

## **The Impact of the Four-year Learning Programme to Students' Career Aspirations: The Case of University of Botswana Accounting and Finance Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper determines whether the students' career aspirations have changed from the time they enrolled for a particular programme during the first year until they have encountered socialisation throughout the four-year learning period, which includes the internship programme. Descriptive research design was used in the study. The research population for the study were all final year University Botswana undergraduate business students on a four year study programme. Purposive sampling was used to select a total of 100 students from the final year Accounting and Finance students and, the two groups being equally represented in the sample. Primary data was used for the study and collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire from the two groups during class time. Descriptive statistics and Independent sample t-tests were used to analyse the data. The internship programme is an eye opener to the students and help them to prepare for their careers. The students who enrolled for the accounting and finance programmes stuck to the careers choices they had made at the commencement of their four year study programmes. The university must continue with internship programmes, if possible assist finance students to secure internship places in finance related institutions both locally and regionally.

**Key words:** Career aspirations, internship, social influences, demographics, academic programmes, University of Botswana

### **INTRODUCTION**

Students enrol for different programmes at universities because of the career aspirations they want to pursue upon graduating whilst others are influenced to enrol in particular programmes by their parents or guardians or other circumstances that include sponsorship restrictions. Career aspirations are the vocational possibilities or work preferences given ideal working conditions that college and university students will want to pursue after graduating [1]. In this light, internship provides students with the first formal opportunity in a working environment which is a key determinant in their careers and is a chance for them to apply the theories learned in classrooms to real world situations in a working environment. Therefore, organisations through internship programmes are able to identify talented potential employees who can fit into their culture, vision and strategic goals [2].

It has been revealed that undergraduate major field of study appear to have a significant impact on getting a job and securing employment at a level of bachelor's degree at an early age in one's career [3]. By extension, such benefits accrue to those students majoring in fields that have the most direct and functional linkages with specific jobs [3]. Accounting has been identified amongst those specialized fields that include among others; computer science, engineering, and nursing. Meanwhile, Astin [4] posits that the faculty also have a bearing on students since faculties with strong orientation towards students tend to have more effects. Meanwhile, Luzzo [5] examined gender differences in 401 college students' career maturity and the analysis revealed that female students scored significantly higher than male students on each of the career maturity measures: career-mature attitudes, career decision-making skills, and vocational congruence. As a result, gender is an important moderating variable in college students' career development.

Danziger and Eden [6] investigate changes in Israeli accounting students' career aspirations during their course of studies, and the relationship between these and their perceptions of professional accountancy firms. The results show that accounting student' aspirations to pursue a career with a professional accountancy firm decline significantly between the first and postgraduate years, while their desire to work in the business sector increases. Moreover, the results show the same trend with regard to the student's positive perceptions of the above firms as future workplaces.

This study aligns to a general conceptual framework by Weidman [7] which showed that "undergraduate socialization can be conceived as a process whereby student (1) enters college as a freshman with certain values, aspirations, and other personal goals ; (2) is exposed to various socializing influences while attending college, including normative pressures exerted via (a) social relationships with college faculty and peers, (b) parental pressures, and (c) involvement in non-college reference groups, (3) assesses the salience of the various normative pressures encountered for attaining personal goals; and (4) changes or maintains those values, aspirations and personal goals that were held at college entrance."

### **Problem Statement**

As evident in Danziger and Eden [6] study, when juxtaposed with conceptual framework by [7], postulates that career aspirations tend to change significantly between the first and postgraduate years due to the socialization processes involved. As a result, expect a significant impact on career aspirations of University of Botswana accounting and finance students who as part of their four-year specialized degree programmes, have a compulsory ten weeks internship programme. The overarching question is, "has the student career aspirations changed from the time they entered university, via the internship programme until they eventually complete their university degree studies?" There is also a lack of studies in Botswana that have been carried out on the factors that influence career aspirations and choices.

### **Objectives**

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether the students' career aspirations have changed from the time they enrolled for a particular programme during the first year until they have encountered socialisation throughout the four-year learning period, which includes the internship programme.

The specific objectives are to;

1. Assess the role played by family members and parents in the students' choice of programme of study

2. Examine why students have chosen their respective programmes of study
3. Assess the role played by the internship programme experiences towards career choice and preparation
4. Check if the students' career goals, plans and aspirations changed significantly during the four year degree programme
5. Establish whether there is any significant difference between the accounting and finance students in terms of their (i). Internship experiences and (ii). Career goals towards the end of the four year learning period.

