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Parents' Economic Status and Undergraduate Selected Courses in Private Universities in Western Uganda. A Case Study of Kampala International University Western Campus

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*Socioeconomic Status,
Undergraduate Selection
of Courses,
Parents' Income Level,
Parents' Education Level,
Parents' Occupation.*

This study assessed the effect of Parents' socioeconomic status on undergraduate selection of courses in Private Universities in Western Uganda, with a case of KIU Western Compass. The study was guided by the following specific objectives: (i) to determine the effect of parents' income level on undergraduate selection of courses by University students at KIU, western campus, The study adopted cross-sectional survey design for quantitative approach. The study considered 205 students of Kampala International University. Quantitative data was analysed using linear regression using SPSS version 25. The study found out that parents' income level had a strong positive significant relationship between Parents' income level and undergraduate selection of courses since the p-value is less than 0.05. The study recommends that students from lower-income backgrounds may prioritize majors that they perceive to have more immediate economic value, such as those leading directly to a specific job or career path, rather than majors in the liberal arts or humanities, which may be seen as less practical.

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INTRODUCTION

The major function of higher education especially in advanced 'knowledge-intensive' economies has been developing graduate employability and enhancing social and economic prosperity of different countries over the last three decades. Evidence has shown that prospective entrants to higher institutions of learning choose to complete an undergraduate degree to enhance their employability and career prospect (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

Globally, in Bangladesh it was established that career planning plays an important role in enabling students to achieve their desired career aspiration and achieve successes in their career (Siddiky & Akter, 2021). It helps them to make suitable course choices and undertaking necessary strategies to accomplish their career aspirations.

In United States, Niu (2017) assert that students that come from families with low social economic background are usually disadvantaged in the pursuit of science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses as compared to those coming from families with high social economic status. The findings further reveal that the higher social economic status compensates for negative predictors of these courses' enrolment such as gender and racial gaps. In Malaysia, the influence of social economic status among matriculation students on their choice of undergraduate program (Misran *et al.*, 2012). This study revealed that low social economic status students have stronger determination to pursue their studies at tertiary level as compared to those of the higher social economic status.

A study conducted by Van de Werfhorst *et al.* (2003) assumed that students take their parents' social positions as a reference for their own choices and are guided mainly by the amount of economic and social capital that is available within the family. Using longitudinal data from 1958, empirical evidence showed that students

from high social class backgrounds achieved a higher standard in both humanities and science. The same study further revealed that students from professional class were relatively likely to choose prestigious subjects of medicine and law at university, independent of ability.

Proctor *et al.* (2023) noted that parents will support their children in choosing Courses that will increase their reputation and recognition in society. A study conducted in Kwara State Nigeria indicated that the parents' socioeconomic class dictates the course choice of undergraduate students. Parents will support their children in choosing courses that will increase their reputation and recognition in society. The study further revealed that there was no significant difference in the influence of parents' social economic status on course choice based on their educational background, occupation and age.

In East Africa especially Tanzania, families with high level of education beginning at secondary school significantly influenced course choice of their children, and there was a tendency of children to choose professions similar to those of their parents (Budhrani *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the influence of biological parents was highly greater than that from relatives.

In East Africa, there was a very high negative correlation between parenting style and student course choice. However, the same study reveals a statistically significant relationship between parent occupation and student course choice and parent social economic status (Dagawa, 2015). Coupe (2020) submits that socio-economic factors are a component of lifestyle and a measure of both financial viability and social status. These can also be attributed to the family background of the parents (current income of the family), the current occupation of the parents (s), the parent's highest educational level and the standing associated with their occupation.

Statement of the Problem

Parents involvement in selection of course, participation in events or activities, and interacting teachers/lecturers provide learning resources or information about their student's grades (Zulaikah et al., 2023). Ideally, the most important factors that influences a student's selection of courses include educational achievements, prospects of higher benefits, passion, career counsellors, teachers and role models. Selection of best choice is a critical element in determining an individual's daily routine, life activities, standard of living; and the spiritual and social aspects of life (Nyamwange, 2016). Currently different course choices for students are always not the right ones, not to the standard and have no big impact on students' profession (Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). Many undergraduate students have their choice of university programmes influenced by their parents and this in turn results into most of them being ill fitted to such courses, gradually become dissatisfied on such jobs leading to low morale with attendant productivity (Odiri, 2022).

In Kampala International University-Western compass, 72.1% of the students study the offered courses that are selected by their parents (Kampala International University Review, 2018). This has resulted to many students missing out of graduation for instance in 2020, 203 students out of 536 did not graduate, in 2021, almost 26.7% dropped their selected courses because of being ill fitted and loss of morale, in 2022, estimated 42.8% lacked their desire to continue with the selected courses and 235 did not graduate. According to Kampala International University Quarterly report (2023), estimated 51% of the students performed poorly with retakes because they took courses selected by their parents. If this trend continues, very many students will not get anticipated jobs, there would be high levels of students' drops out as well as SDG 4 "quality education" would be compromised.

