Vol. 1, No. 2, 2026
htts://dkujournals.edu.et
Ras Dejen Journal of Sciences

Determinants of Students' Decision to Study English Language and Literature

College of Social Sciences, English Language and Literature, Debark University

Demeke Sisay Getahun

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Sciences, Debark University, Ethiopia

Email: asemu2005ec@gmail.com

Received: May 12, 2026

Revised: August 01, 2026

Published: November 12, 2026

Abstract

This study explores the key factors influencing first-year students' choice of English Language and Literature at the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH) during the 2015/16 academic year. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative data from questionnaires administered to 112 students with qualitative data from interviews conducted with 22 students. Stratified random sampling was used for the questionnaire, while purposive sampling was applied for the interviews. The results indicate that perceived job opportunities and future employability are the most influential factors in students' decision-making. Additional factors include societal perceptions of professions, national education and language policies, parental and peer influence, students' self-efficacy beliefs, foreign language anxiety, prior educational experiences, and limited awareness of course content and potential career pathways. The findings underscore the complex interaction of personal, social, and institutional factors and point to the need for improved academic advising and better dissemination of information about the program.

Keywords: Job opportunities, Societal attitudes, National education policy, Self-efficacy, Foreign language anxiety

©2026 Debark University
Corresponding author:asemu2005ec@gmail.com

Determinants of Students' Decision to Study English Language and Literature

1.1. Background of the Study

English is widely taught as a foreign language (FL) globally and in Ethiopia, where it holds a crucial role in communication, business, technology, and as a lingua franca. Despite not having the most native speakers in the globe, according to Harmer (2001), English dominance is linked to the USA's global influence and the practical need for people worldwide to achieve at least intermediate proficiency for survival and success.

In Ethiopia, English is used as the medium of instruction from secondary to tertiary education, and taught from grade one onward. The national education policy supports training language professionals in key areas like ELT, research, and communication (MoE ,1994). Therefore, improving English language learning is prioritized.

Career choice in language learning, particularly in English language and literature, is deeply influenced by various factors including students' exposure to the language, attitudes, motivation, and self-concept.

Attitudes: whether positive or negative, toward the language, teachers, or society play a crucial role in language learning and career decisions (Helms and Rogers , 2011). Similarly, self-concept, or how learners perceive their own abilities, affects academic performance and language acquisition (Mercer, 2011: 14) & Hamlyn, 1983 as cited in Mercer, 2011).Understanding these factors helps to explore why students choose (or avoid) English-related careers.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The problem identified in this study is the consistently low interest among students in choosing English Language and Literature as their field of study. Based on the researcher's personal experience and student enrollment data, many students are assigned to the program without genuine interest, largely due to government-imposed quotas.

Enrollment statistics from 2005 to 2008 E.C(2013 to 2016) reveal that a significant decline in the number of students voluntarily selecting English, with almost no students choosing it as a first choice by 2008 E.C(2016).Though the study was a past study, the same is true and it is a common sense that this reality is live in 2026. The researcher as well as his colleagues in the department of English Language and Literature are experiencing the problem under investigation.

Despite the importance of the issue, there has been little academic research on the factors influencing students' career or departmental choices, especially in the context of English Language and Literature. Notably, no prior M.A. research at Haramaya University has focused on this problem.

The study categorizes the factors influencing students' departmental choices into two main groups. Academic factors include students' educational background, personal interest, and past performance in English, while non-academic factors encompass career preferences, family and peer influence, societal attitudes, and anticipated job prospects.

The researchers argue that this neglected issue deserves scholarly attention and aims to identify and analyze the reasons behind students' choices, with the goal of informing stakeholders and encouraging further research in the field.

1.3. Objective

1.3.2. General Objective:

The study aims to examine the factors influencing students' decision to choose English Language and Literature as their field of study.

1.4. Research Questions

The study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What career or occupational factors influence students' decisions?
2. How do students' perceptions of the field affect their choices?
3. What role do ability and self-efficacy play in choosing the program?

1.5. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on first-year College of Social Sciences and Humanities students at Haramaya University during the 2015/16 academic year, specifically examining why they chose to study English Language and Literature. It is conceptually limited to investigating key factors influencing career choice: self-efficacy, perception, job-related factors, and attitude, and how these influence students' decision to join the department.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study assists the English department in anticipating future trends and gaining a clearer understanding of students' preferences and motivations in selecting the field. It identifies the key factors that influence students' interest in English, which can also serve as a valuable reference for other academic departments facing similar challenges. In addition, the findings provide a

foundation for further research aimed at understanding students' academic interests across different disciplines. The study also offers practical guidance for improving the quality of English language teaching at both secondary school and university levels. Finally, it provides important insights for educational planners and policymakers in shaping and strengthening the future role of English language education within the broader educational system.

2. Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

Determinant Factors Contributing to Department Choice

2.1. Career Choice and Departmental Selection

Career choice is portrayed as a significant life decision influenced by various internal and external factors. Bratsch (2001) describes it as a lifelong process shaped by personal interests, family and peer influence, and job availability. Brown (2002) adds that local labor market conditions can pressure students into selecting departments based on job prospects rather than personal interest. This often leads to students abandoning preferred fields, like English Language and Literature, due to perceived lack of job opportunities and societal value.

White (2007) supports this by stating that individuals often choose careers for immediate economic gain without considering long-term consequences. Jungen (2008) emphasizes that career decisions are a major life event, heavily influenced by parents, peers, and socioeconomic background, necessitating adaptability and awareness to navigate these influences effectively.

2.3. Academic performance

Academic performance refers to the overall success in the teaching-learning process throughout life. It is closely linked to career choice; students who pursue careers aligned with their interests tend to perform better academically. Conversely, entering a field by chance can negatively impact performance. As Bratsch (2001) emphasizes, personal interest plays a key role in either facilitating or hindering success, students can excel in difficult subjects if they are genuinely interested, while lack of interest can lead to under performance. The study also suggests a two-way relationship: poor academic performance may lead to poor career choices, while strong academic performance is often associated with more reasonable and informed decisions (Bratsch, 2001).

2.4. LackofAwarenessabouttheContents

Awareness about a subject is crucial before engaging with it, as it enables informed decision-making. According to Sayers (2006), effective strategies and techniques help learners gather

accurate information, particularly about academic programs, which reduces the risk of misinformation or bias. A lack of such awareness may lead students to neglect valuable programs, creating attitudinal imbalances between departments. Supporting this view, McGuigan et al. (2012) emphasize that inadequate information in the education sector can negatively affect students' future decisions, leading them to either avoid certain fields or pursue short-term gains over long-term goals.

2.5. The Influence of Future Plan

Additionally, students' future career plans significantly influence their academic interests and choices, particularly in language education. Khera (2007) argues that having clear goals provides direction, suggesting that success is unlikely without well-defined aspirations (p. 243). In a global context where English is dominant, achieving even a moderate level of English proficiency is essential for success across disciplines. Therefore, aligning one's future goals with interest and competence in the English language is critical to achieving broader academic and professional success.

2.6.Language Competence and Performance

Language competence refers to the underlying knowledge or ability a person has in a language, including sufficient skill, strength, and understanding (Vincent, 2008). In contrast, language performance is the actual use or application of this knowledge in real-life situations (Winter et al., 2006). While the two are closely related, they are not the same—a student may have strong competence but still struggle with performance. Therefore, to become effective in language use, one must not only develop competence but also actively practice through performance.

2.7. Job Expectations

In Ethiopia, students' choices regarding academic departments or careers are significantly shaped by their expectations about future job opportunities and their personal attitudes. While job availability is a strong influence, a positive mindset can be even more critical. As noted by the Association of Business Practitioners (2010), an optimistic student may turn perceived limitations in job prospects into opportunities through determination and excellence in their field. Conversely, pessimism can hinder success, regardless of the profession. Job expectations, therefore, play a crucial role in either supporting or obstructing career decisions. Sparks and Waits (2011) emphasize that both students and policymakers must consider the employment

outcomes of graduates, suggesting that a clear understanding of future job opportunities is essential for informed decision-making. Without such foresight, students risk uncertain futures, affecting both immediate academic choices and long-term career paths.

2.8. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to carry out tasks and manage situations. According to Bandura, it is the confidence in one's capacity to organize and perform actions necessary to handle future challenges (Bandura, 1995, as cited in Mizumoto, 2013). A high level of self-efficacy is linked to professional success, while low self-efficacy can hinder career achievement. Additionally, recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses is crucial in making effective career choices and succeeding academically and professionally (Barrett, 2009).

2.9. Learners' attitude

Learners' attitude plays a crucial role in facilitating or hindering language learning. Brewer and Miller (2003) define attitude as a consistent tendency to respond favorably or unfavorably toward a particular topic, which influences preference but does not directly predict behavior (p. 29). This suggests that a positive attitude leads to a higher preference for a subject, while a negative attitude results in a lower preference. Supporting this, Eagly and Chaiken (1993, as cited in McKenzie, 2010) argue that attitude is a hypothetical construct inferred from observable learner responses, such as their decision to engage in learning. Furthermore, positive attitudes toward oneself, native speakers, and the target language enhance language acquisition (Oller, Hudson & Liu, 1977, as cited in Brown, 2000). McKenzie (2010) discusses two psychological perspectives on attitude: the behaviorist view, which sees attitude as a learned stimulus-response association through socialization, and the mentalist view, which considers attitude as internal and introspective. Both perspectives agree that attitudes are acquired rather than innate, highlighting the importance of fostering positive attitudes to improve learning outcomes.

