

## **Pushed Or Pulled? Factors That Influence Students' Choice to Study Food and Beverage Management Program**

Christine Kinyua (corresponding author)

Chuka University, P.O. Box 109 – 60400 Chuka, Kenya department of environmental research development

E-mail: [wshtine@gmail.com](mailto:wshtine@gmail.com) Telephone: +254 727578765

Dr. Rose W. Burugu,

Moi University, P.O. Box 3900 - 30100 Eldoret, Kenya department of hotel and hospitality management

E-mail: [rwburugu@gmail.com](mailto:rwburugu@gmail.com) Telephone: +254 750849536

### **Abstract**

An individual's career path depends on the choice of the program one chooses to study in college. The choice is influenced by many factors which may push or pull the student to settling for a particular program. Some students may choose a study program as a result of personal benefits it brings while others may settle for it because circumstances have forced them to do so. This paper examined factors that influence students' choice to study food and beverage management program which leads to a career in the hospitality industry. The target population for the study was students studying FBM program. Questionnaires were administered to a purposely chosen sample of 120 students from four selected colleges in Eldoret Town. The results showed that although students were to some extent pressured to pursue the FBM program, the ultimate reason behind their choice was the attraction they felt for the industry.

**Keywords:** hospitality industry, career decision, career choice, push factors, pull factors, study program

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

There is a wide variety of study programs in the universities and other institutions of higher learning that students can choose from. Among them there are many programs that have been tailored to suit students who want to pursue a career in the hospitality industry. There are countless opportunities for advancement and employment in hotels and lodging, cruise ships, airlines, restaurants, institutions among others. Careful thoughts ought to be given to the choice of a study program because it plays an important part in a student's life before and after graduation. For instance students who study food and beverage management are more likely to work in the food and beverage sector in the hospitality industry. It is not by chance that students choose a particular study program but there are many factors reasons that influence the decision.

Shar and Shah (2014) regard students as an important part of any nation and hence they should go through a process which imparts them with knowledge about the various career options and the

process of career selection. Shar and Shah refer to a study by Khan et al., (2011) which shows that students of South Asia region do not have any concept of career counselling while getting higher grade education and majority of them are not aware of their strength, aptitude and their talents. Such students can easily be swayed to study a program considering that they are not aware of their full potential and again they are denied a chance to explore their potential. For instance they can be won over by the stereotypes about certain fields being favorable for a particular gender or decisions made for them by the people in their lives such as parents, role model and any other influential persons. Therefore these students may not be in a position to match their strengths and talents to the make a choice of the program they desire to pursue.

The Kenyan scenario is almost similar where every year form four students choose the study programs they want to pursue in the university before sitting for their final Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE). Students are often provided with a list of study programs offered in various universities to act as a guide of while making a choice of their study program. During that exercise little information is provided about various programs and many students are likely to make their choices blindly. Due to lack of adequate information regarding various study programs, students' choices are embedded in their perception of an ideal job and the subjects they study in secondary school. The only support students get within the school is from career masters or counselors and teachers who guide the students in making a choice (Kochung and Migunde, 2011). All this is done with the hope that a student will achieve the minimum required entry points for the chosen programs. The results of the KCSE determines who studies what program in the university. Even if a student does not achieve a grade that can secure them admission to study in the university, the grade achieved is a major consideration in getting admitted for any study program in the institutions of higher learning. Uninformed decisions may lead to students becoming miserable later in their careers since the choice of the study program to a great extent determines the career that a student pursues in their life.

Apart from the secondary school grade attained, Korir and Wafula (2012) state that there other several factors that influence one's career choice including personality, cultural background, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and existing resources such as information and finances. Each of these factors create different perceptions about various careers and either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation or both motivations is enhanced on individual students in the choice of the career they find desirable. With reference to the discussion above, the choice of a study program usually begins in the early stages of an adult's life particularly when students are about to graduate from high school. These students may have only a vague notion of their future career paths but various factors may push or pull them towards their career. It is against this background that the researcher finds it important to investigate factors that influence students' choice to study food and beverage management program.