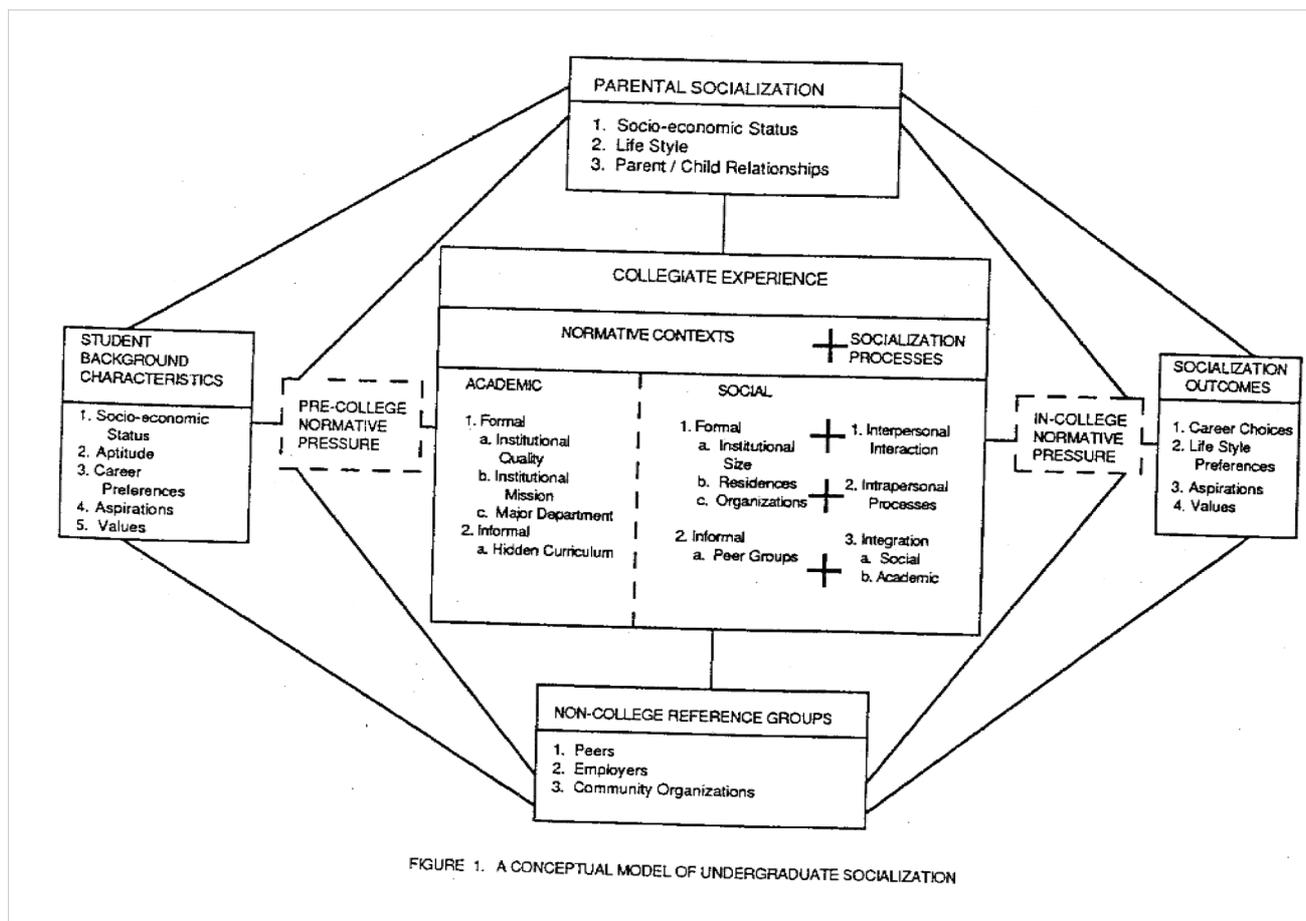
### **Significance of the study**

The study aimed to establish the appropriateness of the finance and accounting programmes in meeting students' careers aspirations from the time of enrolment until completion of the programmes. Further, the study aimed to show the significant role placed by the internship programme in shaping student career goals and aspirations.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Though several organizational variables have been identified in most socialisation studies e.g. [8], this study will adopt a more general conceptual framework developed by [7], who summarised the socialisation process among three components; (1) individual, group and organisational influencers, (2) social processes through which these sources of socialising influencers are encountered by students and, (3) resultant socialisation outcomes in various colleges. As a result, this approach emphasizes two concerns in terms of the way people are socialised into an environment; namely, social interactions (interpersonal processes) and organization structures (the characteristics of educational institutions) with regard to exerting pressures on students. In a nutshell, the framework explores set of socialization process, concentrating largely on normative context and interpersonal relations among members. As a result, it considers the joint socialization of (1) student background, (2) normative influences exerted by academic and social structure and (3) mediating impact of parents and non-college reference groups during college life as students participate in the immediate campus social structure [7].

