First-Year Students' Level of Career Indecision: Haramaya University in Focus

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Abstract

This study explores the level of career indecision among first-year students at Haramaya University. The study employed a descriptive survey with a quantitative approach. A total of 215 first-year students from both natural and social sciences streams were selected using a systematic random sampling technique. A Likert scale was used to measure the students' level of career indecision. The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including cumulative frequency, mean, standard deviation, and an independent sample t-test. The study found that first-year students, on average, scored in the range indicating they are developmentally undecided (M = 2.23, SD = 0.49). The study also reveals no difference in the level of career indecision between students who attended government schools and those who attended private schools t (213) =-1.639, p=.103. And, regarding gender difference, male students exhibit significantly greater career indecision than female students, t(213)=2.860, p=.005. It is recommended that comprehensive modern career guidance and counselling programs be facilitated to assist students by providing career-related information and addressing similar issues.

Key terms: Career Indecision; First-Year Students

1. Introduction

Career decision-making is one of the most important choices students face when selecting an occupation. It extends beyond choosing a specific job; it is an experience that prepares them to enter the job market (Grigor & Turda, 2022). University students can experience challenges in making decisions, especially where there is little or no valuable information and support, which can also lead to indecision and result in poor choices with negative outcomes in their lives (Amini et al., 2022).

Many scholars have defined career indecision as career indecision refers to an individual's difficulty in making a career decision, characterized by an inability to decide (Gaff et al., 1996). Described as wavering, pausing, or hesitating in career development (Savickas, 2011), and as a state of adaptive uncertainty (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009; Phillips, 1997). As Sidiropoulou & Dimakakou et al. (2012) noted, the concept of career indecision typically includes an individual's difficulties in making career decisions. Career indecision may stem from various sources, such as difficulties in personal and vocational identity, with career decision-making difficulties being a part of this (Gati et al., 1996).

Career indecision is a normal stage in human development, and it should be distinguished from indecisiveness, which is a trait-like form of indecision that persists over time and situations. Indecisive people are "individuals who seem to have difficulties in making all sorts of life decisions, whether they are of great or little significance" (Gati, 2013; Osipow, 1999; Crites, 1969, pp. 305-306).

According to Goliath (2012), career indecision is seen as a developmental phase through which individuals pass when they are required to make decisions; it is regarded as a normal state in human development. It is rooted in a lack of information about oneself, self-confidence, decision-making, fear, and anxiety. Career indecision can be remedied through information relating to careers and the individual or through standard career interventions. It has seven main antecedents: lack of information about oneself, organization, the work environment, self-confidence, decision-making fear and anxiety, non-work demands, and situational constraints (Goliath, 2012). Furthermore, Callanan and Greenhaus (1992) identified various types of career indecision, including developmental career indecision, chronic indecision, hyper-vigilant decidedness, and vigilant decidedness.

According to Guay, Ratelle, Senécal, and Deschênes (2006), developmental career indecision is considered developmentally normal and results from a lack of information about oneself and the world of work. Developmentally undecided individuals have moderate levels of career choice anxiety, low levels of generalized indecisiveness, a high need for career information, and a moderate need for self-information.

The other type of career indecision, chronic indecision, can be described as a permanent inability to set career goals and remain undecided over time. Chronically undecided individuals experience high levels of career choice anxiety, generalized indecisiveness, and a strong need for both career and self-information. Furthermore, results indicate that chronically undecided individuals have higher levels of identity confusion and feelings of inferiority (Greenhaus et al., 1995). Hyper-vigilant decision-making, on the other hand, represents an impulsive and disorganized pattern of decision-making (Johnston et al., 1997). According to Greenhaus et al. (1995), hyper-vigilant individuals may have career goals, but their decisions are based on a lack of information about themselves and the work environment. Furthermore, the researchers state that hyper-vigilant individuals rush into decisions in response to extensive stress or other factors.

Career indecision generally denotes a state of being undecided about one's educational, occupational, or career-related path. It can also be defined as an inability to make an occupational or educational decision when required and as a delay in concluding the career decision-making process (Xu & Bhang, 2019). Fabio et al. (2012) indicated in their study that students experience greater difficulty related to career decision-making due to a lack of readiness. Other studies also state that students may experience difficulty due to a lack of motivation, inconsistent or insufficient information in the absence of career counselors (Boo & Kim, 2020a), anxiety about their careers, lack of self-confidence (Amini et al., 2022), and the rapid growth of information technology, industrial growth, and job competition (Walya Munene & Mulwa, 2020).

