilizing qualifications already attained and following one's changing interests had as much driving force as external forces such as adjusting to better paying jobs and fulfilling the wishes and aspirations of family and peers. The study also revealed some mistakes committed by the students such as choosing a programme for what it can pay basing on current market trends that can change even before one completes the programme, falling for programmes suggested by others without regard to one's interests and picking a programme simply because it has a sponsor still affect them. The most detrimental mistake some committed however, was taking up programmes that prepare them for a different career path when they had gone past the prime age of getting attention for entry grade jobs from prospective employers. The study recommends that provision of career guidance and counselling services must not only focus on school leavers should be emphasized at all levels including those at the peak of their careers. This will help prospective students to avoid making decisions or choices that they may live to regret. Prospective students should be advised to seek professional career guidance and counselling first before they pick a programme to pursue. This will equip them with the right information on which they can base their decisions. Last but not least, there is need for deep self- introspection on the part of the prospective student. One must be aware of dominant abilities, aptitudes and interest such that they make choices that are compatible and avoid programmes in which they end up dropping after wasting resources*

**Key Words:** Career Guidance, Career Counselling, Internal factors, External factors, Social agents

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

Choosing a degree programme has far reaching implications for any student. Besides committing time and substantial financial resources, it's a decision that can affect one's entire life. Regrettably some people do not seem to give it the due attention and care it deserves. The major challenges that affect the decisions range from lack of quality information to the personal biases and illusions of the students as well as influences from social agents one associates with. In order to come up with a decision, one requires relevant, complete and accurate information on which to base their convictions.

The general assumption is that when one gets employed that too on the basis of the course they have undertaken, any further studies must be built on the qualification already attained and should also be aligned to the job held. While advice may come in different forms and from different sources, the responsibility for the final decision entirely lies with the individual student. Further studies by the employed must promote career advancement and create opportunities for promotion and ascendance to high position.

However, programmes chosen by the gainfully employed students are often incompatible with their distinguished abilities, not aligned to the skills demands of their current jobs and not related to qualifications already obtained. Some choose to pursue programmes directing them to a different career path even at such advanced age when prospects of changing career appear to be remote while others pick up programmes that they apparently struggle to complete sinking substantial financial resources in the process. One wonders as to what factors do these students look at when choosing programmes.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

While there is an assumed understanding that students already employed have settled for a particular career and their further studies should be aimed at enhancing skills required for the job and also prepared themselves for advancement and promotion, some students' choices defy that common logic as t they enroll for programmes that do don't build on their existing qualifications and that are not compatible with the current job skills requirements. Some of the students even choose programmes in which they exhibit questionable interest, passion and commitment to the extent that they struggle to complete. The study therefore sought to establish the real factors that influence the programme choices made by the working class students.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To explore the factors that influenced the choice of degree programme by students already in employment.
- To evaluate the extent to which working class students respond to external influences when they choose a degree programme in which to enroll.
- To assess the challenges associated with the degree programme choices that some working class students make.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What factors actually influenced the degree programme choice by working class students?
- Do working class students respond to external influences when they choose a degree programme in which to enroll?
- What challenges can be associated with the degree programme choices that some working class students make?

The study is expected to help expose areas in which student and prospective students require advice and assistance such that appropriate guidance and counselling intervention strategies can be developed. The results of the study are also expected to be of use to universities as curriculum planners such that they develop degree programmes with the interests of the students in mind. Employers are also expected to benefit from the study as disclosures by students can help them take appropriate steps in promoting and incentivizing the uptake of relevant degree programmes by their current staff.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Making a choice is not an easy task for most people. College student are also not spare especially when it comes to choosing a programme to study. Sometimes serious mistakes that have a life time impact are made. By standard, university programmes particularly at undergraduate level have a long duration and commit substantial financial resources hence one has to exercise caution and due diligence to ensure that the choice made is sustainable and withstand the test of time. Just like any decision, selecting a degree programme requires relevant and accurate information. There are many factors that one has to consider to come up with the right decision. No single factor however, should be relied upon in isolation to influence a perfect decision. Usually, a combination of factors has to be simultaneously applied. Some of the factors that warrant the attention of the student are discussed below;

