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SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE AND CAREER CHOICE SATISFACTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

There has been increasing concern over the alarming number of students who fail to complete their university courses. Consequently, many students change programs, drop out, or experience job dissatisfaction, which may ultimately lead to underperformance in the workplace. Against this backdrop, the present study investigated the relationship between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction among undergraduate students in selected universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was anchored in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental supports in career development. Methodologically, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted. The target population comprised 25,153 first-year undergraduate students across 13 universities in Nairobi County. For the quantitative strand, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed, resulting in a sample of 320 students drawn from two public and three private chartered universities out of a population of 12,137 students. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics; frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations alongside Pearson's correlation analysis. For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling was used to select 20 participants for focus group discussions, and the data were analyzed through content analysis supported by verbatim excerpts. This design enabled methodological triangulation and deeper interpretation. The findings revealed that school career guidance significantly influences career choice satisfaction. Specifically, career days, subject teachers, and career guidance teachers positively contributed to satisfaction levels. In contrast, KUCCPS demonstrated the lowest contribution, possibly due to limited sensitization and constrained placement options. The study therefore recommends structured, aptitude-based career counselling programs and inclusive, student-centered placement processes to enhance alignment between students' abilities, interests, and career pathways.

Keywords: School Career Guidance, Career Choice, Career Choice Satisfaction, Career Fair, College Placement and Careers, Teacher Career Guidance



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Introduction

Career development is a central task in adolescence and early adulthood, with implications for identity formation, economic prospects, and long-term wellbeing (Koçak et al., 2021). Accordingly, UNESCO (2019) defines career guidance as structured services that assist individuals in making informed decisions about education, training, and employment by integrating self-knowledge with labour market realities. Consequently, effective guidance aligns personal attributes with occupational pathways, thereby fostering vocational readiness and satisfaction.

Theoretically, career decision-making can be understood through both developmental and social-cognitive perspectives. Specifically, Ginsberg's Developmental Theory frames career choice as a progressive process in which individuals reconcile aspirations with realistic assessments of abilities and opportunities. Complementarily, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the influence of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental supports on career interests and decisions. Taken together, these frameworks underscore that career satisfaction depends not only on academic performance but also on informed decision-making, psychological readiness, and supportive systemic structures.

Empirical evidence further reinforces the importance of structured career guidance. For instance, studies in Guyana, Romania, Turkey, and Pakistan report that students often require more comprehensive career information and professional counselling to make informed choices. Moreover, reliance on informal advice, limited access to

guidance services, and admission systems driven primarily by examination scores have been associated with misaligned programme choices and reduced satisfaction (Ali & Shafiq, 2021; Karaca et al., 2016; Tocu, 2018). These findings collectively suggest that both individual-level factors, such as self-awareness and aspirations, and systemic factors, including institutional capacity and placement policies, shape career outcomes.

In the Kenyan context, career selection occurs within a highly structured placement environment coordinated by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS). Although KUCCPS aims to ensure equity and efficiency in programme allocation, cluster requirements, cut-off points, and institutional capacity frequently override students' stated preferences. As a result, many students experience discrepancies between preferred programmes and actual placements, often reporting dissatisfaction (Ndung'u & Obae, 2020). Furthermore, school-based guidance is frequently constrained by limited counsellor training, inadequate resources, and poorly structured programmes (Gacohi, 2017; Keraro et al., 2014).

Despite recognition of career guidance as essential for vocational readiness, many students enter university without adequate preparation or informed decision-making support. Although prior research has examined career information access and placement outcomes, less attention has been given to students' subjective satisfaction with their choices and the influence of various guidance mechanisms such as school counselling, parental input, institutional sensitisation initiatives, and KUCCPS career information on satisfaction. This gap is



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critical, as career satisfaction directly affects academic engagement, persistence, professional identity formation, and long-term labour market outcomes.

