

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Career Development among Undergraduate Students of Madda Walabu University, South East Ethiopia

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### *Abstract*

*Career guidance and counselling is a vaguely implemented concept in most educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations. The severity of the problem and scarcity of relevant information among university students have prompted the undertaking of this study the aim of which was to assess career development among undergraduate students of Madda Walabu University. Cross-sectional study design was employed to gather quantitative data through self-administered structured questionnaires. The participants in the study were 605 undergraduate students of Madda Walabu University who were recruited through multi-stage sampling. The analysis employed SPSS-20.0 to calculate t-test and ANOVA. The findings suggested that socio-demographic variables were important in determining the factors, levels and variances in career development. The participants' perceived benefit of career development has shown that there is a statistically significant difference between the expected mean and the observed mean,  $t(604) = 29.11, p < .01$ . However, they had only some unsatisfactory information on career development and most of them (47.4%) did not have a bright future. The result of this study showed that career development is important in understanding students' personal values, clarifying their goals, career choice directions and job-searching skills. Because the respondents' reported information on career development is so poor, lack of future direction and decreased performance are inevitable. It is suggested that career counselling services are seen to be highly recommendable in advancing students' career development in many aspects.*

### *Keywords*

*career development, socio-demographic variables, university students*

### *Introduction*

Career guidance and counselling is a vaguely implemented concept in most educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations. Students need a professional counsellor's guidance to develop their career. Student services should be available on campus to help them develop self-awareness (personal interests, skills, potentials, weaknesses) and assess occupational opportunities such as, employment trends, expected

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competencies in the field, requirements for employment and job descriptions related to the area. Students also need to prepare a career plan related to their career research, goal setting and means of accomplishing goals, and develop job-searching skills (identifying prospective employers, preparing résumés, preparing for interviews). Hence, the role of career guidance counselling services is invaluable in enabling students to select the best fit with their ability, interest and personality.

Nayak and Rao (2004) disclosed that discipline choice is a very important decision and that it is a long process rather than a simple incident. Vocational interests and choices do not appear all of a sudden during adolescence; they appear as a result of the development process. Different scholars have listed the main factors which can have a major influence on the selection of occupational types. For example, Mesfin (2000) mentioned that the most frequent factors are interest in the job, personal abilities, personality traits, security, stability and prestige appeared to play a subsidiary role in influencing the choice of a vocation. In general students are uncertain of what courses they should study, and there is always a preference for courses that are believed to be easy or enjoyable. Most of the students do not understand the relationship between course selections and their future destinations for business, interest and physical fit; therefore, the connection between education and career entry is also not understood by many (Stuart, 2002). It is emphasised that students who join different occupational training areas should select and be placed in accordance with their interests, aptitudes and capabilities for the requirements of that particular occupation (Antinos, 2006; Heluf, 2005).

Even though students' career choice, interest and aptitude are essential factors influencing their success in universities and colleges, the Ethiopian tertiary education admission system is merely based on university entrance examination results and some affirmative action targeting girls, physically disabled students and students from 'developing' regions believed to be disadvantaged.

Scholars in the field recommend that comprehensive modern career guidance and counselling programmes will be effective in assisting students, along with their parents, in responding to these and similar issues. It is believed that when career counsellors have time, resources and the structure of a comprehensive programme within which to work, worthy things happen. These include improving academic achievement, helping students to take more demanding courses and development and use of career plans (Day as cited in Yilfashewa, 2011).

Through improving career guidance demands for young people, policy makers can address challenges in tertiary education. There challenges are in meeting gaps in access, level of quality of services and improving the nature of services. In college, the major challenges are to provide sufficient human and capital resources of the right type within educational settings. Gaps in access are particularly evident in career development and in the vocational tracks of college settings. There is generally a lack of career guidance provision for students in tertiary education despite the significant benefits of career development (Sun & Yuen, 2012).

Some local researchers described that the existing modern counselling services in Ethiopia are confined to educational settings, especially universities; but the availability

of counselling in non-academic settings is insignificant (Yusuf, 1998). Thus, the process of vocational development is a continuous, ongoing one, and it is essentially an act of developing and implementing a self-concept.

### *Counselling Services in Madda Walabu University*

The origin of provision of counselling services to the students at Madda Walabu University was in September 2008. It commenced with employing a counsellor who had the qualification of Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. This person worked as a student counsellor for about two years. During the first year of service, many functions were not fulfilled. Among these, the counselling service office location was not suitable for all students. The university administrators did not give much emphasis to the services. Counselling services for the students were considered useless.