Regarding gender and career indecision, Mau (2000) concluded that the effects of gender on career indecision might be more apparent in cultures where female students are not given the same opportunities to make career decisions as men. Similarly, studies showed an insignificant negative correlation between gender and career indecision (Crişan & Turda, 2015).

Students transitioning to university may experience career indecision. Studies indicated that Career counselling is moderately to highly effective for students who are experiencing career indecision (Goliath, 2012). It helps them to overcome difficulties during the career decision-making process (Gati, Krausz, and Osipow, 1996). Furthermore, Fakir (2010) stated that career counsellors can assist individuals in obtaining information about the world of work and certain careers. However, according to Getachew and Daniel (2021), in Ethiopia, career guidance and counselling are vaguely implemented concept in most educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Choosing a career is one of the most difficult and important decisions students may have to face. The current educational policy of Ethiopia states that in their first year at the university, students are expected to make important decisions about their department, which is related to their future profession. For many young people, career choice represents a difficult and complicated process that can lead to a state of indecision with negative, long-term consequences in their professional, personal, and social lives (Osipow, 1999). Besides, students can experience indecision, which can be related to various cognitive factors, such as career decision-making self-efficacy, dysfunctional career thoughts, lack of information,

internal-external conflicts, self-knowledge, and one's previous work experience (Sidiropoulou & Dimakakou et al., 2012).

A person's success, and by extension a country's prosperity, can be gauged by how they shape the future. For first-year university students, their future career path is significantly influenced by their chosen profession and academic department. This initial year is crucial for self-exploration and identity development, as highlighted by Super (1990). Understanding career indecision is vital for developing strategies that assist students in forming a clear vocational identity. The finding of this study also enables universities to provide timely support to those who may require it, allowing for early informed decision-making and the implementation of interventions that enhance students' futures.

Studies in vocational psychology, particularly career decision-making and indecision, are limited, despite their importance for national development. Research indicates a negative correlation between career decision-making difficulties and self-efficacy in Canadian students (Morgan & Ness, 2002). In Turkey, factors such as locus of control, parental attitudes, and career outcome expectations are linked to career indecision (Büyükgöze Kavas, 2011). South African male students showed more decisiveness in their vocational choices than female students (Beerlall, 1997). Ethiopian students' career choices are influenced by socio-economic background, academic support, and attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Metasebiya Genanew, 2024; Getnet Kassahun et al., 2021). Given the limited research specifically on career indecision among first-year university students in Ethiopia, this study addresses this overlooked area due to its significance. Accordingly, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is the level of career indecision among first-year students?
- Is there a significant difference in the mean career indecision scores for students who attended government schools and private schools?
- Is there a significant gender difference in career indecision among first-year students?

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design and Approach

In this study, a descriptive survey research design with a quantitative approach was employed. A quantitative approach is most appropriate when researchers aim to measure and analyze relationships or differences between variables. Questions involving concepts such as 'how much,' 'how many,' or 'to what extent' typically align with a quantitative approach

(Bryman, 2016). Access to statistical tools and techniques is crucial for researchers utilizing quantitative approaches, as they aid in data analysis and outcome prediction (Pallant, 2020).

2.2. Study Area

This study was conducted at Haramaya University main campus, a public research university located in Maya City, Haramaya town, Oromia Region, Ethiopia. It is approximately 510 kilometers (320 miles) east of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

2.3.Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target population of this study was first-year students in the 2024/25 academic year from both natural and social sciences streams at the main campus of Haramaya University. From a total 504 population, 223 students were selected using Taro Yamane's Formula (1967): $n = N / (1 + N (e^2))$. Thus, $n = 504 / (1 + 504(0.05^2)) = 223$ students were selected using a systematic random sampling technique. Due to inappropriate completion of the questionnaire, 8 students were excluded, and 215 respondents were used for the final analysis.