Grounded in developmental and social-cognitive perspectives, career satisfaction reflects alignment between students' self-efficacy, interests, outcome expectations, and structural opportunities. Where guidance systems are inadequate or placement processes constrain choice, such alignment may be disrupted. Therefore, this study examined undergraduate students' satisfaction with their career choices and the influence of different career guidance mechanisms on decision-making outcomes. Ultimately, by situating satisfaction within both individual psychological processes and systemic placement structures, the study provides evidence to inform policy, improve placement frameworks, and strengthen student-centred career guidance in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), proposed by Lent, Hackett, and Brown, which conceptualizes career development as a dynamic process encompassing three interrelated stages: the formation of vocational interests, career choice, and the attainment of career success or stability. Central to SCCT are personal goals, self-efficacy beliefs, and outcome expectations, which interact with environmental supports and barriers to shape individuals' career trajectories. Applying SCCT to the present study emphasizes that career satisfaction depends on the alignment between students' self-perceived abilities,

interests, and anticipated outcomes and the opportunities provided by institutional and systemic structures. In the Kenyan context, the KUCCPS placement system mediates access to higher education programmes, often constraining personal choice through cluster points, institutional capacity, and competitive cut-off thresholds. As a result, students' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals may not align with available opportunities, creating potential misalignment and dissatisfaction. Consequently, this study examines how school-based counselling, parental guidance, institutional sensitisation, and placement information interact with students' personal attributes to influence career satisfaction. By integrating SCCT, the framework provides an evidence-based understanding of the mechanisms underlying career decision-making and highlights avenues for interventions that can improve alignment between students' aspirations and actual career pathways, ultimately enhancing vocational readiness and long-term career outcomes.

Methodology

This study employed a concurrent parallel mixed methods research (MMR) design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously. This approach was adopted because it leverages the strengths of both approaches, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by integrating numerical trends with rich, contextual insights. The study population consisted of first-year undergraduate students from selected universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. To ensure representativeness, a combination of



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stratified and simple random sampling was used. Of the 13 universities in the county, five were selected to include both public (two) and private (three) institutions, representing approximately 30% of each category. Within

these institutions, simple random sampling yielded a total of 12,137 students, from whom 347 participants were selected for the quantitative component (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sampling Matrix for 1st Year University Students

Clusters	Sampled Universities	1st Year Student Population	Sample Size
Public	A	5,898	182
	C	1,667	44
Private	F	2,077	57
	J	432	7
	K	2,063	57
Total		12,137	347

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, including the standardized Career State Inventory (CSI) adopted from Leierer et al. (2017). Complementarily, qualitative data were obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 20 purposively selected students 10 from a public university and 10 from a private university using semi-structured open-ended questions and probes. This design enabled triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and richness of the findings. Furthermore, rigorous ethical procedures were observed. A letter of introduction from the Counselling Psychology Department of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa facilitated authorisation from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Subsequent research permits were obtained from the Nairobi County

Commissioner’s Office, the Ministry of Education; Nairobi County Director’s Office, and the Daystar University Institutional Scientific Ethical Review Committee (DU-ISERC). Finally, university authorisation letters were secured, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Consequently, the integrated mixed-methods design, representative sampling, and stringent ethical compliance ensured that data were both robust and contextually meaningful, enabling a nuanced analysis of how career guidance mechanisms influence undergraduate students’ career choice satisfaction.

Results

The study examined the relationship between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 27, with



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descriptive statistics including percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations employed to summarise participants’ responses. Furthermore, inferential statistics, specifically Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson correlation, were used to determine the strength and significance of relationships between independent and dependent variables. Qualitative data, collected through focus group discussions, were analysed thematically, with findings organised into key themes that captured participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding career guidance. Subsequently, a convergent mixed methods approach was applied to integrate the quantitative and qualitative results, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of how school career guidance influences students’ career choice satisfaction. Overall, this analytical strategy enabled triangulation of findings, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the study’s conclusions. The study sought to

examine the relationship between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction using percentages. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS Version 27. Descriptive statistics involved percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations. The Analysis of Variance and Pearson correlation were used to determine correlations between independent and dependent variables. The data was analysed thematically and presented in themes. Gradually, the convergent Mixed method was applied.

Descriptive Statistics

Relationship between School Career Guidance and Career Choice Satisfaction

The study applied questionnaires and FGDs to collect responses from the respondents. The findings on the role of school career guidance on career choice satisfaction are discussed below:

Table 2: Relationship between School Career Guidance and Career Choice Satisfaction among Respondents

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>					
	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Maxi</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
The guidance I received during the school career day/ fair impacted my course selection	320	1	5	3.10	1.438
My subject teachers played an important role in guiding me	320	1	5	2.91	1.353
The career guidance teacher played an important role in guiding me	320	1	5	2.70	1.395
KUCCPS played an important role in guiding me	320	1	5	2.63	1.441
Valid N (listwise)	320				



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Table 2 presents information that the guidance received during the school career day/fair day highly contributed to career satisfaction among respondents (mean=3.10; SD=1.438). The satisfaction after career guidance may have resulted from information that's given on career academic requirements. This was followed by the role of subject teachers in influencing the students (mean=2.91; SD=1.353). According to the respondents, the subscale of career guidance teacher had (mean=2.70 SD=1.395), while KUCCPS had the lowest contribution to career choice satisfaction (mean=2.63; SD=1.441). Probably, this is because it is meant to provide sensitisation and information on career, qualifications and correspondence requirements, a task that it is yet to successfully implement. On the other hand, there are limited admission capacities and career options for the placement of students in universities and colleges, so

KUCCPS is only left with the option of taking those that are readily available.

