



Tourism education enrolment among Kenyan public universities: Socioeconomic aspects

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 August 2021

Received in rev. form 17 Sep. 2021

Accepted 19 Sep 2021

Keywords:

Socio-economic factors, Enrolment,
Tourism Education, Students' Choice

JEL Classification:

O15; P36

ABSTRACT

The paper innovates on the existing literature and field data by assessing the socio-economic factors influencing the enrolment decisions of students, to tourism programs among 12 selected Kenyan public universities. The study uses a descriptive design. A structured questionnaire and an interview guide were used to gather data from 192 students and 12 departmental heads. The study used a multi-sampling technique; purposive sampling was adopted to select the universities, while simple random sampling was used to determine students pursuing a degree in tourism management. Data collected were analysed using SPSS. A structural equation model was used for data analysis, following exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factors analysis. The logit regression results reveal the existence of a statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and students' choice to enroll in tourism programs. The most important reasons influencing the student's tourism degree choice are tuition fees, employment prospects and parents/family background. The study recommends that education practitioners, scholars, governments, and private sectors allocate resources and dedicate efforts to improving and tourism awareness among high school students. Future research should investigate the same study variables using longitudinal and in-depth approaches to minimize generalizability concerns related to the study findings.

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Introduction

The cumulative factors influencing a student's career path emanate from both external and internal surroundings; the cost and availability of financial aid, aspirations, aptitude, and social factors (Owusu et al., 2018). This belief is anchored on various theoretical foundations like the human capital theory, which ties empirical evidence among psychological, demographic, and social/cultural-economic factors influencing the enrolment decision to a specific program in institutions of higher education [IHEs] (Gichuhi & Kibui, 2015). Moreover, the degree of importance students attach to these factors is contextual-based.

Kenyan tourism education is dynamic, a mixture of gradual changes, depicting an education system logged by many issues. The Kenyan government realized the potential of the tourism sector in the economic development in the late '70s (Mayaka & Akama, 2007,2015). At this juncture, the Kenyan government established the Kenya Utalii College in 1975; a joint project with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, as a fully-fledged hospitality and tourism training institution to train management staff for the industry (Atef et al., 2019). Since then, the country has witnessed the mushrooming of public and private universities, colleges, and polytechnic, endeavoured to teach and train tourism-related courses.

In terms of enrolment, public universities have been registering double-folds between 2012 and 2015 (Commission of University Education [CUE], 2016). For example, total enrolment in public chartered universities sprouts from 363,334 to 456,926 students, between 2014 and 2018, representing a 25.76% increase in enrolment (CUE, 2018). Concurrently, the Kenyan government has

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implemented mechanisms to streamline the rate of enrolment. Among them, the introduction of free primary education in 2003 and the oblivion of several policy documents, including the Kenya Vision 2030, Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, Sessional Paper No.2 of 2015, and the Big 4 Agenda of 2018, all aimed to boost the tourism enrolment among institutions of higher learning. Despite these efforts, tourism as a program has always been categorized among the *Business and Administration category* since 2014 (see table 1), which does not give an ideal picture of tourism, as a stand-alone program.

Table 1: Enrolment Rates for the period 2015-2018

Enrolment Aspects	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Public and Private Universities Enrolment	539749	547316	538820
Public Chartered Universities Enrolment	461820	458946	456926
Bachelor Degree Enrolment	409222	409927	368100
Program by cluster (Business and Administration)	110	152	149

Pointedly, despite the higher enrolment rate, the desire for equitable and accessible university education has resulted in the exponential growth of universities. CUE has, over the years, enhanced efforts in assuring education quality and regulating enrolment cluster-point requirements for various university programs, to achieve national and global competitiveness. However, a general concern in the university sector in Kenya has been the issue of substantial graduate unemployment (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2020); the imbalance between humanities, Arts and Social sciences on the one hand, and Science, Technology Engineering, and Mathematics [STEM] on the other, and the consequent shortage of needed knowledge and skills in areas such as manufacturing, housing, health, food security, biotechnology and information communication technology, CUE (2016).