### **Aptitude**

An aptitude may be described as a person's potential to attain a certain level of competence. According to Super (1963), aptitude develops from birth meaning it is biological although it may be shaped by the environment in which it is nurtured. This covers student's personal abilities / competencies. Gellat (1989), notes that doing what one is good at is a natural source of inspiration and motivation hence makes learning exciting. Gellat (1989) went on to hint that it can also reduce chances learning difficulties and failure in the course. It is of no use for one to pursue a course in which they struggle as it leads to loss of both time and financial resources. Chireshe, (2012), observes that failure in its own right causes frustrations and can be very stressful hence has to be avoided. However, the problem arises when what one is good at has limited opportunities on the job market or the job options available do not pay much. Ellefsen, and Beran, (2007) posit that the disparities in what different careers pay raise temptation for individuals to force themselves into degree programmes that open up avenues for lucrative job opportunities even when they lack certain aptitudes.

### **Students' Personal Interests**

Interest is a personal attribute that develops and change as one matures. While interest and aptitudes are closely connected, they are not exactly the same and cannot be interchangeable. Chireshe, (2013), observes that one might have broadened aptitudes which make them suitable for various degree programmes. In this case, the student has to look at other factors to make the final decision on their choice. Most importantly, they have to look at which job arouses or interest them most. In the long run, it not only about what you are able to do but also what you enjoy doing that sustains concentration on the job. It is therefore possible for a student to drop certain courses in which they are good at simply because at some point, they find the courses boring.

### **Personal Commitment**

Choosing a university course requires one to look inward and assess their commitment to the chosen path. Assuming that one has the issue of money and other practical considerations settled, do they actually possess the skills and the patience to go the distance of the programme? Moreover, do they actually want to do the course? (Faizer, (2013)

### **Rewards Associated with Certain Careers**

Different jobs rarely pay the same in most markets. It is normal that one job may pay more than the other. By similar standards, not every job that pays well today may remain the same forever. When market forces are at play, circumstances do change from time to time EduAdvisor, (2020) subscribes to Egunjobi, et el, (2013) that job market are unstable and change in respond to global trends - today a country may have to rely on expatriate labour and pay handsomely but with time the same country might find itself exporting the same skill it once imported. If oversubscribed the wages may get diluted as individual compete for the job rather than what it pays. An exceptional focus on what a job pays at the time when one enrolls may be somehow misleading. Chances are that one may complete the degree programme when goals have shifted and pointers have moved elsewhere. The same applies to job market opportunities as a factor.

### **Job Market Opportunities**

Job markets are sensitive as they respond to movement of market forces particularly levels of demand and supply. While it is prudent to scan the market for prospects of landing a job after one has gone through a particular course, it must be born in mind that circumstances change with time Today it may be a marketing degree that tops the market but tomorrow e-commerce might have taken center stage. StudyLink, (2020) and EduAdvisor, (2020) concur that

job market analysis could be as important as it but should not be exclusively be relied upon as the basis of making a lifetime decision.

### **Cost of the Programme**

Acquiring university education is huge investment which requires careful consideration and planning. One has to take serious stock of their sources of sponsorship before they pick a programme. EduAdvisor, (2020) notes that universities more often than not charge different fees for different programmes and also that programmes run for different duration. Similarly, some courses might be on state grant while for others one has to meet the full cost. All that have a bearing on the overall investment. Fundamentally, the issue of funding becomes a limiting and controlling factor which has a bearing on the choices students make

### **Influences from Social Agents**

**Social agents cover** family, peers, mentors, and people that are seen as successful by society. These interact with the students daily and undoubtedly influence them in one way or the other. Ceja, (2006) and Ehigbor and Akinlosotu, (2016) concur that family shapes one's life and influences most of their important decisions. Each family develops expectations that have to be fulfilled by family members to maintain certain values and status. When members choose courses to do, they strive to keep a balance between their personal preferences and the status that the family must preserve. Similarly, people tend to compare themselves with their peers hence they borrow much from them when making decisions. Peers are natural competitors. No one wants to be left behind or to feel inferior hence the influence. Lastly, in every society there are people used as benchmarks of success. These may be referred to as role models for their followers. It is unusual for one to look up to them for direction on what is good. The desire to be like them ends up influencing the decisions they have to take.

