

Role of Passion in Career Choices of University Students: A Mixed Method Study

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Abstract

Passion is one of the less studied but widely accepted constructs which certainly plays a pivotal role in an individual's life. In the Indian culture, society gives a higher position to academic career over career based solely on arts. The current study adopts a mixed-method approach using descriptive statistics, interviews, and reflective journals on 124 university students in the age group of 18-28 years. The results suggest that choosing a career is a complex process involving external as well as internal forces like parental influences, personal choices, and interests as well as readiness to take risks. Additionally, students who are aware of their passion and have chosen it as a full-time career showed more meaningfulness, satisfaction, and fulfilment while others who have chosen different careers displayed frustration, dissatisfaction, and feel a sense of vacuum in their world of passion.

Keywords: Passion, career-choices, career-decisions, parental influences, personal choices, satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career is a prime phase in the developmental lives of the youth (Robertson, 2014; Bubić and Ivanišević, 2016). Career choice is a dynamic process in which the youth go through an exploration phase to understand what exactly they want to do and also explore various career options with appropriate guidance (Porfeli and Lee, 2012). During this phase, the individual begins to discover and establish his or her identity and further develop essential skills for career (Chauhan and Joshi, 2015). Additionally, when this phase of the youth is handled carefully, it helps in affirming the individual identity and fosters well-being (Kummen, 2013). Amongst various theories of career, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent et al. (1994) states that the career development behaviours are affected by three social cognitive processes - self-efficacy

beliefs, outcome expectations and career goals and intentions which interplay with ethnicity, culture, gender, socio-economic status, social support, and any perceived barriers to shape a person's educational and career paths (Lent et al., 2000; Blanco, 2011). This emphasizes the complex interplay between the personal aspirations and/or passion of youths in their career choices and decision-making and the external influences which act upon them. Passion and career are concepts which could or could not go hand in hand in Indian context. Interests of individual, their passion and personal interests play a major role in the selection of career (Caldera et al., 2003). However, researchers have acknowledged the influence of family and parents play a major role in the career choice and career development of the individuals (Chauhan and Joshi, 2015). Many of the individuals face

confusion and difficulties in regard to the decision making related to careers and which are significantly influenced by their family (Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld & Earl, 2005). When it comes to choosing a career, the parents push their children into career which are “stable” and “prestigious” without considering what the children are really interested in (Atkins, 2007). In a qualitative study done by Ralitsa Atkins (2007), it was seen that the parents pushed their children to study medicine as this profession was considered by them as “prestigious”. The participants also mentioned that they felt brainwashed by their parents and that they had been shaped in a particular manner to take up medicine. Atkins mentioned that the notion that medicine is considered as a “stable” profession was seen in all her interviews. Atkins (2007) stated that similar to this study, engineering is considered a successful profession in India and the children are pushed towards it. “Professional prestige” was identified as an important deciding factor for youth career decision making in India (Agarwaal, 2008). In collectivistic cultures like India, youth’s career choice and outcome expectation is dependent on perceived congruence with parents (Cheung and Arnold, 2014). Furthermore, research points at the influence of parent’s education and profession on the career choices of their children (Kracke, 1997).

Additionally, parent’s profession and skills, knowledge, socio-economic, educational and cultural backgrounds and their financial and moral support to children are also seen to be important influences in their children’s career choosing process (Noreen & Khalid, 2012). Interesting findings were noted in a study done by Leppel, et al. (2001) where it was seen that father’s professional or policymaking occupation has a significant effect on female students as compared to the mothers in similar career area. However, mother’s occupation was seen to have an influence on male students. Research in this area shows how mothers have a strong impact on general career direction and academic lives of children whereas the fathers have a huge role in computing the career choices (Adya & Kaiser, 2005).

The current study aims to explore student’s awareness about their passion, its role in their current educational course, in turn to career choices and their perceived satisfaction as an outcome of the these forced versus self-choices.

