

Influence of Job Opportunities on Course Choice in Vocational Training Centres in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

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Abstract

Job prospects and labor market conditions significantly influence choice of vocational course. Family enterprises, socioeconomic factors, and career counselling can influence trainees' choices. Guidance and information are crucial for informed decisions about vocational training. However, making wrong course choice leads to lack of work enjoyment, increase job stress and performing tasks poorly. A society's degree of poverty makes it harder for trainees to find work prospects. This study aimed at assessing the influence of job opportunities on the Choice of Course in Vocational Training Centres in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. Utilizing questionnaires and interview schedule, this research examines the factors that influence course selection among 2,386 trainees and 29 major managers in Taita Taveta County VTCs. The relationships between variables were found using a correlational research design. In the study, 714 trainees and 7 managers participated, who were stratified using the Stratified VTC approach. Collected data was coded into SPSS version 26 and analysed using descriptive (Frequencies and means) and inferential statistics (Regression analysis, the chi-square and ANOVA). Results indicated that employment opportunities insignificantly predicted course choice, $F_{(1,706)} = -.110, p > 0.05$, which indicates that the employment opportunities played none significant role in shaping the course choice ($b = -.579, p > 0.05$) among the study participants. The study recommended that VTCs should focus on demand, marketable and direct job opportunities. Additionally, VTCs should have career offices for vocational guidance and counselling services.

Keywords: Personality, job opportunities, Vocational Training Centres.

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INTRODUCTION

Job prospects have an impact on how trainees view their lives in relation to their future course specialties. Training and education must always be in line with the employment prospects available and the talents of the trainees. A society's degree of poverty makes it harder for trainees to find work prospects (Etzel & Nagy, 2021). Research by Iyer & Siddhartha (2021) emphasizes the strong influence of labour market conditions on vocational course selection. Their study found that individuals are more likely to enroll in courses directly related to fields with high job demand and wage potential. This suggests that the availability of job opportunities significantly shapes course choice.

Parents who run small enterprises sometimes want their trainees to follow in their footsteps. This translates into their entering the workforce after finishing

school with ease and being promoted within the family enterprises (Wummel, 2024). Societal and cultural factors also influence course choice. Effective career counselling and access to information about labor market trends can also influence course choices. Research by Anovunga, John, and Akpadago, (2021) emphasizes the role of guidance and information in helping individuals make informed decisions about vocational training.

Studies by Bhagat, Wu and Chang (2019), suggest that cultural perceptions of certain vocations can impact course decisions. For example, some cultures may prioritize healthcare or engineering careers, leading individuals to choose courses in these fields. Oftentimes, the offspring of family company owners have greater familiarity with how the business world functions (Etzel & Nagy, 2021). The trainees frequently spend their

whole lives working in the family firm, going through everything their parents went through in the industry.

Regional disparities in job opportunities are highlighted by research from Iyer & Siddhartha (2021). Their study emphasizes the importance of considering geographic location when analysing the influence of job opportunities on course selection, as labor market conditions can vary significantly from one region to another.

The trainees may have either positive or negative effects from this. The trainees are aware that they must have a secure financial situation in order to live well. When considering a career route, individuals opt for positions paying more or offering the best employment stability (Myhill *et al.*, 2021).

The financial aspects that trainees consider include high earning potential, benefits, and opportunities for advancement (Gerhart & Feng, 2021). Given the challenging economic climate, many students believe that in order to succeed in society, they must hold a high-paying position. In order to ensure their long-term security, trainees may look into programs that will be beneficial to them in the long run. Teaching is perceived by trainees as a course with few career chances, poor course growth, and little opportunities for promotion. Even when instructors do well in class, certain courses, like teaching, are not satisfying (Singoei, 2021).