### **Factors that are Paramount for the Student who has Already Chosen a Career**

While a lot has been written about the factors that influence student in general to choose a programme, very little is has been said about the factors that influence individuals that are already working. Assuming that working class students are people that have already made their decision on the career path to follow, there must be special or unique factors peculiar to the group that affect their choices. For this study, some insights have been borrowed from human resources development works by Cole. (2011) and Stoner and Freeman (2019).

### **Programme Content / Skills Enhancement**

First the decision could be to do with the skills required for their job. Getting the right skills or upgrading oneself brings about a whole new experience and excitement in the way one performs in their job. It increases efficiency, and effectiveness in the job. Stoner and Freeman (2019), posit that when new skills are learnt and applied they result in new levels of job satisfaction. The best programme is one that equips the learner with appropriate job related skills that can immediately make an impact on the job.

### **Career Advancement**

When one is employed, they do not expect to remain at the same level time again. Getting promoted or being entrusted with bigger responsibilities should be a major source of motivation. It is however, common practice that higher educational qualifications positions one to be promoted, (Cole 2011)

### **Securing the Job**

When a company hires without looking at qualification, the right thing to do is to train such that the employee is equipped with the right skills to make them do their work more efficiently and effectively. This will also help to motivate the employees as they become more confident with their work. If training is to be done outside the company, chances are that the employees may enroll with a college or university where they should exercise caution in selecting the most appropriate and relevant programme.

### **Moving with Technological Changes**

According to Stoner and Freeman, (2019), one may go back to college for the sake of gaining new skills that match technological changes in the job market such as computerization or e-commerce. This could be referred to as reskilling to ensure that many power does not become redundant.

### Mode of Delivery

In order to strike a balance between, work, social life and studies, students that are employed often consider the mode of training associated with the courses on offer. The desire is for a flexible mode that would allow one to handle both work and studies without much deprivation on social life.

### Classification of Influential Factors as Either Student Centered or Third Part Induced

The factors discussed above are either linked directly to the person taking a decision or the surrounding factors that put pressure on the person in question to make a decision. The factors can therefore be classified as either internal if directly linked to the one taking the decision or external if exerted on the decision taker by third parties. The table below shows the

**Table 1: Classification of Influential Factors (External or Internal)**

External Factors (Pressure from Third Parties)	Internal Factors (Personal Desires)
Family Expectations	Competences / aptitude
Peer pressure / competition	Interests
Job market opportunities	Commitment
Role models	Job security
Counselling	Copying with technological changes
Employer expectations	Skills enhancement
Conditional sponsorship	Career advancement
Cost of the programme	

### Mistakes Associated with Choices that Students Make

According to EduAdvisor, (2020) there are a number of pitfalls that students make when they choose degree programmes that the take up to study. Some of the central and common mistakes raised are highlighted below;

#### Choosing A Programme for The Rewards Associated with The Possible Job Opportunities

More often than not, students go for options they think would give them a good financial reward as if money is all one needs to lead a satisfactory life. Studies show that one is likely to be happy with a job if they focus on the intrinsic side of rather than what it pays. Such intrinsic values include but not limited to self-interests in learning outcomes, personal challenge and curiosity. EduAdvisor, (2020) notes that having a high salary and job satisfaction are not positive functions and therefore might not be correlated. A job may reward highly and yet it is very stressful and disruptive in family social life. On the other hand, there are some jobs that may pay less but creating social space for one to lead an interactive, stress free and interesting quality life. There should therefore a balance between material rewards and real job satisfaction. Super (1963) sums it all by asserting that work satisfaction and life satisfaction depends on the extent to which the individual finds adequate outlets for abilities, interests, personal traits and values.

