

Selection of Business Major at the National University of Lesotho

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Abstract

The study examined factors that influenced students' selection of a business major to assess the impact on a decision to major in accounting, Human Resources Management (HRM) or marketing. A sample of 174 was selected, through a stratified probability sampling technique. A total of 127 questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 73%. A factor analysis produced two factors: Personal Interest in the Subject (PIS) and Job Prospects (JPF). PIS has a major impact than JPF. The one-way ANOVA determined that PIS has a significant influence on the choice of accounting and HRM and not for marketing major while JPF did not have an impact on the selection of any three business majors. The results suggest a need for review of promotion of business majors in order to achieve well-balanced supply of students for the different business industry's skills needs.

Keywords: Major, Selection, Accounting, Marketing, HRM.

1. Introduction and problem statement

According to Lesotho Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2010/11–2014/15) higher learning institutions in Lesotho is considered as a level of education that is provided by universities, vocational colleges, institutes of technology and other collegiate level institutions, such as, trade schools and career colleges, that award academic degrees or professional certifications. In Lesotho, for instance, higher learning institutions level consists of approximately 15 institutions, three are the universities, the rest are colleges offering certificates qualifications and one college offering some professional qualifications. Amongst the three universities, the oldest and largest university is the National University of Lesotho (NUL) which opened its doors for students in 1975 (NUL calendar, 1987-1988).

NUL currently has seven faculties, namely: Faculty of Agriculture (FA), Faculty of Education (FE), Faculty of Health Science (FHS), Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), Faculty of Humanities (FH), Faculty of Law (FL) and Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). FSS is the largest Faculty made up of five departments among which are the Department of Business Administration (DBA) that offers a four-year Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) with majors in Accounting, HRM and Marketing. The first two years of the B. Com degree is common for all the three majors where students take courses in mathematics, statistics, communication, economics, general management, computing, business law, and basic accounting. They select a major in accounting, HRM and marketing in year 3 though they still have courses that are common to all majors, such as, entrepreneurship and strategic management. For many years, student's enrolment in the three majors have been skewed towards accounting major. The trend in the three years show that there have always been more students in accounting (both in 3rd and 4th year) than there has been in marketing and HRM (Table 1.1). A number of studies have examined factors influencing student for choosing one business major over the other but pertinent and relevant questions for the university management and prospective employers remain unanswered. Questions stakeholders are asking are; why do students choose different majors? Are there differences among students majoring in the different business majors?

One thing clear is that business students are influenced by certain factors to pursue certain majors against others. Also the influential factors may differ per situation as specializations that attract few students for one institution tend to have more students in another institution which raises a question of why some specializations tend to have a higher number of students as compared to others in certain institutions. According to Price (1999) different factors influencing the selection of various majors may reveal difference in work expectations as well as student misperceptions about careers related to their particular major.

Selecting a major is one of the most important decisions that students face (Thetsane&Mokhethi, 2019) because such decisions do not only determine what degree one graduates in but also the career(s) one would mostly qualify for (Collins &Giordani, 2004).This is supported by Carnevale & Melton, (2011) who argue that a major can determine one's ability to find employment after graduation. Beggs, Banthamand Taylor (2008) argue that good choice of a major is important as it assists student to achieve their educational and post-educational goals. They further added that the match between the student's abilities and interest and the capabilities required for the major is important in the selection of majors by undergraduate students. However, some students enter the university having already chosen a major while others may select a major without a clear goal. Some select a major because they hear about wonderful job opportunities and high starting salaries associated with that particular major. Mauldin, Crain and Moince(2000) argue that business students are mainly influenced by employment opportunities andhigh starting salaries when they select a major. This argument is consistent among different majors, including accounting and marketing (Giladi, Amoo, & Friedman, 2001). However, it is clear that students are influenced by different factors in selecting a major, for instance, friends and family, vocational interest, and abilities. Other nonmonetary characteristics, such as, the perceived quality of instruction and departmental requirements may have much influence on the selection of a major (Vangermeersch, 2000).