When students are ready, it happens frequently that the courses they want to take are no longer offered. This can be the result of industry restructuring and downsizing. For instance, you can develop abilities that open doors for you in the future by training to be a portfolio worker. Trainees should view themselves as a

set of qualities and competencies rather than as a position (Efendi *et al.*, 2021). The capacity to manage work, time, and money is one of the most important abilities of the portfolio worker, along with self-direction, adaptability, creativity, versatility, and computer and information technology proficiency. The trainees become aware of employment prospects thanks to fundamental changes in attitude and identity (Simiyu & Werunga, 2021). Many studies have been conducted on TVET institutions and VTCs in Kenya but little has been done on VTCs in Taita Taveta County thus the need to study on determinants of Course Choice in Vocational Training Centres in Taita Taveta County Kenya. For example (Ouma *et al.*, 2021) analysed the experiences of girl children in Taita Taveta County. An in-depth study on how the socioeconomic background of students influences their choice of vocational courses is lacking.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Area of the Study

The study involved trainees and VTC managers in Taita Taveta County, Kenya, a county in the former Taita Taveta District (Figure 1). Taita Taveta County, established in 2013 under Kenya's devolved government system, is located in Voi town and borders Tanzania, Kwale, Kilifi, Makueni, and Kitui counties. Its diverse geography includes parts of the Taita Hills, Chyulu Hills, and Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks (Thiong'o, 2023). As of the 2019 population census, the county has 340,671 people, with major ethnic communities being Taita, Taveta, and Kamba (Langat *et al.*, 2024). The county has several educational institutions, including primary and secondary schools, and the government is investing in improving infrastructure and providing quality education for its residents.