#### Rushing to Make a Choice

Many students rush to make a decision and pick a programme without enough accurate information to back up their choice. Such impulsive decisions often backfire horribly when the course turns out to be a very uninteresting. This results in irreparable damage to the individual as the often realize their mistake when they have already committed time and money. These two important resources are irrecoverable hence have to be invested wisely. EduAdvisor, (2020), advises that when one is not sure of their decision, a second thought must be sought and professional career counsellors may easily fill this gap as the usually have more accurate and relevant information readily available for their clients.

#### Going Along with Social Agents (parents, friends, role models, etc)

**It is never a wise decision to choose a programme to satisfy other people's wishes and dreams.** EduAdvisor, (2020) reminds that it's you and not your family or friends that would study and take up the job. Following third

parties' desires blindly may be suicidal as they push you into something that might not be compatible with your personal interests and how you want to live your life

### Having False Social Perceptions About a Particular Programme

There is a fine line between reality and fantasy or perception. Reality is usually not as cool as is imagined. One should base their decisions on real facts rather than living an inspiration from films and moves or other people's success stories. For instance, in as much as you can emulate Bill Gates, you must appreciate that circumstances and environments are different and those separate the two of you.

### Being Discouraged by Others

The writing is very clear. If at least advice is against others making up a decision for you, then there is a limit to the level of discouragement you should tolerate from them. Never give in to anyone's discouragement unless they have convincing facts which when you reflect upon, you personally feel there is need to reconsider. All advice from outside must end up with you to take or leave. One's personal interest should be the most important aspect to consider.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey design coupled with a qualitative approach. The descriptive survey method was preferred for its flexibility in allowing the researcher to interact with respondents in a natural and unobtrusive manner thus experiencing reality in how respondents view things. The descriptive survey also allows focused analysis of data gathered for purpose of describing attitudes and behaviours that influence and shape the feelings and understanding of the population under study. Cooper and Schindler, (2014) note that the descriptive study has the power to describe the phenomena / characteristics associated with the subject population as well discovering the association between variables of interest. The descriptive survey was also found handy because it allows and empowers the use of multiple qualitative techniques such as comparing and contrasting, measurement, classification and evaluation. Cooper and Schindler, (2014) observe that understanding different meanings that people place on their experiences require qualitative research techniques that delve deeply into people's hidden interpretations, understandings and motivations. The data for the study was mainly collected through questionnaires. Cooper and Schindler, (2014) observe that questionnaires have an advantage of collecting data in a form that makes it easy to present and analyze.

The targeted population were all undergraduate students enrolled with the universities in Masvingo . The study used convenient stratified random sampling to come up with forty (40) respondents drawn from all the undergraduate students across faculties. The students had equal chances of being selected as long as their registration records showed that they were employed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of the Respondents by Age and the Degree Choices Made

The forty (40) students that participated in the study were grouped according to their ages and then further stratified according to the programmes they chose. This was done to assess if age had a bearing on the choices made. Table 2 below shows the results that were obtained.

**Table 2: Analysis of the Respondents by Age and the Degree Choices Made**

Level of Education Already Attained	Frequency (n=40)		Degree Programme Enrolled For			
	Number	Percentage (%)	Aligned to the Job		Not Aligned to the Job	
			No.	%	No.	%
Below 30 Years	9	22.5	3	7.5	6	15
31 - 50	27	67.5	17	42.5	10	25
Above 50	4	10	2	5	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45</b>

Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires



The result showed that students drawn from the working class are generally mature people, most of whom are middle aged (67.5%). For this age category, more than half (42.5% out of 67.5%) or 63% pursue programmes which propel them in the careers they have already chosen while a significant 37% or (25% out of 67.5%) still aspired to embark on new career path despite the advanced age. These could be making a mistake as most employers rarely take beginners / trainees from such an age group. For the students below 30 years of age, (15% out of 22.5%) or 66.7% had no intention to continue with their current jobs hence the decision to pursue qualifications not aligned to the jobs held. This signifies that there was mistaken choice when they pick their first courses that landed them in the current jobs.