A question then arises, as to why students in Kenya prefer the tourism program, despite the private sector and the Kenyan government seemingly encouraging students' enrolment in STEM courses. That scenario underscores the need for further research, particularly on the socio-economic context. This study, therefore, revisits the enrolment decision debate by exploring the socio-economic factors influencing university students' tourism program enrolment decisions within the selected public universities in Kenya.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The demand for higher education has grown in most countries due to increased populations, economic difficulties, and increasing pressures on public budgets. This has resulted in shifting the burden of paying tuition fees from the government to the students. In cognizant of this notion, for example, the university education in Kenya began in 1963, and it was offered free, covering tuition fees and living expenses (Weidman, 1995). The free university education lasted until 1991 when the government introduced a cost-sharing policy, where parents were expected to cover the tuition fees and living expenses. To that effect, the government established a student loan program, the higher education loans board (HELB), to enable needy students to access higher education (Sanyal & Martin, 1998).

In line with this thought, the cost of studies, career prospects, parental influence, employment, and income opportunities, have been considered essential socio-economic factors influencing enrolment (Tadaro & Smith, 2015), which follows the econometric model. Econometric models typically view college attendance as an economic benefit, where students pursue higher education because of the perceived benefits, based on expected costs, expected future earnings, college characteristics, and students' characteristics. Interestingly, when the unemployment rates increase, individuals thereof pursue higher education even when the expected level of income is minimal as a way of escaping unemployment (Saroush et al., 2015).

Graduate employment is one of the criteria used to evaluate the success of pursuing higher education. Many students pursue higher education so that they can become economically stable. Therefore, undergraduates view higher education as a pathway to conquering the barriers through enhanced career opportunities, greater earning potential, and obtain knowledge and expertise in their career paths (Chan et al., 2014). Avery & Turner (2012) allude that a bachelor's degree program remains a good investment for individuals and society, for the country's economic health and economic competitiveness of a community.

Enrolment is also sensitive to the availability of financial aid, especially among individuals with lower family incomes. When investigating a family background, three issues are pertinent; income, education, and occupation (Ekpo & Igiri, 2015; Li & Qiu, 2018; Lyu et al., 2019). Low-income families may wish for their children to pursue higher education, which may not be possible because they may not afford to pay tuition fees. On the other hand, affluent families usually plan for their children to further their studies because they can afford them, which means that the family income influences students' enrolment for higher education. Changes in the family income may directly impact the students who may choose to enrol in cheaper programs or even leave education altogether.

Idealized by the human capital theory, the belief is that education increases an individual’s human capital. Therefore, parents with a high level of human capital tend to earn more income and access financial resources. It then makes them able to support their children through post-secondary education decisions (Kromydas, 2017). The complete statement of this theory is found in Becker & Tomes (1986), where utility-maximizing parents are concerned about the welfare of their children. The model assumes that the degree of intergenerational mobility is determined by the interaction of utility-maximizing behaviour with investment-consumption opportunities in different generations. However, Haveman & Wolfe (1995) criticize the Becker and Tomes model stating that it yields little empirical guidance because it addresses a few family-based determinants of investments in children. The various attributes of enrolment decision-making from the literature are well summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of the literature review

Author	Investigated Factors	Study coverage
Migin et al. (2015); Padlee et al. (2010); Dahari & Abduh (2011); Mubaira & Olawale (2012)	Cost of living Direct costs, i.e., tuition fees, accommodation, books, and supplies Family income Availability of financial support e.g scholarships, loans, bursaries, fellowships, and grants.	Tuition fees and related costs influence
Saroush et al. (2015); Chan et al. (2014); Avery & Turner (2012); McArthur (2011); Kennett et al. (2011)	Econometric model facets, i.e., perceived economic gains High payouts and job security Professional knowledge and expertise Better career opportunities and paths Economic competitiveness, i.e., individual and societal investments Personal interests (self-improvements and meet new people/cultures)	Perceived Benefits influence
Katwii (2016); Ouma (2018); Kromydas (2017); Lyu et al. (2019); Mirashrafi et al. (2013); Ekpo & Igiri (2015); Li & Qiu (2018); Osuafor & Okonkwo (2013); Ceka & Murati (2016)	Parent income Parent’s level of education Social class Family size Family income	Parent/Family background influence

Underpinning Theory

The concept of human capital theory [HCT] considers direct and opportunity costs as the principal determinants of education demand. The theory posits that one chooses the optimal length of schooling to maximize the present value of the net lifetime wealth, and in this case, the choice of program to enrol (Becker, 1967, 1962; Fleischhauer, 2011; Gichuhi and Kibui, 2015; Teixeira, 2014). Education as an investment usually affects increased career opportunities, more chances of earning higher salaries, increased individual productivity, a more fulfilling work environment, learning essential skills, and a lower probability of unemployment (Tytingvåg, 2015). Education is therefore assumed to be an investment where individuals derive utility (Manono et al., 2013). HCT plays a vital role in enrolment management as it provides a conceptual basis for student enrolment decision-making (Barwick et al., 2021). This then manifests as a catalyst, as the socio-economic desire becomes feasible if the expected gains after graduation are immense.

