A Study on students’ choice of preference in selecting specialization at Nizwa College of Technology

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Abstract:
The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing in selecting specialization among the second year students, Business studies department, Nizwa College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman. The factors investigated included such as personal or self, associate with family and relations, within the college teachers, friends, seniors, current market, industry and others. Students are facing problem when they have to choose their specialization because several factors are influencing in the selection of specialization. This selection of specialization is essential for everyone to select their field of interest and select their career and to be recognized them in the world. Business Studies Department has three disciplines of specialization which are Accounting, Marketing and Human Resource Management. The students are following first year as common after the first year they have to choose their specialization. The study was conducted using survey method with a sample of 163 students. The data for this study has been collected using structured questionnaire. The findings of this study revealed that personal and college environment factors have the most influential role while proposing specialization among the students of Business Studies Department, Nizwa College of Technology, Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman.

KEY-WORDS: Specialization, personal factors, Accounting, Marketing, Human resource.

Introduction

The educational history of the Sultanate of Oman has undergone rapid development. In 1970, there were three primary schools in the country with less than 1000 students and no college or university (Al Bandary, 2005 and Al Shmeli, 2009). Today, there are more than 62 higher education institutions run by private and public sector offering various programmes. The total number of students in Higher Education in Oman in 2009 is approximately 80,000 (Al Shmeli, 2009). Higher Education Institutions are owned and governed by a variety of entities, including the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Man Power, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, other governmental entities, and private owners (OAC, 2006).

Today, students should have the career planning to develop their path in the effective way especially in the hyper competitive environment. Ones decision in the career choice helps to him / her and also to the parents, society and government in the broad way. Meantime, decision about career planning should consider the social, economic and political condition. Generally career choices are influenced by number of factors such as personality, interest, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and finance (Kochung and Migunde, 2011). Every individual undertaking the processes are influenced by number of factors including the context in which they live in, their social contacts, personal aptitudes and educational attainment (Bandura et al 2001). More people are influenced by careers that their family and parents favors, others follow their educational choices have been opened for them, some choose to follow their passion regardless of how much it will make them while others choose the careers that give more favorable remuneration.
Each of the three specializations is providing variety of knowledge of students to compete successfully in the job market. Students are having too much of stress when they are going to choose the specialization because there are number of factors influencing in the career choice. Our purpose is to investigate the students’ behavior in terms of choice of their specialization during their studies. Our aim is to get insights regarding the factors that influence the students’ choice of specialization and what are the criteria for the selection of a certain type of specialization. Most of the students have difficulties in choosing their specialization because they are not mature enough to take decision as well they used to depend on their family and sometimes their friends in choosing their specialization.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate which factors are more influencing for choosing specialization among the students of Business Studies department, Nizwa College of technology, Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman. Students are facing problem when they have to choose their specialization because several factors are influencing in the selection of specialization. This selection of specialization is essential to select their field of interest and select their career and to be recognized them in the world. Business Studies department has three disciplines of specialization which are Accounting, Marketing and Human Recourse Management. The students are following first year as common after the first year they have to choose their specialization. There are several factors which are making students confuse while choosing specialization and not able to take decision. Present study has been conducted to make the students life comfortable in selecting their specialization.

**Objectives**

1. To study the demographic profiles of students at Nizwa college of technology
2. To understand the students choice of preference of their specialization referred to their juniors.
3. To suggest remedial measures to improve the existing method of offering specialization at Nizwa college of technology