Correlation Analysis

The study sought to find out about the correlation between school and career choice satisfaction among undergraduate university students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings indicated that school career guidance impacts students' satisfaction with their job choices. The hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction among undergraduate university students at selected universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Pearson correlation analysis was utilised to establish this association, and there was a statistically significant correlation between school career advice and career choice satisfaction, with the null hypothesis being rejected. The findings are presented in the table below:

Table 3: Correlation of School Career Guidance and Career Choice Satisfaction among Undergraduate University Students

Correlations

		School	Satisfaction Level
School	Pearson Correlation	1	.257**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	319	319
Satisfaction Level	Pearson Correlation	.257**	1



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Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	319	320

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the correlation in Table 3 above, the results showed that there was a weak positive and statistically significant correlation between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction ($p < 0.05$, $r = .257$). The results proved that school career guidance influences career choice satisfaction among students. There was a statistically significant $p (= .000 < \alpha (0.01))$ correlation between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction, with the null hypothesis being rejected.

In the qualitative study, one participant during the FGDs said:

“Specifically, my teacher of English was one man who motivated me to do English and literature. I enjoyed the way he taught, which was just well, and it was nice. And that’s how he became my role model. I knew that besides doing education, he was also a farmer. During holidays, he would farm for extra income, and I want to follow in his footsteps “(P05, Female student, public university, June 2024).

Another participant responded that, “Another factor that influenced how we chose our careers is where we were born. If the most educated person in my village is a teacher, and the rest are farmers. Our teachers and parents believe in defending our villages, our homeland. I think they have limited vision. In my case, had a passion for something that my teachers and parents could never support in Kenya, and that is entertainment I feel like I should do

something more like in music career or film industry but I believe that in a measure of 90 per cent, they will never and there is no way I can convince them that there is a musician who is flying with a private jet and that an individual in music industry can be successful”.(P08, Male student, public university, June 2024).

However, another respondent reported that: “Teachers feel that they know everything. For example, if one wanted to be a doctor, which is a dream from high school, but the teacher wonders how one can become a doctor or a pilot, it is so discouraging. Worse still, if the results come out against expectations, so that instead of scoring grade A, you end up attaining a C+ grade, and KUCCPS places you in a different career, this will lead to career confusion”. (P10, Male student, public university, June 2024).

Consequently, another participant said that, “I think KUCCPS as an organization is failing because according to their principle, they say it's an organization that should bring satisfaction while placing students in various courses and maybe I can add on other bodies like the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), you may find that even most of the students are not satisfied with their placement. I think they should reframe and restructure their organisations in a way that for example if a student fails and maybe wants to do a certain course they are given an option like doing another exam. Whether a



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student comes from a rural, urban, private or public school still KUCCPS should treat everyone without any favouritism”. (P16, Female student, public university, June 2024).

In support of the findings, one participant said;

“Forcing a child to do a certain course is not good at all. It's not good! It's not right! You know, forcing is like a rape, a rape case! Yes. Is it legal or illegal? Rape case is very illegal

in our country, isn't it? So that's just the same thing. Why force someone to do something she doesn't want? So, parents should allow the children to do what they want because if one is forced to do a course that he doesn't like, there is no gain in the end. Time will be wasted, and one can even fail since he is not passionate about it and a lack of support in schools also affects career choices in this way”. (P06, Male student, public university, June 2024).



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Discussions

From the correlation in Table 2 above, the results showed that there was a weak positive and statistically significant correlation between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction ($p < 0.05$, $r = 0.257$). The results proved that school career guidance influences career choice satisfaction among students. There was a statistically significant $p (=0.000 < \alpha$ (0.01 correlation between school career guidance and career choice satisfaction, with the null hypothesis being rejected.

These results were supported by Malik and Al-Emran's (2018) study results, which indicate that educators and advisors had a lot of influence on students' decisions to select a career in computer science. Kazi & Akhlaq (2017) looked into the variables influencing students' job decisions. The next most popular response (48%), to the statement was that they chose the field based on advice from their teachers. Teachers' increased confidence in their capability to be successful in their careers was cited as the fourth-highest cause (47%).