2. The aim of the study

It is therefore against this background that this student-based research seeks to identify factors influencing university choice of a businessmajor at NUL. The study further assess the impact that the influential factorsmay have on a decision to major in accounting, HRM and marketing. Specifically, the research question posed by this current study is whether there are significant differences in the impact that influential factors may have on student selection of a major in accounting, HRM and marketing. While it is clear that no one factor may influence a student's choice of a major, investigating the factors that mostly influence student's selection of a major can assist the university management to become more understanding and sensitive as to the reasons why students choose a certain business major over other majors and influence certain variables to change the outcome if necessary. Similarly, the results may assist policy makers and regulatory authorities to reform their agendas in an attempt to achieve a well-balanced supply of students who have the necessary skills sought by different industries.

3. Literature review

Selecting a university major is not only important in one's academic life but also in the future personal life because it has an influence on the academic's continuity, financial compensation and the social status. A wide range of research has shown that many students select a major primarily for job opportunities and the monetary rewards (Dudley, S.C, Dudley,L. W, Clark, & Payne, 1995; Kim, Markham & Cangelosi, 2002; Mauldin, et al, 2000; Montmarquette, Cannings&Maharedjian,2002).Al-Rfou (2013) also agree that choosing a specialization is a very critical decision in the person's life as it determines the job opportunity and social status. Factors including personal interest, gender, peer influence, family background, career opportunity and availability of jobs are some of the factors that affect the student's decision making with regard to the choice of a major (Abedalqader, 2016). Kaur and Leen (2007) reported that the students generally decide on a major of study during their high school years according to the job market requirements. This is consistent with Walstron et al, (2008) who discovered that prospects in term of jobs and incomes are important criteria for the selection of a major. Therefore, choosing a university major is part of the process of making a career decision. For many people, the university major they choose leads them to their future careers.

3.1 Job prospects

The most influencing factors for selecting a major for the business students arein a career associated with the major, job opportunities, desire to run a business some day and projected earnings in the related career (Lowe & Simons, 1997). Al-Rfou (2013) argues that future job factors also play an importantrole as students do consider future earnings, career options, occupational prestige and type of work when making their decisions. In addition, Sugahara,and Boland(2009) state that future job prospects and future earnings expectation plays a significant role in the selection of a major however they are not the only factors that matter. According to Porter and Woolley(2014), what influences students to do business related majors is career objectives.

However, Song and Glick (2004) also noticed that completion of higher education and the type of university major that students choose directly influences their career opportunities which resulted in differential earning power. Future earnings have been measured as the most important factor influencing student's choice of a major (Malgwi, Howe & Burnaby, 2005; Carnevale & Melton, 2011; Keshishian, Brocavich & Boone, 2010; Bartoli & Polane, 2012). There are other factors, such as taste (Sugahara & Boland, 2009) that encompasses all the other factors that influence a student's decision which explains why even when students have accurate earnings information some still choose lower-paying majors over higher-paying majors.

3.2 Personal Interest in the Subject

Many authors believe that personal interest in a subject is the most critical factor when it comes to choosing a university business major (Malgwi, et al, 2005; Zhang, 2007). As a result, such researchers support the importance of interest in the subject on student's decisions regarding selection of a university major. For instance, Strasser, Ozgur, and Schroeder, (2002) and (Baker and Griffin, 2010) argue that interest in the subject is one of the most critical factor when selecting a major in the higher learning institutions. Likewise, Dietz (2010) reported interest in the subject as the primary influence on the choice of a major, particularly for the first years. Strasser et al (2002), while acknowledging its importance for all business majors, provide evidence suggesting that personal interest in the subject influences student choice of a major particularly within management majors. Roach, McGaughey and Downey (2012) noted that while students identify personal interest as a driving force in their selection of a major, some research suggests that there may be a mismatch between student's perceptions regarding the work they expect to do after graduating with a particular degree and what they actually end up doing in jobs that are available. For instance, marketing students perceive marketing as consisting of advertising and selling, and this might be too narrow perception (O'Brien & Deans, 1995). On the other hand, personal interest in a subject may be important for a selection of a majors where students perceive themselves as having made heavy investment in their education (Roach, et al, 2012), for instance, students majoring in accounting and information systems view the quantitative requirements for these degrees as making their degree more difficult to obtain than other degrees. Therefore, students pursuing these degrees may validate their decision in terms of personal interest in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