Between 2010 and 2012, the counselling service was unofficially provided by the dean. This service is not recognised by the university's administrators. The services covered various psychological, academic and social problems requiring the help of professionals. The counselling service was subsequently closed for two years whereafter the university employed two Bachelor of Arts in Psychology graduates as counsellors.

Addressing individuals and group trainees' problems needs educational and practical experiences at individual, small-scale and association levels as well as careful career guidance and counselling services. Students need this career counselling from various angles ranging from field selection, marketing and recruitment potentialities to interests and other psychological requirements, and physical and psychological fitness. Seeking the required readiness appropriate for career counselling and guidance services could be provided to promote the overall development of the trainees and the country. It also enables learners and practitioners to be productive for themselves as well as for society.

Hence, it is unquestionable that the relevance of conducting a study on this issue is that it gives prompt solutions for the improvement of the service. Unless the psychosocial and emotional problems of students are addressed through effective career counselling services, these problems are aggravated or persist at the same pace, resulting in the wastage of more human resources.

## *Methods*

### **Research design and area**

The study used a cross-sectional survey design to collect data for portraying the characteristics of career development among undergraduate students of Madda Malabu University which is found in Ethiopia; and located at a distance of 430 km to the southeast of Addis Ababa. This design was chosen because of its appropriateness for the purposes of the study. The cross-sectional survey design is suitable for describing the way things are. The data gathered from respondents through questionnaires were used to discover particular characteristics of undergraduate university students. The study used quantitative design because all variables in this research were measured instead of being manipulated.

The study was conducted among 605 randomly selected regular undergraduate students in March 2013. The university has two campuses: Robe main campus and Goba College of Medicine and Health Sciences. In 2013 the university had ten schools, one institute, one college and thirty-seven departments with a total number of 5,960 undergraduate students.

### Sampling and participants

This study used 605 randomly selected undergraduate students of Madda Walabu University in March 2013.

Table 1: Background information of sample students by college/school and department

Institute: College/School	Department	Sample for Regular	Sample for Extension
Engineering and Technology	Civil and Urban Engineering	36	-
	Construction Technology and Management	33	5
	Water Resource and Irrigation	-	-
	Information System	-	-
	Computer Science	-	8
Mathematical Science	Mathematics	-	-
	Statistics	36	-
Natural Science	Biology	38	-
	Physics	-	-
	Chemistry	-	-
	Sport Science	16	-
Biodiversity and Natural Resources	Eco-Tourism	-	-
	Natural Resource Management	-	-
	Forestry	-	-
College of Health Science	Generic Nursing	40	14
	Health Officer	35	11
	Midwifery	25	-
	Medicine	-	-
Agriculture	Animal Science	-	-
	Plant Science	20	-
	Rural Development and Agricultural Extension	-	-
Business and Economics	Accounting	34	9
	Economics	32	-
	Marketing Management	22	-
	Management	29	12
Social Science	Tourism Management	18	-
	Geography	-	-
	History	18	-

Institute: College/School	Department	Sample for Regular	Sample for Extension
Behavioral Science	Civic and Ethical Education	17	-
	Sociology	24	10
	Law	-	-
	Psychology	-	-
Language	English	10	-
	Afan Oromo	20	13
	Journalism	-	-
	Amharic	-	-
Institute of Pedagogical Science	EDPM <sup>#</sup> Educational Planning	20	-
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>532</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>605</b>	

<sup>#</sup>EDPM – Educational Development Planning and Management

The samples in Table 1 were determined based on single population proportion to size sampling in relation to college/school and department. For more information see the above Table 1.

Regular undergraduate students of Madda Walabu University were the source population and the study populations were those students selected for the study through simple random sampling. The sample size was determined by using a single population proportion formula considering the following assumptions: proportion of career development which was 50%, level of confidence of 95%, margin of error 0.05, design effect of 1.5 and 10% non-response rate. Finally the sample size was computed to be 605 by using the following formula:

The respondents were stratified into the health and non-health campus. From the total ten non-health schools (Robe campus) and one medicine and health sciences college of the university (Goba campus), one college, one institute and nine schools were selected randomly. The total sample size of the study was allocated proportionally for the schools/college. Samples allocated for the schools/college were allocated proportionally for the stratified class year under the departments of selected schools/college.