Several related studies have been conducted such as Jamabo (2014) studied relationship between

parents social-economic variables and adolescent vocational aspirations, Sidik and Satrianto (2020) conducted effect of parents; socio- economic status on student interests continuing post graduate education. None of the studies have given concredited cause but it anticipated selection of courses depends on parents' social-economic status. Basing on this background, it was very paramount to study the determinants of the relationship between Parents' social-economic status and undergraduate selection of courses in Private Universities in Western Uganda.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between Parents' social-economic status and undergraduate selection of courses in Private Universities in Western Uganda.

Specific Objectives

- To determine the relationship between parents' income level and undergraduate selection of courses at KIU-western campus.

Research Hypothesis

H₀ There is a statistically significant relationship between parents' social-economic status and undergraduate selected courses of students in Kampala International University Western Campus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effect of Parents' Level of Income on Undergraduate Selection of Course of University Students

In a quantitative logistic regression analysis by these researchers on admission data from Philippine's largest and foremost state University- the University of the Philippines, it was revealed that there is an income advantage not only in terms of admission but also in being admitted to the applicants' first choice course. The study further reveals that students from top 3 income categories had higher probabilities of being admitted (Rosinger et al., 2021). This also applies in Uganda where income levels determine the course choice of a child/ student at undergraduate level

which the researcher will establish whether this exists in Private Universities in Uganda. Parental financial concerns and expectations directly or indirectly influences the course choices of their children by adding their biases and attitudes into particular occupational fields (Mbabazi et al., 2023).

Monaheng (2023) conducted a descriptive survey in Niger Delta University of the Dayelsa State Nigeria and the study findings revealed that parental level of education, parental occupation and parental social-economic status have influence on choice of course. The study was done in another university out of Uganda which is very difficult to be generalisable in Uganda's private Universities hence geographical gap.

Omar et al. (2021) conducted a study on factors affecting course choice among undergraduate students in University Utara-Malaysia. Using reliability analysis, multiple regressions, and correlation results showed that the influence of family, personal interests, and economic considerations have a positive relationship to course choices. Moreover, the results of regression analysis showed that the personal interests exerted great influence on the choice of a career compared to family influence and economic considerations. The study was done in another university out of Uganda which is very difficult to be generalisable in Uganda's private Universities hence geographical gap.

Manoharan et al. (2017) conducted a study to examine the influence of parents' income and education on the career aspirations of industrial aspirants. Using a census sampling procedure on engineering students at the time of joining the college, it was established that there is a positive low correlation between the income of the respondents and career aspiration. There was no significant relationship between parents' income and career aspirations. And this is somehow different from the current study which considers a general parental aspect and not just one aspect of parents' income. The study was done in another context which is very difficult to be generalisable

in Uganda's private Universities hence contextual gap.

Cooper and Pugh (2020) revealed in their study that individuals from high-income families are much more likely to attend University as compared to those from low-income homes. The study further revealed that the relationship between family income was much stronger during the early to mid-1990s but weakened. The study was done in another university out of Uganda which is very difficult to be generalisable in Uganda's private Universities. The studies also used different methodologies that were not used in this study. Hence geographical and methodological gaps.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a cross-sectional study design, to examine the relationship between Parents' social-economic status and undergraduate selection of courses in Private Universities in Western Uganda. This study design was preferred for the study because the researcher intends to have a one-off interaction with the respondents and then write a report thereof. The data on the study units was collected once at one point in time and the study phenomena described the way it is without any manipulation (Aktar, 2016). Both qualitative and quantitative approaches (methods) of data collection and analysis were used. The quantitative methods enabled the collection of numerical data to explain, describe, understand, predict, or control the phenomenon of interest. This method enabled the researcher to quantify the views of respondents towards certain variables and draw statistical conclusions.

The study considered a sample size of 205 students. These were selected using stratified and then simple random sampling technique. Here, students were put into Strata; depending on the selected offered courses. From these Strata. Stratified sampling was used since it is the one that can help to choose participants that are from different designations in terms of programme studied. Simple random sampling was then employed to select students. Their names were written on tags, then placed in a container and

thoroughly mixed. Tags were then be drawn one by one from the container, repeating the process until the required number of tags is obtained. According to Dudovskiy (2016), the rationale behind employing simple random sampling is to remove any bias in the selection process, leading to samples that accurately represent the population.