This model is felt to be more appropriate as it aligns fully to the specific objectives of this study. However, the effect of parental influence and non-college reference groups will be relegated to a lesser importance. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, more attention was paid to the collegiate experience in influencing career outcomes, and for this to form the conceptual framework for the study. The generalised model is summarised below, with the arrows bidirectional; Source; [7]



### AN OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Career aspirations and choices of students are impacted upon by a wide variety of factors. Many of these factors have been studied over time to establish their significance in shaping the careers of many a student. These studies have been conducted across the many disciplines found in the academic sphere. This section of the paper identifies some of the common factors often examined to establish their impact on career choices that students make by the time they graduate from a degree programme. A significant amount of literature has been reviewed to ascertain the focus of previous studies in the broad area of student career aspirations and choices, with emphasis on accounting, finance and business areas of study.

This study aims at making a contribution to knowledge by focusing on two factors, being the four-year academic programme and the internship (industrial attachment) for students in Accounting and Finance at the University of Botswana. Numerous studies have been undertaken aimed at ascertaining the impact of different factors on career aspirations of students. The studies undertaken in different countries around the world have been based on different categories of tertiary education students and have focussed on different factors that impact career choices and aspirations of tertiary education students. The environments within which these studies were undertaken also differ, sometimes significantly so.

### Studies on factors students consider in choosing a career

Numerous studies have sought to establish the factors that students consider in choosing a career in accounting, finance or other specialisations in the business areas ([9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16])

The most frequently interrogated factors have been influence from family and peers as well as influence from academic staff ([4]; [17]; [16]); intrinsic, financial and job-related factors ([10]; [17]); learner's own choice of career ([10]; [16]).

The findings of most of these studies have, not surprisingly, been varied as they have overlapped with regard to some of the factors. In summary, the main findings are outlined in the findings of the following research studies:

A study by [4] suggested that academic staff have a notable positive or negative influence on student career choices. As he points out, "student-faculty interaction has a number of fascinating effects on career outcomes. Most notable, perhaps, is the positive effect on choosing a career in college teaching. Clearly, this result suggests that interacting frequently with faculty produces in students a greater sense of identification with their faculty mentors. Student-faculty interaction also has positive effects on both career choices and major field choices in all fields of science (but not in engineering, it should be stressed), and negative effects on the choice of a career or major in business."

In 1997, [17] revealed that accounting students in New Zealand who intend to select a career in chartered accountancy give significantly higher priority to financial and market factors than those who have chosen a non-accounting career. Similarly, not surprisingly, they perceive the benefits of becoming a chartered accountant to be greater than the associated costs. Further, the results indicate that intrinsic factors, other factors and exposure to accounting at high school have no significant influence on this career decision. The study also showed that students choosing a non-accounting career view the accounting profession as dull and boring.

While the study by [10] showed that accounting students listed job security as the job attribute considered most important in selecting their first job. This was followed by challenging and interesting work, advancement potential, employer-paid health insurance and personalities of supervisors and co-workers, in that order.

The study by [17], also examined the influence of various factors on accounting students' choice to pursue a professional career as a chartered accountant (CA) or to pursue a non-accounting career. The factors they explored included intrinsic factors, financial and job-related factors and other factors such as parent and peer influence, work experience, exposure to high school accounting and the student's perceived benefit-cost ratio to being a chartered accountant.

### **Impact of academic programmes and internships on student career choices**

There are much fewer studies that sought to establish the impact of academic programmes on career aspirations and choices. Equally few are those studies that sought to establish the impact of internship programmes on student career aspirations and choices. As [18], noted it is surprising that given the value of internships to business students, few studies have examined their influence on undergraduates' career considerations. Studies that had a focus on the impact of academic programmes and internships on career aspirations and choices of students have mainly been outside the accounting and finance disciplines ([12]; [18]; [19]; [14]; [20]; [21]; [18]).

The outcomes of many of these studies can be summarised on the basis of the overall findings of the following studies: [12] found that approximately fifty percent of the undergraduate students in business programmes aim to find employment in their chosen area of speciality.

The result of a study by [19], also suggest that academic major plays an important role in students' career choice behaviour. Students rely on faculty expertise to help them make well-informed career goals. Further, the study suggests that differences in the academic areas and related professions impact students' career decision self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and vocational exploration and commitment. Student career behaviours are shaped by the learning experiences unique to each programme. Students across the majors included in this study revealed significant differences in the variable of career outcome expectations. These expectations affect how students prepare for their future jobs.

Another study on the possible attraction of non-accounting students to a professional accounting career (CPA) in Japan by [14], has demonstrated the strength of a study programme in a professional area such as accounting in influencing the choice of career by students. In this study, the outcomes revealed that students who had work experience and majored in disciplines other than accounting/business were more reluctant to become a CPA. Accounting schools in Japan have simply attracted students who have previously majored in accounting at the undergraduate level and entered directly after graduating from university without any work experience.