2.10. Foreign language anxiety

Foreign language anxiety refers to the fear or apprehension experienced by learners when engaging with a foreign language, often linked to feelings such as frustration, self-doubt, and uneasiness (Dornyei, 2005). This anxiety can lead to a lack of interest or avoidance of foreign language learning, especially if not managed properly (Khodadady&Khajaru, 2013). Anxiety in language learning can be categorized into two types: debilitative (harmful) and facilitative (beneficial). Debilitative anxiety negatively impacts performance and motivation, and thus

should be minimized and transformed into a more useful form (Brown, 2000; Dornyei, 2005). On the other hand, facilitative anxiety can positively influence learners by enhancing their performance and motivation in language learning (Ehrman& Oxford, 1995; Young, 1992; Horwith, 1990 as cited in Brown, 2000; Dornyei, 2005). Therefore, while anxiety is generally seen as a negative factor, a moderate amount of facilitative anxiety is considered beneficial for academic and language learning success.

3. Materials and Methods

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used to conduct a study assessing factors influencing first-year students' choice to study English.

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

As stated by Creswell (2007), a qualitative approach is preferable when a study requires more humanistic and interactive procedures that capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings, whereas a quantitative approach is more appropriate when the researcher seeks measurable, numerically based data that allow for identifying patterns and trends.

Accordingly, questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data from a larger number of participants, while interviews were employed to obtain in-depth qualitative insights into students' views and experiences. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to offset the limitations of one method with the strengths of the other and to ensure a more balanced, reliable, and thorough analysis in addressing the research questions.

3.2. Population and Sampling Techniques

3.2.1. Target Population

In research methodology, the target population refers to the entire group of people or entities that the researcher is interested in studying and to whom the final findings will be generalized.For this specific study, the target population was defined as all regular first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH) at Haramaya University during the 2015/16 academic year. Based on official enrollment records from the university's registrar, this population comprised a total of 555 students.

This specific group was selected as the target population because they were experiencing the transition to university life / they were enrolled in foundational courses relevant to the research topic. By focusing on this complete group of 555 first-year students, the study aimed to gather accurate, representative data that reflects the experiences and characteristics of students within this college during that academic year.

3.2.2. Sampling Techniques

The study employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation from all 11 departments. Stratified random sampling is a technique in which a researcher selects samples from different strata or classes (Tavakoli, 2012). Within each stratum, systematic random sampling was applied to select 112 students, representing 20% of the population for the questionnaire. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select 22 students for the interviews, with two students per department (one male and one female), allowing for the triangulation of data and deeper exploration of the quantitative findings.

3.3. Data Gathering Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The primary data for this study was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was carefully designed based on the research objectives and adapted from established instruments used in prior studies (Fizer, 2013; Njiru, 2013). It covered key topics including factors affecting career choice, students' perceptions of English, and self-efficacy, ensuring that the instrument aligned with the study's aims and captured relevant information.

A questionnaire was chosen as the primary data collection tool for several important methodological reasons:

- **Ability to Reach a Large Sample:** With a target population of 555 students, a questionnaire provided an efficient and practical way to gather responses from a large group of participants within a reasonable time frame.
- **Standardization and Consistency:** Every participant received the exact same set of questions in the same format. This standardization ensured that answers could be reliably compared, measured, and analyzed objectively.
- **Anonymity and Honesty:** Questionnaires allow respondents to answer sensitive or personal questions (such as self-efficacy and individual perceptions) anonymously, which

encourages more honest, candid, and uninhibited responses compared to face-to-face interviews.

- **Cost-Effectiveness and Time Efficiency:** Administering a written or digital questionnaire is resource-efficient in terms of both time and cost, allowing the researcher to collect a massive volume of quantitative data swiftly.

By leveraging these advantages, the questionnaire method successfully ensured that the data gathered was comprehensive, reliable, and directly aligned with the core objectives of the study.

3.3.2. Interview

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into students' perspectives. During these interviews, students were asked about their department preferences and the reasons behind their decisions to choose or avoid English, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing their academic choices.

Interviews were deliberately chosen as a qualitative data collection method for several key methodological reasons. First, unlike questionnaires that restrict participants to predefined answers, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and depth. They allowed the researcher to ask probing follow-up questions based on the participants' immediate responses, uncovering complex personal motivations, attitudes, and emotional factors behind students' choices that quantitative surveys might overlook.