### Data collection and analysis

In order to collect relevant and reliable data the researcher employed questionnaires which were used before by scholars in the area. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires. Supervision of the data collection was done by the instructors from different schools in the university. The questionnaires were first developed in English and then translated into both Afan Oromo and Amharic languages to suit the respondents. Data-collection facilitators were fluent speakers of both Afan Oromo and Amharic language. Two days' training were allocated for data collectors on how to collect and process

data. *SPSS-20.0* was used to compute descriptive statistics, analysis of *t*-test and ANOVA because the questionnaire was Likert scale or ordinal type.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were approved by the Addis Ababa research review committee. After approval for ethical clearance, communication was made with Mada Walabu University using the joint letter taken from Addis Ababa University before data collection. Prior to administering the questionnaire, the objectives of the study were clearly explained to the participants and oral informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the execution of the study. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so and that this would not affect any service or benefit that they were get from any institution.

### **Operational definitions**

**Career:** a job or profession for which one is trained and in which one intends to be involved through life.

**Career development:** encompasses all activities that foster the individual student's knowledge, skills and capacities in relation to planning, developing and directing their career through informed choices. Career development involves the person's creation of a career pattern, decision-making style, integration of life roles, value expression, and life-role self-concepts (Herr *et al.*, cited in Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009).

**Career information:** comprises the delivery of accessible written, text, online, media or oral information concerning career needs and pathways; and includes career fairs, employer presentations, documents from tertiary providers and employers, and job search websites. It incorporates opportunities for students to relate career information to personal, career opportunities, progression routes, and build knowledge about where support may be available and how to access it.

**Career counselling:** refers to the professional help provided to students to deal with their career concerns and to facilitate their career development. Helping students in field selection and becoming aware of the many occupations available for exploration; assisting them in deciding what to do after their graduation; and helping them to understand the challenges and opportunities of work are the main issues of career counselling in educational settings.

**Career guidance:** the process of providing an individual with career information and information about the world of work (information, exploration). This term is used interchangeably with vocational guidance.

**Vocational guidance:** the process of helping an individual to choose an occupation, to prepare for it, to enter into it, and progress in it. It is vital in assisting students who have the usual problems experienced in vocational development. It was originally thought to be provided only prior to training and employment.

## Results

This section deals with the findings of the study. The aim of this study is to investigate the status of career development of Madda Walabu University undergraduate students. To assess the overall status among Madda Walabu University students, the researcher used quantitative data based on self-administered structured questionnaires.

It is believed that the demographic characteristics of students may determine their career development status. Hence, students' socio-demographic characteristics were studied and the results are presented hereunder.

**Table 2: Socio-demographic variables in terms of age, gender, origin of residential and academic year level of respondents**

Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	452	74.7
	Female	153	25.3
Admission type	Regular	523	86.4
	Extension	82	13.6
Origin of residential	Urban	239	39.5
	Rural	361	59.7
Age	16–20	194	32.1
	21–25	353	58.3
	26–30	47	7.8
	31–35	11	1.8
Academic year level	I	244	40.3
	II	203	33.5
	III	138	22.7
	IV	20	3.6

Table 2 describes the general information of the student respondents based on their socio-demographic characteristics. The total number of participants in the study was 605. As indicated, 452 (74.7%) of the participants were male, whereas the rest 153 (25.3%) were female. It is shown clearly in the table above that the frequency of participants in terms of age ranges from 21–25 years old. This constitutes the majority of the respondents which was 353 (58.3%). On the other hand, 194 (32.1 %) of them were in the age range of 16–20 years. Respondents in the age range of 26–30 was 47 (7.8%). The rest of the respondents were in the age range of 31–35, which accounts for 11 (1.8%).

In relation to frequency of participants in terms of origin of residential, from urban residence were 239 (39.5%) and a large number of the respondents were from rural residence which accounts for 361 (59.7%). Moreover, in terms of academic year level, Year I participants accounted for the majority of the respondents with 244 (40.3%) while Year II, Year III and Year IV respondents totaled 203 (33.5%), 138 (22.7%) and 20 (3.6%) respectively.

**Table 3: The importance of career counselling services for the students**

Item	Agree		Disagree		Not sure		Total	
	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Understanding students' personal values	431	71.2	54	8.9	120	19.8	605	100
Students to clarify their career goals	362	58.9	52	8.6	191	31.6	605	100
Helping students in their choice of career direction	445	73.6	34	5.6	126	20.8	605	100
Assessing students' skills and abilities	390	64.5	40	6.6	175	28.9	605	100
Locating career information for the students	438	72.4	42	6.9	125	20.7	605	100
Helping students in job-searching techniques	422	69.8	60	9.9	122	20.2	605	100
Developing students' interview skills	397	65.5	53	8.8	155	25.6	605	100
Decision-making skills	381	63.0	47	7.8	176	29.1	605	100
Identifying obstacles to students' career choice	371	61.3	123	20.3	111	18.3	605	100
Helping in writing résumé	385	63.6	126	20.8	94	15.5	605	100