A study by [20] suggests that students overall find that the internships are an effective means of providing them with business education and preparing them for their future careers. Such perceptions/expectations are, however, stronger for those students who have not yet taken an internship than those who have taken or are currently taking one. This suggests that the internships while meeting the students' expectations overall with regard to their belief that internships were helpful in shaping their future career path and improving their job opportunities, all of their expectations were not met to the levels expected by students prior to undertaking internship. An interesting finding of this study was that students found internships more valuable than taking a regular course.

## Summary

The foregoing literature overview shows that, indeed, there has been considerable interest in seeking to understand the factors that influence student career choices and aspirations. Several studies have tended to focus on such factors as influence from family and peers as well as influence from academic staff, intrinsic, financial and job-related factors, learner's own choice of career and to a lesser extent, study programmes and internships. The findings of various studies that have been conducted on the broad topic of factors that influence students in their career choices and aspirations have yielded results that in some cases are complementary and in other cases are contradictory. What is evident is that students are impacted upon by a wide variety of factors as far as their career choices are concerned. What varies is the extent to which these factors impact the students. That also is function of a wide variety of other factors that include the programmes of study and environmental factors. However, there is limited research on the impact of academic programmes and internships or attachments, especially in accounting and finance. This study sheds more light on the impact of study programmes and internships on career choices and aspirations of accounting and finance students, albeit to a limited extent.

In this study the following hypotheses were tested;

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Family members, parents and/or friends play a positive role in the students' choice of programme of study

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The internship programme experience plays a positive role towards career choice and preparation

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Students career goals, plans and aspirations changed significantly towards the end of the fourth (final) year of study

**H<sub>4a</sub>:** There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to internship experience.

**H<sub>4b</sub>:** There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to the four year socialisation process.

## METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive study which sought to uncover the impact of a four year learning period, which is inclusive of internship on students' career aspirations. In this light, only 4<sup>th</sup> year Accounting and Finance students from the University of Botswana were considered. The main reason for surveying the views of 4<sup>th</sup> year students being that at that time this group of students would be in their final year of study and have also completed the internship programme ten weeks after their third year of study, and any change in career at this stage would be well informed. [22] have discovered a change in attitude among undergraduate accounting students from two UK universities, and in particular, when accounting students begin accounting studies, they have a favorable attitude towards accounting as a profession, but their enthusiasm wanes over the course of the programme. In order to assess students' careers aspirations, a survey method through use of semi-structured questionnaire was used. A survey method has been used in similar and related studies on assessing perceptions on career aspirations and impact of internship, see [6, 21].

### Data and Sampling

The research population for the study were all final year University Botswana undergraduate students studying a four year business programme. Judgement or purposive sampling was used to select a total 100 students from the final year Accounting and Finance degree students, and the two groups being equally represented in the sample. Judgement or purposive sampling was used to select fourth year accounting and finance students. According to Zikmund, Babin [23], judgment (purposive) sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which an experienced individual selects the sample based on his or her judgement about some appropriate characteristics required for the sample member. In this context, the two groups all undergo the same internship programme at the end of their third year of study and are often attached to accounting or finance departments of various organisations. Further, the two degree programmes are related since students undertake mostly the same first and second year courses, only to specialise at their third and fourth year levels.

Data was collected from April to May 2018 on fourth year accounting and finance students who were enrolled in the two degree programmes and had already undergone internship the programme. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to students from the two groups during class time. Fifty questionnaires were administered to fourth year finance students and the remaining fifty to accounting students. Students voluntarily completed the questionnaires during one of the classes in May 2018, when they were only a few weeks away from completing their degree studies. This period was chosen because at this stage students were almost done with their degree studies, with only final examinations for their last semester pending at that stage.

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed, with some questions adopted from similar studies on student perceptions and career aspirations ( [6]; [21]). The questionnaire was divided into two key Sections. Section A enquired on the students' demographics. Section B probed on the students' perceptions on their career choices, plans and aspirations. The questions regarding career choices and internship experiences were on a 5-point Likert scale.

There were also closed and open-ended questions interrogating whether student's career aspirations changed due to the course of their studies. The questionnaire was piloted before being given out to students.

### **Data Analysis**

Information regarding respondents' demographic profiles was summarized using frequency tables generated through Statistical Software for Social Science (SPSS). Paired-sample t-tests were performed to examine significant differences of mean scores for the respondents' perceptions on internship experiences and career goals towards the end of the four year learning period. In particular, T-tests were performed to examine the mean score for each of the internship experience results for a particular programme of study, on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). This was done, in order to investigate a possible moderating effect of internship experience on career aspiration.