2.4. **Instruments of data collection**

To procure the needed data, standardized, closed-ended questionnaires were used for this study. The instruments had two parts. Part one focused on the participants' demographic information, and the second part was a Likert scale instrument adopted to test students' level of career indecision (CDS). The Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow, 1976) is a 19-item self-report questionnaire that measures an individual's certainty and indecision regarding their choice of career and school major based on norms for a college-age population. The first 18 items are statements that the respondent answers according to a 4-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = not like me and 4 = like me (Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999a). Guerra and Braungart-Rieker (1999b) report test-retest reliabilities of .82 to .90 in two studies over 2 weeks; the majority of these test-retest correlations by item fall into the .60 or .70 range (Osipow & Reed, 1985). According to Hartman, Fuqua, and Jenkins (1986), cited in Meyer (1987), categorized career decision status based upon total CDS Indecision Scale scores. Students scoring below -1 S.D. on the scale were labeled as decided, those scoring between -1 S.D. and +1 S.D. were classified as developmentally undecided, and a third group scoring about +1 S.D. was referred to as chronically undecided. As stated by Lam & Santos (2018), Mean scores range from one to four, with higher scores indicating greater career indecision.

2.5. Methods of Data Analysis

After collecting the pertinent data, it was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including cumulative frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze demographic characteristics of participants and to assess the level of career indecision among students. Inferential statistics, specifically the independent sample t-test, were applied to examine gender differences in students' levels of career indecision and differences between students who attended private schools and those who attended government schools in their career indecision.

2.6. Ethical consideration

During the data collection process, informed consent was first obtained from participants by ensuring the information would only be used for the study's purpose. Secondly, confidentiality was addressed and maintained by ensuring no personal identifying information would be collected or disclosed, and all data would remain confidential, used exclusively for the research purposes outlined in the study. The data collector clearly explained to all respondents that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Finally, informed consent was obtained by assuring the respondents that the information they provided would be used solely for the purpose of the study.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Table 1: Socio-demographic information of participants

	Count	**Percent**
Gender		
Male	153	71.2%
Female	62	28.8%
Total	215	100%
Age		
17-20 years	123	57.2
21-25 years	80	37.2
25-30years	12	5.6
Total	215	100.0
Types of school attended		

Privet school	60	27.9%
Government school	155	72.1%
Total	215	100%
Experience in access to career counselors		
Yes	72	33.5%
No	143	66.5%
Total	215	100%

As presented in the above table (Table 1), 153 (71.2%) of respondents are male and 62 (28.8%) are female students. 123 (57.2%) of respondents are from 17-20 years of age range. Whereas, 12 (5.6%) of respondents are between the age range of 25-30. Also, the table indicated that 60 (27.9%) of respondents attended private school and 155 (72.1%) of them attended the government schools. 72 (33.5%) of respondents have the experience of accessing career counsellors at some point in their lives. On the other hand, 143 (66.5%) of respondents do not have experience in accessing career counsellors.

3.2. The level of career indecision

Table 2: career indecision level of first-year students

N	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**
215	2.2305	.49057

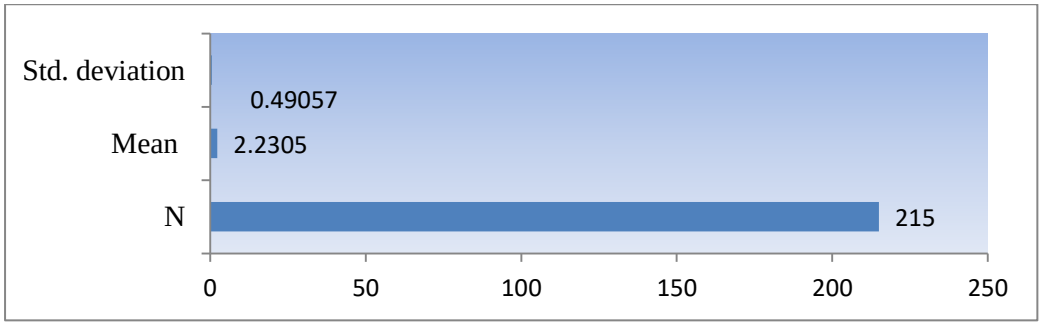

Figure 1: career indecision level of first-year students

As depicted in Table 2 and Figure 1, the career indecision level of students is M = 2.2305, indicating greater career indecision among first-year students and SD = .49, indicating that they are developmentally undecided. This type of career indecision is suggested to be caused by a lack of information about oneself and the world of work.