Qualitatively, the study considered five Key respondents such as Deans of students, Parents University committee and academic registrar because of their knowledge, expertise in the University. This was to ensure uniformity and consistency of the information that was provided (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Data Collection Methods

The close ended questions were administered to collect quantitative data for the study. The pre-determined close ended questions entailed the respondents to choose from the provided responses. The closed ended questionnaire section was preferred because they were normally easy to fill in, and took little time and effort, kept the subjects to the point, giving them a wide range of choice in accordance with (Amin, 2005). Questionnaire survey was used to collect data from the selected students of KIU. This method was enabled by a questionnaire that had a set of closed questions. The method was used particularly to collect data on all study objectives. In addition, these questionnaires were researcher administered. This method was also used to collected data from students.

Data Analysis, Processing and Management

Data collected using questionnaire was coded, entered into the computer using Statistical Package for Social Scientist version 25 and cleaned for quality assurance. Quantitative data was analysed using inferential statistics which was additionally analysed to attain relevant conclusions and was presented using tables. Linear regression analysis was used to ascertain the magnitude of effect of the dependent variable on independent variable.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics on parents' income level

The first objective was to the relationship between parents' income level and undergraduate selection of courses at KIU-western campus. Relating to the above-mentioned areas, a five-point Likert scale was used to quantify respondents' views on parents' income level. The scale used Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Not sure (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The mean was based on the item measured on a five-point Likert scale indicating the degree to which parents' income level on Undergraduate selection of courses. Thus, any mean above 3 indicates agreement of the respondents with the issue before hand while any mean of 3.00 shows that respondents were not sure and any mean below 3 indicates that disagreement of the respondents. Table 1 presents evidence on the relationship of parents' income level on Undergraduate selection of courses.

Table 1: Parents' income level and Undergraduate selection of courses

Statements	SD	D	NS	A	SA	M
My parents' main source of income is enough to meet my academic need	81 (39.5%)	82 (40%)	3 (1.5%)	21 (10.2%)	18 (8.8%)	1.94
Parents always select course basing on income earned	20 (9.8%)	24 (11.7%)	4 (1.9%)	75 (36.6%)	82 (40%)	4.13
Financial status of my family impact decision to pursue a particular program of study	26 (12.7%)	31 (15.1%)	5 (2.4%)	67 (32.7%)	76 (37.1%)	3.52
Financial stability of parents' career path is associated my selected course	87 (42.4%)	66 (32.2%)	7 (3.4%)	19 (9.3%)	26 (12.7%)	1.42
Parents pay the tuition in time	87 (42.4%)	102 (49.8%)	–	9 (4.4%)	7 (3.4%)	1.21

Source: Primary data (2024)

The results in Table 1 shows that the 81 (39.5%) strongly disagreed, 82 (40%) disagreed, 3 (1.5%) not sure, 21 (10.2%) agreed, and 18 (8.8%) strongly agreed that parents' main source of income is enough to meet academic need. The mean of 1.94 shows that average of respondents disagreed with findings. The results from qualitative findings say;

Science students rely on loans to finance their education. These are federal loans offered by the government) or private loans offered by banks or other financial institutions. For stance, majority of them work as they are studying, they get salary loans to pay off their tuition (Key Informant G Male aged 53).

The results from Table 1 shows that the 20 (9.8%) strongly disagreed, 24 (11.7%) disagreed, 4 (1.9%) not sure, 75 (36.6%) agreed and 82 (40%) strongly agreed that parents always select course basing on income earned. The mean of 4.13 shows that average of respondents agreed with findings. This is very true with Key Informant H male aged 61 who stipulated that;

Parents choose their children course of study primarily based on potential income rather than your personal interests or aspiration (Key Informant A, male aged 61).

In relation to Key respondent F, female, aged 46 assert that;

Higher-income families may have more flexibility in supporting their children's education, potentially allowing students to pursue courses that align closely with their interests rather than focusing solely on future earnings.

The results in Table 1 shows that that 26 (12.7%) strongly disagreed, 31 (15.1%) disagreed, 5 (2.4%) not sure, 67 (32.7%) agreed and 76 (37.1%) strongly agreed that financial status of the family impact decision to pursue a particular program of study. The mean of 3.52 shows that average of respondents agreed with findings.

The results in Table 1 shows that 87 (42.4%) strongly disagreed, 66 (32.2%) disagreed, 7

(3.4%) not sure, 19 (9.3%) agreed and 26 (12.7%) strongly agreed that financial stability of parents' career path is associated to the selected course. The mean of 1.42 shows that average of respondents disagreed with findings.

Key Informant G Male aged 53 narrated that;

Parents' financial stability can impact their ability to support their children's education financially. They prioritize courses that they believe will lead to stable careers and higher incomes, ensuring their children have the resources they need. Many parents choose Bachelor of Medicine for their children, some of those children end up giving up and other don't graduate in time.

