

Mapping the Road to Academic Passion; Exploring the Factors Influence Students' Choice of Specialization Area

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study are, to identify influence factors on specialization area selection ,to identify highly influence factors on specialization area selection, to identify less influence factors on specialization area selection, to identify influence factors on specialization area selection of campus wise and to identify Gender influence on student specialization area selection. Problem statement is the utmost issue and origin of the research. The developed conceptual framework clearly shows the relationship of the independent factors with the dependent factors course selection. Sample selection is another important step of the research. Using stratified technique 369 students were selected student from academic year of 2010 to 2016.This 369 sample consist with 140 students from Accounting specialization, 79 students from Finance specialization, 79 students from HRM specialization and 72 students from Marketing specialization. Researcher analyses data using univariate, methods and bivariate methods. Personal factor; academic quality factor and job related factor influence in large extent, nature factors and influenced factor influence in moderate extent to the Specialization Area.

Key Words-: PERSONAL FACTOR, ACADEMIC QUALITY FACTOR, JOB RELATED FACTOR, NATURE FACTORS, INFLUENCED FACTOR AND SPECIALIZATION AREA.

1.1 Introduction

The knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained through education empower individuals' potential to optimally utilize their human cognizance. This supports to open the doors of opportunities, which enables the individual to achieve better prospects in their career growth.

The education system of Sri Lanka is categorized into five parts such as primary (Grade 1 – 5), junior secondary (Grade 6 – 9), senior secondary (Grade 10 – 11), collegiate or GCE Advanced Level (Grade 12 – 13) and tertiary (University) (Kamala Liyanage, 2014). Undergraduate education in state universities is free but extremely competitive, limited and standardized, fewer

than 10.5% (less than 11,000) of those who sat the general certificate examination (G.C.E A/L) and 16% (less than 16000) students of those who qualify to get admission to state universities. (University Grand Commission

Sri Lanka 2013). University Grand Commission classifies the subjects available at G.C.E A/L Examination into six (06) main streams such as 1. Arts stream, 2. Commerce stream, 3. Biological science stream, 4.

Physical science stream, 5. Engineering technology stream, and 6. Biosystems technology stream.

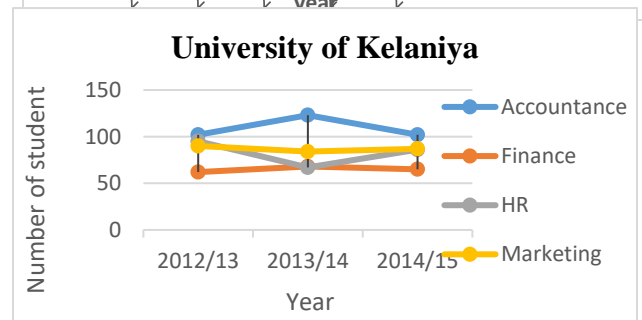
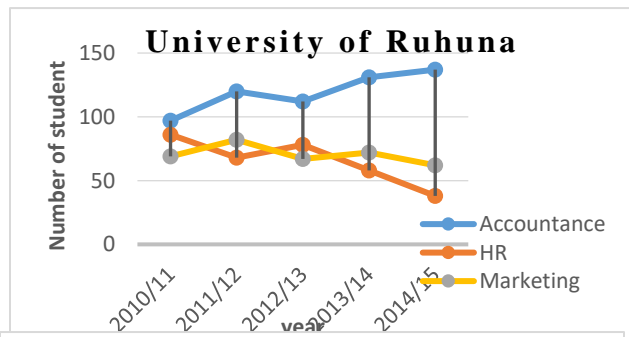
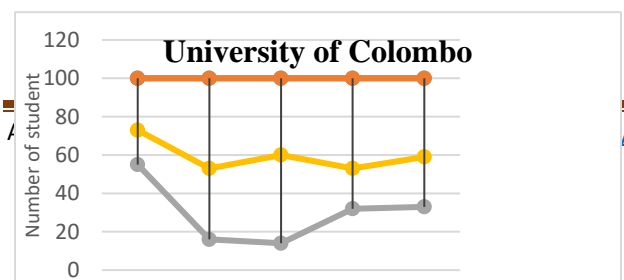
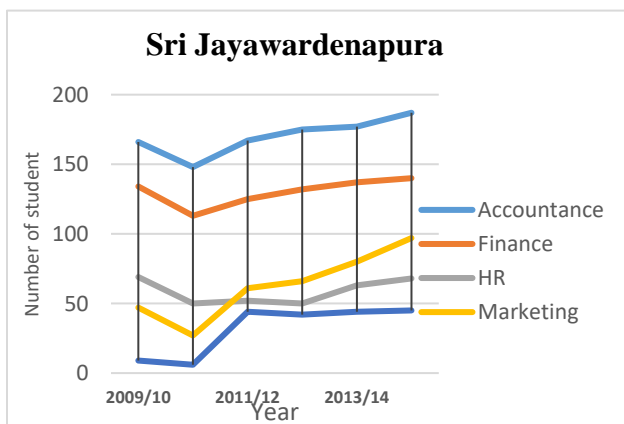
Considering different filed of studies now a days the management degree has become a necessity as all the companies require candidates possessing managerial