Table 3: Difference in the mean career indecision scores for students attended government school and privet school

Career indecision	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Government schools	155	2.2645	.48688	-1.639	213	.103
Privet schools	60	2.1427	.49321			

As Table 3 revealed, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the career indecision scores for students who attended government schools and those who attended private schools. There is no statistically significant difference in the mean career indecision scores between students from government schools (M=2.2645, SD=.48688) and students from private schools (M=2.1427, SD=.49321; t(213)=-1.639, p=.103, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =-.12181, 95% CI: -.26826 to .02464) was very small (eta squared = .00469), or 0.469% of the variance in career indecision is explained by the types of schools (whether government or private) students attended.

Table 4: Gender difference in career indecision

Career indecision	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Male	153	2.2904	.48664	2.860	213	.005
Female	62	2.0827	.47217			

The results from Table 4 indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean career indecision scores between male (M=2.2904, SD=.48664) and female students (M=2.0827, SD=.47217; t(213) = 2.860, p=.005, two-tailed). The magnitude of the mean difference is .20778, with a 95% CI of .06458 to .35089. This reveals that male students exhibit significantly greater career indecision than female students, as supported by statistical evidence from the t-test results.

4. Discussion

Participants in this study were first-year students from both the social sciences and natural sciences streams. Regarding the career indecision level of these students, the results indicated that there is greater career indecision among first-year students, as well as they are developmentally undecided (M = 2.2305, SD = .49). This type of career indecision can be

caused by a lack of information about oneself and the world of work (Goliath, 2012). The findings in this study are similar to those by Talib & Aun (2009) on Malaysian undergraduate students, who reported a high level of career indecision due to a significant need for career information. They noted that individuals with extensive information about occupations and careers are more decisive in their career choices, reflected in effective decision-making. Similarly, a study by Das et al. (2020) indicated a high level of career indecision among students. Additionally, Boo and Kim (2020b) found that many students experience career indecision due to a lack of information (M = 4.47, SD = 2.21).

The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in the mean career indecision score between students from government schools (M=2.2645, SD=.48688) and those from private schools (M=2.1427, SD=.49321; t(213) = -1.639, p = .103, two-tailed). Contrary to this study, Javed and Tariq (2016) found a main effect for educational institution, with students from private institutions experiencing less difficulty making career decisions (M = 13.72, SD = 4.28) than those from government institutions (M = 15.0, SD = 4.43). The difference in the findings can be due to the instruments used in those studies, or related to the differences in the curriculum applied, or due to other factors.

The analysis of the current study revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean career indecision score between male and female students, indicating that male students exhibit significantly greater career indecision than female students. In the same vein, Kishor (1981) reported that males were more career decided than females. Similar to this study, Talib & Aun (2009) found a significant difference in career readiness among male and female undergraduates [t(1159) = 5.39, $p \leq .001$]. Likewise, Goliath (2012) revealed a statistically significant difference in career indecision among undergraduate students based on gender. Also, a study by Das et al. (2020) indicated that career indecision among students is at a high level. The factors behind this gender difference have not been given much emphasis by those findings, and further research could overcome this limitation.

5. **Conclusion**

This study found that first-year students experience career indecision due to a lack of information about themselves and the world of work. The study also revealed no difference in the level of career indecision between students who attended government schools and those who attended private schools. Additionally, the findings revealed a difference in the level of

career indecision between male and female students, with male students exhibiting significantly greater career indecision than female students.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions made above, the following recommendations were provided:

- Comprehensive modern career guidance and counselling programs should be facilitated to assist students by providing career-related information and addressing similar issues.
- Efforts should be made to integrate self-assessment activities and information about various career paths into orientation programs for first-year students. This would proactively address the information gap early in their university experience.
- It is vital to conduct further research to understand the specific factors contributing to career indecision within this student population, potentially exploring differences based on their academic disciplines or backgrounds in more detail. This can help tailor career guidance and counselling programs more effectively to meet the diverse needs of students.

7. Limitation of the study

This study, despite its strengths, has limitations including a small sample size restricted to first-year students at a single university, potentially impacting generalizability. The study also did not investigate the underlying reasons for gender differences in career indecision, necessitating further research.

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