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Correlation Between the Social Support and Career Decision Making Among TVET Students in Kirinyaga County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Technical and Vocational Education and Training, or TVET, encounters a number of obstacles in career courses, such as a misalignment between training and market demands, a lack of funding, and unfavourable opinions. When choosing a career, students in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in Kenya encounter a number of obstacles, such as a lack of knowledge about available career paths, insufficient career counselling, and the impact of social attitudes. The purpose of the study was to establish the correlation between social support and career decision making in TVET institutions situated in Kirinyaga County, Kenya by utilizing correlational research design. Th study was anchored on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT by Lent, et.al., 1994) and a total of 2100 trainees enrolled in the four public TVET colleges in Kirinyaga County were targeted. Both proportional and purposive simple random selection techniques were used to choose a sample of 278 students. Questionnaires were used to gather data. At one of the colleges, 20 male and 20 female students took part in a pilot project. Validity was assessed by departmental experts and peer review. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronchbach alpha. Descriptive as well as inferential statistics were used to analyse the data with aid of SPSS version 27. The study established a positive significant correlation determined between social support and career decision-making (r (278) =.023, p <.05). This research recommends that guardians, college trainers, and career counselling professionals to create awareness that may help elevate students social support, ensure material support and develop attainment/importance task value which in return may result to better career decision making. Further research is hereby recommended on the correlation between social support and task value on career aspirations/choices among primary school, secondary school or university students to compare and contrast the results across diverse developmental stages.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A person's financial status, overall well-being, and the maintenance and enhancement of their mental health can all be significantly impacted by their employment (Iwamoto and Chun, 2020). A career supports a person's living needs by generating income or satisfying other mental needs, such as interests and hobbies. Creating and maintaining a fulfilling life depends on choosing a career. However, selecting a sustainable job may be challenging, particularly for young individuals. According to Jiang et al. (2019), employment restrictions are gradually reduced by increasing the quantity, variety, and interaction of jobs. According to Lent and Brown (2020), choosing a career is getting harder.

Everyone will probably have to deal with the issue of choosing a career at some point. For most people, choosing a job is a series of decisions made over years rather than a one-time event. One of the most important decisions a person will ever make is their career choice, and the effects are likely to endure a lifetime. Lately, a lot of people have encountered difficulties in their career routes. A person's profession choice has a significant impact on many facets of their life. This affects social settings, an individual's total income, self-esteem, standard of life, and social standing. Workers are most affected by their work. According to Arab (2014), this has an impact on a person's personality, feeling of happiness, family structure, social and intellectual pursuits, and economic empowerment. According to Kulcsar et al (2020) career decision encompass choosing an occupation and the associated educational training, then a job and then whether to remain in that job or switch to another one, what formal and informal advanced training to take, and so on. When facing such decisions, many individuals experience difficulties that prevent decision-making or lead them to choose a non-optimal alternative

Numerous studies conducted worldwide have shown differing findings. According to one Vietnamese study, the most crucial factor in choosing a career was environmental exploration, and social support that have been found to have a negative effect on the association between environmental exploration and career choice (Pham et al., 2023).

The immediate familial setting, community social links, and the idealization of the profession were identified as possible motivators for pursuing a career in music in Hungary (Judit et.al. 2024). When asked about their career choices, students at British and Indian universities said that a degree from a prestigious university increases their chances of finding employment in the globalized labor market (King & Sondhi, 2018).

Additionally, in a study conducted in Liberia by Doriris et al. in 2024, students studying information and communication technology (ICT) placed a high value on extrinsic factors like compensation. The study went on to show that while the prestige associated with information communication and technology occupations was given lesser value, job security and career access were given higher priority. Studies conducted in Ghana and other nations have also shown that a number of factors, including job recognition and appealing remuneration, influence students' career choices (Salifu et al., 2018). From the study, the family, the trainers, the capacity of the students to choose his or her preferred choice, influence the career choice and the teachers have a big impact on career choice and the aspirations of learners.

