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Specialisation Preferences and Perceived Motivation in Ecotourism and Wildlife Management Programme at the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria

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Ogunjinmi, A. A.
Department of Ecotourism and Wildlife Management
School of Agriculture and Agricultural technology
Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria
Email: aaogunjinmi@futa.edu.ng
Phone: +2348077428332

Abstract

This study determined specialisation preferences and perceived motivational factors in ecotourism and wildlife management programme among students in the Department of Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria. A sample of 156 students was randomly drawn from 261 students in the Department. Data were collected with questionnaire while analysis was through independent t-test, ANOVA and Pearson's correlation. Results show that 74.4% of the students preferred ecotourism management while 25.6% preferred wildlife management. Furthermore, observed mean values of the perceived motivational factors (self-actualisation=4.20, job opportunity=4.08, field attractiveness=3.88, ease of study=3.55, and scholastic achievement=3.93) were lower than reported in previous studies. It is recommended that the departmental curriculum should enhance opportunities for study exchange programme with institutions offering similar programmes overseas and also field practical exposure in all areas of the programme that could bolster students' job opportunities after graduation.

Keywords: Specialisation, preferences, perceived, motivation, programme

Introduction

Choosing a profession is a significant stage in life and expresses one's personal inclinations (Natan and Becker, 2010). Studies indicate that people choose a career when it is compatible with factors they perceive as significant for an ideal career (Natan and Becker, 2010). According to *Meyer et al.* (1993), compatibility leads to a

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greater commitment to the chosen career, while incompatibility will eventually result in burnout and exit from the profession. Ajzen (1991) theory of planned behaviour, an extension of the Ajzen and Fishbein (1969, 1980) theory of reasoned action support career choice among individuals. According to the theory, human action is guided by three kinds of considerations which include beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behaviour and the evaluations of these outcomes (behaviour beliefs), beliefs about the normative expectations of others and motivation to comply with these expectations (normative beliefs), and beliefs about the perceived power of these factors (control beliefs) (Ajzen, 2006).

The predisposition for a career choice is a composite of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Among such factors include family socio-economic backgrounds such as income and types of occupations (Zahari *et al.,* 2005), parental influence, family, friends or significant other people of reference (Ajzen, 1991, Amani, 2013), income and future career prospects (Bhat *et al.,* 2012), intentions, self-esteem and ease of employment (Ajzen, 2006, Amani, 2013). Orenuga and Costa (2006) also identified four major motives for the choice of specialisation as interest, prestige, good employment opportunities and regular work hours. Similarly, Wong *et al.* (2007) found technical and functional competency, general management competency, autonomy/independency and lifestyle, job security and stability, geographic security, entrepreneurial creativity, service and dedication to a cause and pure challenge as the students' motivational factors to choose a career. In the study conducted in Sweden, Hjalager (2003) reported working with people and/or communication, work experience, and the value of the programmes in many trades and industries as the three most important motives for career selection. Dapiawen *et al.* (2008) report that the primary reason for students' specialisation is ‘my own decision'. According to Ugezu and Modekwe (2012) in their studies of medical doctors, 94% of the respondents who had made a choice of area of specialisation felt their choices were not influenced by peers and classmates.

Disciplines in academia, according to Nzewi (2008) are primarily concerned with the issues of lectures, research and grades earned by students; attention is seldom

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directed towards the critical but non-academic human and social backgrounds that discretely impact students' devotion to study, their failures and successes, their career decisions and fulfilment in the field after graduations. Nzewi (2008) further opined that it is of central human concern that academia should stimulate students to aim for attaining job fulfilment in their chosen careers. This is predicated on constant self-reflection and self-assessment that would enable a suitable choice of areas of specialisation within broad disciplines. Many attributes have been thought to be the underlying factors for the selection of the specialisations in the institutions of higher learning, while more and more determinants are coming up due to the dynamic change in the market which needs to be identified (Lovelock, 2007 cited in Wairimu, 2013). As the challenges of environmental sustainability mount, a steady supply of well-trained and highly educated professionals is needed to meet the complex demand of ecotourism and wildlife sectors. Preferences of present day students may reflect ultimate career choices of future ecotourism and wildlife management practitioners, which in turn could play an important role in the development of ecotourism and wildlife sectors in Nigeria. Identifying motivational factors in specialisation preferences will facilitate planning and appropriate changes in ecotourism and wildlife management training and curriculum. According to Arnott and Saunders (2008), past studies seldom delve into the purpose-driven choices made by students in the field of their specialisation. It serves as a significant social study to identify why students opt for the academic discipline of specialisation when pursuing university education (Arnott and Saunders, 2008). To spur interest in agriculture, fisheries and natural resources, courses among the youth require crucial inquiry into their personality endowments and motivational reorientations or partly personal value systems vis-à-vis influences of environmental or external structures (Romeo, 2014).