Table 1 shows that 87 (42.4%) strongly disagreed, 102 (49.8%) disagreed, 9 (4.4%) agreed and 7 (3.4%) strongly agreed that parents pay the tuition in time. The mean of 1.21 shows that average of respondents disagreed with findings. In relation to Key Informant C male aged 52, he says that;

When tuition fees are paid promptly, it ensures there are no disruptions to students' academic journey. This stability allows student to attend classes, access resources, and participate in extracurricular activities essential for academic development. This is not a case in Kampala International University where parents don't pay in time. Some of the student pay for themselves because they work while studying.

Pearson correlation coefficient

In this section, Correlations were employed. Specifically, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship existing between the parents' income level on Undergraduate selection of courses. The correlation was important in obtaining preliminary insights into the link between parents' income level on Undergraduate selection. The parents' income level on Undergraduate selection was included in the relationship because hypothesis testing utilized a simple linear regression. Table 2 below presents the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 2 Correlation results for parents’ income level on Undergraduate selection of courses

		Parents’ income level	Undergraduate selection of courses
Parents’ income level	Pearson Correlation	1	.708**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	205	205
Undergraduate selection of courses	Pearson Correlation	.708**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	205	205

** Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 (2-tailed)
 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 (1-tailed)

Table 2 shows that parents’ income level had a strong positive significant relationship between Parents’ income level and undergraduate selection of courses since p-value is less than 0.05. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=.708$) shows that there is a positive significant relationship between Parents’ income level and undergraduate selection. The two stars next to 0.708** indicate a significant correlation. This shows that there is a strong relationship between parents’ income level and undergraduate selection. This is in agreement

with Cooper and Pugh (2020) who revealed in their study that individuals from high- income families are much more likely to attend University as compared to those from low-income homes.

Inferential statistics

The study conducted Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine whether the multiple regression model was fit for the data. The study findings provide F test which shows an overall test of significance of the fitted regression model.

Table 3: Multi linear Regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.731 ^a	.692	.584	.48229

a. Predictors: (Constant), parents’ income level, parents’ education level, parents’ occupation

The adjusted R² value was 0.584 and it shows how much of the total variation in the dependent variable, sustainability of paved roads was explained by the independent variables, parents’ income level. Therefore, the study results revealed that 58.4% can be explained by independent variables in relation to dependent variable.

This helped to find out if undergraduate selection of courses can be predicted without relying on the independent variables. The results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 ANOVA

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.261	1	6.605	21.351	.000 ^b
	Residual	21.837	204	.146		
	Total	40.098	205			

a. Dependent Variable: Undergraduate selection of courses

b. Predictors: (Constant), parents’ income level, parents’ education level, parents’ occupation

The study findings show that the model had an F ratio of 21.351 and the p value was 0.000<0.05, implying that the F ratio was statistically significant, therefore the overall regression model

was statistically significant and can be used for prediction purposes at 5% significance level, this further indicates that the variables used in this study are statistically significant.

Table 4: Regression analysis coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.768	.303		3.823	.000
Parents' income level	.262	.028	.232	3.323	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Undergraduate selection of courses

The results in *Table 4* shows that $\beta = 0.232$ implying that a unit increase in Parents' income level will lead to 23.2% increases in undergraduate selection of courses. This is statistically significant at 95% confidence levels since $p=0.000 < 0.05$. The hypothesis that states "Parents' income level doesn't enhance undergraduate selection of courses" is rejected. The study findings are in line with Monaheng (2023) who revealed that parental level of education, parental occupation and parental social-economic status have influence on choice of course. However, Omar et al. (2021) assert that the personal interests exerted great influence on the choice of a career compared to family influence and economic considerations. However, this study only concentrated on the personal interests and ignored other factors such as income levels, education levels as well as occupation of parents which are being undertaken by the current study.

CONCLUSION

The findings concluded that parents' income level had a strong positive significant relationship between parents' income level and undergraduate selection of courses. The findings also concluded that there is a very strong relationship between parents' income level and undergraduate selection. The findings also shows that a unit increase in Parents' income level will lead to 23.2% increases in undergraduate selection of courses.

Recommendation

The study recommends that students from lower-income backgrounds may prioritize majors that they perceive to have more immediate economic value, such as those leading directly to a specific job or career path, rather than majors in the liberal

arts or humanities, which may be seen as less practical. The study recommends that students from higher-income families may be more able to financially support their children in pursuing majors that may not have immediate financial returns, such as those in the arts or social sciences, because they have the means to provide for their basic needs during and after college.

The study recommends that government should promote equity in education to advocate for policies that promote educational equity and ensure that financial constraints do not limit students' academic and career opportunities. It should also encourage educational institutions to adopt policies that support diverse academic interests and provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their financial background.

The study recommends that educational institutions should support the student by developing or expanding support services such as academic advising, mentoring programs, and tutoring, to help students in less financially supported majors succeed academically and professionally. This creates partnerships with organizations that can offer internships, mentorships, and job placements for students in various fields, ensuring that career prospects are accessible regardless of major.

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