

Factors Affecting on Students' Preference on Choosing Academic Track for Higher Education in Pokhara

***Pusparaj Timilsina**

ABSTRACT

The students joining higher education undergo various confusions while selecting academic track for their further studies. Students who pass the tenth grade are supposed to join the subject of their interest in grade eleven or intermediate level which will be the fundamental course for their higher education ahead. Grade eleven is the main entry point for students to establish their future in the higher education. Higher education in Nepal starts from bachelor level but students are supposed to identify their major subject starting from grade eleven. It seems that SEE graduates tend to select the major subject while joining higher education depending on various aspects like intelligence of a person, the interest towards that subject, family, peer pressure, social inputs, guidance from teachers, etc. Family (57.47%) is the major agent to assist students to take decisions for choosing the academic track while joining grade eleven. 92.52% students were not forced but 7.4% students were forced by the parents to choose the major subjects for higher education. It is surprising that 59.19% students wish to go abroad for university level education. The children joining senior high school need to be provided career guidance and counseling before choosing and handling major academic track for their higher education.

Keywords: *Academic track, guidance, higher education, intelligence, motivation*

INTRODUCTION

Intelligence is often defined as our intellectual potential; something we are born with, something that can be measured, and a capacity that is difficult to change. In recent years, however, other views of intelligence have emerged. One such conception is the theory of multiple intelligences proposed by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardener (Susman, 2021). In the context of Nepal becoming one of grade 11 students, they must be ready to decide for their future, it is very important for the students of what will they choose for their higher education. There is fluctuation in number of students in various subjects in higher education

coming from the past to the present scenario. Students in technical courses are increasing and theory based subjects are facing the lack of students in recent years. This research paper is the answer to the quest to find the reasons of the questions related to the fluctuations in the number of students varying from subject to subject as well as the factors motivating students to choose certain academic track for higher education.

An individual's success depends upon the effort he/she makes to complete the desired task. People can be influenced by the various factors while they have to choose certain things in their life. Students in Nepal are supposed to choose their academic track after they complete their Secondary Education Examination at grade ten. Students choose various subjects depending on the several reasons being led by the psychological and social factors. The leading educationists and the critics believe that multiple intelligence theory of Howard Gardner can be employed while analyzing the students' mentality for joining some specific course. The critics further argue that Gardner's definition of intelligence is too broad and that his eight different "intelligences" simply represent talents, personality traits, and abilities in brief. Gardner's theory also suffers from a lack of supporting empirical research.

The literature review is an important part of analysis that contributes valuable roles during the process of research work. The most important role of review is to generate and collect the ideas from the previous studies in the related literature as evidence to the present study. There are factors that could affect grade 10 students in choosing specific academic track in the academic when they have to join grade 11. This research implies with the factors that may affect those grade ten pass out students that help them in choosing academic track for their career. This research revealed that Nepalese students rely heavily on their family's decision-making.

Students cope by following their parents' advice. They also have to cope with an expectation of financially supporting the family upon completing their education. Studies from other Asian countries also show parents' impact is decision making of students when it comes to students' course preference. It is explained that academics should be integrated with career-focused courses so students can see practical application for the academic courses such as science, maths, management, CTEVT courses, etc.

According to online blog article by Angerman, family background is one of the major factors to examine for those who seek career guidance. When talking about "family background" issues, the extent of influence of the parents and the extended family has on the person in at focus – both at positive and negative ways. This includes the place where he grew

up, the economic realities facing the family, illness, the countries of origin, among others (Angerman, 2009). So, directly or indirectly family has played the decisive role in leading the students to decide their academic track for higher education.

Gardner (2013) asserts that regardless of which subject you teach – “the arts, the sciences, history, or math” –you should present learning materials in multiple ways. Gardner goes on to point out that anything you are deeply familiar with” you can describe and convey in several ways.

Students are found to be motivated to learn when they think that school activities are meaningful. (Brophi, 1988 in Woolfolk, 2014). Woolfolk continues by arguing:

“When Ball (1987) observed over 200 students at secondary schools, low interest in the subject itself was the most common explanation for school failure. When students themselves were asked to explain why they succeeded, interest was the most frequent explanation” (Brophi, 1988 in Woolfolk, 2014).

There are some studies of motivation and interest for Social Sciences, but they cover only limited motivational factors. Students in campuses and universities are interested in Social Sciences because these subjects could be related to themselves and how the world has influenced them. Educational systems have a strong tendency towards legitimizing the existing social and political order. It is therefore important to examine whether critical perspectives are articulated at all, and exactly what students are encouraged to criticize. (Apple & Gadding, 2009)

Covington and Mueller (2001) made the observation in her dissertation from Sweden; students in schools turn away from global environmental challenges because the problems are overwhelming. There is thus an urgent need to examine more closely, which makes social sciences and other subjects less motivating to students.