**Hypothesis**

1. Ho = There is no relationship between the gender and the specialization (first option) chosen by students.
2. Ho = There is no relationship between the gender and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.
3. Ho = There is no relationship between the level and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Galhena and Rathnayake (2011) used questionnaire to explore the influence of various factors on career choice decision of studying management in Sri Lanka. They found that skills and abilities, education and personality are the most influential factors. They also found that teachers are the greatest influencers on determining students’ career choice. Ming (2010) found that the factors behind affecting students’ college choice decision are location, academic programme, college reputation, educational facilities, cost and availability of financial aid, employment opportunities, advertising and campus visit. Cavus, Geri and Turgunbayeva (2015) Clarifies career as the application of a person’s cognition and capabilities, providing command over profession, timely work expertise and a basis of developing and bettering business networks. Individuals chose career planning to pursue the professional objectives, getting informed about upcoming opportunities, their results and their timely evaluations. It is considered to be a beginning in the stages of career choices but still of paramount significance. People prefer the career that could provide them sound basis for an improved standard of living. Ozen (2011) Choices that people make related to their career can be categorized to be influenced by two factors that are psychological and social. Social factors are part of an individual’s social bonds, their parents, family, history and other characteristics of their environment. Psychological factors can be an individual’s perception, cognitive and effective intentions, beliefs, ideas, personality and assessments related to forthcoming business environment Ferry (2006) Different inquiries on the life of the students
have come up with different findings. The results of a quantitative study conducted in central Pennsylvania by taking rural young adults and adolescents as respondents indicated that influence exerted by an individual’s family, society, state of economy, their interpretation of better job and financial constraints were major reasons that can impact their career selection. Edward and Quinter (2012) investigation disclosed that an individual’s proclivity towards a particular field or subject, its predilection for a particular job and match between his personality and selected professions is an important factor contributing in career path. Redman and Wilkinson (2001) the word career has been a derivative of French and Latin origin. Its simplest definition is given by Geciki (2002) as; the occupational, commercial or industrial activity that a person may adopt during his educational life or in some other part or till his death. Kim, Markhan and Cangelosi (2002) also found that marketing major students cared less about the reputation of the marketing major at the particular university they enrolled, the quality of teaching instruction available to students, parental influence, and the extent that the major was promoted by educators influenced student’s decision to pursue marketing major. Rebecca J. et al (2016) conducted a study on 399 students in Kenya which resulted in that there is a relationship between personality types, and career choice. Most of the students were satisfied with the course they selected before entering the university which indicates that suitable career choice for students would improve satisfaction and success in their course of study and future employment. But on the other side, when students make changes in their course section it indicated that the choices of subject selection did not go in line with their future career choices. Consequently, it constructs probability of the status of the relationship between personality types and career choice among undergraduate students in Kenya. The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between personality types and career choices among undergraduate students. Christine (2005) study conducted in South Africa on 770 students to determine the relationship between the personality traits and career choices, and because of cultural and environmental change the relationship seems weaker as compared to other countries. 770 respondents completed the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) and the Interest Questionnaire (INQ). Partial correlations showed that gender and race may influence these relationships, however these were slight changes. LaBarbera & Simonoff (1999) also found that academic reputation, parental influence, the nature of the school’s marketing curriculum and the relevance of available courses, and even student peers could have significant influence in student decision making. According to Kerka (2000), career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and financial.

Methodology
Sampling method

Proportionate stratified sampling technique has been used for the study. The data is analyzed by using simple percentage, arithmetic mean. Chi-square is used to test the hypothesis. There were no studies conducted to satisfy the above stated objectives and to that extent this study is considered significant.

Sampling frame and sample size
The study has been conducted among student community in Nizwa College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman. The population comprise of 434 Students in Business Studies Department that are currently in Diploma year 2, Advanced Diploma and B.Tech pursuing HRM and Accounting specializations. A sample size of 163 from the population has been chosen for the study. The respondents are chosen at random. The study duration was during November 2016. Primary data has been collected using a structured questionnaire. A pilot study has been conducted to check the validity and to fix the errors in the instrument.

Theoretical framework
There are different sources through which a student is inspired or influenced for opting a particular specialization over the other specializations available. The options which the students try before finalizing their specialization are professors opinion, own interest, theoretical approach, friends opinion, specialization scope, other teachers, financial interest, nature of specialization and physical attributes to name a few.

**Lecturers’ opinion:** opinion of the professors are taken very seriously by their students because they assume their teachers as their role models and try to follow the instructions given by the respective teacher. Students will lot of time in the college, so in the process they interact regularly with their teachers to clarify on different issues and in turn they will upgrade their knowledge in the respective fields. Hence, professor’s opinions is one of the significant input for the students to choose their career and select an appropriate specialization.

**Own interest:** self-interest of the student will have an influence in taking a decision towards choosing an appropriate specialization. But the limitation in this option is that the student is confined to limited knowledge and sometimes it may be misleading and invites problems for the students in the future.

**Theoretical approach:**
The specialization chosen by the student is more theoretical and does not require any practical to be conducted, then the students may show interest towards those specialization which is not having practical or may be having less practical to be done during the course.

**Friends’ opinion:**
This is one of the source through which more number of students are interested to change the specialization according to their friends. Because they want to spend maximum amount of time with their friends during their education and also after completing it. In this situation all the students are at same level and they don’t have clear understanding and future consequences of the chosen specialization. Rarely few students will be benefited if they get a right specialization and the group they belong to are serious in upgrading their knowledge in the specialization chosen.