**Analysis of the Respondents’ Educational Background**

Educational background checks for the forty (40) students that participated in the study was done and revealed the results tabulated in Table 3 below;

**Table 3: Analysis of the Respondents’ Educational Background.**

Level of Education Already Attained	Frequency (n=40)	
	Number	Percentage (%)
Certificate/Diploma	32	80
Degree or better	8	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires

All respondents who participated in the study were individuals who already had tertiary education. This means that they had at some point not only decided on career path they wanted to pursue but also invested time and money in training and skills development. While **80%** of the respondents were expected to be pursuing undergraduate degree, it was arousing that the other **20%** represented people who had already attained degrees but had enrolled for other programmes at undergraduate level. The idea of one enrolling for a qualification at the level they have already achieved is in its own an indicator of discontentment.

**Alignment of The Currently Held Qualification To The Job Being Done.**

Suitability of the qualifications currently held to the jobs being done was assessed and the following results were obtained;

**Table 4: Alignment of the currently qualification held to the job being done.**

Qualification Currently Held	Respondents		Alignment to Current Job			
			Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Certificate/Diploma	32	80	27	67.5	5	12.5
Degree or better	8	20	4	10	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>77.5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22.5</b>

Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires

As anticipated, the majority of the respondents (**77.5%**) held qualifications that were suitable for the jobs that they were doing. For this category, pursuing a degree was presumably for consolidation of skills and positioning oneself for career advancement. For the **22.5%** that had inappropriate qualifications for the jobs they held, the presumed push was for them to acquire an appropriate qualification to secure the jobs held. A further analysis of these two categories of respondents was done to assess the alignment of the degree programmes currently enrolled in and the jobs held. Tabulated below was the outcome of the assessment;

**Table 5: Alignment of the Degree Programmes Currently Enrolled in and the Jobs Held**

Category of Respondents Drawn from Table	Total No. of Respondents		Alignment of Current Job to Degree Programme being Pursued			
			Aligned		Not Aligned	
	No.	%	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Respondents with qualifications matching the current job.	31	77.5	17	42.5	14	35
Respondents with qualifications <b>NOT</b> matching the current job	9	22.5	3	7.5	6	15

<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45%</b>
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Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires

The above analysis showed that only 55 % of the respondents enrolled for programmes which promoted their current careers while 45% pursued programmes that had nothing to do with the jobs held. Out of the 77.5% whose baseline qualifications already met job requirements, 35% had no intention to continue with the career as they chose degree programmes not aligned to the job. Of the Nine (9) respondents that did not have qualifications matching the current job, only three (3) seemed concerned about getting the right qualification to secure the job – the other six (6) are in the job because of circumstances but had no intention to promote the career.

### Factors Influencing Choice Of Degree Programme

The Forty (40) students that participated in the study were called upon to list the factors that actually influenced their decision to take up the undergraduate programmes they were pursuing at the university and they disclosed the reasons/factors tabulated in Table 6 below;

**Table 6: Factors Influencing Choice of Degree Programme**

Factor/Reason	Prevalence of Influence (n= 40)		Dominance Rank
	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)	
<b>Intrinsic / Internal /Personal Factors</b>			
Correcting wrong choices made in the past.	9	22.5	4
Competences/ Aptitude	5	12.5	6
Prior learning	22	55	1
Interests	4	10	7
Changing interests and circumstances – desire to change career.	5	12.5	6
Desire to develop and progress in the current career - Prospects for career advancement, promotion, changing company, job opportunities abroad	22	55	1
Self-enrichment and skills broadening	3	7.5	8
Preparation for post-employment life.	1	2.5	10
<b>Extrinsic Or External Factors</b>			
Pressure from social agency – peers, family and role models	7	17.5	5
Job Security	3	7.5	8
Limited choice / desperation/non-availability of degree programmes related to their prior courses	2	5	9
Time / Duration	2	5	9
Mode of course delivery	19	47.5	2
Conditional sponsorship / selective sponsorship	3	7.5	8
Targeted reskilling by employer to avoid lay-off of loyal staff	4	10	7
Job market trends - material rewards associated with certain careers	18	45	3

Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires

### Analysis of Results in Table 6 on the Factors influencing Choice of Degree Programme

- Some students, 22.5%, never wanted to be what they are hence their current choices of what to study represented a corrective action they are taking for the wrong career decisions taken in the past. Previous choices were traced either to external influence from family and other influential agents or state of helplessness including limited opportunities available at the time.
- Three (3) students, (7.5%) cited job security as a driving factor for their current programme choice. They wanted to acquire qualifications that matched the job demands such that they may not be laid off for being underqualified.
- Fifty-five (55%), went with tradition as they pinned their decision on the desire to develop and progress in the current career. This group exclusively looked at chances of getting promoted in their respective jobs if



they attained a higher but relevant qualification, chances of getting engaged by a bigger and a better paying company or enhancing employment opportunities abroad. The same students (55%) showed respect for their prior learning or qualifications.

- Although they took full responsibility for the choices made in the past, 12.5% of the students revealed that had developed new interests which they think can be fulfilled if they acquire the new qualification they are pursuing. They looked at prospects of changing careers to meet the changing interests and circumstances. This confirms the view held by Super (1963), vocational preferences and competences are governed by the situations in which people live and work, hence their self-concept change with time and experience making choices and adjustment a continuous process.
- Notwithstanding the respect they have in their current jobs, eighteen (18) or 45% of the students had a feeling that the current jobs were not meeting their expectations in terms of remuneration hence they were looking at alternatives on the job markets that are yielding better or higher return. To this group, career choice is no longer an issue of interests and capabilities but an issue of what you get in return. Choice to them has become too materialistic. This perhaps answers the puzzle as to why some students force matters to do programmes in which they struggle to pass.
- For 10% of respondents, the choice of programmes enrolled for was employer's decision. The employer wanted to retain them but not in their current jobs. New training was therefore a preparation for redeployment. For others it was all about multi-skilling the employee in preparation for higher positions that require a wider range of skills to make effective decisions.
- Three (3) or 7.5% of the students outstandingly emphasized that their choice to study for a degree programme that has no link to what they currently do was simply a self-enrichment choice. They neither had clear intention to change career nor did they show regrets to what they were doing.
- For three (3) or 7.5% of the students, the programmes they enrolled for was not a matter of choice but mere utilization of arising funding opportunities. To them, studying for a degree remained a dream because of the cost that they could not meet. When sponsors arose though with conditions on the disciplines (programmes) of interest, they had to go by the conditions just for the funding. For this category the benefits and opportunities tied to the programme they are studying are secondary – for now the excitement is on getting a degree. The low score here may be attributed to the fact that all students involved are employed and may at least self-sponsor. Only those that are in low paying jobs get excited by bursaries.
- Despite age, some students still succumb to the pressure of family, peers and other luminaries in their lives. In this case, seven (7) students or 17.5% chose degree programmes to gain acceptance of others.
- Two (2) students or 5% showed sensitivity to course duration. In as much as they wanted a certain programmes, they could avoid them for their longer training periods. Longer periods are associated with more in terms of investment costs and lost time for social life.
- Only one student or 2.5% indicated studying was in preparation for life after retirement/ self-employment. This is common with individuals who enrolled for business related degrees. Such people look forward to venture into business on retirement or might already be shouldered with responsibilities to run the family business apart from their usual line of work.
- For 5% of the students, it was disheartening that for their discipline, there were no degree programmes on offer at the local universities. Advancement opportunities available at universities abroad meant resigning from the job – something which cut them off from their source of income making it an impossibility for the self-sponsored. These disciplines were therefore dead end or closed careers. The situation left the affected students no option except to divert and take other routes.
- Nineteen students (19) or 47.5% showed concern for the mode of study in which it is delivered. For this study however, it was a forgone factor as the university used is an Open and Distance Learning Institution. In order to strike a balance between, work, social life and studies, students that are employed often consider the mode of training associated with the courses on offer. The desire is for a flexible mode that would allow one to handle both work and studies without much deprivation on social life.