Research & Methodology

The study used an explanatory-descriptive design; triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. A structured questionnaire with 14 items, was randomly distributed among 192 first-year students of 2017/2018 academic year, and an interview guide to 12 heads of department, all from 12 purposively selected public universities offering tourism degrees.

The questionnaire used a 5-Likert scale point, from 1(strongly agree) to 5(strongly disagree). Face-to-face and zoom interviews, and email and physical questionnaire distribution were used to gather primary data, while secondary data came from reviewing relevant literature. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS.

A structural equation model was used for data analysis, following a two-stage framework; confirmatory factors analysis and exploratory factor analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 provides a general profile descriptive statistic on socio-economic factors that influence the enrolment of the tourism course. SEF1 (respondents satisfied with the offer of a place on tourism education) sub-variable had the highest mean of 3.82. Further sub variable SEF11 (respondents' parents' educational background influenced them to study tourism) had the lowest mean of 1.91. Among the respondents highly recognized, the three socio-economic attributes included employment opportunities (M=2.94, SD=1.246) and promotional opportunities (M=2.90, SD=1.073). On the lower end, high school teachers and counsellor's influence (M=2.17, SD=1.246) and Course fees (M=2.94, SD=0.954) represented among the bottom three items with the lowest mean and standard deviations.

Table 3: Socioeconomic Descriptive Statistics

	Socio-economic factors Items (SEF)	Mean	Std.Deviation
SEF1	I was delighted with the offer of a place in tourism education	3.82	.954
SEF2	My examination result only qualified me for a tourism course	2.22	1.001
SEF3	The tourism industry provides more employment opportunities than other industries	2.94	1.246
SEF4	The tourism industry offers more significant promotional opportunities than other industries	2.90	1.073
SEF5	Working in the tourism industry provides a secure future	2.88	1.194
SEF6	The starting salary expected after graduation is high	2.23	.954
SEF7	The number of alumni who have attained employment upon graduation attracted me to study tourism	2.49	1.176
SEF8	The course fees for tourism education influenced my choice of tourism education	2.02	.954
SEF9	In choosing tourism education, financial assistance was an essential factor for me	2.79	1.299
SEF10	My parents' income encouraged me to study tourism	2.09	1.122
SEF11	My parents' educational background influenced me to study tourism	1.91	.977
SEF12	My close friends encouraged me to study tourism	2.43	1.221
SEF13	My high school teachers and counsellors encouraged me to study tourism	2.17	1.047
SEF14	My siblings encouraged me to study tourism	2.18	1.093
	Valid N (listwise)	192	

Another finding from social-economic was based on career marketability, and the role played by parent's wealth status in influencing their children's career paths, as echoed by one interview respondent:

...Besides wanting to attain self-actualization, many people pursue a course based on marketability, tied to future job securities. In other families, parents will pursue and even make their children love what they do... not only that, some parents are wealthy hence influencing students to follow their career path of wish, in short, the dictate the career paths of their children.....[HOD07]

Another respondent looked at the costs attributed to the course choice as a key basis for a larger large influx of students into Kenyan universities pursuing tourism courses:

.... considering many families in Kenya are below the poverty level, students from such families tend to choose a course with lower tuition fee costs, like tourism and other business-related courses..... despite the County governments government, tuition fee for some courses like medicine is unmanageable by such students..... then following their perceptions or even consultation from parents, they end up settling for cheap courses...[HOD09]

Regarding parents' education level influence, three respondents gave contradicting views in the Kenyan context, poverty levels and levels of parents' income, psychologically demeanour students, though not always, to choose fairly inexpensive university programs to ensure they do not overburden their parents in an already harsh life.