In Nigeria, admission to courses in the universities could either be through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and Pre-degree programme administered by the universities for entry into 100 Level or through Direct Entry (DE) admission for holders of advanced certificates such National Diploma (ND), Nigerian Certificate in

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Education (NCE), holders of Diploma through Interim Joint Matriculation Board (IJMB), University Diplomas and Higher National Diploma (HND) for entry into 200 Level and 300 Level respectively. Whatever the entry level, all admissions are through JAMB in conjunction with the universities. Each candidate must obtain JAMB form (UTME Form or DE Form) and select a University, a Polytechnic or Mono-technic and a College of Education as well as first and second preferred course of study and also sits for UTME (except DE candidates) and Post UTME conducted by tertiary institutions in Nigeria. For a candidate to qualify to sit for post UTME conducted by the universities, he or she must have scored 180 marks and above while for post UTME conducted by Polytechnic or Mono-Technic and Colleges of Education, the candidate must have scored between 150 and 179 marks. The aggregate scores obtained from UTME and post UTME is used in determining the cut-off marks for admission into any programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Candidates that do not qualify for admission into specific courses selected based on low aggregate scores obtained or score below cut-off marks specified by the institutions and are within cut-off marks for other courses are offered admission to such courses regardless of their preferred courses of choice as long as they possess Ordinary Level (O/L) requirements and sat for relevant UTME subjects for the course(s). Despite these, matriculated students could change from one programme to another within the university based on the rules and guidelines approved by the senate of the university. For example, in the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria, a student could seek to change his or her academic programme to another within the University due to poor performance or academic withdrawal. In both cases, the student must not have more than four (4) outstanding courses at 100 Level. The application for change of academic programme must, however, be approved by the senate of the university for such students. Any student whose application for change of academic programme is approved is admitted into 200 Level.

Previous studies on motivational factors in specialisation preferences have been conducted in various disciplines (Gjerberg, 2001, Dapiawen *et al.,* 2008, Natan and Becker, 2010, Bhat *et al.,* 2012), however; few studies relating to tourism/ecotourism

have been conducted and as such, limited information is available on specialisation preferences in ecotourism and wildlife management. Among such studies on tourism are Lee *et al.* (2008), Sibson (2011), and Bamford (2012). The study is aimed at determining specialisation preferences and perceived motivational factors in ecotourism and wildlife management programme at the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to identify: i) differences in male and female students' preferred areas of specialisation, ii) differences in male and female students' motivational factors, iii) differences in students' motivational factors based on preferred areas of specialisation, iv) differences in motivational factors based on their level of study, and v) relationships between motivational factors and students' preferred areas of specialisation.

Methodology

The Study Area

The study area was Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Southwest, Nigeria. The state lies between latitudes 50 45' and 70 52'N and longitudes 4020' and 60 05'E. Its land area is about 15,500 square kilometres (UNAAB-IFSERAR, 2010) (Figure 1). The study was conducted in the Department of Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria. The Department is the first Department to offer ecotourism management programme in Nigeria and was established in 2007 through the splitting of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Management into Ecotourism and Wildlife Management and Fisheries and Aquaculture Technology. However, the Department took off with 45 students in 2008/2009 academic session.