- There traditional or universal factors such as aptitude and interest that had great emphasis in theory scored lowly at 12.5% and 10% respectively.

### External Influence in Degree Programme Choices

Despite the fact that the group of people dealt with, were mature, gainfully employed and somehow expected to be independent, their decision making was not free from external influences. Job market trends, social agents such as family and peers as well as employers topped the list of external forces that students cannot overcome by age and financial independence.

### Common Challenges Associated with the Degree Programme Choices That Working Class Students Make

The forty (40) students were asked to identify one mistake which they think can be committed when making a programme choice. Reported below are the possible mistakes they raised.

**Table 7: Common Mistakes Associated with the Degree Programme Choices that Working Class Students Make**

Choice Mistake Identified	Prevalence of Influence (n= 40)		Dominance Rank
	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)	
Falling for conditional sponsorship	1	2.5	4
Studying for a career path change at old age	16	40	2
Falling for monetary rewards that can change any time	21	52.5	1
Choosing a course to appease other people	2	5	3

Source: Primary data extracted from questionnaires

Two possible mistakes featured prominently, the issue of picking programmes aimed to changing career at an inappropriate age and choosing a programme for what it can pay as currently reflected by the job market. The mistakes were recognized by 40% and 52.5 % respectively. All the four (4) mistakes raised however, had space in theory.

## CONCLUSIONS

In view of the findings above, it is concluded that choosing a degree programme is a complex issue for some working class students as it is for school leavers. Despite enjoying some independence associated with age and gainful employment, the students still face multiple and competing factors which result in them making some mistakes in the choices they make. For this category, internal factors such as enhancing skills for advancement in a career already chosen, correcting wrong choices made in the past, utilizing qualifications already attained and following one's changing interests have as much driving force as external forces such as adjusting to better paying jobs and fulfilling the wishes and aspirations of family and peers. Some mistakes common with school-leavers such as choosing a programme for what it can pay as currently reflected by the job market though without guarantee that the situation will remain the same, falling for programmes suggested by others without regard to one's interests and picking a programme simply because it has a sponsor still affect them. The most detrimental mistake they commit however, is taking up programmes that prepare them for a different career path when they have gone past the prime age of getting attention from prospective employers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provision of career guidance and counselling services must not only focus on school leavers but must be emphasized at all levels including those at the peak of their careers. This will help prospective students to avoid making decisions or choices that they may live to regret. Universities may help in this respect by establishing competent students' advisory departments manned by professional counsellors in career guidance.
- Prospective students should be advised to seek professional career guidance and counselling first before they pick a programme to pursue. This will equip them with the right information on which they can base their decisions. As an example, job market trends change from time to time – a low job today may be a high job tomorrow, so for someone chasing high returns, it may mean remaining in school for their entire working life.

- There is need for deep self-introspection on the part of the prospective student. One must be aware of dominant abilities, aptitudes and interest such that they make choices that are compatible and avoid programmes in which they end up dropping or changing after wasting resources.
- Providers of scholarships must improve on their selection criteria to ensure that the right beneficiaries get the opportunity. Unless this is done they may continue to put resources on candidates that have questionable interest in the areas they desire to promote.
- Local universities must continuously scan the job market and ensure that new programmes are developed to meet the training needs of all and sundry. University education should not leave out any career as long as there are prospective students to take up the course.

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