In a globalized world students are interested in the big questions and issues, and social sciences probably offer better opportunities to stimulate this than many other subjects do (Oia, 1995). According to Boyer (1987), “in taking a course, one of the life’s major decisions is being made. A lot of time, money, and effort will be involved. The shape and excellence of the student’s life may rest on the result.” It is very difficult for each student to decide the course that they are going to take for their future as it may bring a long time effect in their life.

Student motivation for schooling in general seems to decrease with increasing age (Skaalvik & Skaalvi, 2009; 2011; Ministry of Education and Research, 2011; 2013). In line with this, it is natural to think that students may be less motivated in subjects and content that they see as less meaningful to their self-building project. Thus, various studies has already

been conducted regarding the role of multiple intelligences in the children while they decide for some kind of specific tasks like to choose the subject of their interest for higher education. The grade-10 students are now having their choices that they may choose according to their personal interest, which is very common to take. It equips the students with the knowledge and skills to pursue a better life.

There are factors that could affect grade-10 students in choosing a strand in the academic when they become a senior high school students, there is certain connection with the demographic profiles of the Grade-10 students. This research paper has tried to include the literature related to Howard Gardner's 'Multiple Intelligences'. In this research work various types of intelligences are presented on the basis of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. These are as follows:

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; Interpersonal intelligence; Logical –mathematical intelligence; Musical intelligence; Naturalistic intelligence; Verbal-linguistic intelligence; Visual –spatial intelligence; Analytical intelligence; Creative intelligence and Practical intelligence

According to the article posted by Adecco (2015), a part of a Swiss multinational human resource consulting company of the same name, states that it is worth the increasing of employers utilizing personality and psychometric testing procedures to analyze the employee's attributes beyond qualifications. It stated in the article "choosing a job to which an individual is inherently suited – rather than just able to convince the interviewer that he/she is interested in the position – will make him/her a happier, more productive employee." From this we can derive a point that the students' career decision-making is most deeply affected by personal factor rather than the school or family factors. The main objective of this study is to assess the factors affecting on students choice of academic track for higher education.qq

DATA AND METHOS

This research work is conducted on students' motivation for choosing the subject that they are studying now. This research also focuses both internal and external factors of students which directly and indirectly effect on their selection of subject. The data were collected from the six different colleges in Pokhara valley including the 174 students from various streams like science, management, law, humanities, education and CTEVT courses. As a researcher I had a direct communication and contact with those grade 11 students in their classroom after I received a permission from the concerned college.

Field visit and questionnaire were the major research instruments for data collection. The primary data were received from the questionnaire and secondary data were received from the concerned college records. While preparing the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a mini survey in a few number of students to find the relevant factors that play major role to students while choosing the specific academic track for higher education.

The questionnaire included both the open and close ended questions were also interrelated to each other. In case of difficulty in understanding, the respondents had a chance to understand the questions be explained by the researcher. Firstly, the researcher obtained a permission from the college authority to conduct his research tasks among the students of concerned colleges. Secondly, he /she explained the purpose of collection the responses and the use of outcome from the research work. Thirdly, the questionnaire forms were distributed among the students and collected once they completed. Sufficient time was allocated for the students to fill up their responses.

The validity and reliability were cross-checked by comparing their responses analyzing the overall answers that they gave. It is also noted that some students didn't even want to answer certain questions being unwilling to reveal their family and personal issues.

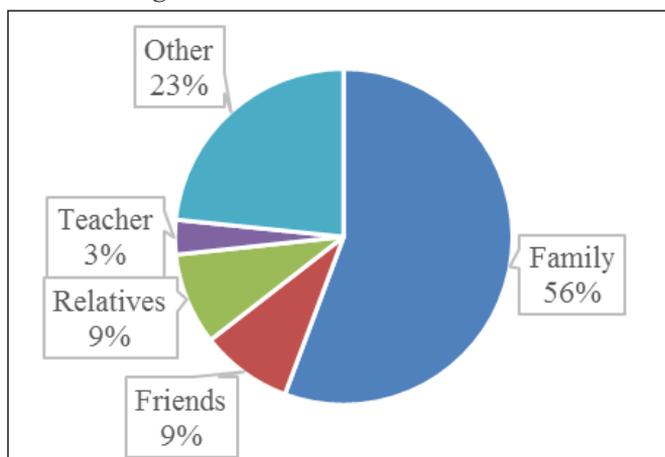
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents of this research were on going grade 11 students who recently joined that course. Students from various subjects like science, management, CTEVT, law, humanities and education were participated. Total 174 students were asked to fill up the questionnaire form and 47 were from science, 45 from management, 43 from CTEVT, 9 from humanities, 15 from education and 15 from law background. They were asked total 17 questions related to their study and family background and income level. All the participants were recently enrolled in grade 11 course in various subjects in the year 2022 AD. The participants are the 15-17 year old teenagers who have just started grade 11. The participants are from different six colleges in Pokhara valley. The survey was conducted through purposive sampling by taking at least one section of that college so students from various streams would be represented. The received data were analyzed through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The dependent and independent variables are analyzed on basis of their relationship and the effects that they cause.