### **1.1 Problem of the Study**

The significance of hospitality industry to the Kenyan economy has continuously motivated institutions of higher learning to offer hospitality programs that help in providing trained and qualified human resources for the industry. The underlying forces behind the decision of students to

pursue programs like food and beverage management by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) is blurred as a result of scanty research articulating the factors that push or pull the students to study the program.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed to examine the factors that influence students' choice to study food and beverage management program. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the most influential push factor in students' choice to study FBM program?
2. What is the most influential pull factor in students' choice to study FBM program?
3. Which is the most influential factor in the choice of FBM program by gender?
4. Which is the overall most influential factor in students' choice to study FBM program?

## **2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

For our existence to be prosperous in this contemporary world, countless choices have to be made to solve various problems that we encounter. Such choices are about the schools we attend, the programs we study and the career path we undertake. The latter is paramount in our lives since it helps us in meeting all our needs and it is almost a lifetime practice. Wrong career choice can make one to be miserable and therefore exhaustive career planning and research needs to be done to match the evolving socio-economic conditions (Wattles, 2009). In the same light (Fabea, 2014) sees career as a lifetime experience, which enables individuals to earn money or to get all their needs provided. This shows how career is relevant in our lives and therefore, the need for career choice becomes quite obvious. Bearing this in mind, students need to be well informed about their career choices.

### **2.1 Push factors**

One of the push factors is an individuals' family members such as parents, siblings or other close contacts. The interaction with these people fuels the determination a student has for the study program they want to pursue which determines their career. According to Gostein (2000), parents influence their children's career choice in a number of ways which include direct inheritance, the provision of apprenticeship and role models. This study was later held up by Taylor in (2004) who found out that parental support and encouragement were important factors that influenced career choice. However, the study further revealed that, children may choose what their parents want simply to please them. Fabea (2014) stated that such an individual enters that career for the parents denying themselves which may render him incomplete in the career. In such as case the student has no strong objection to the choice being made for him/her, and this leads to condemnation to a career which they are not suited. Gostein (2000) mentions that the parents may motivate their child to take up a career which always interested them but never got to do thus, parents feel accomplished through their children. The study further stated that students may find it easier to take up their family business than to pursue a different career. Such students view the family business as inheritance that is passed from one generation to another. These claims were upheld in a research by

Kochung and Migunde (2011) which indicated that students' career objectives are often influenced by their family's aspiration.

Another push factor is an individuals' academic ability. Some students may desire to study a certain program but then their academic qualification limits them. This affects their career paths because they are left with no option other than the programs that suit their academic ability (Beggs et al., 2008). In other words some students are forced to pursue a career that they really did not want but the circumstances surrounding their academic ability pushes them to. Most of the study programs are designed to match a potential student's intelligence so that they can easily excel in their field of study. The preceding academic level is usually like an aptitude test to determine the suitability of a student for a given study program. For instance scientific fields requires people with high intelligence who can be able to handle tasks with greater reasoning requirements.

Other push factors are as a result of factors that are within the environment that a student was brought up and grows in and usually individuals have no control over them. For instance some cultures have a perception that some careers suit one gender better than the other. Female students tends to study programs that will lead to the careers that are thought to be suitable for women and vice versa. Greenwood (1999) affirms that it is not unusual to find men and women in stereotypical job fields. It is also very common for a person with a good previous experience in a career to consider going to school. This move is driven by the challenges they face when new recruits seem to be a threat to their career advancement. In order to compete well and increase chances of promotion at work they tend to advance in their studies to sharpen their skills. In addition, employers want to retain employees who have a wide knowledge of their field and are up-to-date with the current trends.

## **2.2 Pull Factors**

Interest in hospitality industry builds as individual student grows up. During various growth stages, some students discover who they are and realize what they want in life. They also envision the best way to achieve the goals in their life. Such students usually have a clear picture of their dream job and their every effort is geared towards realizing the dream which include the study program they pursue. Though the amount of money to be earned is matter that many students are concerned about, students with an interest in hospitality career are usually not influenced by salary and benefits. The desire to work in the hospitality industry is what commands their decision. This is supported by Beggs et al., (2008) who found that interest was more important in career choice than job characteristics, psychological and social benefits.