Second, the face-to-face format fostered a conversational and supportive environment, helping to build rapport and trust between the interviewer and the student. This personal interaction enabled the observation of non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice and body language, which added a richer layer of context and authenticity to the data. Ultimately, combining interviews with questionnaires created a more comprehensive and balanced picture of the students' experiences, reinforcing the overall validity of the study's findings through methodological triangulation.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

To ensure a comprehensive, systematic, and rigorous gathering of information, this study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. Data collection was carried out in distinct, well-planned phases during the 2015/16 academic year, moving from broad quantitative measures to deep qualitative exploration. The specific steps executed during the fieldwork are detailed below:

Step 1: Obtaining Administrative Permissions and Ethical Clearance Before entering the field, formal permission and clearance letters were secured from the Department of English language and Literature and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH) at Haramaya University. These letters were presented to relevant administrative offices and department heads to gain official consent for accessing student records, classrooms, and contact information.

Step 2: Pilot Testing the Research Instruments Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with a small group of students outside the actual sample group. This step was crucial for evaluating the clarity, wording, and reliability of the questions. Based on feedback and initial reliability tests (such as checking internal consistency), necessary adjustments and refinements were made to the final questionnaire.

Step 3: Administration of the Quantitative Questionnaires The first major phase of data collection involved the quantitative strand. Finalized questionnaires were distributed to the target population of first-year CSSH students (totaling 555 participants). Clear instructions were provided regarding the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality. The questionnaires were administered in controlled settings (or distributed and collected systematically), ensuring a high response rate and minimizing missing data. Once collected, the quantitative data was checked for completeness, coded, and entered into statistical software for initial analysis.

Step 4: Preliminary Analysis of Questionnaire Data Following the collection and initial review of the questionnaires, a preliminary analysis was performed to spot broad trends, patterns, and areas requiring further clarification. This step was essential because it directly informed the next phase of the research.

Step 5: Conducting Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews Guided directly by the insights and emerging trends from the questionnaire data, the second phase—qualitative data collection—was initiated. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with selected student participants. These interviews allowed the researcher to probe deeper into complex issues, such as specific department preferences and individual reasons behind choosing or avoiding English. The interviews were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and supplemented by detailed field notes.

Step 6: Data Triangulation and Synthesis The final step involved combining and comparing the findings from both methods. The quantitative survey results and qualitative interview insights were cross-examined (triangulated) to check for consistency, convergence, and depth. This systematic merging of data enhanced the overall reliability, validity, and credibility of the study's final conclusions.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data collected from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS 20, with descriptive statistics applied to summarize the results. Interview responses were used to triangulate and enrich the quantitative findings, providing deeper insights into the data. The information was then categorized into key themes for interpretation, and these findings subsequently informed the study's conclusions and recommendations.

The data gathered from both questionnaires and interviews was processed through a systematic, multi-step analytical framework. Because this study employed a mixed-methods design, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were utilized sequentially to ensure a thorough examination of the results. The data analysis was carried out through the following specific steps:

Step 1: Data Preparation, Editing, and Coding Following the fieldwork, all completed questionnaires were thoroughly checked for completeness, accuracy, and consistency. Incomplete or invalid responses were sorted out. The valid survey responses were then transformed into a numerical format by assigning specific codes, preparing the raw data for statistical software entry.

Step 2: Quantitative Data Analysis Using SPSS The coded questionnaire data was entered and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were applied to summarize the results. This step provided a clear statistical overview of the respondents' patterns regarding career choices, perceptions of English, and self-efficacy levels.

Step 3: Transcription and Organization of Qualitative Data For the qualitative component, audio recordings and field notes from the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were transcribed verbatim into text. The researcher repeatedly read through the transcripts to achieve immersion and accurately capture the participants' personal perspectives and underlying motivations.

Step 4: Thematic Categorization and Interpretation The transcribed interview data underwent thematic analysis. Information was systematically sorted, labeled, and grouped into key themes that aligned with the study's research objectives. This categorization allowed the researcher to interpret the deeper, nuanced reasons behind students' department preferences and language choices.

Step 5: Data Triangulation and Synthesis to maximize the credibility and validity of the research, the quantitative findings from SPSS and the qualitative thematic insights from the interviews were brought together. This process of triangulation cross-examined the two data sets, using the qualitative stories to explain and enrich the quantitative trends.

Step 6: Formulating Conclusions and Recommendations In the final stage, the synthesized and triangulated findings were interpreted in light of the study's core objectives and prior literature. These final, well-grounded insights directly informed the study's conclusions and served as the basis for practical recommendations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Presentation of Students Background

This section presents and analyzes the background information of the 112 student respondents involved in the study. The sample shows an equal gender distribution, with 56 males and 56 females (50% each), providing balanced representation. Regarding school location, a slight majority of students (53.6%) completed their secondary and preparatory education in urban areas, while 46.4% came from rural settings. Parental education also varied, with 63.4% of students having educated parents and 36.6% having uneducated or illiterate parents.