Method

Participants

The study was done on university students who are enrolled in bachelors and masters level program. Through an advertisement at university classes, a total of 124 individuals showed interest and voluntarily participated in the current study. However, twenty-two of the students dropped out of the study whereas two of them were excluded due to the age criteria. Therefore, total of 100 participants in total voluntarily participated in the study. The participants enrolled in university courses informed that current course will be their future employment (which is common practice in Indian Setting). The participant’s ages ranged from 18 to 28 years with a mean of $m = 23.39$ and standard deviation of $SD = 2.43$. An informed consent with a brief introduction of the nature of research was obtained from the participants.

Quantitative Measures

A descriptive method was used as a precursor to describe quantitative results. A qualitative method which was also embedded within the methodology frame helped and supported the quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). In addition to this, descriptive statistics was used to describe the demographic profiles of the participants such as age, gender, qualifications, socio economic status, and so on. This analysis of descriptive data enabled the researcher to better describe the results of the qualitative data. Furthermore, chi square analysis and correlational statistics was also carried out to understand the data more in depth. Moreover, using these quantitative methods, the researcher had an enhanced understanding of relevant concepts and theories.

Qualitative measures

The participants were interviewed about their present career choices and their passion. The interviews were conducted and transcribed immediately. If the respondents were not comfortable in verbally sharing, they were asked to write the responses and submit. Interviews began with the probe: “Describe how you feel about your current career choice”. Leading questions were posed when suitable: “Is your career choice aligned with your passion? Are you satisfied with the career choice? Would you change your choice if given a chance?” Leading questions were asked when the respondents did not share about these aspects without external probes. Moreover, the conversation flowed efficiently with other questions and probes. Therefore, data were converted for descriptive and non-parametric analysis.

Data Analysis

Initial frequency and percentage were computed to understand both demographic and other responses of the participants. These responses are linked to understanding of passion and their present career choices, based on various background characteristics like age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, qualification, and family structures on their choice of career and overall satisfaction. Moreover, chi square test of independence was done to assess the relationships between various aspects to expand the understanding of data. For the qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis given by Braun and Clarke (2006) was conducted in various phases. All the interviews were transcribed word by word and were re-read several times to understand the data. After thoroughly reading the transcription, codes were generated and collated into potential themes. Both the researchers worked separately and together to determine the thematic domains, core ideas, themes, and subthemes. The themes were reviewed and were defined and named. The themes were reviewed and were defined and named. Domains, categories and sub categories is given in Table 5.

Moreover, the categories which are presented in the table are articulated by a considerable number of interviews and quotations instead of number or even percentage of responses by each theme.

Results

Based on literature, an important way of presenting the results and findings from mixed-method research (e.g., Creswell et al., 2002), involves discussing the findings from quantitative data first after which the findings stemming from qualitative analysis are discussed. These two sets of findings are considered together to understand the studied aspects in a better way.

Quantitative Results

Table-1 *Demographic Details of participants*
(*N= 100, Mean Age= 23.03*)

Demographic Details		n	%
Gender	Male	37	37.0
	Female	63	63.0
Educational Qualification	achelors	52	52.0
	Masters	48	48.0
Occupation	Student	52	52.0
	Working	48	48.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	83	83.0
	Married	17	17.0
Family Structure	Nuclear	98	98.0
	Joint	2	2.0
Cardinal Position	Elder	95	95.0
	Younger	5	5.0
Socioeconomic Status	Upper	36	36.0
	Middle	63	63.0
	NA	1	1.0
Mothers Education	Secondary	3	3.0
	Higher Secondary	48	48.0
	Graduation	28	28.0
	Post-Graduation	21	21.0
Fathers Education	Secondary	3	3.0
	Higher Secondary	3	3.0
	Graduation	58	58.0

	Post-Graduation	27	27.0
	Not Reported	9	9.0
Mother's occupation	Housewife	48	48.0
	Working	50	50.0
	Not Reported	2	2.0
Father's occupation	Job	66	66.0
	Business	34	34.0

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of the demographics profiles of the participants.