Similar findings were reported by Ngunjiri (2013), who carried out a study to assess secondary schools in Kiambu West District's preparation for career education. An individual assessment of these sessions with the learners showed that they lacked belief in being helpful nor had enough illustrations and resources for their concerns of career, even though approximately half of the sampled teachers (54.6%) saw that "attending to students' questions in career matters" in the career guidance department was the main activity. Although the career department's primary responsibility was to answer students' queries about careers, a more thorough examination of the data from instructors and students revealed that 87% of learners did not view the previous sessions, which took place within the previous year, to be rewarding or satisfying. The majority of the sampled instructors (98%) said they were not familiar with the vocation/career assessment tests (VAT), while 1% of them acknowledged having personally viewed these tools online. A small percentage of pupils (12%)

mentioned that they had used these internet-based tools before. Due to their lack of appreciation for crucial resources needed to carry out career education, these findings may indicate that, generally, teachers were disadvantaged in the subject. Forty per cent of other teachers seemed to admit outright that their lack of skills intimidated them.

The results agree with those of Abe and Chikoko (2020) where the second theme category (interpersonal effect) demonstrated the impact that teachers of STEM have on the students' career decision-making behaviour. The following information was reported by the 30 contestants (20%) who accepted the important influence of their educators in their professional decision-making: "Well, I taught myself during my high school years, but my teacher's influence made me more interested in STEM. My family didn't know what I was doing, they just wanted me to succeed," the student said. "My high school science teacher's advice strongly encouraged me to pursue science-related careers, which are my greatest passions."

Study findings from Kiambu County on the career placement effects of KUCCPS among undergraduate learners in public universities, which was conducted by Ndungu & Obae, R. (2020) used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (γ_{xy}), which was -0.75 and reported a very strong negative correlation. This indicates that the student was not placed in the course of their choice when they first applied; instead, they were placed in programs unrelated to their initial choice at KUCCPS. Consequently, there is a negative association. Of the students, 29.9% agreed and 55.5% disagreed that they had received enough information from KUCCPS on their degree program. While 31.7% agreed, the majority (56.2%) disputed that they got information from their school counsellor following KUCCPS criteria. Furthermore, the majority (74.0%) denied that the school's KUCCPS job information resources had an impact on their decision to pursue a degree, while 17.9% concurred. Siddiky & Akter



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(2021) state that students give teachers a lot of weight while deciding on a career (median=4.00).

Conclusions

This study provides compelling empirical evidence that school-based career guidance remains a critical determinant of students' career choice satisfaction. Structured interventions delivered during career days and fairs, as well as ongoing support from teachers and career guidance personnel, significantly shape students' confidence, clarity, and satisfaction with their chosen pathways. These findings reaffirm the centrality of proximal, relational, and contextually grounded guidance processes in enabling young people to make informed and meaningful career decisions. In contrast, the comparatively weak contribution of the government-mandated university placement agency signals a systemic disconnect between centralized placement mechanisms and students' lived aspirations, interests, and competencies. The implications are both practical and structural. First, reforms in university placement systems are urgently needed to shift from a predominantly bureaucratic allocation model toward a responsive, student-centred, and psychologically informed framework. Second, a coordinated, government-led ecosystem that integrates schools, career counsellors, higher education institutions, industry stakeholders, and families would strengthen alignment between learner competencies, labour market realities, and national development priorities. Inclusive engagement of students in course selection processes grounded in their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and evolving interests can significantly reduce dissatisfaction, programme switching, and attrition.

Within the context of Kenya's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC), these findings arrive at a pivotal moment. As CBC emphasizes talent identification, learner strengths, and individualized pathways, the need for robust, evidence-based career guidance structures becomes even more pronounced. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies (SAGAs), and allied institutions are therefore uniquely

positioned to institutionalize comprehensive guidance frameworks that are developmentally responsive, equity-driven, and aligned with 21st-century workforce demands. Beyond the Kenyan context, this study contributes to the global psychology of career development by illuminating how institutional structures, relational guidance processes, and policy environments intersect to shape career satisfaction among young learners. It advances scholarly understanding by underscoring that career choice satisfaction is not merely an individual cognitive outcome, but a socially constructed and systemically mediated process. Strengthening guidance ecosystems, therefore, is not only an educational priority but a psychological, economic, and social imperative for sustainable human capital development.

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