Notably, students with educated parents demonstrated greater interest in their field of study, supporting existing research that parental influence significantly affects academic choices. In terms of departmental representation, students were drawn from a variety of programs: Gender and Development accounted for 13.4%, Geography and Environmental Studies and Sociology each comprised 12.5%, History and Heritage Management represented 9.8%, and other departments: including Oromo, English and French Language and Literature, GIS, Journalism, Tourism, and Urban Planning: ranged from 5.4% to 8.9%.

This background data provides context for analyzing students' expectations, government policy impact, perceptions toward their field of study, and self-efficacy.

4.1.1. Effect of Parents' Education on Students' Career Choice

Parents play a significant role in shaping students' academic paths and career decisions. In this study, 58.9% of students reported receiving positive support from their parents regarding their career choices, suggesting that encouragement can reinforce students' interests and aspirations. Conversely, 23.2% of students experienced negative parental influence, facing restrictions or discouragement from pursuing certain fields, such as English Language and Literature. Additionally, 17.9% of students were uncertain about the impact of their parents on their decisions, highlighting that parental guidance can vary widely and may significantly affect students' academic and career trajectories.

These results suggest that while most parents support their children's choices, a notable portion may impose their preferences, limiting students' freedom.

Qualitative data further supports this: one student initially chose Journalism and Mass Communication due to peer influence but later switched to English, his true interest. He highlighted the tension between personal passion and societal expectations tied to income.

The study aligns with Jungen (2008), emphasizing that parents and peers significantly influence career decisions :an important factor given the long-term impact of these choices on individuals' futures.

The data indicate a clear urban–rural difference in students' selection of English Language and Literature. Urban students were more likely to rank English higher, with one urban student choosing it as their 3rd choice, whereas no rural students ranked it that high. Conversely, rural students tended to place English lower on their list; for example, three rural students selected it as their 15th choice, while no urban students did. This pattern suggests that urban students demonstrate greater interest and confidence in pursuing English. An interview with a sociology student supported this finding, noting that urban students benefit from increased exposure, stronger parental support, and better language skills, all of which positively influence their choice. Supporting literature (Lier, 2004) reinforces the notion that school location affects career decisions, with urban environments generally providing more favorable conditions for academic and professional aspirations than rural settings.

Conclusion**:** Students from urban areas are generally more inclined and better positioned to choose English Language and Literature as a career path than their rural counterparts, largely due to better resources and language exposure.

4.2. Analysis of Occupation-Related Factors that Affect Students' Career Choice

This section analyzes how job expectations, career preferences, access to facilities, and social and academic factors influence students' career and departmental choices.

Quantitative data analysis revealed several factors influencing students' departmental choices. Job expectations emerged as a major determinant, with 61.6% of students reporting that anticipated job prospects highly influence their choice, while only 17.8% felt that job expectations have no impact. This indicates that employment considerations strongly shape students' future career decisions. Personal career preferences also play a significant role, as 68.8% of students stated that their individual interests and aspirations greatly affect their choice, whereas 16.1% reported little or no influence. This suggests that most students prioritize careers based on personal interest, potential job opportunities, or societal value. Access to academic facilities, such as libraries, textbooks, and infrastructure, was another influential factor; 65.2% of students indicated that the availability of resources strongly affects their decision, while 20.5% felt it has little or no impact. These findings highlight that the presence or absence of adequate educational resources can significantly influence departmental selection.

Qualitative data from student interviews revealed several key factors influencing departmental choice. Many students reported that job opportunities and salary expectations heavily guided their decisions, with fields such as Urban Planning, Tourism and Hotel Management, and Journalism being favored for their better prospects, income potential, and novelty. Societal respect also played a significant role; some students avoided or regretted joining departments like English or French due to perceived low social prestige or limited career opportunities. For instance, one English major (S4) expressed regret and felt social pressure because the field lacks societal recognition. Entrance exam results were another major determinant, with several students noting that low scores forced them into undesired programs such as English or French; S6, a French major, mentioned she would have preferred English or Urban Planning if her scores had been higher. While a few students chose their department based solely on personal interest, most decisions were influenced by external factors such as job availability, family pressure, past academic performance, and societal views. S5 highlighted this complexity, noting that multiple factors: including personal interest, background, English scores, government policies, and peer influence: shaped their departmental choice.

4.2.1.Job Expectation and Learners' Department Choice

Table 6 presents data showing the strong connection between students' future job expectations and their choice of department, particularly regarding the English Language and Literature program.