Further, to that, respondents were asked if there was any change in career goals as a result of internship experience and to explain their assertions. The last set of questions sought to address if students' career goals, plans and aspirations has changed significantly during the course of their studies. In particular, students were asked about the clarity of their current career plans (ranging from 1-very unclear to 5 no definite career goals) and to explain each choice. Finally, perception on students career intentions after graduation were assessed by ticking a set of answers which included; related full time job, new career position, attend graduate school, and other. Of more interest via a follow-up open ended question was for those who intend to switch to a new career after graduation. As a result, themes were developed for all open-ended questions to get an overall perception on the questions asked.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since this study involves collection of primary data, high standards of confidentiality were applied. Thus, information gained was used for the intended purpose and the identity of participants was anonymous to protect students' interest and future wellbeing. All participants were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary. Further, a consent form was provided that was signed by the respondent, giving permission that they agree to take part in this research.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

Background information of the respondents is shown on Table I. A total of eighty six (86) questionnaires were returned by the respondents which was 86% response rate. In terms of respondents' programme of study 42 (48.8%) were studying accounting whilst the other 44 (51.2%) were studying finance. In terms of gender, 28 (32.6%) were male and 58 (67.4%) were female. The majority of the respondents 80 (93%) fell within the 21-24 age group followed by the 25 - 30 age group that had 5.8% of respondents whilst 20 years had 1.2% of respondents. The majority of the respondents, 98.8% were single whilst only 1.2% of the respondents were married. The GPA in the range 3 - 3.49 constituted the highest percentage of respondents with 29.10% followed by GPA ranges of 3.5 - 3.99 and above 3.99 that both had 26.7% of respondents. The GPA range of 2.5 - 2.99 had 15.1% of respondents whilst the GPA range of 2 - 2.49 had 2.30% of the respondents.

**Table I: Background Information of Respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	28	32.6
Female	58	67.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
20	1	1.2
21-24	80	93
25-30	5	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Programme of Study</b>		
Accounting	42	48.8
Finance	44	51.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	85	98.8
Married	1	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Current GPA</b>		
2 - 2.49	2	2.3
2.50 - 2.99	13	15.1
3 - 3.49	25	29.1
3.5 - 3.99	23	26.7
> 3.99	23	26.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Role of family members in the students' choice of programme study**

The influence of family members, parents and/or friends who work in field/sector related to the programme of study are depicted on Table II. The majority of the students at an average of 62% for both Accounting and Finance programmes had a family member(s) and/or friend(s) working in the field related to their programme of study. This is in line with the findings of [17], who concluded that parent and peer influence determined students' choice of programme. Therefore Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>: is accepted, "Family members, parents and/or friends play a positive role in the students' choice of programme of study".

**Table II: Role of family members in the choice of study programme**

Programme of study							
		Accounting		Finance		Total	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<b>Family members or friends working in the field related to your programme of study</b>	<b>No</b>	16	38%	17	39%	33	38%
	<b>Yes</b>	26	62%	27	61%	53	62%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Reasons for choosing programme of study

The reasons for choosing respective programmes of study by students are depicted in Table III. In particular, students were requested to state their degree of agreement with the identified reasons.

Seven out of the eight reasons evaluated by the students had means above the expected mean of 3 except for “career guidance at school/university” that had a mean of 2.66. The overall mean of the reasons for choosing respective programme of study by students was 3.77 which is greater than the expected mean of 3. This implies that in general the students were in agreement that they considered the stated reasons in deciding their programme of study.

Notably, “To equip me for a career in the finance and accounting industry” had the highest mean of 4.50 followed by “To learn about the accounting or finance industry” with mean of 4.47 and then “Opportunities of employment” with third highest mean of 4.10. The other reasons with means above 3 were “Good publicity about the profession”, “The opportunity to study subjects I am good at”, “Availability of financial support (i.e. scholarship, sponsorship etc.)” and “Encouragement from family and friends” with means of 3.88, 3.73, 3.71 and 3.09, respectively.

The respondents choose their respective programmes of study because of the need to learn and equip themselves for a career in accounting or finance sector and employment opportunities available in the sector. The good publicity of the profession, studying subjects you are good at, availability of financial support for the respective programme of study and, encouragement from family members and acquaintances were the other factors considered by respondents in choosing programme of study, but were of lesser importance to the students when compared the preceding set of reasons. The outcomes are in agreement with the findings of [10], [17] and [16]).

However, career guidance at school/university did not play major factor in deciding the programme of study for respondents because it had a mean of 2.66 below expected mean of 3.

