

Challenges facing first- and second year students in the Choice of specialty and the role of the preparatory year program: case study at University of Jeddah

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Abstract:

This study presents factors affecting first-year student's choices of specialty at the University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia and highlights the influence of social networking between first-year students and other students from other faculties and how these factors possibly contributing to play valuable roles determining their enrolment in colleges in the second year. A survey questionnaire was designed to suit the objectives of the study. The results of this study demonstrated that the degree and term of admission, competition for seats in desirable majors, influencing of social custom and tradition are factors that play a fateful role in student's decisions. These factors indicate numbers of recommendations should be considered to fulfil the new direction of the Saudi vision 2030.

Keywords: preparatory; challenge, bachelor's degree, factors, University of Jeddah

المخلص العربي

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى عرض العوامل التي تؤثر على اختيارات طلاب السنة التحضيرية للتخصص في جامعة جدة في المملكة العربية السعودية، موضحة تأثير الشبكات الاجتماعية بين طلاب السنة التحضيرية والطلاب الآخرين من المستويات الأخرى في التخصصات والكليات المختلفة وكيف يمكن أن تسهم هذه العوامل بصورة إيجابية في اختيار بعض الطلاب للتخصص للسنة الدراسية الثانية. تم تصميم استبيان ليناسب أهداف الدراسة، حيث أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن شروط القبول، التنافس على المقاعد في التخصصات المرغوبة، وتأثير العادات والتقاليد الاجتماعية هي عوامل تلعب دورًا مصيريًا في قرارات الطلاب. تشير هذه العوامل إلى أنه يجب النظر في عدد من التوصيات موضحة في هذا البحث بحيث يتواءم اختيار التخصصات الجامعية مع رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية ٢٠٣٠.

كلمات مفتاحية: السنة التحضيرية، المرحلة الجامعية، عوامل، جامعة جدة



Introduction:

Knowledge is the fundamental driver of social and economic development. Therefore, Vision 2030 acquires the contribution and commitments of Saudi Universities to knowledge creation and innovation. The success of education at all levels depends on students, which will play major roles in the transformation of the natural economy and sharing a commitment of vision 2030. Thus, it is necessary to build an educational system that prepares graduates with skills and attitudes to contribute to the goals of the vision by preparing professionals with the skills and knowledge for successful application and practice (<http://www.ieche.com.sa//documents/closing-statement-en.pdf>). Professional development begins from the first year of students' enrollment at the university.

Early career choice is very crucial for first-year students since it influences future income, self-esteem, and social status. Clarity of preferences for young adults can be achieved by providing proper guidance and adequate information. Current school graduates struggle to identify early career goals. Therefore, universities in Saudi Arabia designed mandatory preparatory programs for first-year students. Among the goals of this program is to improve students' academic, computer, communication and research skills. Most importantly, it aims to guide students to the appropriate college that matches student's abilities and skills. The University of Jeddah is one of the latest universities in Saudi Arabia that was established in 2014. At this university, student has to follow one of two directions in the preparatory year program; science or literary track. Science track includes general math, physics, biology and chemistry, and entrepreneurship skills. The literary track includes individuals and society, introduction to education, principles of public administration and the principle of statistics and humanities. Both tracks share few courses, computer skills and information technology, concepts of fitness and health, university study skills and English language courses. During this year, students are exposed to extra introductory programs and courses. This program allows students to be exposed to different seminars and social networking with students from other faculties. This could help them with their specialty choices.

Providing proper guidance and adequate information are crucial for helping first year students determining their profession. Therefore, one of the goals of the preparatory program is to guide students to the appropriate college that matches student's abilities and



skills. Many factors could affect students' decisions in determining their future major, including demographic factors, introductory academic courses, communication with peers, faculty seminars or even university official social media. In each track, introductory courses give students an insight into different professions at the university helping them in finding their passion and desired future profession. Exposing new students to others from different faculties or attending introductory seminars in different faculties is another way in helping students in determining their profession. More importantly, the official social media of the university, such as Instagram and Twitter, could play a role in knowing the different departments at the university.

One of the challenges facing first-year students after determining the desired profession is the enrollment in the desired specialty. The degree and terms of admission for each department and the competition for seats in desirable majors are some of the factors that play a crucial role in students' decisions.