The survey of 112 students revealed a clear lack of interest in the English program, with 99 students (88.4%) ranking it as their 8th choice or lower, indicating it is generally not viewed as a preferred option. Only 13 students (11.6%) placed English among their top 3 to 7 choices, suggesting that a small minority consider it a viable or desirable career path. Additionally, 86.6% of students reported that job expectations significantly influenced their choice of department. This pattern aligns with previous research (Sparks & Waits, 2011), which highlights that students' perceptions of future job opportunities play a major role in shaping their academic and departmental decisions.

Students are primarily selecting departments based on perceived job prospects, with the English program often being a fallback option rather than a first choice. This underscores the significant role of employment expectations in shaping academic pathways.

4.2.2. The Effect of Education Policy on Students' Choice:

Ethiopia's education policy, particularly the 70/30 policy: which allocates 70% focus to Natural Sciences and 30% to Social Sciences: has a significant influence on students' career choices. According to the survey, 62.5% of students believe that this policy affects their preference for fields such as English and other disciplines, while 28.6% reported that it does not influence their choice. Moreover, 56.3% of respondents feel that the policy negatively impacts their career decisions, in contrast to only 31.3% who perceive a positive effect. This suggests that the current policy framework may constrain students' academic interests and shape their career trajectories, particularly in underrepresented fields like English Language and Literature.

Students tend to follow the policy to improve job prospects, often leading them to study fields they are less interested in. Interviews reveal that teaching in native languages at the primary level (like Oromo in Oromiya and Amharic in Amhara) reduces students' interest in English and other subjects. While the policy aims to promote indigenous languages, this approach can unintentionally hinder academic engagement when local languages are overused, especially beyond what the policy permits.

4.3. Impact of students' perceptions on their field of study choice:

This study investigates how individual perceptions, social expectations, awareness levels, and foreign language anxiety shape students' academic and career pathways.

Students' personal viewpoints heavily influence their department selection. A significant portion of respondents indicated that their perceptions had a high (40%) or moderate (42%) impact on their decisions, while only a small minority (18%) felt it played a minor role.

Societal attitudes are equally influential, with 59% of students noting that public perceptions of specific professions affect their choices. Qualitative interviews confirmed that societal prestige often guides decision-making:frequently driven by a lack of personal confidence—whereas only a few students focus primarily on personal interest or income.

A lack of proper information regarding course content also creates barriers. Over half of the participants (53.5%) reported that limited knowledge about the English Language and Literature program strongly affected their choices, often resulting in academic uncertainty, consistent with prior research (McGuigan et al., 2012).

Finally, foreign language anxiety presents a notable obstacle. More than half of the students (54.5%) stated that anxiety surrounding foreign languages impacted their decisions. Interviews further revealed that some students associate studying English with cultural alienation or historical colonial legacies, which actively discourages them from pursuing the field.

4.4. Analysis of the Impact of Ability and Self-efficacy related Factors

The study investigates how self-efficacy and English language ability affect students' attitudes and choices towards studying English Language and Literature.

A large majority of students (80.4%) believe that strong self-efficacy plays a crucial role in fostering a positive attitude toward their field of study, while only 10.7% disagreed and 8.9% were unsure. This suggests that self-efficacy is a decisive factor in students' career choices. Regarding English language ability, about 58.9% of respondents indicated that their proficiency influences their interest and choice to study the language, whereas 33% stated that ability does not affect their decision and 8% were uncertain. This indicates that while language ability is important, it is not the sole factor shaping students' choices. Interviews revealed two main perspectives: some students with strong English skills choose other fields despite their competence, while others with lower ability hesitate to join English programs, demonstrating that low ability can reduce interest. Supporting literature further suggests that the perception of

foreign language learning as difficult, often associated with low ability, reinforces the significant influence of self-efficacy and language competence on students' academic and career decisions.

3.5. Effect of Self-Efficacy, Performance, and Ability on Choice

3.5.1. Self-Efficacy and Previous Performance:

Self-efficacy, defined as students' belief in their own ability and knowledge, strongly influences their choice to study English Language and Literature, with 70.6% of respondents reporting a high or very high impact. A smaller portion of students: 10.7% indicated that self-efficacy has little influence, while 8.9% felt it has no impact on their decision. These findings align with Barrett's (2009) view that higher self-efficacy enhances both performance and motivation in one's chosen field. Additionally, previous performance in English courses plays an important role in career choice, with 54.5% of students acknowledging its vital influence. In contrast, 23.2% believed that past performance has little or no effect, and 22.3% perceived no relationship between performance and career decisions. This is consistent with Sayers (2012), who argues that poor academic performance and negative teacher attitudes can diminish student interest and shape career choices.