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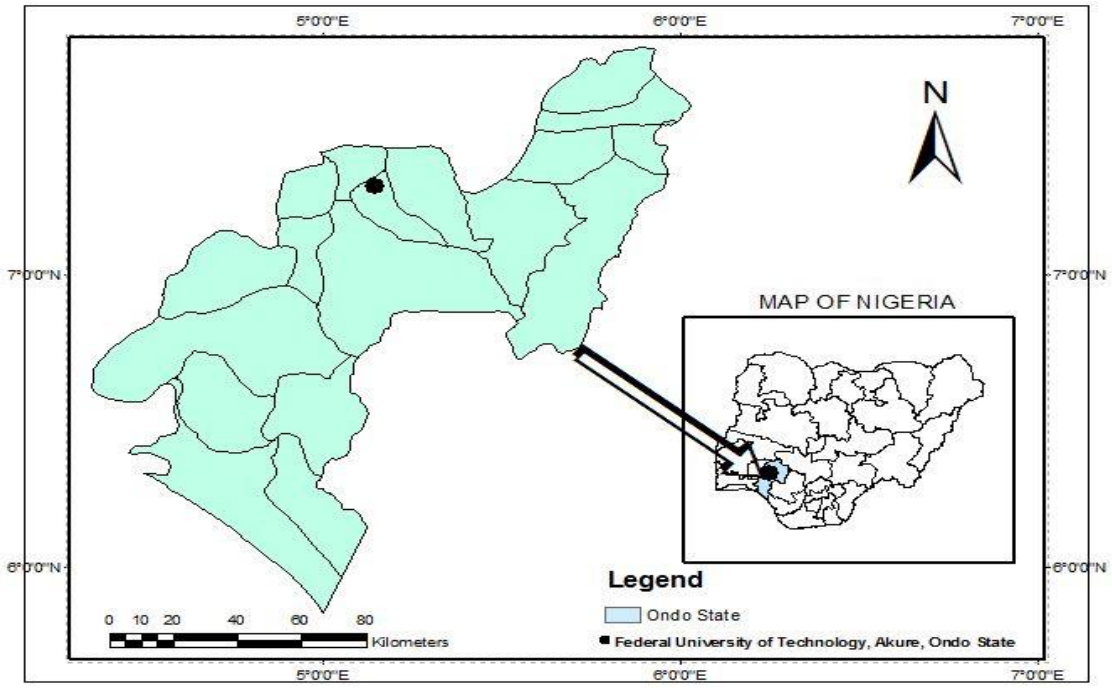

Figure 1: Map of Ondo State, Nigeria showing location of the study area

Population, Sampling, Instrument and Analysis

The sample size of 156 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determination of sample size. As at the time of the study, there were 261 students in the Department comprising 219 undergraduates and 42 graduating students. The sample size was proportionally distributed according to the population of students in each level. Thus, from 37 students in 100 level, 22 students were selected, 28 from 47 in 200 level, 30 from 50 in 300 level, 31 from 52 in 400 level, 20 from 33 in 500 level and 25 were selected from 42 in the graduating class. The respondents in each level were randomly selected from the population. Data were collected using pretested structured questionnaire comprising personal factors such as sex, age, level of study, preferred area of specialisation, and Lee et al. (2008) motivational factors for choosing a hospitality and tourism management programme. Reliability coefficients determination follows Cronbach's (1951). Cronbach's alpha determines the internal consistency or average correlation of items in a survey instrument to gauge its reliability (Santos, 1999). For overall motivation, the reliability Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.87, self-actualisation was 0.63, job opportunities

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(0.75), field attractiveness (0.73), ease of study (0.62) and scholastic achievement (0.67). Data were analysed with T-Test, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson's correlation.

Results and Discussion

Profiles of the Respondents

A large percentage of respondents (58.3%) were in the age group of 21-25 years with a mean of 22.2 years and median of 22 years; the median age was thus higher than the national estimated median age of 18.2% for Nigeria (CIA World Factbook, 2016). Also, 50.6% were male while 49.4% were female. This could be a factor of enrolment of more males in science and technology courses than females. Aderemi *et al.* (2013) also observed that the number of female students admitted for science and technology courses was consistently lower than that of male counterparts. This is inconsistent with the findings of Lee *et al.* (2008) in their studies of hospitality and tourism management (HTM) in Hong Kong where they observed that female were more in overall undergraduate population than male. In addition, 19.9% and 19.2% were in 300 and 400 levels, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Variable	Percentage
Age	
16-20	28.9
21-25	58.3
26-30	12.8
Mean= 22.2, Median= 22	
Sex	
Male	50.6
Female	49.4
Level of Study	
100	14.1
200	17.9
300	19.2
400	19.9
500	12.8
Graduating	16.0