Peers tend to share similarities such as age and social status and are likely to influence one another's beliefs and behaviors. At one pint of their lives, young adults are involved in a rigorous process of career decision making which may be influenced by the information and degree of persuasion from their peers. A study by Natalie (2006) revealed that by interaction with school and community, students learn and discover careers which eventually lead to their career choice. The study contradicts research findings by (O'Mahony et al., 2001) which indicated that peer and knowledgeable adults influence was very low in students' choice of hospitality career.

Many students are very concern with availability of jobs in their field of interest. It is getting harder to get a job at entry level since employers are becoming choosy while searching for new employees. They are more attracted to those with experience (Lee, 2008). Students want to study in the field that is likely to absorb them as soon as they graduate. They do not want to wait for long before landing a job in their field of study which increases the likelihood of opting for a job that is outside their field for the sake of paying the bills. Attending career fairs is one of the ways students can learn about potential opportunities and employers in their chosen fields. Herren et al., (2011) states that companies try to influence the student's career decisions by showing them the benefits they would enjoy for working with them. This is exactly what students need to hear in order for them to choose a suitable study program for the career.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Four middle level colleges in Eldoret town were involved. The target population comprised of students studying Kenya National Examination Council food and beverage management program. Purposive sampling was used to select the four colleges. A total of 120 students were involved in the study where 30 students were randomly selected to fill the questionnaires from each college.

### **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Demographic profile of the respondents**

The number of female students was higher (75%) than that of males (25%). A chi-square test showed that  $\chi^2(1) = 30.000$ ,  $p = 0.000$  which indicated that  $p < 0.05$  and therefore a significant difference. This significant difference in gender distribution can be attributed to the fact that female students have more desire to work in the hospitality industry than their counterparts (Chuang and Dellmann, 2010). Most of the respondents (92%) were between the age brackets of 18-22 years which shows that most of the students were young and energetic. The rest of the respondents were above 22 years but less than 28 years. The booster subject studied by respondents in high school, 45% studied Home Science, 40% studied Business Studies, 11% studied Agriculture and the remaining 4% studied other subjects. There was a significant difference in the booster subject studied with most of the students having studied Home Science which is an indication that they possibly projected an F&B career path as depicted by  $\chi^2(3) = 60.467$ ,  $p = 0.000$ .

#### **4.2 Most influential push factor**

The results of the study showed that the most influential push factor was the students' need to advance in education so as to increase chances of promotion at work. Fifty six percent (56%) of the respondents stated that this factor had great influence in their choice to study food and beverage management, 21% indicated no influence while 23% stated the influence was neutral. The choice of students was not as a result of family members influence as clearly indicated by 59% of the respondents stating that family members had no influence. The remaining 13% indicated that family members had great influence in their choice while 28% stated that the influence of family members was neutral. This means that many students made individual decisions without any family

involvement. These finding of concur with that of a study by Korir and Wafula (2012) where respondents disagreed that family tradition dictated their career choice. The KCSE grade had little influence with 9% of the respondents indicating it had great influence on their choice. Majority of the respondents 70% stated that this attribute had no influence on their choice while 21% were neutral. This trend can be attributed to the fact that entry grade for all KNEC study programs is the same (KNEC, 2017). The attribute that the respondents found no other program to suit them better in their college had the least influence with only 3% indicating that it had great influence on their choice, 24% indicated neutral and 73% stated that it had no influence at all.

**Table 1: Influence of Push Factors on Respondents**

Push Factors	No influence		Neutral		Great influence	
	F	Percent	F	Percent	F	percent
Family members	71	59%	34	28%	15	13%
KCSE grade	84	70%	25	21%	11	9%
Increase chances of promotion at work	25	21%	28	23%	67	56%
No other course suited me better than FBM in my college	87	73%	29	24%	4	3%