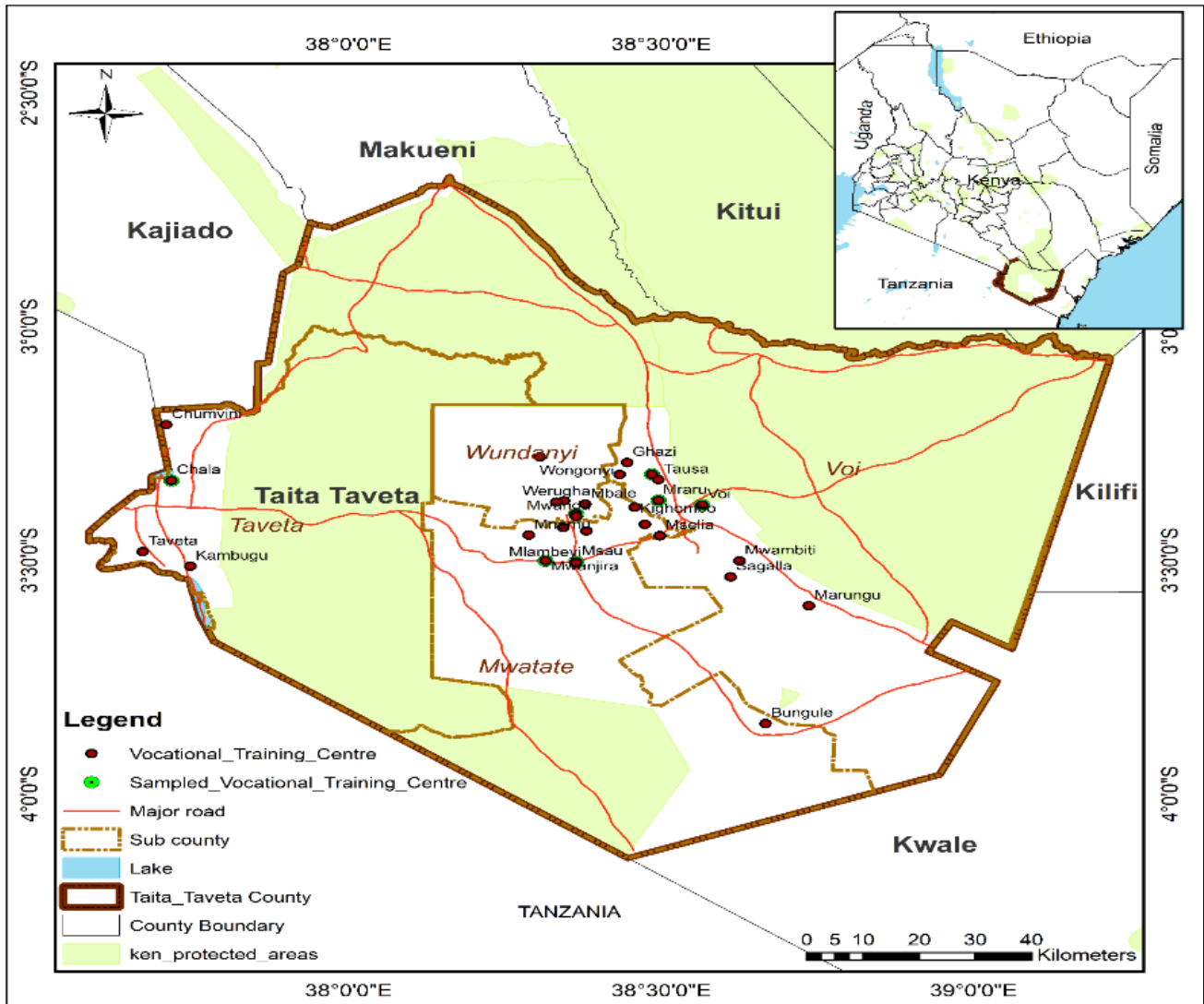


Figure 1: Map of the Area of the Study

Source: Author (2023)

Research Design

The study examined the relationship between trainees' personality traits and course choices in vocational training in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. A correlational research design was used to identify associations between variables. Correlational research design is a type of research method used to examine the relationships or associations between two or more variables (Harefa *et al.*, 2023). All trainees in Taita Taveta County Vocational Training Centres were considered, and a homogenous characteristic was found in all four sub-counties.

Philosophical Research Paradigm

To investigate VTCs in Taita Taveta County, the researcher used an ontology research paradigm that allowed for yes/no and agree/disagree questions. A research paradigm, in the context of philosophy, refers to the underlying philosophical framework or perspective that shapes and guides a researcher's approach to conducting research and understanding the nature of knowledge (Lim, 2024).

The ontology research paradigm is a methodological approach that focuses on understanding and defining the fundamental categories of existence and their relationships within a particular domain of knowledge. It aims to create structured frameworks, or ontologies, that categorize entities, concepts, and their interconnections to clarify how knowledge is represented and understood (Ugwu *et al.*, 2021).

Target Population

In Taita Taveta County VTCs in 2022, 2,386 trainees and 29 principle managers were the study's target demographics. The trainees and principle managers in Taita Taveta County VTCs gave information on the factors influencing course selection through questionnaires and interview schedules, respectively. The primary managers and trainees were selected due to their accessibility and availability. They would be present in the VTCs during regular business hours, making it simple for the researcher to gather data. Given that they are the ones pursuing the courses they

choose, the trainees would likewise provide accurate information.

Sample Size Criteria and Sampling Technique

This study focused on trainees and principal managers in the Kenyan Taita Taveta County VTCs. Sampling was carried out in order to enable the extensive study of a subset rather than the entire target population. The sample size required to find a meaningful relationship between personality characteristics and course preferences was determined using power analysis (Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021).

714 trainees, or 30% of the 2,386 trainees in each of the four sub counties of Taita Taveta County VTCs, were randomly chosen for the study in order to get a more representative sample. Additionally, the survey included 30% of the senior managers in each Sub County. Seven principal managers and 714 trainees made up the study's sample size. The VTCs were grouped based on the four sub-counties: Mwatate, Wundanyi, Voi, and Taveta, using a stratified sampling approach. Simple random sampling technique was used to determine the sample size. The sample size for this investigation is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size

Code	Trainees per Sub-County	Population		Sample	
		Trainees	Principal Managers	Trainees	Principal Managers
A	Mwatate	807	9	242	2
B	Wundanyi	607	7	182	2
C	Voi	643	9	192	2
D	Taveta	329	4	98	1
Total		2,386	29	714	7

Source: Author (2022)

Stratified and simple random sampling approaches were used to collect data on the factors influencing course selection in VTCs in Taita Taveta County. The Taita Taveta County VTCs were divided into 4 Sub Counties (Mwatate, Wundanyi, Voi, and Taveta) by the researcher using stratified sampling, 242 trainees in the Mwatate Sub-County, 182 trainees in the Taita Sub-County, 192 trainees in the Voi Sub-County, and 98 trainees in the Taveta Sub-County VTCs were chosen using a simple random sample approach. Additionally, two principle managers from Mwatate Sub-County, two principal managers from Taita Sub-County, two principal managers from Voi Sub-County, and one principal manager from Taveta Sub-County VTCs were chosen using a simple random selection approach.