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Students' Preferred Areas of Specialisation

The results show that 74.4% and 25.6% preferred ecotourism management (EM) and wildlife (WM) management as the preferred areas of specialisation, respectively (Figure 2). That the majority of the students preferred ecotourism management could be due to the perception of students on the related nature of ecotourism to tourism and thus could provide them job opportunity in the tourism sector. Contrary to expectation, no gender differences were observed in specialisation preferences by the students (t= 1.96, p ≥ 0.05); although the mean of the male group was higher than that of the female group (Table 2). This confirmed the findings of Diderichsen *et al.* (2013) that showed almost no gender differences in students' specialties choices. Soethout *et al.* (2004) however reported gender differences in specialty career choices. Bhat *et al.* (2012) and Gjerberg (2001) observed that gender significantly influenced specialty choice.

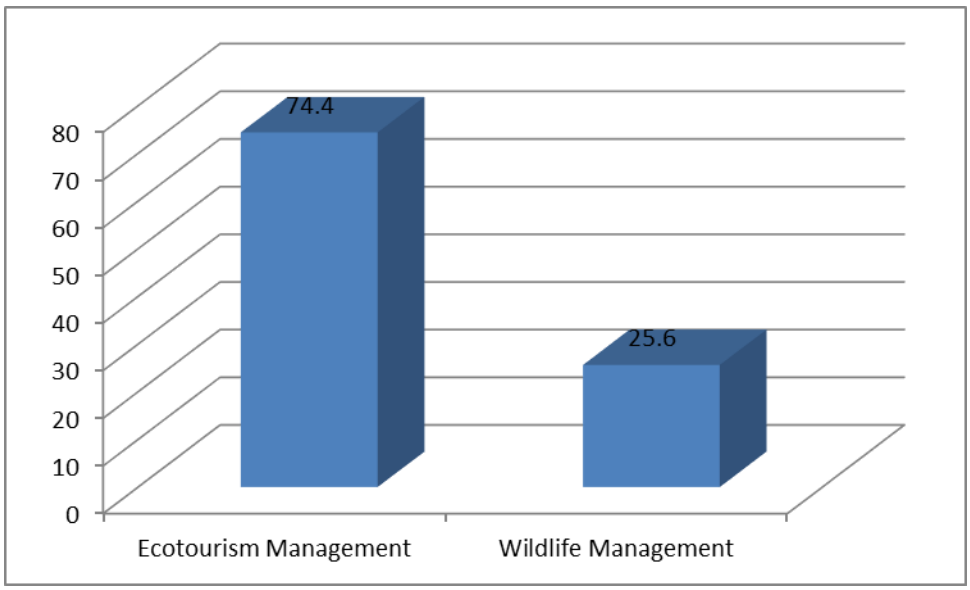

Figure 2: Respondents' preferred areas of specialisation (%)

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Table 2: Gender differences in students' preferred areas of specialisation

Variable	Male (Mean)	Female (Mean)	Mean Difference	T-value
Preferred Area of Specialisation	1.32	1.18	0.14	1.96*

* P ≥ 0.05

Students' Motivational Factors

Table 3 presents students' ratings of motivational factors for the area of specialisation preferences. For self-actualisation items, the means ranged from 3.71 to 4.48 with the highest mean value for possible contact with foreigners and foreign cultures. For job opportunity items; they ranged from 3.43 to 4.51. The highest mean value was for "I believe that the field is practical rather than theoretical". Similarly, the means for field attractiveness items ranged from 3.37 to 4.47 with I believe that there are many opportunities to take more overseas trips having the highest means. For ease of study, they range from 2.72 to 3.95 with the score for university entrance examination qualified them for this major having highest mean score while the mean for scholastic achievement items ranges from 3.70 to 4.31 with the likeness to be an excellent scholar in this field having the highest mean score.