**Table III: Students' reasons of choosing respective programmes of study**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
<b>Reasons for choosing programme of study</b>							
i) To equip me for a career in the finance and accounting industry	1.2%	1.2%	7.0%	27.8%	62.8%	4.50	0.778
ii) To learn about the accounting or finance industry	-	-	11.6%	30.2%	58.2%	4.47	0.698
iii) Good publicity about the profession	-	3.50%	37.2%	26.7%	32.6%	3.88	0.913
iv) The opportunity to study subjects I am good at	1.2%	17.4%	20.9%	27.9%	32.6%	3.73	1.132
v) Encouragement from family and friends	15.1%	16.3%	29.1%	23.3%	16.2%	3.09	1.289
vi) Career guidance at school/university	17.4%	27.9%	31.4%	17.5%	5.8%	2.66	1.134
vii) Availability of financial support (i.e. scholarship, sponsorship etc)	3.5%	9.3%	27.9%	31.4%	27.9%	3.71	1.083
viii) Opportunities of employment	1.2%	4.7%	15.1%	40.7%	38.4%	4.10	0.908
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>3.77</b>	

**Table IV: Role played by internship experiences towards students' careers**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
<b>Role played by internship experiences toward career choice and preparation</b>							
i) Experiences added value to my learning	1.2%	2.3%	12.7%	41.9%	41.9%	4.21	0.842
ii) Experiences had a positive impact on my learning	1.2%	3.5%	10.5%	43.0%	41.8%	4.21	0.856
iii) Experiences kept me actively engaged in learning	1.2%	3.5%	14.0%	48.8%	32.5%	4.08	0.843
iv) Experiences have had a positive impact on the broader community & region	1.2%	11.6%	27.9%	39.5%	19.8%	3.65	0.967
v) Experiences have helped me develop critical thinking skills	1.2%	5.8%	14.0%	44.2%	34.8%	4.06	0.912
vi) Experiences have helped me prepare for my career	2.3%	3.5%	11.7%	39.5%	43.0%	4.17	0.935
vii) Experiences have helped me prepare for my graduate school	4.7%	8.1%	15.2%	45.3%	26.7%	3.81	1.068
viii) Experiences let me apply theories and concepts in the real world	3.5%	7.0%	11.6%	45.3%	32.6%	3.97	1.023
ix) Experiences were more rewarding	2.3%	5.8%	27.9%	33.7%	30.3%	3.84	1.004
x) Experiences were more interesting and engaging to me	1.2%	7.0%	12.8%	43.0%	36.0%	4.06	0.938
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>4.01</b>	

### Role of internship experiences towards career choice and preparation

The view of respondents on the role played by internship experiences towards their career choice and preparation was determined based on ten internship experience statements shown in Table IV.

All the ten internship experience statements had means above the expected mean of 3 with an overall mean of 4.01. This implies that students were in agreement that the internship experiences played a role towards their career choice and preparation.

Six out of ten internship experience statements had means above 4. Two internship experience statements, being "Experiences added value to my learning" and "Experiences had a positive impact on my learning," had the highest means of 4.21 and at the second position was "Experiences have helped me prepare for my career" with a mean of 4.17. The other experiences with means above 4 were "Experiences kept me actively engaged in learning", "Experiences have helped me develop critical thinking skills" and "Experiences were more interesting and engaging to me".

The other four experiences had means below 4 but more than 3.5, and these were “Experiences let me apply theories and concepts in the real world”, with a mean of 3.97, “Experiences were more rewarding”, with a mean of 3.84, “Experiences have helped me prepare for my graduate school”, with a mean of 3.81 and, “Experiences have had a positive impact on the broader community & region”, with a mean of 3.65.

The respondents were in agreement that the internship experiences had a positive effect and added value to their learning, kept them engaged in learning and helped them to prepare for their careers. The internship enabled them to apply theories and concepts learnt in real practical situations and prepared them for graduate studies. The findings are in agreement with the outcomes of [20]).

The internship experiences played a major role towards career choice and preparation of the respondents based on the overall mean of 4.01 for all the internship experience statements. A specific statement as to role of internship, “Experiences have helped me prepare for my career” had a mean of 4.17, implying that the respondents agreed internship experiences played a role towards career choice and preparation. Therefore Hypothesis **H<sub>2</sub>**: is accepted, “The internship programme experience plays a positive role towards career choice and preparation”.

The impact of the internship experiences towards career goals of the respondents are depicted in Table V. The majority of the students 60(69.8%) confirmed that the internship experiences caused a change to their career goals within their field of study.

The reasons cited by respondents for change in their career goals after internship experience were the realization that either the accounting or finance sector was very broad, there were other careers they were not aware of and found it very difficult to work as a subordinate and preferred to be own boss. Therefore the internship programme did not change the students' career goals but was an eye opener to other career goals they could pursue within their field of study.