4.5.2. Learners' Ability and Choice:

Learners' English ability appears to have a moderate influence on their choice of English Language and Literature, with 54.5% reporting a moderate impact, 22.3% indicating a very high influence, and 23.2% stating it has no influence. Interviews revealed that most students consider ability less important than factors such as job opportunities, expected income, and professional respect when making career decisions. Many students acquire basic English skills from early grades, so language ability alone does not strongly determine their choice of study. Interestingly, there is often a mismatch between ability and interest: some students with high proficiency show low interest in pursuing English, while others with lower ability express greater enthusiasm. This inverse relationship seems to be driven primarily by concerns over employment prospects in the field rather than by language competence or self-confidence.

4.5.3. Impact of Ability-Related Factors on Students' Choice

Students' competence in the English language plays a significant role in their academic and career choices, with 79.5% reporting a moderate to very high influence. Similarly, writing ability is acknowledged by 79.5% of students as having a moderate to very high effect on their decisions, while the ability to express ideas influences 71.4% of respondents. Competence in

keeping grammatical rules was reported to have a moderate to very high impact by 61.6% of students, though 32.2% indicated it had little influence. Low proficiency, particularly in writing and expression, discourages students from pursuing English-related fields. However, some students with higher language competence noted that external factors, such as job opportunities and societal respect, played a more decisive role in their career choices than language ability alone. Overall, these findings suggest that language competence strongly affects students' academic and career decisions, supporting existing literature that emphasizes the role of performance expectations in shaping career preferences.

4.6. Conclusions

Low student interest in English Language and Literature is largely influenced by limited job opportunities, low salaries, and the lack of societal respect accorded to professionals in the field. Societal attitudes and students' own perceptions of different professions, particularly in terms of income and social status, play a significant role in shaping career choices. Additionally, the perception of English as a colonial language, along with regional variations in educational policies: such as the use of native languages as the medium of instruction in primary education: negatively affects students' language proficiency and their willingness to pursue English-related careers.

Students' beliefs in their own abilities and self-efficacy also influence career interest; however, this factor appears to be less influential than external considerations such as employment prospects and societal recognition. Foreign language anxiety further discourages students from choosing English-related fields, as fear and discomfort associated with learning a foreign language can undermine confidence, despite the fact that anxiety may be either debilitating or motivating when appropriately managed. Moreover, many students make career decisions without adequate information about the nature and content of English Language and Literature programs, leading to uninformed choices. Finally, language competence and academic performance play an important role, as students with stronger English skills are more likely to select English studies, believing that their proficiency will enable them to succeed academically.

4.7. Implications of the study

The findings of this study imply that teacher compensation plays a critical role in influencing career choices among English Language and Literature professionals. Inadequate salaries and

limited incentives may discourage talented individuals from entering or remaining in the profession, potentially affecting the quality of English education. Addressing compensation issues is therefore essential for sustaining a motivated and competent teaching workforce.

The study further implies that negative attitudes toward English among students, teachers, and society significantly hinder effective language learning. Without deliberate efforts to improve perceptions of English and acknowledge its importance across disciplines, learners may continue to lack motivation and commitment. This underscores the need for collective attitudinal change involving all educational stakeholders.

Another implication is that inconsistent implementation of educational policies, particularly those related to the use of English as a medium of instruction, can undermine learning outcomes. Uneven policy enforcement across regions may create disparities in students' exposure to and proficiency in English, highlighting the importance of uniform application of national education policies.

The findings also imply that stakeholder involvement is crucial in developing learners' English language skills. Limited support from parents, teachers, and the wider community may restrict students' opportunities to practice and value English, thereby affecting their academic and professional prospects.

Furthermore, the study implies that students' limited engagement with reading materials and media in English constrains language development. Weak reading habits and minimal exposure to English-language content may reduce vocabulary growth, comprehension skills, and overall language competence.

The results also suggest that insufficient collaboration between teachers and students can negatively impact language acquisition and academic performance. Effective teacher–student interaction is therefore essential for fostering meaningful learning experiences and improving English proficiency.

Finally, the study implies that limited access to e-learning resources and digital English content may restrict students' exposure to high-quality language input. Expanding e-learning opportunities, particularly through online materials and global resources, could enhance learner motivation, accessibility, and engagement with authentic English use.

References

Association of Business Practitioners (2010). Self Awareness and Personal Development. UK: British Business Professional Skills Development.

Barret,J. (2009). Career, aptitude and selection tests: Match your IQ, personality and Abilities to your ideal career.UK: Kogan Page Limited Publishers.

Bartram, B. (2010). Attitudes to Modern Foreign Language Learning: Insights from Comparative Education. Great Britain: MPG Books Group publishers.

Bloor,M, & Wood F, . (2006). Keywords in Qualitative Methods: A Vocabulary of Research Concepts. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Bratsch, K. (2001). Career Choices: A Career Exploration Guide. USA: American Book Business Press.

Brown, H. (2000). Principles of Language learning and Teaching (4th.ed). Sanfracisco:Longman, Inc.