Research Instruments

In this study, the researcher collected data using a structure questionnaire and an interview schedule. Academic performance records, course enrollment records, and the Course Choice Preference Survey were utilized. Particularly for the Principal Managers of the Taita Taveta County VTCs, interview guides were used. The researcher was careful to only use official school documentation from the Taita Taveta VTC's office's Principal Managers. The researcher was able to learn more about the personality qualities of the trainees, their preferences for courses, and their actual course selections in vocational training by integrating various research tools. This information made it possible to evaluate the link between personality characteristics and course preferences, enabling researchers to better understand how trainees' personalities affected their choices during their vocational training.

Reliability and Validity of the Research Instruments

An established, validated, and previously checked for consistency questionnaire was utilized to make sure the personality assessment questionnaire was reliable. In Kilifi County, a pilot study was carried out with a small sample of trainees to evaluate the questionnaire's internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. For good dependability, the high alpha value should be above 0.70. An established personality assessment measure with shown construct validity was taken into consideration to ensure validity. Additionally, expert judgment from University of Eldoret was used to assess the face validity of the questionnaire and ensure that it captured relevant personality traits related to course choice in vocational training.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to conducting the research in the County, the researcher sought approval from the relevant MoE officials. The researcher was given authorization to conduct the study by the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), and a letter of introduction to the Principal Managers and trainees at the VTCs in Taita Taveta, Kenya. The study's data collection took place in September and October of 2022.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to code the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the descriptive data. Inferential statistics used included correlation analysis, chi-square test, ANOVA, and regression analysis. The study question was taken into consideration when interpreting qualitative data, which was collected from narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the completed surveys, 99.2% of the responses were from Taita Taveta VTC trainees. Based on interviews with the Principal Managers, a higher percentage of VTCs (71.4%) are located in rural regions, compared to urban areas (28.6%). This can likely be attributed to the large population of young people attending school in the countryside and the government policy aimed at decongesting urban areas. To make towns more liveable and productive by reducing traffic and overcrowding, the Taita Taveta County administration may have considered it appropriate to build more VTCs in rural areas. These results are comparable to those from Kakamega County, where 88.9% of VTCs were discovered in rural regions and 11.1% in urban areas (Maingi, 2019).

Table 2: Location of the VTCs in Taita Taveta County

Location of VTCs	Number	%
Urban	2	28.6
Rural	5	71.4
Total	7	100

Source: (Field data, 2022)

Demographic characteristics the trainees in the Taita Taveta VTCs

Taita Taveta VTCs had more male trainees than female trainees, with 447 (63.1%) male trainees and 261 (36.9%) female participants. This suggests poor female enrolment in STEM programs, which has a negative impact on TVET schools' completion rates (Najoli, 2019). Despite the numerous obstacles that prevent female students from enrolling in TVET programs and trades that are dominated by men, there is little public awareness of the issue and no official strategy to address it (Struthers & Strachan, 2019). Male-dominated institutions are offered and challenged by women entering the forest management field (Johansson *et al.*, 2020).

Table 3: Data on Sampled Trainees in the Taita Taveta VTCs (n=708)

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	447	63.1
Female	261	36.9
Age		
15-19 years	313	44.2
20-24 years	281	39.7
25-29 years	41	5.8
30-34 years	73	10.3
Year of enrolment		
2018 & below	3	0.4
2019	8	1.1
2020	121	17.1
2021	208	29.4
2022	368	52.0

Source: Author (2022)

The majority of trainees were between the ages of 15 and 19, while 39.7%, 5.8%, and 10.3% were respectively 20 to 24, 25 to 29, and 30-34. According to Makato *et al.*, (2022) the mean age was 21 years, indicating a young stage. In 2022, 52% of trainees registered in VTCs, with the remaining trainees coming from 2021, 20.1% from 2020, 1.1% from 2019, and 0.4% from 2018 and earlier. These results suggest that trainees enroll in VTCs as soon as they graduate from high school or from elementary school (Tsui *et al.*, 2019). Only 0.4% of students enrolled in artisan courses in 2018 and below, according to the results, indicating significant success rates. Scholarships and bursaries make it easier for trainees to pay their tuition on time, encouraging them to enroll in VTCs and finish their education (Syme *et al.*, 2022).

Nature and Characteristics of the Artisan Courses Undertaken (n=708)

Results on the name of the course undertaken by gender are presented in Table 4. Most VTCs trainees (18.9%) pursued Artisan in Motor Vehicle Mechanics, while the least (0.1%) pursued Artisan in Agribusiness.