Table 1*Factors that Motivated Students to Choose Academic Track in Grade 11*

Title	Science (47)	Management (45)	CTEVT (43)	Humanities (9)	Education (15)	Law (15)	Total (174)
Family	30(63.82%)	16 (35.55%)	28(65.11%)	4(44.44%)	12(80%)	10(66.66%)	100(57.47%)
Friends	4(8.51%)	5(11.11%)	4(9.30%)	1(11.11%)	0	2(13.33%)	16(9.19%)
Relatives	2(4.25%)	0	4(9.30%)	1(11.11%)	1(6.66%)	2(13.33%)	16(9.19%)
Teacher	4(8.51%)	0	0	1(11.11%)	1(6.66%)	0	6(3.44%)
Other	7(14.89%)	24(53.33%)	7(16.27%)	2(22.22%)	1(6.66%)	1(6.66%)	42(24.13%)

Table 1 shows that out of 174 students, 100 students decided what to join being motivated from the family members i.e. 57.47%, whereas, the least motivating factor was teacher having only 3.44%. The second motivational factor was other/self which was 24.13% followed by friends and relatives 9.19% and 5.74% respectively. If we see the individual subject, students learning science got inspired the most having 63.82% from family and the least was 4.25% from relatives. Surprisingly, no management students had been motivated from relatives or teacher, however, they were inspired by other/self (53.33%) to join management course in grade 11. Students in CTEVT courses were also inspired most by the family having 65.11% which was the highest percent as motivation factor in the above given chart.

Figure 1*Motivating Factors in Choosing Academic Track in Grade 11*

The pie-chart presents the data of how much different factors played roles on choosing the specific subject in grade eleven. Out of Total 174 respondents, the highest percent (56%) students were motivated by family whereas the least motivating factor was found (3%) is a teacher who taught them up to grade ten. Other/self-category falls in second position i.e. 23%.

Surprisingly, the factors like relatives and friends both are 9% each. It shows family was the vital factor in choosing the specific subject in grade 11.

Table 2

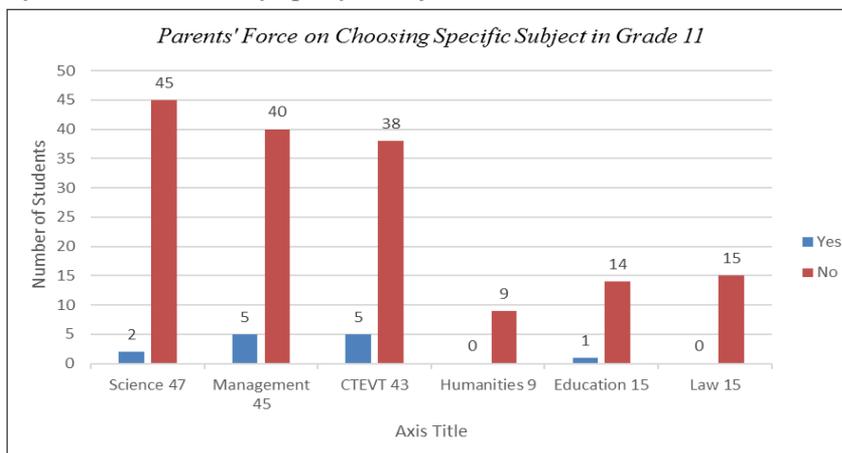
Parents' Force on Choosing Specific Academic Track in Grade 11

Streams	Yes (%)	No (%)
Science (47)	2 (4.25)	45 (95.74)
Management (45)	5 (11.11)	40 (88.88)
CTEVT (43)	5 (11.62)	38 (88.37)
Humanities (9)	0 (0)	9 (100)
Education (15)	1 (6.66)	14 (93.33)
Law (15)	0 (0)	15 (100)
Total (174)	13 (7.47)	161 (92.52)

This table presents whether the parents forced their children to choose specific subject in class 11 or not. The data show that Students who joined Humanities and Law were fully motivated to join such courses in grade 11 by themselves. However, the students studying in 1st year in CTEVT courses were forced (11.62%) the most to join that course which was followed by management students with 11.11%. Only 4.25% students responded that they were forced by the parents to join science subject in grade 11 but 6.66% students were forced to join Education faculty. Out of 174 students only 13 students were forced to join specific subject in grade 11 against their interest, whereas, 161 (92.52%) students were given priority on their personal interest on joining certain subject.