In Kenya, numerous research on career choice have been carried out with differing degrees of success. It has been shown that Kenyan students are not confident in their ability to choose a career (Winga, 2021). As Kenya's higher education system has expanded and an enrollment expansion policy has been implemented, college students' employment problems have worsened and the pressure to find employment has increased. For emerging adults, researching, choosing, and committing to a career is one of the most significant developmental activities.

Job-related worries among college students, such as pressure to perform well and difficulty choosing a career, have become divisive social issues. According to Chelagat et al. (2023), a student's pursuit of higher education may eventually be impacted by their gender, the availability of employment opportunities, guidance and counseling, and personal interests. Opportunity and individual factors are likely to influence career choice, according to Mberia et al. (2018). Numerous factors influencing profession choice have been identified by research conducted both locally and globally. However, little research has been done on the connection between Kirinyaga County TVET students' career decisions and social support.

The term "social support" describes the genuine assistance that a person receives while making a career decision from their interactions with other people. This study looks at four different kinds of social support: material, emotional, informational, and evaluative. According to Thoits (2011), social support has many facets. First, rather than being received (i.e., acknowledging that help was given), support might be viewed as perceived (i.e., having support available or feeling supported). Second, assistance may be informational, emotional, or instrumental. The giving of resources or help with practical issues or tasks, such as lending money or renting a car, is known as instrumental support. Giving someone direction, counsel, or information that could assist them deal with a situation is known as informational support.

. By demonstrating empathy, care, respect, value, or encouragement, one can offer emotional support. Put another way, parents, instructors, and senior and junior students are crucial allies for college students majoring in physical education while choosing a career route (Chun and Yeng, 2023).

In Turkey, college students' social support network has a big impact on their employment choices, claim Maya and Jona (2021). According to Park (2020), social support has a big role in how other people affect career choices in Korea. Social support is frequently used to describe any constructive help that can be obtained from others through social ties

Purpose of the study

Based on the stated problem, the purpose of the study was to establish aspects of social support and its correlation with career decision making among TVET students in Kirinyaga County

Objective of the study

The study sought to find out the correlation between the social support and career decision making among TVET students in Kirinyaga County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zhou et al. (2024) conducted research in China to ascertain the effect of social support on career decision making problems. It looked at how social support affects career decision-making. A survey comprising questions about psychological capital, professional decision-making issues, career decision-making self-efficacy, and social support was completed by 770 college students who participated in the study. There was a strong correlation discovered between self-efficacy in making career decisions, professional decision-making obstacles, psychological capital, and social support. The results show that social support may influence career decision difficulties through the mediation chains of psychological capital and self-efficacy; the implications of this were investigated. While the last study concentrated on decision-making concerns, the current study addressed professional decision-making in general.

Azhenov et al. (2023) studied students' readiness to make professional decisions inside the higher education system in Russia. In this study, 104 students from Toraighyrov University participated as respondents. The study employed a quasi-experimental

approach and randomly picked students from the humanities (psychology, education, journalism, and social work) and STEM (science, technological engineering, and metallurgical engineering). The results showed that for each of the three clusters of career choice-making challenges—insufficient preparation and inconsistent/lack of information—the control group differed significantly from the experimental group in both the pre-course and post-course assessments.

The reviewed study utilized a quasi-experimental methodology, which may limit the results' generalizability to other groups or contexts due to the non-randomized state of the research, whereas the current investigation employed correlational design that incorporated simple random sampling.

In their 2021 study conducted in Turkey, Angeline and Rathnasabapathy investigated the relationship between undergraduate students' views of social support and their self-efficacy in selecting a vocation. 50 male and 50 female undergraduate students are participating in this study to see if social support influences self-efficacy in choosing a job. The results show that social support and self-efficacy in professional decision-making are positively connected, and that female learners experiences greater levels of social support in comparison to male learners.

The psychological factors influencing secondary school students' profession choices in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania, were examined in a 2019 study by Vaghela. The study also identified social and psychological elements that influence profession choice. Questionnaires were utilized to gather data, and a case study methodology was adopted. The representative sample of 100 pupils, 30 teachers, and the head of school was chosen using probability sampling. Considering that the study was conducted at the secondary level, attention was paid to peers at the tertiary institutions.