Table-2 *Passion, career choices, satisfaction and strategies*

		<i>n</i>	%
Field of Passion	Sports	11	11.0
	Arts	82	82.0
	Fashion	2	2.0
	Social Work	1	1.0
	NR	4	4.0
Are You Pursuing your Passion	Yes	43	43.0
	No	57	57.0
	NA	1	1.0
Would you choose passion over current career or activity if given chance	yes	90	90.0
	No	10	10.0
Are you feeling satisfied over your choices	Yes	50	50.0
	No	42	42.0
	Maybe	8	8.0
Are you able to balance between	Yes	65	65.0

Table-3 *Chi Square Test of Independence on demographic characteristics, passion*

Socio Economic Status x Passion			
SES	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 16.377$ $p = .000$
Upper	25	11	
Middle	18	45	
NA	0	1	

activity chosen for career and passion			
	No	31	31.0
	Maybe	4	4.0
Strategies Adopted for Balance	Mixed Activities (practice, online videos, competitions)	86	86.0
	Extra Courses	7	7.0
	Practice at home	3	3.0
	Blogging	3	3.0
	Not reported	1	1.0

As seen in the table, passion of the participants ranged from art-related activities, sports, fashion, to social work. 82% of the participants reported their passion for art related activities which involved dance, music, tabla, singing, flute. Only 43% respondents stated that they were pursuing their passion as their current career choice whereas 57% were not pursuing passion as their career choice. Out of the 57% individuals, almost 90% stated their desire to take up their career choices related to their passion itself whereas the remaining 10% shared that they did not want to mix up their careers and hobbies. Half of the population displayed satisfaction with their career choices. However more than half of the population, 65% individuals stated their inability to balance passion and careers. In order to indulge in passion and stay in touch with it, participants mentioned a range of strategies they adopt involving watching videos of passionate activity, practicing, participating in competitions, taking extra courses related to passion, blogging and so on.

Gender X Passion			
Gender	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (1, N=100) = .145$ $p = .703$
Male	15	22	
Female	28	35	
Mothers Education x Passion			
Mother's Education	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (3, N=100) = 3.186$ $p = .364$
10 th	1	2	
12 th	21	27	
Graduate	9	19	
Post graduate	12	9	
Fathers Education x Passion			
Father's Education	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (4, N=41) = 4.905$ $p = .297$
10 th	0	3	
12 th	1	2	
Graduate	26	32	
Post graduate	14	13	
Not Reported	2	7	
Mother's Occupation x Passion			
Mother's Education	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 1.727$ $p = .422$
Working	23	27	
Housewife	20	28	
Business	0	2	
Father's Occupation x Passion			
Father's Occupation	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (1, N=100) = 0.70$ $p = .791$

Working	29	37	
Business	14	20	
FS x Passion			
SES	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (1, N=100) = 2.705$ $p = .100$
Joint	2	0	
Nuclear	41	57	
Balance x Passion			
Balance	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 2.123$ $p = .346$
Yes	31	34	
No	10	21	
May be	2	2	
Passion x Satisfaction			
Satisfaction	Are you pursuing your passion		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 44.819$ $p = .000$
Yes	38	12	
No	5	37	
May be	0	8	
Satisfaction x Choosing Passion			
Satisfaction	Would you choose passion if given a chance		Chi Square Test of Independence
	Yes	No	$\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 7.153$ $p = .028$
Yes	41	9	
No	41	1	
May be	8	0	