Table 3 clearly illustrates that most respondents do agree with the benefits of a counselling service for career development. Accordingly, the respondents pointed out that in relation to their career development, a counselling service would help them to understand their personal values (71.2%) to classify their career goals (58.9), to assess their skills and abilities (64.5%), to develop their job-searching techniques (69.8%) and to identify obstacles to career choice (61.3%). In contrast, relatively few students – 20.8%, 7.8% and 8.8% – did not agree that the help of a career counselling service would be effective in writing a résumé, decision-making skills and developing students' interview skills respectively. Therefore, Mada Walabu University students believe in the importance of a career counselling service for their career development.

**Table 4: One sample t-test on perceived benefit due to career counselling**

Variables	N	Mean	Expected Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perceived benefit due to career counselling: Sum 1 to 10	605	25.25	20	4.662	604	29.112 <sup>#</sup>	.00

<sup>#</sup>*P* < 0.01

One sample *t*-test, used to investigate perceived benefit of career development has shown that there is a statistically significant difference between the expected mean and the observed mean, *t* (604) = 29.11, *p* < .01. Therefore, students' perceived benefit is above expected.

Table 5: Advancing students' career development

In relation to advancing your career development, have you thus far been successful in:	Agree		Disagree		Not sure		Total	
	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Understanding personal values in career development	341	56.4	159	26.3	105	17.4	605	100
Clarifying your future career goals	342	56.5	158	26.1	105	17.4	605	100
Choosing a career direction	327	54.0	158	26.1	120	19.8	605	100
Assessing abilities, potentials and weak points	345	57.0	135	22.3	125	20.7	605	100
Locating career information	338	55.9	155	25.6	112	18.5	605	100
Acquiring job-search techniques	339	56.1	153	25.3	113	18.7	605	100
Developing interview skills	357	59.0	164	27.1	84	13.9	605	100
Developing decision-making skills	363	60.0	142	23.5	100	16.5	605	100
Identifying obstacles to career choices	357	59.0	135	22.3	113	18.7	605	100
Writing a résumé or other correspondence to advance career	381	63.0	120	19.8	104	17.2	605	100

Counselling services are thus seen to be highly recommendable in advancing career development in many aspects. According to data shown in the Table 5, the respondents believe that advancing students' career development helps them to understand their personal values in their career development (56.4%), to clarify their future career goals (56.5%), to develop decision-making skills (60%), to identify obstacles which might hinder their career choices (59%), and to write a résumé or other correspondence to advance their career. Respondents who disagreed account for 26.1%, 25.6% and 25.3% respectively, claiming that career counselling services do not help in choosing a career direction, locating career information and acquiring job-search techniques. Despite the fact that there is a lack in terms of advancing students' career development in the university, it shows misunderstanding of the students about the concept of advancing students' career development.

Table 6: Students' information on career development

Item	Agree		Disagree		Not sure		Total	
	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Have adequate information	323	53.4	198	32.7	84	13.9	605	100
Do not know where to secure this information	275	45.5	208	34.4	122	20.2	605	100
Graduate and this worries you greatly	283	46.8	204	33.7	118	19.5	605	100
Worry that affects your educational performance	306	50.6	203	33.6	96	15.9	605	100
Do not see a bright future ahead of you	287	47.4	231	38.2	87	14.4	605	100

Table 6 reveals that students have different level of information on career development. Accordingly, about 53.4% reported as they have adequate information, whereas about

45.5% do not know where to secure the information. Even though students have some information on career development, most of them (47.4%) do not see a bright future ahead. This in turn results in creation of worries which affect their educational performance (50.6%). Moreover, almost half of the respondents admitted worrying about what to do and how to get employed after graduation (46.8%). In short, the data shows that the information that the students of Madda Walabu University have in relation to career development is not satisfactory.

**Table 7: ANOVA knowledge and information on career development by academic year**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	110.085	3	36.695	3.003 <sup>#</sup>	0.03
Within groups	7296.247	597	12.222		
Total	7406.333	600			

<sup>#</sup>*P* < 0.05

Analysis of variance on knowledge and information on career development has revealed a statistically significant difference among the students based on their year level,  $F(3,597) = 3.00, p < .05$ . The descriptive statistics have shown that third-year students have greater knowledge of career development. As academic year increases, career development information rises due to exposure to different information sources.