This project examined the effect of preparatory year program on students' specialty decision making and investigated factors affecting the achievement of their goal. Tested samples were first and second-year students. The aim of this study was to investigate some factors affecting first-year students' choices of future majors such as social networking with students from other faculties, introductory meeting at the university, friends, and families, official social communication channels of the university (Twitter and Instagram), interest and GPA. Moreover, exploring factors play roles in determining their enrolment in colleges in second-year students such as the degree and term of admission, competition for seats in desirable majors and influencing of social custom and tradition.

Methods:

The survey questionnaire was designed to suit the objectives of the study. It was structured to investigate students' choices of a future career in first- and second-year students at the University of Jeddah. The survey consisted of the following items:

- (1) Demographic characteristics (gender, track (science or literacy) and marital status)
- (2) Students consideration of possible specialties before and after the preparatory program.
- (3) Factors that students considered important in their choice of a specialty like the preparatory program academic courses, social networking with other students from other faculties, introductory meetings presented by the university, the official social communication channels of the university, friends, and family or their interest.
- (4) The second part of the survey was for the second-year students to investigate factors determining the course of specialization like the degree and terms of admission,



competition for seats in desirable majors, the influence of social customs and traditions or social status.

The data generated using a Google survey published to first- and second-year students. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 by using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage). The level of the association was tested using Spearman's Rho test.

Results:

The questionnaire survey was completed by 270 students (228 are first-year students (206 females and 22 males) 42 second-year students (39 female and 3 males) (Table 1)

Students' distribution	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Science track	260	96.3%	218	95.6%	42	100%
Arts track	10	3.7%	10	4.4%	0	0%

Table 1: Students' distribution enrolled in the study

Demographics of students:

The majority of the students enrolled in the study were from the science track (260 responders from science (96.3%) compared to 10 responders from literary (3.7%)). 245 of the responders were females (90%) while 25 were males (9.3%). Most of the enrolled students were single (95.6%) (Figure 1) (Table 2).

Table 2: Gender and material status of students enrolled in the study



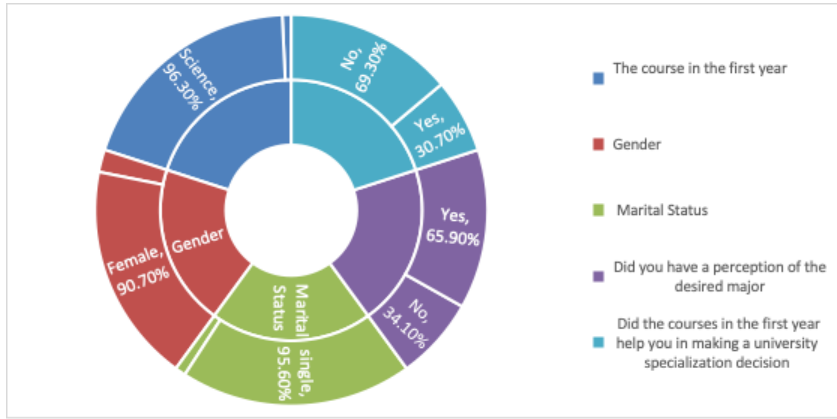


Figure (1): Chart represents the demographic data for all students enrolled in the study

Perception of students of the desired major and factors affecting their decision:

A total of 156 (68.4%) of the first-year students have a perception of their future major

Gender	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Female	245	90.7%	206	90.4%	39	92.9%
Male	25	9.3%	22	9.6%	3	7.1%
single	258	95.6%	226	99.1%	32	76.2%
Married	12	4.4%	2	0.9%	10	23.8%

during their enrolment in the preparatory year program compared to 72 (31.6%) that did not. Among responders, 187 (69.3%) did not find courses in the preparatory program helpful in

choosing a future specialty. Interestingly, both first- and second-year students (125 (46.3%) and 16 (38.1%), respectively) found that social networking with students from other faculties was a good influence in choosing a future specialty. (Figure 2)