The chi square test of independence between SES and pursuing passion $\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 16.377$ $p = .000$ suggesting that students belong to high socio economic status pursued their passion as compared to students from middle class. When comparison between male and female participants was made in pursuing their career based on passion, the result suggested

that $\chi^2 (1, N=100) = .145$ $p = .703$ there are no gender difference seen. Mother's education which is very important factor in developing nations in children's academic decisions, when compared, results showed that $\chi^2 (3, N=100) = 3.186$ $p = .364$ does not influence the choice. Similarly, father's education didn't show any differences in pursuing career based on passion

χ^2 (3, N=100) =3.186 p = .364. Similarly, father's occupation and mother's occupation, which was cited in previous researches as major factor of choice of career didn't show significant differences χ^2 (1, N=100) =0.70 p = .791; χ^2 (2, N=100) =1.727 p = .422 in the current study. Further when we explored that students who pursued their career based on passion, how they differ on their satisfaction level. The result suggests that students who chose their career based on their passion reported more satisfaction χ^2 (2, N=100) =44.819 p =.000 in comparison to their

counterpart. When explored that what if students get chance to follow their passion, then students who preferred their passion as their career choices reported more satisfaction in contrast to their counterpart χ^2 (2, N=100) =7.153 p =.028.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative section will report aspects studied in the interview and journal data. They are organized differently in order to more meaningfully and accurately reflect the thoughts and emotions of participants.

Table 5- Categories, sub-categories and quotations

Sr. No.	CATEGORIES	SUB CATEGORIES	QUOTATIONS
1	Understanding passion	1. Awareness	<i>"I was always aware of my passion to be dance. However I became aware of it very late when I had already chosen my career."</i>
		2. Identification	<i>"It took a lot of time to actually recognise what I was passionate about. Once I did, there was no looking back"</i>
2	Current choice of career	1. Aligned with passion	<i>"I was lucky enough to choose my passionate activity as my career. I am a very happy professional singer and trained in that completely"</i>
		2. Unrelated to passion	<i>"My passion and my current career choice is not aligned at all. I was always passionate about acting and wanted to pursue dramatics. But could not"</i>
3	Inability to pursue passion as career	1. Fear of uncertainty	<i>"I have immense passion for flute. I wanted to take it up as my career. But this field is so uncertain that I decided to drop the plan"</i>
		2. Financial insecurity and instability	<i>"When I finished my boards, I wanted to pursue cricket as my career. But then I realised that field won't give me stability at all."</i>
		3. Personal choice	<i>"I always felt that my passion and career should be different. I treated my passion as my hobby. And I chose to stand by it"</i>
		4. Parental influence	<i>"I always wanted to take off beat career and was inclined towards classical singing. I was never really interested in academics. But my parents were firm and told me that you should have a proper academic degree"</i>

Table 6- *Integrated Results Matrix*

Quantitative results	Qualitative results	Quote
When students who chose their career based on their passion reported more satisfaction	When the passion of the students and the careers they chose were aligned, they reported more satisfaction	Participant 93: “I feel immensely satisfied that I got to choose what I always wanted. Though there was a little resistance in choosing acting as a career, I finally did it. And I am extremely satisfied. Each day I feel my life is fulfilling. I wonder what would have been the case if I was doing something else”
There was no significant difference seen males and females in pursuing passion.	Both males and females pursued their passion happily and were content.	Participant 27: Being a male, I always had a fear that would I be able to pursue my passion of classical dance. There was a lot of judgements. However my passion for my dance overpowered everything and I am a happy dancer today .”

Discussion

In the present study, it was seen that individual's career choices were influenced by many factors involving parental standpoints and support, societal acceptance, stability of the field, financial certainty and security and risk—taking abilities. Identification or recognition of their passion was shared by the participants to be one important aspect in their life, whereas awareness of it was another which had a major impact on their career decision making process.