Brown, D. (2005). Career Choice and Development. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Brewer, J. & Miller, R. (2003). The A- Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts. California : SAGE Publications Ltd.

Canagarajah, A.(2005). Dilemmas in Planning English /Vernacular relations in Post- Colonial Communities. Journal of Sociolinguistics. Vol.9,No. 3.

Cleland,J., Johnston,P., Anthony,M., Khan,N., &Scott,N.(2014). A survey of factors influencing career preference in new-entrant and exiting medical

Students from four UK medical schools. 14/151.

Creswell, J. (2007). Research Design (2nd ed.): Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. London: SAGE publications, Inc.

Dornyei, Z. (2003). Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing. USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

____(2005). The Psychology of the Language Learner : Individual Differences In Second Language Acquisition. London:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Ellis, R. (2008). The Study of Second Language Acquisition. New York: Oxford University press.

Gardner, R. (1985). Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation. Great Britain: Edward Arnold publishers Ltd.

Haggins, C.(2009). English as a Local Language: postcolonial Identities and Multilingual Practices. UK: Techset Composition Ltd.

Helms,J. & Rogers, D. (2011). Majoring in Psychology: Achieving Your Educational and Career Goals. UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Holmes, J. &Meyerhoff , M. (2003). The Handbook of Language and Gender .UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Jupp, V. (2006). The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods. London : SAGE Publications Ltd.

Jungen, K. (2008). Parental Influence and Career Choice: How Parents Affect the Career Aspirations of Their Children. Unpublished MSc: University of Wisconsin- Stout.

Kaplan, R. (2013). Language Planning: Applied Research on English Language. Vol.2, No.1.

Kassa Michael & O'Connell, A. (2014). Statistics Education in Ethiopia: Successes, Challenges and Opportunities. ICOTS9 (2014) Invited Paper.

Khera, S. (2007). You can win: A step by step Tool for top achievers. New Delhi: Macmillan Indian Ltd.

Khodadady,E. &Khajary, G. (2013). Exploring the Role of Anxiety and Motivation in Foreign Language Achievement: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach.pp.269-86.

Krzanowski, W. (2007). Statistical Principles and Techniques in Scientific and Social Investigations. UK: Oxford University Press.

Lier, L.(2004). The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning: A Sociocultural Perspective. Boston: Springer Science + Business Media, Inc.

Mammo Muchie(2010). Review: Quality of Higher Education in Public Institutions. Ethiopian Electronic Journal for Research, Innovation Foresight, 150-156.

McGuigan, M., McNally, S., &Wyness,G.(2012). Student Awareness of Costs and Benefits of Educational Decisions: Effects of an Information Campaign. London: Centre of the Economics of Education.

McKenzie, R. (2010). The Social Psychology of English as a Global Language: Attitudes, Awareness and Identity in the Japanese Context.New York: Springer Science+ Business Media B. V.

Mercer, S. (2011). Towards an Understanding of Language Learner Self-Concept

: Educational Linguistics. New York: Springer Science Business Media publishers.

Mizumoto, A. (2013). Effects of Self-regulated vocabulary learning process on Self- efficacy: Innovation in Language Learning and teaching. Vol.7, No. 3, 253-265.

MoE. (1994). Ethiopian Education and Training Policy. Addis Ababa: St. George Printing Press.

Njiru, F. (2013). Factors Affecting Career Progression of Women in The Corporate Sector: A Case Study of Standard Chartered Bank in Nairobi. Unpublished MA Research: University of Nairobi.

Syyers,P.(2012). Ambiguities and Tensions in English Language Teaching: Portraits of EFL Teachers as Legitimate Speakers. New York.: Taylor & Francis.

Sayers,R. (2006). Principles of Awareness Raising for Information Literacy: A Case Study .Bangkok: UNESCO.

Soukhanov, A. (n.d). The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. America: Jonathan P. Latimer.

Sparks, E. & Waits, M. (2011). Degrees for what Jobs? Raising Expectations for Universities and Colleges in a Global Economy.Washington, D.C: NGA Center for Best Practices.

Tavakoli, H. (2012). A Dictionary of Research Methodology and Statistics in Applied Linguistics .Tehran: RAHNAMA PRESS.

Ur, P. (2009). A Course in Language Teaching: practice and Theory. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Vincent,L. (2008). Differentiating Competence, Capability and Capacity. Vol.16, No. 3

Webster, N. (2002). Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language unabridged. U.S.A: Marriam Webster, Inc.

White, P.(2007). Education and Career Choice: A New Model of Decision Making. UK: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

Winterton,J., Le deist,F.&stringfellow, E.(2006). Typology of Knowledge, Skills and Competences: Clarification of the Concept and Prototype.Italy: Luxembourg.