**Table V: Change in career goals due to internship experiences**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	60	69.8%
No	26	30.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### **Impact of the four learning programme to career aspirations**

The respondents were asked on whether they had clear career goals/plans after graduation and their responses are portrayed in Table VI. The majority of the respondents 68 (79%) were sure on what they intended to do after graduation. While 15.2% of the respondents indicated that it was unclear as to what they intend to do, whilst 5.2% of the respondents had no definite career goals and did not know what to do after graduation.

With regard to those that were not clear about their career goals various reasons were stated. A combination of the lack of employment opportunities in the job market and the broadness of the finance/accounting disciplines thus leading to the availability of numerous career options, made it difficult for students to decide on a career to pursue. The lack of knowledge of the different careers available were cited as the reasons by the students that either had no clear or definite career goals. The respondents also mentioned uncertainty of the future and the need

to start their own business ventures as other reasons as to why their career goals/plans were unclear or not definite.

**Table VI: Career goals/plans towards the end of the four year learning period**

	Frequency	Percent
No definite career goals	5	5.8%
Very unclear	1	1.2%
Somewhat unclear	12	14.0%
Somewhat clear	37	43.0%
Clear	31	36.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table VII depicts the plan of the students after graduation. The majority of the respondents, at 62.8%, intended to have a fulltime job related to their programme of study, whilst 14% wanted to further their studies by attending graduate school. Eleven (12.8%) of the respondents planned to pursue a new career unrelated to their programme of study and 9 (10.5%) wanted to pursue other things. The findings are in agreement with [12] who found that undergraduate students in business programmes aim to find employment in their chosen area of specialty.

Few respondents (11%) wanted to have new careers unrelated to their programme of study because they had a passion for different careers to their programme of study, believed that knowledge gained from the undergraduate programmes could be utilized in other sectors and did not like working environment of professions relating to their programme of study. Lack of provision of practical skills that can be utilized in the workplace from programme of study was also cited as another reason to pursue a new career.

**Table VII: Career plans after graduation**

	Frequency	Percent
Fulltime job related to your programme	54	62.8%
New career position unrelated to your programme	11	12.8%
Attend graduate school	12	14.0%
Other	9	10.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of the students had clear plans on what they intended to do after graduation. Overall, 62.8% of the respondents intended to have a career related to their programme of study, which implies that their career goals, plans and aspiration had not changed significantly over four year learning period. Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>: is rejected, which states that "Students career goals, plans and aspirations has changed significantly towards the end of the fourth year of their undergraduate programmes."

### **Comparison of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to internship experience and four year socialization process**

Table VIII shows a comparison of accounting and finance students' perceptions towards internship experiences. Accounting students had an overall mean of 4.30 as compared to finance students' overall mean of 3.73 implying that accounting students agreed more to the internship experience statements as compared to the finance students. This is perhaps because

finance students are often placed in accounting firms as a last resort during their internship placements, due to inability to find relevant spaces in finance-related institutions<sup>1</sup>.

When an independent t-test was conducted for the means of the seven internship experience statements considered, eight had statistically significant results except for three internship experience statement had statistically insignificant results.

The difference amongst the means of the internship experience statements for the accounting and finance students were all more than 0.50 for seven out of ten internship experience statements and were statistically significant. Statistically insignificant differences were there for just three out of ten internship experience statements. The statements were "Experiences kept me actively engaged in learning",  $p=0.052$ , "Experiences have had a positive impact on the broader community & region",  $p=0.139$ , and "Experiences have helped me develop critical thinking skills",  $p=0.12$ .

The independent t-test results for the ten internship experience statements considered for the accounting and finance students were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The average t-test score for all the internship experience statements was  $t = 2.997$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This implies that there was a significant difference amongst the means of the internship experience statements of the accounting and finance students. Therefore hypothesis  $H_{4a}$ : is accepted which states that "There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to internship experience" because accounting and finance perceptions towards the ten internship experience statements were different.

Table IX shows a comparison of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to the four year socialization process. Accounting students had an overall mean of 2.47 as compared to finance students' overall mean of 2.29. When an independent t-test was conducted for the means of two statements regarding careers aspirations after the four year socialization process all had statistically insignificant results.

There were small differences between the means of the accounting and finance students, for the statements considered regarding their career aspirations after the four year socialization process. "What are your current career goals/plans" in which accounting students had a mean of 3.14 whilst finance students had a mean of 2.91. Accounting and finance students had means of 1.75 and 1.61 respectively for, "What do you intend to do after graduation?"