..(1) In my opinion, it is a mixed perception.... From my village, the underprivileged parent, those who couldn't go beyond primary school level, their children have become victorious and pursue high-end courses like medicine, law, and medicine..... [HOD07]...(2) This can be both ways. Some parents due to lack education knowledge, do not know the difference between university courses; beyond the conventional community thinking. Thus their children end up choosing courses based on their grades, and not what parents tell them...[HOD03]...(3)... For my case as an example, my parents pushed me to take tourism because my father had done a tour guiding course at Utalii College in the '70s... I can vividly agree that parents' educational level and experiences at one point pose a great influence on their child's career path like mine....[HOD08].

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM followed a two-phase process consisting of a confirmatory measurement model and a structural model (Byrne, 2016). The first phase involved estimating the measurement model, which assesses the relationship between the observable variables and the theoretical constructs they represent. The second phase was the specification of the structural model and evaluation of the relationships proposed, and testing of the hypothesis (Fan et al., 2016). The first stage of SEM involved CFA that evaluated the measurement model on multiple criteria; internal reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity. Before this, exploratory factor analysis [EFA], whose key steps included the computation of the factor loading matrix, was conducted. EFA was used to identify factors based on data and maximize the variance explained (Orcan, 2018). Before the EFA, two statistical tests that assess the suitability of data for structure detection were performed: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. Table 4 indicates the test results for the suitability of structure detection, where the KMO value was 0.711, which is close to 1. This means factor analysis was suitable ($p < 0.05$) (Cronk, 2018).

Table 4: Test for Suitability of the Structure Detection

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	
0.711	Approx. Chi-square	718.126
	df	242
	Sig.	0.000

The Factor-loading matrix or a pattern matrix, shown in table 1.5, contains the loadings used to express the items in terms of the factors, interpretation of factors. The more the factors, the lower the pattern coefficients as a rule since there were more. In this study, the pattern matrix coefficients ranged from 0.561 to 0.987 after the items lacking factor loadings (SEF1, SEF3, and SEF7) were eliminated. The remaining variables are almost perfectly related to a factor pattern and were used to calculate the average index for the composite variables for hypothesis testing.

Table 5: Cross Loadings for the Measurement Model

Factor Loadings	1	2	3	4	5	6
SEF2	.623					
SEF13		.723				
SEF12		.671				
SEF14		.561				
SEF8						
SEF6			.602			
SEF5			.618			
SEF10				.697		
SEF11				.691		
SEF4					.997	
SEF9						.593

***Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.

***Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization

The second phase involved latent variables in testing the hypothesized relationships and to fit the structural model. To ascertain that the model provided a good fit for the data, the study considered a minimum of four tests of model fit that need to be deemed to be postulated by Hair *et al.* (2010). Apart from picking the four most widely respected and reported fit indices, the study picked on Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RSMEA), Comparative fit index (CFI), Chi-square (X^2) to the degree of freedom (df), which is the traditional measure for evaluating overall model fit, where it is accompanied with a p-value less than 0.05. Incremental fit indices (IFI), which compare the chi-square value to a baseline model and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is a development of the Normed Fit Index (NFI) with more consideration to sampling size.

Results in Table 6 show a good fit for the measurement model compared to the cut-off points considered with the default model. Bentler (1990) found an acceptable value of RMSEA indicating good fit associated with PCLOSE less than 0.05; CFI, IFI, and TLI were very close to 0.9, which is also acceptable (Emir, 2016). Chi-squared was also in the range >1 and <5 associated with a significant p-value.

Further, the study considered analyzing the path significance of each relationship, where it examined the standardized estimate (S.E), critical ratios (C.R), and p-value for the proposed hypothesis. A hypothesis is considered significant if a p-value is greater than 1.96 and a p-value less or equal to 0.05. Therefore, to obtain a t-value, the regression weight estimates were divided by the S.E. Thus, the

regression weight estimate of the hypothesis in this study presented in Table 7 indicates that all causal paths for the hypothesis were significant with the t-values above 1.96 and the p-value of less than 0.00.