In Kenya, Migunde (2020) studied the influence of social support on career development of teenagers. From year one to year four, 358 secondary school students made up the sample. Perceived professional development and social support were surveyed among students. The findings demonstrated a favorable correlation among self-efficacy and perceived social support in career decision making ($r=-.240$, $p<.05$) and internal locus of control ($r=-.350$, $p<.05$).

Both perceived social support and career hesitancy ($r=-.150$, $p<.05$) and external professional locus of control ($r=-.107$, $p<.05$) are strongly inversely correlated, according to the data. While the current study concentrated on college students who have made professional selections, the reviewed study were carried out on secondary school students who might be dealing with various social emotional challenges.

METHODOLOGY

Target population, sample size and sampling technique

The target population included 2100 students at the public TVET colleges in Kirinyaga County. The study adopted purposive and stratified simple random sampling strategies because it is not feasible to examine every student. The TVET colleges in Kirinyaga County were chosen using the purposeful sampling approach. The researcher utilized stratified technique to divide TVET colleges into several strata ensuring equal representation of male and female students, Simple random sampling was employed to determine the participants using lottery method. Simple random technique, ensures that all participant have equal chances of being picked (Kothari 2004) . In this study the sample size was generated by using a table for generating the sample size from a given population by Krejcie and Morgan as quoted from Chuan (2006).

Research Instruments

Social Support Scale

The study adapted a comprehensive perceived social support questionnaire by Zimet et.al (1988). This scale was modified to suit the study and it had twelve questions on seven-point Likert scale.

Career Decision Scale

Career choice-making tool by Osipow et al. 1976 was modified to evaluate students' professional decision-making abilities. The 18 elements in the scale are separated into two smaller subscales. 14 items indicated indecision in career choices whereas four items measured the extent of confidence experienced following a career choice.

FINDINGS

Career Decision Making Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 indicates the descriptive statistics of career decision making scores.

Table 1: Career Decision Making Raw Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Career decision making	278	48	28	76	60.59	11.841	-.788	-.059

Table 1 indicates that Career decision making raw scores. From the statistics, the average score and standard deviation are (M = 60.59, *SD* = 11.841). However, the least raw score was 28 and the maximun was 76 culminating in a range of 28. In addition, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were -.788 and -.059 meaning that the distribution was nearly normal.
Standardized decision making descriptive statistics are given in Table 2

Table 2: Career Decision Making Standardized Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*SD*	Sk	Kur
Standardized scores of career decision making	278	40.54	22.48	63.01	50.00	10.00	-.788	-.059

Findings from Table 2 postulates that the average score and deviation were (M = 50.00, *SD* = 10.00). Further, the greatest score was 63.01 while the least score was 22.48 making a range of 40.54. Also, the skewness coefficient was -.788 while the kurtosis was -.059. This indicates that the distribution was nearly normal.
Career decision making scores were further categorized based on gender in Table 3

Table 3: Career Decision Making Descriptive Statistics based on Gender

Gender of students	Mean	N	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Range	Kur.	Sk.
Male	49.5192	165	9.45455	22.48	63.01	40.54	.061	-.719
Female	50.7020	113	10.75144	24.16	63.01	38.85	-.103	-.909
Total	50.0000	278	10.00000	22.48	63.01	40.54	-.059	-.788

The Table 3 confirms that female and male participants were 113 and 165 respectively. However, the average score and standard deviation for the male students were (M = 49.5192, *SD* = 9.45455) while that of female counterparts were (M = 50.7020, *SD* = 10.75144). In addition, the least scores were 22.48 for the male respondents and 24.16 for female respondents whereas the maximum score was 63.01 for both male and female respondents. From the average score per gender, findings pointed that female college students had better career decision making than male college students, this is despite the fact that the maximum scores were consistent across the genders.