The independent t-test results for the two statements regarding career aspirations after the four year socialization process for the accounting and finance students were insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The average t-test score for the three statements regarding career aspirations was  $t = 0.797$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . This implies that there was an insignificant difference amongst the means of the statements regarding career aspirations of the accounting and finance students. Therefore hypothesis  $H_{4b}$ : is rejected which states that "There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to four year socialization process" because accounting and finance perceptions regarding career aspirations after four social process are almost the same.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on the experiences of the authors due to their positions at the University

**Table VIII: Comparison of Accounting and finance students internship experiences**

	Accounting		Finance		t-test for equality of means	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	t	Significance
i) Experiences added value to my learning	4.55	0.550	3.89	0.945	3.940	0.000
ii) Experiences had a positive impact on my learning	4.52	0.671	3.91	0.910	3.550	0.001
iii) Experiences kept me actively engaged in learning	4.26	0.701	3.91	0.936	1.972	0.052
iv) Experiences have had a positive impact on the broader community & region	3.81	0.890	3.50	1.023	1.494	0.139
v) Experiences have helped me develop critical thinking skills	4.31	0.749	3.82	0.995	2.579	0.120
vi) Experiences have helped me prepare for my career	4.52	0.634	3.84	1.055	3.616	0.001
vii) Experiences have helped me prepare for my graduate school	4.24	0.726	3.41	1.187	3.883	0.000
viii) Experiences let me apply theories and concepts in the real world	4.24	0.821	3.70	1.133	2.491	0.015
ix) Experiences were more rewarding	4.14	0.783	3.55	1.109	2.873	0.005
x) Experiences were more interesting and engaging to me	4.40	0.627	3.73	1.065	3.574	0.001
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.30</b>		<b>3.73</b>		<b>2.997</b>	<b>0.033</b>

**Table IX: Comparison of Accounting and finance careers goals towards the end of the learning period**

	Accounting		Finance		t-test for equality of means	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	t	Significance
i) What are your current career goals/plans?	3.14	1.072	2.91	1.007	1.042	0.300
ii) What do you intend to do after graduation?	1.79	1.071	1.66	1.055	0.552	0.582
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>2.47</b>		<b>2.29</b>		<b>0.797</b>	<b>0.441</b>

**Table X: Summary of accepted/rejected hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Statement	Results
H <sub>1</sub>	Family members, parents and/or friends play a positive role in the students' choice of programme of study	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub>	The internship programme experience plays a positive role towards career choice and preparation	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub>	Students career goals, plans and aspirations has changed significantly towards the end of the fourth year of their undergraduate programmes	Rejected
H <sub>4a</sub>	There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to internship experience	Accepted
H <sub>4b</sub>	There exist a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to four year socialization process	Rejected

### Summary of findings

Family members, parents and/or friends have an influence in the students' choice of programme of study as revealed by the study that 62% of the respondents had a family member(s) and/or friend(s) working in the field related to their programme of study.

The respondents choose their respective programmes of study because of the need to learn and equip themselves for a career in accounting or finance sector and employment opportunities available in the sector. The good publicity of the profession, studying subjects you are good at, availability of financial support for the respective programme of study and, encouragement from family members and acquaintances were the other reasons for choosing the programme of study by respondents.

The internship experiences helped the respondents to prepare for their careers thereby playing a major role towards their career choice and preparation. The internship was an eye opener to the respondents because it made them aware of other careers they could pursue for their respective programmes of study.

The students had clear plans on what they intended to do after graduation. The four year learning period had not caused a significant change to the career goals, plans and aspirations of the students. In particular, 62.8% of the respondents intended to have a career related to their programme of study.

There was a significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to internship experience. The accounting students were more satisfied with their internship experiences as compared to their finance counterparts. This could be due to the fact that finance students intern in accounting firms as a last resort during their internship placements, due to failure to secure relevant spaces in finance-related institutions. However, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of accounting and finance students' career aspirations due to four year socialization process. They still wanted to pursue a career related to their respective programme of study after the four year socialization process.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The study premised on identifying whether the students' career aspirations have changed from the time they enrolled for a particular programme during the first year until they have encountered socialisation throughout the four-year learning period, which includes the internship programme. Based on the empirical study and findings, it is concluded that internship was an eye opener to the students and helped them to prepare for their careers. The four year socialization process, during the respondents' studies did not cause any change in their career aspirations from the time enrolled for their respective programmes. The findings stresses the importance of internship to students in deciding their careers aspirations upon graduation. The students who enroll for the accounting and finance programmes are sure of the careers they intend pursue. Main recommendations include:

1. The internship programme in accounting and finance is useful to students' career goals and aspirations and should be continued.
2. Students in finance should be assisted by the University to secure internship places in finance related institutions locally and regionally, to match their degree specialization.

### **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study had limitations in terms of numbers of programmes considered for the study and sample size. For a better understanding of the impact of the learning period to students' career aspirations, future research should consider students from all the faculties of the University rather just focus on two academic programmes.

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