Figure 2

Parental Preference on Choice of Specific Subjects in Grade 11



Students see both opportunities and challenges in all the subjects that they are currently studying. When the students were asked the reasons of choosing the specific subject for their carrier they replied in different perspectives. Some of the responses given by the students are as follows:

I see a lots of oppourtunities in this field like I can be a doctor, nurse, engineer, government employee and many others. After completing this course I want to join forestry for further education. But this course is very difficult to complete if we don't give our full time and focus (S1 from Science).

We can get various opportunities. At first we can get knowledge about business and other organization. Also we can get various opportunities in job. We can get motivation on business and other sector like market, bank, accounting, etc. But we can face many difficulties while completing this course like difficulties to understand as well as hard numerical problem. We should give much time to understand for further success (S2 from Management).

Similarly, job opportunities, easy to go to foreign country, self-employment but complicated course (S3 from CTEVT).

We can easily go abroad, we can easily get job and if we don't get any job, we can do social work. I don't see any difficulties to complete this course (S4 from Humanities and Social Science).

I can become a teacher, go in public service commission, and receive knowledge, to change the society. There are problems to complete the course due to difficult curriculum, homely problems, difficult to learn in English and unable to manage time (S5 from Education).

I am studying this course to become independent, to become a lawyer and also live with respect. But this course is not easily available everywhere and need to come from long distance to attend Law classes (S6 from Law).

Overall, the results are remarkably supportive that parental factor has significant effect on choosing what strand they will be able to decide. The findings show that majority of students are affected by school, family and personal factors. Family (57.47%) is the major agent to assist students to take decisions for choosing the subject and teacher (3.44%) is the least priority agent for motivating students on choosing subjects in higher education.

From the data analysis we conclude that 92.52% students were not forced but 7.4% students were forced by the parents to choose the major subjects for higher education. Almost

45.97% students were guided by the teacher to find the suitable course whereas 52.87% responded they did not receive any help while going for certain course in grade 11. While observing the mentality of the students to shift their current course to another course for university education, 12.06% students want to shift in another course in the near future. From the perspective of job availability, 12.68% students are not sure to get a job in Nepal after completing the course.

It is surprising that 59.19% students wish to go abroad for university level education as they think education in Nepal is not based on day to day practice and also does not help for income generation. Maximum 23.40% students from science have more than 8 lakh annual family income, but no one from humanities and law are in this category. This data shows that, most of the parents who have good income and belong to good professions motivate their children to choose science.

It can be concluded that students' career success can be best attained if the right strand suited to their personality, ability and intellect serves as their guide in taking the course for higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is dedicated to present and discuss the findings regarding the factors that affect students' preference on choosing academic track for higher education. Having both the qualitative and quantitative data together, this study has unpacked the reasons which motivated students while choosing major subjects for higher education. Family decision is found major factor for students to choose science or CTEVT courses, however, management, law, education and humanities students are found self-motivated while deciding the subject for future. It is recommended that the children joining senior high school need to be provided career guidance in choosing and handling certain decisions making with the help of the three factors such as personal, family and school factor. As a student, it is not important to depend on other's decision in choosing an academic strand, so, it is recommended that students can choose wisely as they can so that they will not suffer when they become a university student. This study further recommends career counseling education to enable students make informed decisions. Students need career guidance to assist them in their choice.

REFERENCES

- Angerman, (2009). *Career choices based on family preferences or background*. Online blog
- Apple M., Au W. & Ganding L.A. (2009). *Mapping critical education*, in Apple M., Au., & Gandin L.A. (Eds) *The Rutledge International*. Rutledge
- Boyer, E. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. Harper and Row. Web.
- Covington, M.V. & Mueller, K. J. (2001). Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation: An approach avoidance reformulation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13,157-176
- Gardner, H. (2013). Frequently asked questions-Multiple intelligences and related educational topics.
- Oia, T. (1995). *Apolitisk ungdom*. Cappelen publishing
- Oxford Research, Kristiansand. Retrieved from: http://www.udir.no/Upload/Rapporter/5/Elevundersokelsen_2008.pdf?epslanguage=no
- Skaalvik, E.M. & Skaalvik, S. (2011). Making up pupils. *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*.(6)
- Woolfolk, A. (2014). *Pedagogisk psykologi*. Fagbokforlaget.