### 4.3 Most influential pull factor

Availability of job opportunities was the most influential pull factor with 71% of the respondents stating that it greatly influenced their choice to study the program. Seven percent (7%) stated that job opportunity did not have influence in their choice while 22% remained neutral on the same. These results were similar to a study by Korir and Wafula (2012) who found that job prospects in F&B sector are an opportunity factor that students attempt to grab. Generally, chances of landing employment has become a major point of reference for students when choosing a study program due to the tough economic age. The second most influential pull factor was the respondents' passion for the hospitality industry with 69% asserting that the aspiration greatly influenced their choice. Ten percent (10%) asserted that a desire for F&B sector had no influence and 21% did not take sides. A study by Chuang and Dellmann (2010) showed similar results where passion for the industry was regarded as a high motivator for pursuing a hospitality career. This is good news for the industry where willingness to serve plays a major role in the success of organizations. Respondents' friends working in the hospitality industry took a third position with 59% affirming that they were attracted to the industry by their friends. The proof by friends could have erased all the bad perceptions they might have had about the industry, making it more attractive. Their friends' way of life made the industry seem so attractive. For the remaining portion of the respondents 20% stated that they were not influenced by their friends while 21% were remained

neutral. Plans to be an entrepreneur in the hospitality industry had the least influence on the respondents with 9% indicating that the vision influenced them, 33% were neutral and 58% were not influenced at all despite the fact that the industry is not capital intensive.

**Table 2: Influence of Pull Factors on Respondents**

Pull Factors	No influence		Neutral		Great influence	
	F	percent	f	percent	F	percent
Passionate about F&B industry	12	10%	25	21%	83	69%
Job opportunities	9	7%	26	22%	85	71%
Friends in F&B industry	24	20%	25	21%	71	59%
Plans to be an entrepreneur in F&B	70	58%	39	33%	11	9%

#### 4.4 Most influential factor by gender

An independent sample t-test was carried out to compare factors that influence the choice to study the food and beverage management program in male and female students. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the influence of family members for male students ( $M=1.23$ ,  $SD=0.43$ ) and female students ( $M=1.66$ ,  $SD=0.77$ );  $t(118) = -2.864$ ,  $p= 0.005$ . Specifically the results suggested that the influence of family members was more in female students than in their male counterparts. On the other hand, passion for hospitality industry had significantly more influence in male students ( $M=2.87$ ,  $SD=0.51$ ) compared to females ( $M=2.50$ ,  $SD=0.69$ );  $t(118) = 2.67$ ,  $p=0.009$ . Since most of the skills applied in the hospitality industry are considered feminine, these findings differed with Greenberger (2002) who indicated that boys seemed to be more directed to manly jobs.

**Table 3: Results of Independent Sample t-test for Influential Factors vs. Gender**

Variables	Male students	Female students	t-value	p-value
Family members	1.23	1.66	-2.864	0.005
KCSE grade	1.33	1.41	-0.564	0.574
Furthering studies	2.17	2.41	-1.445	0.151

No better program	1.30	1.29	0.103	0.918
Passion for F&B industry	2.87	2.50	2.673	0.009
Job opportunities	2.47	2.69	-1.712	0.090
Friends in FBM	2.20	2.46	-1.519	0.131
Entrepreneurial plan	1.53	1.50	0.238	0.812

#### 4.5 Overall most influential factor

The study conducted a paired sample t-test to determine whether there was a difference between the means of push and pull factors. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two factors since the  $p$  value was less than 0.05;  $t(119) = -12.443$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The sample statistics notably revealed that the students were pulled to study FBM program since the mean value of the pull factors was greater  $M = 2.26$  than that of the push factors  $M = 1.65$ . It is also important to note that the two sets of responses had a low degree of correlation ( $r = 0.058$ ,  $p = 0.527$ ). This means that the push and pull factors under study influenced the students choice independently but not in a synchronized manner.

**Table 4: Results of Paired Sample t-test for the Overall Most Influential**

		Statistics		Correlation		Test		
		Mean	SD	Correlation	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Pair 1	Push	1.65	0.436	0.058	0.527	-12.443	119	0.000
	Pull	2.28	0.377					

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the students might have been pressured to pursue the program as a result of several factors, the definitive reason behind their choice was the attraction they felt for the industry. It is relief for the hospitality industry which relies heavily on commitment of the workforce for efficiency since most of the students chose and favored hospitality careers even though there were numerous options. The pool of job opportunities in Kenya seems to be shrinking endlessly and sadly, majority of the students were not influenced to study FBM to gain skills that would help them become entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry despite the numerous entrepreneurial opportunities the industry offers. The study therefore recommends constant encouragement and exposure from successful hospitality entrepreneurs so that the students can be mentored into becoming employers in the industry in addition to incorporation of entrepreneurial courses in the program.



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