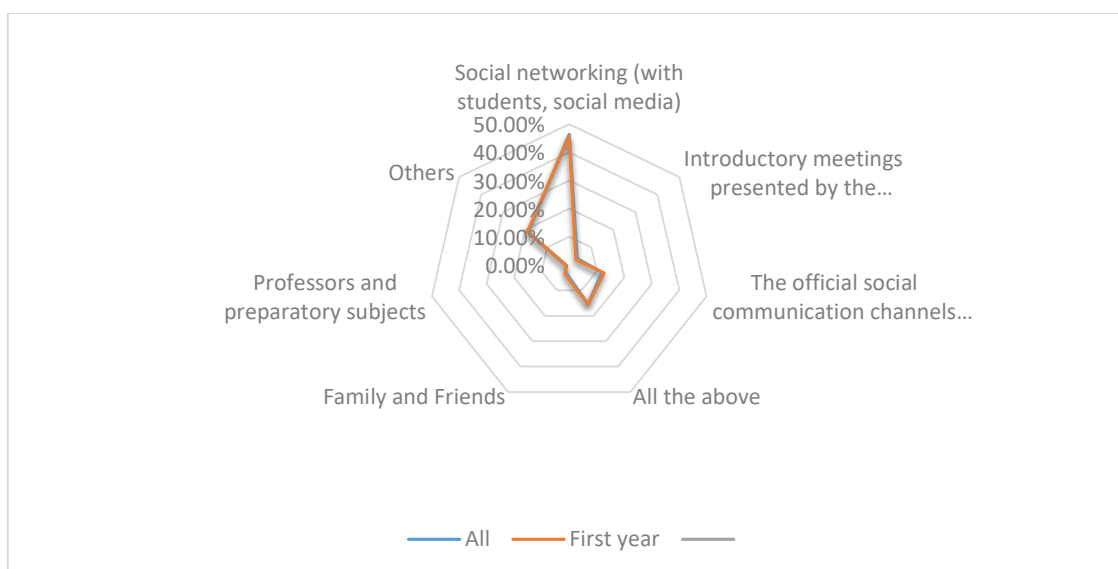


Figure 2: factors play role in determining future specialty in first year students

Factors determining the course of specialization in second-year students:

In second-year students, 66.7% weren't registered in the desired specialty compared to 26.2% that did. Among all responders from second-year students, 69.05% of students found that the degree and terms of admission were a crucial factor in determining the course of the specialization (Table 3, Figure 3). See appendix for questionnaire results.

Table 3: second-year student response to factors affecting their enrolment in the desired major

Reason	frequency	Percentage (%)
The degree and terms of admission	29	69.05%
Competition for seats in desirable majors	5	11.90%

Influencing social customs and traditions	6	14.29%
Unavailability of specialization	1	2.38%
Nothing	1	2.38%

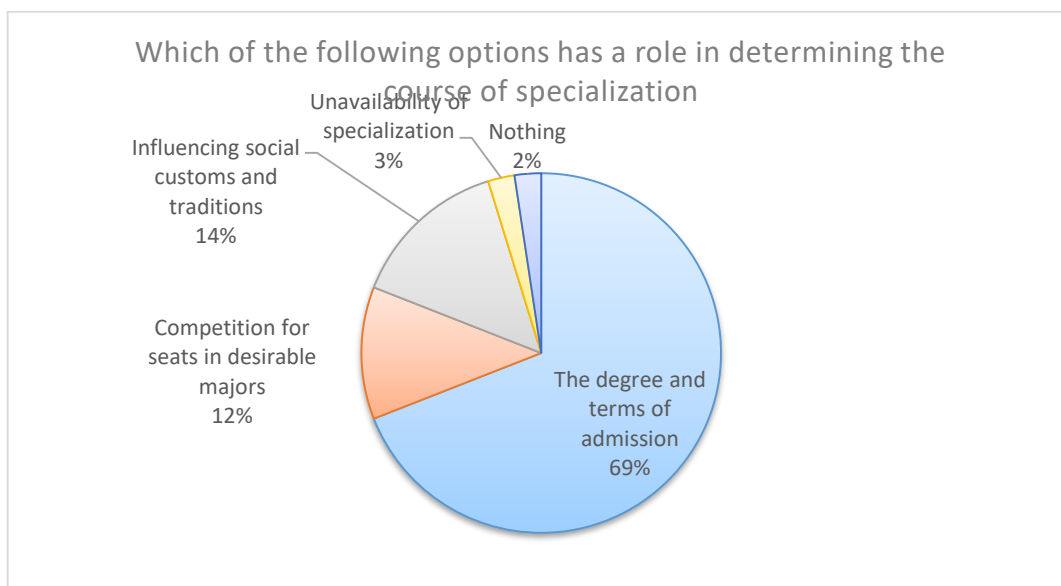


Figure 3: factors affecting second-year students in determining the course of specialization

Discussion:

Preparing graduates with professional skills begins from the first year of students' enrollment at the university. Specialty choices for these students are crucial for their future careers and in improving their professional skills. Therefore, guiding students to appropriate college that matches their ability and skills is an important aim of the preparatory year program for newly admitted students.