**Nature & Scope of specialization:**
This source will be very interesting for the students, if the specialization selected by them are in line with the subjects they like and also the scope of that specialization that gives more number of options in the job market nationally and internationally. If the chosen specialization facilitates them to accommodate in different industries available and also a chance of placing in the upcoming industries.
Physical attributes:
This option sometimes changes the mindset of students from one specialization to other due to availability or non-availability of physical attributes like the right teacher, lab facility, practical things to be conducted, scope for learning new things and available opportunities in the job market.

Financial interest:
This generation is more interested in getting job very fast rather than becoming knowledgeable, so they opt for the specializations which gives them immediate job and also they can get a good salary and other incentives. Females prefer to get job in government rather than private sector and they are more interested in financial growth rather than a personal growth which yield a good results in the long run.

Government Job advertisements:
The number of advertisements given by the government departments will influence the students in selecting the specialization, because they feel that if they prefer the specialization offered by the government in their advertisements, will be helpful for them to settle their career and they can earn handsome salaries without taking any risk.

Industry Expectations:
Due to globalization more job openings are available in private sector and this option will be beneficial for the students who wants to prosper very fast in their career. They can follow the advertisements given by the private sector and try to select the specialization which is in demand.

Result Analysis
Hypothesis testing
Ho = There is no relationship between the gender and the specialization (first option) chosen by students.
Ha = There is a relationship between the gender and the specialization (first option) chosen by students.

Gender & first option-specialization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chosen option</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>6.553*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>5.027</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.37.

Form the above table it is evident that the first option given by both male and female students are human resources with 53% and 88% followed by accounting and marketing specializations. Similarly gender and first option chosen has given a chi-square value of 6.553 and the p value is .038 (for α=
(0.05) i.e. $P \leq 0.05$ the test is significant and there is a relationship between gender and the specialization selected. Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

**Hypothesis testing**

Ho = There is no relationship between the gender and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.
Ha = There is a relationship between the gender and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.

**Gender & second option-specialization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-Square Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>1.903</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>2.047</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Assoc</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.33.

Form the above table it is evident that the second option given by both male and female students are accounting with 53% and 52% followed by human resource and marketing specializations. Similarly gender and second option chosen has given a chi-square value of 1.903 and the p value is 0.038 (for $\alpha = 0.05$) i.e. $P \leq 0.05$ the test is significant and there is a relationship between gender and the specialization selected. Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

**Hypothesis testing**

Ho = There is no relationship between the level and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.
Ha = There is a relationship between the level and the specialization (second option) chosen by students.
Form the above table it is evident that the second option given by diploma-1, diploma-2 and advanced diploma students are accounting with 71%, 57% & 25% followed by human resource and marketing specializations. Similarly level and second option chosen has given a chi-square value of 16.780 and the p value is .010 (for $\alpha = .05$) i.e. $P \leq .05$ the test is significant and there is a relationship between level and the specialization selected. Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Students’ specialization choice is influenced by numerous factors including outcome expectancies, individual variants such as gender, personal interests, learning experiences, environmental factors and personal contacts. There are variations in the level of influence each factor has on students’ choice of specialization by gender, family members are more influential in students’ as compared to other persons. As students interact with their peers, their advice is less important as compared to family members, teachers, counsellors and academic advisors. However teachers are more influential compared to career counselors. This study recommends that teachers should provide students with experiences that expand the exploration process and a wide range of career information on all the specializations available, so that they can be able to explore widely before making their choices. The study further recommends that, after initial specialization decisions have been made, academic advisors can continue to encourage successful career development by identifying sources of psychosocial support available to students. Persons that offer career advice to students should ensure that they are well informed so as to provide accurate information that will lead students to correct career choice. In order to streamline the specialization system we suggest the college to conduct a specific specialization related test before allocating specialization and fix the cutoff marks for qualify for that specific specialization. Another method is to have an entrance test and rank the students and provide their specialization based on certain cut off marks. We can take three courses for three specialization in 1 year namely Principles of accounting for Accounting specialization, Principles of
Marketing for Marketing Specialization and Principles of Management for Human Resource specialization. Specialization to be allocated based on their marks in these subjects. Suppose a person gets “A” grade in Accounts and opts for accounting specialization, he should be given that specialization irrespective of his CGPA. Similarly we can do for other specialization also.

Scope for the Further Research
It is one of the research conducted by the Business Studies Department, Nizwa College of Technology, Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman to evaluate the factors that are influencing the student’s choice of specialization and how these factors are significant to students. This research can be extended to all the colleges of technologies to get a clear picture and additional factors can be added which are not included in the present study.

References
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