3.3 Family Members and Peers

There is another critical factor that affects students' choice of a major which is parental or family members influence (Abedalqader, 2016). However, research conducted in this field, showed inconsistent results. For instance, Cohen and Hanno (1993); Sharifah and Tinggi (2013), found that family members do not influence students' choice of a major. In contrast, other studies revealed that family members and friends influence the choice of a university major. Parents, (Thetsane & Mokhethi, 2019; Calkins & Welki, 2006; Frley & Stanies, 2004), high school teachers (Calkins & Welki, 2006), university lecturers (Saemann & Crooker, 1999), and friend and other students (Mauldin et al, 2000) may provide valuable information, opinion, judgement, verbal encouragement and support regarding the selection of a university business major. Fizer (2013) reached a conclusion that family members, peers advisors may have a hand at influencing the choice of a major selected by university students. This is supported by Al-Rfou (2013) who states that parents, sometimes siblings and friends, play a major part in a student's choice of a major. Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) and Thetsane and Mokhethi (2019) established that parents were the most significant factor influencing a major to pursue while the teachers were the second influential factor. In contrast, Pimpa, (2004), found that while parents do influence the choice of a business major, the influence was not significant for those students who choose accounting as their major. Additionally, students' choice of a major may also be influenced by the occupation held by their parents and/or their siblings.

4. Research methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive research design due to the fact that the study seeks to identify factors influencing selection of a business major and determine the impact such factors have on selection of a business major. The total population was 194 DBA full time undergraduate 3rd and 4th year students pursuing Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com degree) in the academic year 2018/2019, majoring in accounting, HRM and marketing. Stratified probability sampling was used to select 142 students from accounting stream, 21 from HRM and 11 from marketing stream as respondents for the study (Table 1.2). Out of 174 questionnaires distributed, 127 questionnaires were returned and authenticated representing a response rate of 73%.

The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A was designed to collect demographic data of the students. Section B concentrated on the factors that influence the respondents' choice of a major and utilizes 5-point Likert-scale where 1 represented high importance and 5 represented not very important. The questionnaire items were based on previous studies that explored students' choice of a major (Malgwi, et al, 2005; Cebula & Lopes, 1982; Swenson et al., 1993).

The questionnaire was administered in the first semester after the third year students have registered for their majors, during class time to those students who were present on that day. The SPSS program was used to analyze the data where factor analysis with Principal component extraction, and one-way ANOVA (analysis of Variance) was used to identify factors and to assess the impact of the identified factors on the three majors using the *F-test* distribution.

5. Results of the analysis

5.1 Demographics of the study sample

The total of respondents was 127 from which 52 respondents (41%) were male and 75 respondents (59%) were female. This indicates that the number of female students in DBA pursuing B. Com programme far exceed that of the male students. These results are consistent with NUL overall statistics enrolment (2018/19) by gender whereby females (63%) are more than males (37%) (NUL Statistics enrolment by gender academic year 2018/19). The majority of the respondents in this study were between the ages 20-25, constituting 78% while 14% were above 30 and 2% were below 20 years respectively. This indicates that the average age of NUL 3rd and 4th year student's in DBA fall between 20-25 years. Regarding respondents major, accounting major constituted 73%, and human resource and marketing constituted 13% and 12% respectively. The majority of students in DBA specialize in accounting.

5.2 Factor analysis

To identify the factors that influence student's selection of a major and to determine construct validity of the instrument an exploratory factor analysis was performed. The factor analysis produced 2 factors accounting for 56.5% total variance (Table 1.3). Factor 1 is named, Personal Interest in the Subject (PIS) (made up of 4 variables) and factor two is Job Prospects Factors (JPF) (made up of 5 variables). Eight variables were eliminated because they both loaded in more than one factor.

5.3 Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha coefficients, estimating internal consistency of each factor were calculated as $\alpha = 0.81$ for PIS and $\alpha = 0.73$ for JPF. An alpha coefficient of 0.7 indicates high reliability of the measuring scale (Pietersen & Maree, 2016; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). All these coefficients are in the range that suggest high reliability of the measuring scale, therefore the instrument used is reliable (Table 1.4).

5.4 Descriptive results

The findings of descriptive statistics of the factors affecting students' selection of a major are given in Table 1.5. Mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation were used to describe the importance of factors that affect students' choice of a major. It can be seen from Table 1.5 that the most important factor affecting students' choice of a business major is "PIS" ($\bar{x} = 1.93$) followed by "JPF" ($\bar{x} = 1.81$). The results show that PIS has a major impact in influencing students' choice of major in DBA. It influences student's choice of a major more directly than JPF.