The findings on motivational factors imply that the students' motivational factors for their preferred areas of specialisation were lower than the observations of Lee *et al.* (2008) who reported that the mean of self-actualisation was from 4.62 to 5.35, job opportunity from 4.65 to 5.37, field attractiveness from 4.20 to 4.75, ease of study from 4.09 to 4.61 while scholastic achievement were from 3.96 to 4.80. Although job opportunity had the highest overall mean among the motivational factors (5.01) in Lee *et al.* (2008), the present findings showed that self-actualisation (4.20) had the highest overall mean. Tijani and Omirin (2013) also observed that personal and professional interest (an item under self-actualisation) was the major motivational factor for the choice of course of study. In addition, ease of study had the lowest overall mean in the present study as well as in Lee *et al*. (2008); the mean value obtained by Lee *et al.* (2008) (4.36) was higher than what was observed in this study

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(3.55). These findings could suggest that students in hospitality and tourism management studied by Lee *et al.* (2008) had higher study motivations than students of ecotourism and wildlife management (EWM) that were the focus of this study. This could be as a result of the fact that few students actually selected EWM as a course of study in their JAMB forms but were offered admission to the course due to their inability to meet the aggregate scores and cut off marks for the courses they had interest in studying and selected for UTME, Post UTME and pre-degree examination conducted by the university.

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Table 3: Students' ratings of motivational items

Motivational items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-actualisation		
I have interest in the course	4.24	0.72
I would like to gain self-actualisation (i.e. to develop and achieve one's full potential)	4.37	0.80
This field suits my aptitude (i.e. talent and ability)	3.71	1.05
Compared to other fields, it is possible to contact foreigners and foreign cultures	4.48	0.70
Overall self-actualisation mean score	4.20	
Job opportunity		
I believe that this field has a growing potential	4.28	0.85
I believe that the percentage of employment is high after graduation	3.43	1.00
Working in this field apparently looks good	3.96	0.81
Scenes or pictures of the ecotourism and wildlife industry appearing in movies/TV look attractive	4.44	0.81
I believe that there are a variety of job opportunities	3.85	1.00
I believe that this field is practical rather than theoretical	4.51	0.77
Overall job opportunity mean score	4.08	
Field Attractiveness		
I like to serve others	3.63	1.17
Jobs in this field look attractive	3.97	0.92
I would like to study more in this field	3.97	0.97
I believe that the level of salary is high in this field	3.37	1.05
I believe that I can have many opportunities to take more overseas trips	4.47	0.67
Overall field attractiveness mean score	3.88	
Ease of Study		
Compared to other fields, it is easier to get good grades in this field	3.60	1.02
This field was recommended by others (e.g., parents, friends or teachers)	2.72	1.40
My score for university entrance exam qualified me for this major	3.95	1.23
Compared to other fields, it is easy to study field	3.71	0.97
Compared to other fields, this field provides more opportunity to be promoted	3.78	0.93
Overall ease of study mean score	3.55	
Scholastic Achievement		
I would like to be a theoretical expert in this field	3.70	1.19
I have more interest in this field, compared to others	3.78	1.07
I would like to be an excellent scholar in this field	4.31	0.88
Overall scholastic achievement mean score	3.93	

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Differences in Motivational Factors based on Students' Gender

No significant difference was also observed between male and female students' motivational factors ($p \geq 0.05$). Females, however, exhibited higher study motivation in all the motivational factors than male (Table 4). This confirmed the observations of Lee *et al.* (2008) that no significant differences exist between male and female motivational factors. Diderichsen *et al.* (2013) found that men and women had an almost identical ranking order of the motivational factors. Consistent with previous findings (Lee *et al.,* 2008), female students exhibited higher study motivation in all the motivational factors than male. Kim *et al.* (2007) found female student's dominance in hospitality and tourism management study motivation in Korea, Taiwan and China.