Hypothesis Testing

In finding if the correlation among social support and career decision making was significant, the hypothesis that follows was tested.
H_{01} There is no significant correlation between social support and career decision making.
Here Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized in testing the hypothesis and findings are presented in Table 4

Table 4: Correlation between Social Support and Career Decision Making

		Career Decision Making
Social Support	Pearson Correlation	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050
	N	278

*This relationship is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The researcher hypothesized that there was no significant correlation between social support and career decision making. However, the analysis of study outcomes through determining the Pearson correlation indicated a positive and a significant correlation between the variables of social support and career decision making r (278) =.023, p <.05 this resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis. Implying that social support and career choice making had an association. This meant that social support had significant notable effect on career decision making.

Table 5: Levels of Social Support and Career Decision Making

Level of Social Support	N	Career Decision Making Mean	*SD*
Emotional	39	15.9712	4.29077
Informative	48	15.6367	4.45771
Evaluative	64	15.8561	4.30860

Material	127	15.0899	4.62482
Total	278	15.6385	

From the results presented in Table 5, students that experienced emotional social support had a career decision making mean score and standard deviation of (M = 15.9712, *SD* = 4.29077) while those that had informative social support networks had an average score and deviation of (M = 15.6367, *SD* = 4.45771). Further, evaluative and material components of social support had an average mean and standard deviation of (M = 15.8561, *SD* = 4.30860) and (M = 15.0899, *SD* = 4.62482) respectively among students. This implied that students that received emotional social support were better in career decision making than the students who received the other forms of social support. However, majority of the students that is, 127 in number received emotional social support and were the least in career decision making.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

According to this study, social support and career decision-making are significantly correlated. It is implied that students who make more professional decisions have more social support, whereas college students who make fewer job decisions have less social support. The findings of other investigations are corroborated by these results. The results of Jiajian et al. (2024) were comparable to those of the present investigation. The study examined the relationship between professional decision-making and social support among Chinese undergraduate teacher education students. It examined the moderating role of proactive personality in the relationship between social support and career decision making. Results indicated that perceived social support significantly influenced career decisions. Further, the analysis showed that proactive personality influenced the positive effects of social support on career exploration and decision making. Implying that social support is a significant predictor of career choices.

Similar results about the relationship between social support and teens' career growth were found in a survey conducted in Kenya by Migunde (2020). Students were asked about their perceptions of social support and professional development, as well as how these relate to their career goals. Additionally, the study found a substantial correlation between self-efficacy and internal locus of control ($r=-.351$, $p<.05$) and perceived social support in career decision-making ($r=-.237$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, there was a strong inverse correlation between career reluctance, perceived social support, and external professional locus of control.

According to Zhou et al. (2024), social support has a big impact on choosing a career. Participants in the study were college students who completed a survey. The study's findings showed that psychological capital and self-efficacy acted as mediators between social support and career choice difficulties. implying that better job decisions are made when there is more social support. Due to the greater importance of psychological capital, this study also found that social support was a better predictor of profession choices.

Consistent findings have also been reported in the Europe, Azhenov et al. (2023) explored students' preparedness for making career decisions inside the higher education system. University learners enjoined in the study from the humanities; psychology, education, journalism, and social work and STEM; science, technology engineering, and metallurgical engineering who were selected at random for the study, which used a quasi-experimental design. The study found out that the experimental group was significantly different from the control group in both the pre-course and post-course evaluations for each clusters of career decision making challenges.

Contrary findings to this study were seen in a study by Wang and Dong (2024). In examining the relationship between family support, parental career-related behaviour support and job adaptability via a meta-analysis. Further, a systematic search for related studies was undertaken through research databases. Furthermore, two researchers carried independent data extraction and followed standards in coding. In this study, comprehensive meta-analysis was employed. Findings indicated a non-significant relationship between family support, parental career-related behaviour support and career adaptability.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results of this study, it was concluded that social support predicted career decision making. It was there therefore concluded that proper social support may result to better career decision making. In addition, it may be summed that emotional dimension of social support had the greatest predictive index on career decision making while informative dimension of social support had the lowest predictive index on career decision making. This research recommends that guardians, college trainers, and career counselling professionals to create awareness that may help elevate students emotional support, ensure material support and develop attainment/importance task value which in return may result to better career decision making. In particular, tutors and parents/guardians should be encouraged to offer high emotional and material support and students to develop higher attainment value so that they consistently actualize their career choices.

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