5.5 One- way ANOVA

In order to explore the impact of the identified factors (PIS and JPF) on the selection of a major a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. Students were divided into three groups according to their majors (Accounting, HRM and Marketing). It is observed from Table 1.6 that there was a statistically significant difference between PIS and the three majors studied $F(3, 152)$, $p < 0.05$. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in means between majors was quite small. Post hoc comparisons using the least significance difference (LSD) test (Table 1.7) indicated significant difference between accounting and HRM with the mean score difference of 0.598 and standard deviation of 0.267 ($p < 0.05$). There was no statistically significant difference between JPF and the three majors studied $F(1, 245)$, $p > 0.05$ (Table 1.6). Thus, from the above analysis it can be concluded that PIS has significant influence on the choice of accounting and human resource management. While JPF do not have an impact on the selection of a business major.

6 Discussion

The aim of this paper was to identify the factors influencing university students to select a business major. It further examined whether there are significant differences in the impact the factors have on a decision to major in accounting, HRM and marketing. The study revealed two most important factors (PIS and JPF) influencing choice of a business major. These results are consistent with Keshishian et al, (2010), findings that reported PIS as the major determinant factor in the selection of a business major. DeMarie and Aloise-Young (2003) also confirmed that not a single student indicated that s/he did not have an interest in the major they select.

This clearly shows that personal interest in a subject is a strong influence for a selection of a major. Hotz, Kang and Arcidiacono (2012); Galotti, (1999); Al Khateeb (2012) and Dietz (2010) also confirmed that student's interest and ability in the different majors is an important determinant of student's choice of a business major.

The second important factor that influenced students to select a business major namely, JPF is also supported by findings from other studies. According to Abu (2010) students' selection of a major, in particular accounting students, dependent on expected future earnings. This argument is consistent with Geiger and Ogilby (2000) who observed that earnings are a significant determinant of a choice of a major. They further argue that students should know that the labour market does not treat majors and jobs the same. Therefore, students should be aware that their educational choice of a major will affect the rest of their adult lives, in terms of career they will have and their expected earnings. With regard to JPF, Al-Rfou (2013) strongly believe that it has a major influence on academic major selection compared to PIS. The author argued that future earnings, career option, occupational prestige and type of work are the most influencing factors in the selection of the major. According to Almlund, Duckworth, Heckman, and Kautz (2011), individuals are interested in programmes that fit with their vision of their future occupation.

With regard to the impact that PIS and JPF have on a decision to major in accounting, HRM and marketing, the study revealed that there is a difference between PIS and JPF and the three majors studied (accounting, HRM and marketing). The findings further revealed that PIS has an impact on the selection of accounting and HRM majors but not for marketing. The findings of the present study are supported by Giladi et al, (2001), who concluded that business majors, in particular accounting major is selected because students feel that it will lead to a job with good income. Students also think that they can get jobs easily in accounting and HRM in the public and private sector, particularly in Lesotho, where the rate of youth unemployment is high at 40.05 % (Lesotho youth unemployment report, 2018).

Interestingly, the selection of marketing major was not influenced by PIS nor JPF. How students select marketing major may reflect their response to the realities of the market place. For instance, in the economy, such as Lesotho, where the main employer is the public sector, marketing as a major may not be considered very critical. As a result, students simply do not know why they select marketing major. Probably, this could be the reason why PIS and JPF seem not to have a bearing on the selection of marketing as one of the business majors. This could also be the reason why marketing stream is ever failing to attract more students than accounting and HRM. This results are supported by Beggs et al, (2008) who argue that students miss the opportunities to select good and relevant majors because they simply do not know the importance of such majors. However, Almlund et al, (2011) recommend that students should select majors that fit with their vision of their future occupation.

7 Conclusion

Selection of a university business major at undergraduate level is considered very critical decision in student life. The current study revealed that students select majors that match their abilities and interest and expected future jobs. Students majoring in accounting and HRM are looking for majors that will be interesting and that will provide them with job security and pay them well unlike marketing students who seem not very sure of why they select marketing as their major. This research contributed to literature by identifying the relationship between the independent variable (PIS) and the dependent variables (business majors, accounting, HRM and marketing). A better understanding of student's decision making could provide university management and educators with valuable information resulting in increased enrolments in different business majors. In this regard, more research is required to attain more evidence regarding students' selection of a business major in particular marketing major that the study failed to establish factor(s) that influence students to opt for it.