Table 6: Test for Suitability of the Structure Detection

<i>Indices</i>	<i>Default Model</i>	<i>Suggested Criteria</i>
RMSEA	0.054	<0.08
PCLOSE	0.000	<0.05
X²/df	3.654	1-5
P	0.000	≤0.001
CFI	0.876	Close to 0.9
IFI	0.785	Close to 0.9
TLI	.843	Close to 0.9

The study postulated no significant influence of socio-economic factors on students' choice to enrol in tourism education among public universities in Kenya. The associated regression weight (Table 7) shows a significant relationship between social-economic factors and students' choice to enrol in tourism education ($\beta = 0.872$; $t=9.176$; $p<0.001$). This indicates that an increase of 1 standard deviation in socio-economic factors is likely to lead to a corresponding rise of 9.176 standard deviations in students' choice to enrol in tourism education. Thus, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected, and the opposite is accepted, concluding that socio-economic factors significantly influence students' intention to enrol in tourism education.

Table 7: Summary of the Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Variables	Estimate	S. E	C.R	P	Decision
H₀	Social-economic factors- students' choice to enroll nexus	.872	.096	9.176	0.000	Not Supported

*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$ t-value > 1.96

Discussions

Social-economic factors stimulate various attributions on perceptions arising from an individual, family, parent's influence, or the larger community. They culminate as motivators in this study towards students' enrolment rate. The findings indicated that students strongly agreed that social-economic factors have a significant implication on students' decisions on the kind of courses they pursue in universities here in Kenya. These findings agree with those of Đurišić & Bunijevac's (2017) study, who found a clear connection between parent's level of education and family income/wealth to their children's enrolment in postsecondary school education.

The majority of the students strongly agreed that employment prospects after graduation affected their decision to choose a tourism degree ($M=2.94$, $SD=1.246$). In line with this finding, Angulo et al. (2010) identified career opportunities as one of the factors affecting students' choices. This is because the job market in Kenya is saturated, and students face a more significant challenge of securing a job after graduation, marred by fierce competition and corruption. The new graduates have been competing with the old graduates in the same job pool, which led to high competition for potential jobs, with the unemployment rate in Kenya standing at 6.2% as of the first quarter of 2019 (KNBS, 2019). However, the job opportunities have not increased correspondingly with the increase of university graduates every year.

Another notable finding indicated that a degrees' tuition rates influence a prospectus student's enrolment ($M=2.02$, $SD=0.954$). While the institutions always want to maximize their revenue by increasing the cost of the courses they offer, study costs and tuition fees have been reported as one of the major factors influencing students' choice for their higher education institution (Saichaie, 2011). However, these findings contradict Çokgezen's (2014) study, which reported a non-significant relationship between the fee charged by an institution and the students' choice to enrol at the institution. Unfortunately, the cost of higher education continues to rise without any sign of slowing down shortly, which has a dramatic impact on prospective students, Baliyan (2016).

In the Kenyan context, government sponsorship and international scholarships have already been supporting students for higher studies. Despite the partial fee subsidy given by the HELB and bursaries from both County and National governments, students still need some amount of money (cater for accommodation, transport, books, among other needs), deemed expensive by low-income families. It, therefore, seems fair for such families to either acquire new means to pay in addition to their annual income or choose relatively low-cost education courses for their children.

For the above reason, Hoogeveena & Rossi (2013) finds socio-economic, moreso financial resources a chief impediment to higher education.

Conclusion

Socio-economic factors were statistically significant to the rate of enrolment among the twelve selected Kenyan public universities. This can be attributed to how socio-economic factors hugely touched on financial capabilities and prospects after being employed. These aspects essentially coin to the capitalist nature of the Kenyan society; monetary gains are put first in whatever investment one sinks into. Therefore, public universities in Kenya should embrace financial assistance to students; strive for partnerships with private and government entities to ensure students' fees. To some extent, students' living expenses are either partially or fully sponsored. This will go a long way to establishing a mutual relationship between students and the universities while boosting the enrolment numbers for tourism studies.

This research has been conducted among undergraduate students. It is recommended that further similar research be carried out among diplomas and postgraduate students for comparison purposes. Second, the study used a descriptive survey design with a cross-sectional data collection technique. Therefore, the study recommends a longitudinal study where tourism students' perceptions and intentions of the industry would be evaluated before they are enrolled. Lastly, the participants were sampled from public universities only. This does not mean that tourism courses are not offered in private universities as well. Therefore, a comparative study should be conducted to establish the variables explored in this study, among private universities and colleges.

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