### *Discussions*

According to Hartman (1999) career counsellors provide students with experience that increases knowledge of occupations, training path, lifestyle, employment-seeking skills, decision-making strategies and above all knowledge of self. The finding of Adedunni and Oyesoji (2010) also show that career guidance and counselling services can provide students with the necessary tools to set career goals, and give them an understanding of the education and skills needed to meet their goals. Lack of career counselling undermines the economic productivity of a country due to lack of proper career preparation, training, placement and satisfaction of students. The finding of the current study was consistent with these finding and reported that career counselling helps students to understand personal values, clarify their goals and choices of career direction, and acquire job-searching techniques.

Some students' educational and career aspirations are inhibited due to personal and social difficulties that must be addressed by counsellors if students are to experience success (Schmidt, 1997). In relation to advancing their career development, this study revealed that more than 60% of students recommend career counselling for assistance in developing decision-making skills and writing a résumé or other correspondence to advance their career. The finding also showed that 56% of students were able to understand their personal value, clarify future career goals and acquire job-search techniques as a result of advancing in career development skills.

Career development is seen as a process of individual development rather than just getting employment and includes lifelong behavioral processes and influences that lead to one's work value, choices of occupation, creation of career pattern, decision-making style, role integration, self-identity and career identity, educational literacy and related phenomena (Schutt, 2000). Nziramasanga (1999) also reports that guidance and counselling assists learners in identifying their own talents and in making intelligent choices for their future careers.

The analysis of information on career counselling suggested 53.4% of students have adequate information, whereas about 45.5% do not know where to secure the information. Again, the finding indicates that lack of future vision and decrease in performance among MWU students need attention. Therefore, the counselling centre of MWU should take the importance of career counselling into account in the process of its re-shaping or restructuring.

### *Conclusion*

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been drawn.

The result of this study showed career development was found to be important in understanding students' personal values, clarifying their goals, career choices and direction, and job-searching skills. However, they reported that information on career development is poor. As a result, the students do not know where to obtain career-related information, resulting in lack of future direction and decrease in performance.

The career development services offered in the university were not enough and also not strong enough to provide adequate information about the characteristics of different vocational fields, labour market information, and skills required by different vocational fields. Career development services through traditional consultancy services from parents, elders and peers may lead trainees to make irrational choices. However, scientific career development services should help to provide necessary information about the course of the study, information about world of work, labour market information and relevant information about abilities and skills in terms of related qualifications and competencies required to take up the identified training programme.

Career development services are relevant in assisting trainees to identify job opportunities and job availabilities in the area of their studies and enable them to avoid wasting time in training for vocations to which they are unsuited. By contrast, the study revealed that career development service was not given adequately in the sample the parent organisation institutions. Therefore, the availability of the services is limited. As a result, this reality has adversely affected the training programme as a whole. Using the intake capacity of higher education institutions as a major criterion can be a cause for some problems like unemployment of trained personnel.

The placement guideline favors students. Moreover, the placement guideline used to place trainees in different vocational institutions gives attention to the living area of trainees during placement activities being undertaken. Finally, career counselling alone does not lead to provision of jobs or eradication of poverty. National governments, therefore, need

to create an economic environment that promotes the growth of enterprises and generally stimulates the economy. When businesses develop and expand, additional labour-market demands emerge for trained personnel, and new job and further training opportunities are created to trace and light the path of industrialisation. For this to happen on a sustainable basis, however, the higher education institutional system must be labour-market relevant, efficient and of high quality.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the above conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations:

- Career guidance and counselling services should be well established in order to reach all students.
- Career guidance and counselling should focus more on creating career self-awareness, and it should adopt a strategy to improve career information and planning among students.
- Career guidance and counselling should be strengthened if students' career awareness and career planning are to improve.
- Career guidance and counselling services should focus on building a bright future for students.
- The Ministry of Education should give more training to career counsellors and provide adequate resources for their use in career guidance and counselling.

### *Competing Interests*

The authors declare that they have no competing of interests.

### *Authors' Contributions*

Abera Getachew (AG) was involved in conceiving the idea, proposal writing, designing, raising funding for the study, data collection, drafting of the manuscript and participated in all implementation stages of the project. He drafted and finalised the text of the manuscript. Gobena Daniel (GD) was involved in proposal writing, raising funding for the study, data collection and participated in all stages of the project's implementation. AG and GD were also involved in data entry, analysing the data, drafting the text of the manuscript and participated in all stages of the project's implementation. AG and GD were both involved in drafting, analysis and reviewing the manuscript critically for important intellectual content and participated in all stages of the research implementation. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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