8 Recommendations and suggestions for Future research

Managerial implications:

While it is clear that no one factor may influence a student's choice of a major, investigating the factors that most influence student's selection of a business major can assist the university management to become more understanding and sensitive as to the reasons why students choose a certain business major over other majors and to find ways of influencing the choice of students to areas of importance. Similarly, the results may assist policy makers and regulatory authorities to reform their agendas in an attempt to achieve a well-balanced supply of students who have the necessary skills sought by different business industries. The results of this study offer important data for lecturers, Deans of Business Faculties that can be used in order to understand decisional aspects of the process of choosing a specialization. Improvements can be done with quality of information offered to students, sources of information that can be used to reach the target market of students from the first year of study, promotion of each specialization, in particular, marketing and human resource management using attributes that are important for students.

This can be effectively achieved if academic advisors for faculties are introduced at NUL to assist students to make good and rational decision in the selection of majors in the university. This calls for the universities to design and introduce other different majors that are in high market demand. Similarly, students will have a wide choice of business majors relevant to different environments and this may also benefit the universities and increase their enrolments. The factors that influenced the selection of a business major revealed by the study (PIS and JPF) are not exhaustive hence more research is needed. **Future research:** Future studies can take advantage of the findings of this study by examining other factors, for instance, factors related to direct reference and many others in influencing students to select a business major.

Table 1.1: Department of Business Administration enrolment in three majors - 2015/16 – 2017/18

Programme	Academic years						Totals
	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		
	3 rd yr.	4 th yr.	3 rd yr.	4 th yr.	3 rd yr.	4 th yr.	
Accounting	73	82	60	79	94	54	442
Human Resource	11	12	7	11	16	7	64
Marketing	11	12	6	11	6	5	51
Totals	95	106	73	101	116	66	557

Source: NUL, Admission department, (2018/2019).

Table 1.1 illustrates the enrolment of accounting, HRM and marketing in DBA from the academic year 2015/16 to 2017/18.

Table 1.2: DBA - Sampling frame for 2017/2018

Academic year	Accounting		Human Resources		Marketing		Total major per		Overall total	
	3 rd yr	4 th yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr
Totals	94	48	16	5	6	5	116	58	174	

Source: NUL Admission department, (2018/2019).

The above table illustrates the sampling frame for DBA students in each major for the academic year 2017/18

Table 1.3: Factor loading results

Items	Factors	
	Personal Interest in the subject (PIS)	Job Prospects (JPF)
The major is interesting	0.807	
Participant is good at the major	0.722	
Participant is satisfied	0.909	
Having no second thoughts	0.766	
Importance of selecting a major		0.622
It plays a critical role		0.707
Good looking future earnings		0.780
Availability of employment		0.535
A good potential career		0.774
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.		

The above table illustrates the exploratory factor analysis results.

Table 1.4: Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
PIS	0.81	4
JPF	0.73	5

The above table illustrates the Cronbach's alpha reliability results for PIS and JPF factors.

Table 1:5 Descriptive statistics on PIS and JPF

Factors	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. deviation
PIS	1.93	0.80
JPF	1.81	0.58

Table 1.5 depicts descriptive statistics (mean and Standard deviation) for PIS and JPF factors.

Table: 1.6: The impact of PIS and JPF on business majors

Factors		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PIS	Between Groups	6.085	2	3.043	3.152	0.046
	Within Groups	113.915	118	0.965		
	Total	120.000	120			
JPF	Between Groups	2.480	2	1.240	1.245	0.292
	Within Groups	117.520	118	0.996		
	Total	120.000	120			

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The table above illustrates one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) results.

Table 1.7: Results of ANOVA between PIS and business majors

Major Studied	Major Studied	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Accounting	Human Resources Management	0.598*	0.267	0.027	0.070	1.126
	Marketing	0.395	0.274	0.152	-0.147	0.938
Human Resources	Accounting	-0.598*	0.267	0.027	-1.126	-0.070
	Marketing	-0.203	0.353	0.567	-0.902	0.496
Marketing	Accounting	-0.395	0.274	0.152	-0.938	0.147
	Human Resources Management	0.203	0.353	0.567	-0.496	0.902

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 1.7 depicts post hoc comparisons using the least significance difference (LSD) test.

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