Table 4: Characteristics of the Artisan Courses undertaken (n=708)

Course	Number	%
Artisan in Motor Vehicle Mechanics	134	18.9
Artisan in Electrical Installation	117	16.5
Artisan in Masonry	116	16.4
Artisan in Fashion Design and Garment Making	103	14.5
Artisan in Hairdressing & Beauty Therapy	98	13.8
Artisan in Information Communication & Technology	37	5.5
Artisan in Plumbing	37	5.2
Artisan in Carpentry & Joinery	26	3.7
Artisan in Welding	22	3.1
Artisan in Food and Beverage	13	1.8
Artisan in Agribusiness	1	0.1
Artisan in Knitting	4	0.6
Total	708	100

Source: (Author, 2022)

This indicates that the trainees in the Taita Taveta VTCs embraced technical courses has opposed to business or secretarial courses (Odondi *et al.*, 2020).

Courses undertaken by Gender

Male trainees 28.2% pursued Motor Vehicle Mechanics, while females 34.9% pursued Fashion Design, and few took Therapy or Food and Beverage. Welding was the least pursued (Table 5).

Table 5: Courses undertaken by gender

Gender	Male		Female	
	Course	Number	%	Number
Electrical Installation	100	22.4	17	6.5
Fashion Design and Garment Making	12	2.7	91	34.9
Food and Beverage	2	0.4	11	4.2
Motor Vehicle Mechanics	126	28.2	8	3.1
Information Communication & Technology	11	2.5	26	10.0
Masonry	114	25.5	2	0.8
Carpentry & Joinery	19	4.3	7	2.7
Agribusiness	1	0.2	0	0.0
Knitting	1	0.2	3	1.1
Hairdressing & Beauty Therapy	8	1.8	90	34.5
Welding	20	4.5	2	0.8
Plumbing	33	7.4	4	1.5
Total	447	100	261	100

Demographic Characteristics of the Principal Managers

The majority of Principal Managers (71.4%) were aged 41-45 years, with 28.6% aged between 36 and 40. This could be due to the fact that many principal managers have likely progressed through the ranks within the vocational training system. They may have started as trainers or instructors and gradually advanced to managerial roles over the years. Another reason could

be due to Educational Requirements where Leadership positions may require specific educational qualifications and work experience. As individuals age, they tend to accumulate the necessary qualifications and experiences to qualify for such roles. The findings are in line with those of (Grissom *et al.*, 2021) that majority of principal in vocation training centres are mature, experienced men and women at the height of their careers and tend to make informed decisions regarding VTCs affairs.

Table 6: Demographic Information of the Principal Managers (n=7)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
31-35 years	-	-
36-40 years	2	28.6%
41-45 years	5	71.4%
46-50 years	-	-
51-55 years	-	-
Gender		
Male	6	85.7%
Female	1	14.3%
Highest Level of Formal Education		
Diploma	6	85.7%
Higher Diploma	1	14.3%
Bachelor’s Degree	-	-
Master’s Degree	-	-
Doctorate	-	-
Other	-	-
Experience		
1-5 years	-	-
6-10 years	6	85.7%
11-15 years	1	14.3%
16-20 years	-	-
21-25 years	-	-

Source: Author (2022)

The gender imbalance was observed, portraying 85.7% male Principal Managers and 14.3% female Principal Managers in charge of the VTCs in Taita Taveta County. It is important to incorporate the views of females for a study is more enhanced with the participation of more females (Gunn, 2020). Since the ratio between males and females was extensively spread out, it is apparent that much work is supposed to be done to achieve gender equality in managing the VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya. Gender equality can positively contribute to proper training in technical institutions (Andreoli *et al.*, 2019)

Most of the Principal Managers 85.7%, were diploma holders while 14.3% had higher diplomas. Principal with high education levels enhance good management in schools and lead to success of institutions. The principal managers with high levels of education is important for they can promote stability in education, promote research and policy in their respective schools (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). The academic qualifications of the principal managers reveal a body of averagely qualified staff in the VTCs in Taita Taveta County. In Kenya, just as Singapore, the polytechnic diploma holders are competing with degree holders in the globalized marketplace of jobs (Mathews *et al.*, 2019). Majority of the principal managers 85.7% had 6-10 years' experience while the minority 14.3% had 11-15 years' experience. The mean experience for the Principal Managers was 9 years.