The current study showed that while choosing a career is concerned, passion takes a backseat in most of the cases due to the perceived instability, insecurity and uncertainty in such offbeat careers. This is seen to be influenced by parents and societal set standards. Asian countries have observed to have a greater perceived parental influence of their parental pattern on their children's career (Chauhan, 2015). In a study done by Ralitsa Atkins (2007), it was seen that the emphasis on education and hard work was high among Asian Americans. In addition to this, the expectations which parents had from children was also seen to be very high. From the study and the interviews which she conducted, it was seen that the parents pushed their children to study medicine as this profession was considered by them as “prestigious”. The participants also mentioned that they felt brainwashed by their parents and that they had been shaped in a particular manner to take up medicine. Fields like medicine are considered to be a more ‘stable’ profession (Atkins, 2007).

Similarly, in the current study, the participants were asked by their parents to take up more stable and secure careers like medicine, law, engineering and so on. Interestingly, in India, engineering is considered a “successful” profession and the children are pushed towards it (Atkins, 2007). It is seen that South Asian parents put great emphasis on choosing a career within the fields of medicine, engineering, business, or law as these fields are perceived to be more stable, respectable, traditional, and high paying (Singh (ed.), 2007).

Furthermore, the parent's profession and occupation also are seen to have a great influence on the career of children (Mbagwu & Ajaegbu, 2016). The results of the current study displayed an interesting trend that individuals who chose their passion as a full time career had a huge support from their mothers. However, it was not related to their parents profession or occupation.

In the present study, many participants shared that their interest, passion and desires were put secondary and hence were not able to choose their passion as their career. In such cases, the individuals reported a lot of dissatisfaction, frustration and unhappiness in life (O’Keefe, Horberg, Savani, 2021). They shared that they do not enjoy what they do and struggle with giving time to their passion. Additionally, they shared that they have to push their own limits and give time to job as well as passion. Furthermore, sometimes they do not even get time to indulge in their passion. They further mentioned that they were not satisfied and comfortable in their current careers.

Interestingly, similar results were seen in a study conducted by Arulmani (1995) where 46% of the participants made career choices and related decisions on the basis of what their parents, relatives or peers wanted them to do whereas only 24% of the participants mentioned that their career decisions were an outcome of parental inputs and their own desires. There were hardly any individuals who made career decisions on their own and on the basis of what they like. Interestingly, 36% of the participants who had earlier based their decisions on their parental guidance, wanted a shift in the career whereas 18% of them were comfortable with the chosen career. However, on the other hand, individuals who chose careers based on their passion, experienced a lot of satisfaction, content and happiness in their lives. However, they reported financial instability and insecurity. They further mentioned that though they are not as financially secure as others who have stable jobs, they are happy and find their lives to be very meaningful (O'Keefe, Horberg, Savani, 2021) Overall the results point towards the internal conflict within individuals who do not get to do what they wanted to and hence the resulting frustration, gloom and affected mental health and well-being.

Apart from not being able to choose their passion as a career choice due to external forces, few of the reported their own choice as a reason for it. They cited primarily personal factors, such as some limitation, inability to take risks or keeping their passion and career discrete, as driving their choice pursuits. Interestingly, it corresponds with the suggestions of Swanson and Tokar (1991), that both the aspects of context and personal factors hold huge value in the theoretical accounts of career choice process.

Although external influences play a huge role in choosing career, this study brings the focus to an important aspect of being able to choose career solely based on passion. Even though the percent is low, this shift in the trend could make a happier and more satisfied generation. Parents and counsellors can note the resulting impact of pushing the youth into something against their choice.

Conclusion

Individuals are driven by passion for various activities and make their lives more fulfilling and meaningful by indulging into it. Some individuals take it up as their full time career while others pursue it just as a hobby. Identifying and being aware of their passion becomes the first and important step in human lives. However, many a times the decision and choice of career is influenced by external forces due to which taking up passion as full time career becomes difficult. In such cases, the individuals feel dissatisfied and feel a sense of vacuum in their world of passion. Individuals who have their passion and career aligned, feel more satisfied and find their lives more meaningful. It is therefore important to understand the effects of pushing the young generation into careers against their choice.

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