To our knowledge, this is the first study at the University of Jeddah that investigated factors influencing students' choice of their future major during preparatory year program (first-year students) and the obstacles they are facing to achieve their goal for a future career in second-year students.

A total of 270 (first- and second year) students (2019-2020) at the University of Jeddah completed an online survey. The demographic data showed that the ratio of a female is higher than males in our sample. The majority of the participants are from the science track and singles.

The first aim of this study was to investigate factors influencing students' choices of their future major. Even though there was no significant association between factors investigated and students' choices, data showed a high influence of social networking between first-year students and other students from other faculties. This emphasizes the importance of networking at the university during multiple activities. Similar to our results, (Salvador, 2003) found that family and social adjustment and perception of lectures do not have a strong impact on students' academic tasks. Alshammari, R (2018) did not find a correlation between using mobile devices and preparatory year path and level of English at a university in Saudi Arabia (Alshammari et al., 2018). Even though social media plays an important role in current education (Khathryn, 2014), the results of this study did not find it effective in helping students with choices of their major. However, others found that there is an impact of social media on college choices, such as Facebook, which suggests that this could help institutions to use this technology to influence students' choices of colleges (Aljereoy, 2018). In regard to the role of the introductory meetings presented by the university, it was reported that most respondents to university's introductory meetings were students from the literary track compared to the science track at King Saud University (Almomeny, 2017). Other factors that have been shown to affect student's decisions are student-parent relationships, perception of parents' finances (Butterbaugh, 2013). Thus, many factors could affect the student's direction.

After choosing the major of interest, were students able to get enrolled in the desired departments? The second aim of this study was to explore factors affecting students'



enrollment in the desired majors. The majority of the participants found that the degree of admission is the most important factor in determining their future career. The second factor was the competition of seats in desirable majors. However, others found that culture has an impact on student's motivation (Razzak, 2016) while our study did not find a strong correlation. This shows that first-year students are facing challenges for the admission of the desired specialty since there is strong competition in certain majors that could offer jobs in the market.

Recommendations

Preparatory programs for first-year students should consider the importance of social networking with a student from different faculties as a good factor in helping these students with their future direction. This could be achieved by preparing different activities that enroll a student from all faculties with first-year students. Competition for seats at certain departments should be considered to fulfill the new direction of vision 2030.

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Declaration of interest statement:

The listed authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Q1	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Yes	178	65.9%	156	68.4%	22	52.4%
No	92	34.1%	72	31.6%	20	47.6%

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Appendix:

Survey results:

Q1: Did you have a perception of the desired major?



Q3	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Social networking with students from other levels	97	35.9%	81	35.5%	16	38.1%
Introductory meetings presented by the university	10	3.7%	7	3.1%	3	7.1%
The official social communication channels of the university	32	11.9%	29	12.7%	3	7.1%
Grade point average	3	1.1%	1	0.4%	2	4.8%
Friends and family	8	3.0%	8	3.5%	0	0.0%
Nothing	13	4.8%	12	5.3%	1	2.4%
Professors and preparatory subjects	3	1.1%	2	0.9%	1	2.4%
Searching through social media and the internet and asking students of the same specialty	15	5.6%	15	6.6%	0	0.0%
Interest	28	10.4%	25	11%	3	7.1%
Communication with students from other levels and university communication channels	13	4.8%	8	3.5%	5	11.9%
All the above	42	15.6%	35	15.4%	7	16.7%
Others	6	2.22%	5	2.19%	1	2.4%

Did the

Q2	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Yes	83	30.7%	73	32.0%	10	23.8%
No	187	69.3%	155	68.0%	32	76.2%

Q2:

courses in the preparatory year help you in making a university specialization decision?

Q3: Which of the following options has a role in determining the course of specialization?

Q4: Are you registered in the desired specialty?



Q5	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
The degree and terms of admission	41	15.2%	12	5.3%	29	69.0%
Competition for seats in desirable majors	79	29.3%	74	32.5%	5	11.9%
Influencing social customs and traditions	144	53.3%	142	62.3%	2	4.8%
Social status	4	1.5%	0	0.0%	4	9.5%
Unavailability of specialization	1	.4%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%
Nothing	1	.4%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%

Q5:

Which of the following options has a role in determining the course of specialization?

Q4	All n=270		First year n=228		Second year n=42	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Yes	23	8.5%	12	5.3%	11	26.2%
No	102	37.8%	74	32.5%	28	66.7%
Do not apply	145	53.7%	142	62.3%	3	7.1%