The trainees in the VTCs in Taita Taveta County were asked whether they were limited to their course by the industries in their area of employment

opportunities, majority of the respondents 386(54.50%) agreed while 272(38.40%) disagreed with a significant difference ($\chi^2=167.42$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$).

Majority of the respondents 351(49.50%) added that they choose their course due to job opportunities in their family business none significantly higher than those who disagreed with the statement. In relation to opinion the trainees' did research on the courses to establish availability of employment opportunities, the majority of the respondents 79.4% agreed, 5.2% were neutral, 15.4% disagreed ($\chi^2=467.02$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$). The findings are as results of Job prospects which have an impact on how trainees view their lives in relation to their future course specialties. The findings are supported by (Etel & Nagy, 2021), who indicated that Training and education must always be in line with the employment prospects available and the talents of the trainees.

Also, when the trainees in the VTCs were asked whether TVET institutions provide vocational guidance and counselling service for graduates on employment opportunities, the majority 83.9% agreed 5.6% were neutral, 10.6% disagreed ($\chi^2=565.71$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$).

The principal managers were interviewed on influence of employment opportunities on course choice. The majority of the principal managers cited that "*when marketing our institution, the people we encounter usually ask us which course is more marketable. Also, when the trainees report to select for a course, they usually prefer to pursue courses that are marketable at the expense of their talents and ability.*"

Table 7: Respondents Opinions on whether Employment Opportunities influences course choice in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi square (χ^2)
I was limited to my course by the industries in my area	174 (24.6%)	212 (29.9%)	50 (7.1%)	204 (28.8%)	68 (9.6%)	$\chi^2=167.42$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$
I did choose my course due to job opportunities in my family business	144 (20.3%)	207 (29.2%)	57 (8.1%)	227 (32.1%)	73 (10.3%)	$\chi^2=165.53$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$
I did research on the courses to establish availability of employment opportunities	267 (37.7%)	295 (41.7%)	37 (5.2%)	74 (10.5%)	35 (4.9%)	$\chi^2=467.02$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$
TVET institutions provide vocational guidance and counselling service for graduates on employment opportunities	291 (41.1%)	302 (42.7%)	40 (5.6%)	43 (6.1%)	32 (4.5%)	$\chi^2=565.71$, d.f.=4, $p < 0.0001$

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, N – Neutral, D – Disagree, SD - Strongly Disagree

Source: Author (2022)

The study employed regression analysis to establish whether there was a significant impact of employment opportunities on course choice. The results were presented in Table 8. Table 8 shows the summary of the findings of the research question test done to establish whether employment opportunities carried a

significant impact on course choice. The dependent variable course choice was regressed on predicting variable employment opportunities to test the research question. Employment opportunities insignificantly predicted course choice, $F_{(1,706)} = -.110$, $p > 0.05$, which indicates that the employment opportunities played none

significant role in shaping the course choice ($b = -.579$, $p > 0.05$). These results clearly direct that there is an insignificant effect of the employment opportunities on course choice. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.001$ depicts that the model explains 0.1% of the variance in course choice. Most studies show that most learners weigh the financial benefits of a course in terms of its potential to open doors to progress and employment before choosing it (Mutungi, 2023). Given the challenging employment

market, many trainees believe that in order to succeed in society, they must hold a high-paying position (Singoei, 2021). In order to ensure their long-term security, trainees may look into courses that will be beneficial to them in the long run (Muriuki & Dominic, 2022). Teaching is perceived by trainees as a course with few career chances, poor course growth, and little opportunities for promotion.

Table 8: Regression analysis to determine whether employment opportunities had a significant impact on course choice of trainees' in VTCs in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Objective	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	p-value	Research Question supported
O4	PE → CC	-.110	.001	.935	.334 ^b	No

Note: * $P > 0.001$, EO: Employment Opportunities CC: Course Choice

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the trainees in the VTCs were greatly influenced to pursue their course due to the industries in their areas or job opportunities in their family business. The trainees did research on the courses being offered in the VTCs to establish the availability of employment opportunities before settling for the course. The VTCs have a career office that provides vocational guidance and counselling services to the trainees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Trainees should choose courses that are on demand, marketable, and lead to employment. Family businesses or industries near VTCs can provide direct jobs after completion. Research courses to determine if they offer employment opportunities before deciding on a course. VTCs should have career offices for vocational guidance and counselling services.

Conflict of Interests: The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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