Table 4: Gender differences in students' motivational factors

Motivational factors	Male (Mean)	Female (Mean)	Mean Difference	T-value
Self-actualisation	16.56	17.05	0.50	1.37*
Job opportunity	24.09	24.87	0.78	1.40*
Field attractiveness	19.03	19.79	0.77	1.43*
Ease of study	17.34	18.18	0.84	1.49*
Scholastic achievement	11.46	12.13	0.67	1.73*

* P ≥0.05

Differences in Motivational Factors based on Preferred Areas of Specialisation

In Table 5, differences in motivational factors based on preferred areas of specialisation are presented. No significant differences were also observed in the students' motivational factors based on their preferred areas of specialisation ($p \geq 0.05$). However, students exhibited slightly higher study motivation in ecotourism management regarding the job opportunity, field attractiveness and ease of study while they exhibited higher study motivation in wildlife management on self-actualisation and scholastic achievement. This is inconsistent with the observations of de Souza *et al.* (2015) that factors that influenced the intention of choice of specialties were different according to groups of specialties suggesting different motivational profiles. Kim *et al.* (2002) found the primary reasons to be interested in

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the type of work associated with their specialisation, good job opportunities, and a good match with their capabilities and future earnings. Huyton (1997) observed abundant job opportunities as the major motive for hospitality and tourism management (HTM) programmes. In the comparison of Greek and UK students, Airey and Frontistis (1997) found that Greek students had a more positive view of job opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industry than their UK counterparts.

Table 5: Differences in motivational factors based on preferred areas of specialisation

Variable	Ecotourism Management	Wildlife Management	Mean Difference	T value
Self-actualisation	16.77	16.90	-0.13	-0.31*
Job opportunity	24.50	24.41	0.09	0.13*
Field attractiveness	19.56	18.92	0.64	1.03*
Ease of study	17.86	17.44	0.43	0.65*
Scholastic achievement	11.65	12.21	-0.56	-1.23*

*P ≥ 0.05

Differences in Motivational Factors based on Level of Study

Differences in students' motivational factors based on students' level of study are presented in Table 6. No significance difference was observed in self-actualisation ($F= 1.13$, $p \geq 0.05$), field attractiveness ($F= 2.21$, $p \geq 0.05$), easy of study ($F= 2.19$, $p \geq 0.05$), and scholastic achievement ($F= 1.27$, $p \geq 0.05$), however, there was significant difference in job opportunity ($F= 5.52$, $p \leq 0.01$). This could imply that students at different levels of study in ecotourism and wildlife management have different perceptions of the ability of the course to provide them with the needed job after graduation.

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Table 6: Differences in motivation factors based on students' level of study

Variable	F
Self-actualisation	1.13
Job opportunity	5.52**
Field attractiveness	2.21
Ease of study	2.19
Scholastic achievement	1.27

**P ≤ 0.01

Relationship between Motivational Factors and Students' Areas of Specialisation

In Table 7, the relationship between motivational factors and students' areas of specialisation preference is presented. No statistically significant relationship was observed between motivational factors and students' preferred areas of specialisation ($p \geq 0.05$). This could be due to the nature of their admission to the programme since most of them did not choose the course as their preferred course of study at the point of admission into the university. Thus, most of the students were actually offered admission into the course because they didn't qualify for their preferred courses and their scores qualified them for the course. In addition, some of them changed their academic programme to Ecotourism and Wildlife Management Programme due to their inability to cope with the initial courses they were admitted to study at the University. It could thus be deduced that students had lower motivations in EWM Programme.

Table 7: Relationship between motivational factors and students' preferred areas of specialisation

Variable	Correlation Value (r)	P Value
Self-actualisation	0.03	0.76*
Job opportunity	-0.01	0.90*
Field attractiveness	-0.08	0.31*
Ease of study	-0.05	0.51*
Scholastic achievement	0.10	0.22*

*P ≥ 0.05

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Conclusion and Recommendations

The majority of respondents preferred ecotourism management to wildlife management. This could be due to the perception of students on the related nature of ecotourism to tourism and thus could provide them job opportunity in the tourism sector. Opportunities for study exchange programme with institutions offering similar programmes overseas that could enable the students have contact with foreigners and foreign cultures as well as making overseas trips should be provided in the development of course curriculum for the department. In addition, field practical exposure in all areas of the programme that could bolster students' job opportunities after graduation and make them excellent scholars in the field should be accorded priority in the delivery of the curriculum. These are necessary in view of the peculiarities of their admission into the department.

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