qualification and skills in all the areas like marketing, finance, HR, General Management etc.

Whatever the field, the selection of a specialization in the relevant area of study is not only important in one's academic life but also in the future personal life since it has an effect on the academics endurance, student's satisfaction, career and employment prospects, financial compensation and finally the social status. An incorrect decision at initial stage about the field of education may ruin the academic as well as professional careers of the student. As the student advances in the curriculum, the course selection decision becomes more complex as elective courses and section decisions must be made (Dennis Zocco 2011).

1.2 Problem Statement

According to specialization data of management faculty during the year of 2010 to 2016 period, most of the students selected Accounting and finance rather than Marketing and Human resource management. There is insufficient research existing on factor that influence on student choice of majoring.



- What are the factors influencing selection of specialization area?
- Is there significant relationship between Influence factors and Specialization area?

Research Objectives

- To identify influence factors on specialization area selection.
- To identify significant relationship between Influence factors and Specialization area?

Literature Review

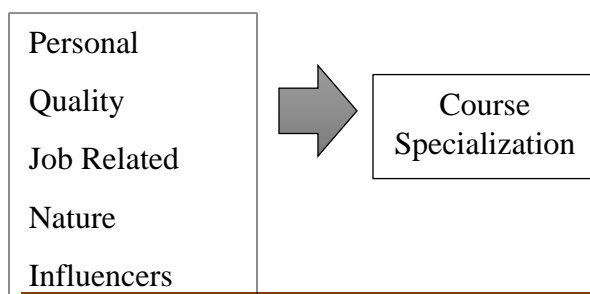
Pavalko et.al (2015) examined the factor that influences an undergraduate student in

Communication Science and Disorders (CSD) who were enrolled in a required undergraduate course at a large university in the southeastern United States. In this research, result revealed five Factors most Influencing to Graduate Program Choice. That factors are Accreditation, Knowledge of advisors, Availability of scholarships/fellowships, Tuition cost and Opportunities for other funding.

Kallo (1995) analyzed decisions relative to graduate school choice in this survey results from 1,068 students who were admitted to either a master's or a doctoral Sciences program at the University of Michigan. Results revealed six factors that influenced all graduate students, including characteristics of the academic of the institution and its programs, residency status, financial aid, work-related concerns, spousal considerations, and the social environment.

Premarathne et.al (2016) analyzed factors influencing the choice of degree-offering Institute among the logistics management students in Sri Lanka. This researcher considers below literature reviews and base on that he construct the own conceptual framework and that included 18 independent variables. Finally, they identified most influence factors are Institutional Discipline and Advanced level stream.

Conceptual Framework



(Source: Adapted From Agbanu, S.K. et al., 2014.)

Personal Factor

The Personal Factors are the individual factors that strongly influence students' course selection decision. These factors vary from person to person that result in a different set of perceptions: attitudes and behavior towards a certain course. There are a numerous amount of personal factors that affect a student's decision to select courses. Personal issues include encouragement and advice from family, friends, and self-assessments that students conduct before selecting the course (Araham & Jacobs, 1990)

Academic Quality Factor

Ramalu et.al (2013) analyze factors that determine students' preferences. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 1993 students from various institutions. It was found that the factors (by ranking) that determine students' preferences in selecting higher learning institution are Quality of Education (Ranked 1), Campus Facilities and Atmosphere (Ranked 2).

Job Related Factor

Bapat et.al (2015) Studied of the current trend in specialization field selection by students in the field of Management and the factors affecting it. This research paper aims at understanding the current trend in students with respect to their preference. A simple percentage method is used to analyze the collected data. According to result, that researcher finds out factors are, placement opportunities, career counseling

Nature Factor

Whereas some of the studies have emphasized the increasingly dynamic and complex nature of the process of specialization area selection. Management students need to acknowledge the significance and relevance of key decision factors for purposes of influencing such contextual factors in the selection such as Course content, Orientation programmes and assessment structures.

Influencers Factor

A major contribution to knowledge on the subject is that respondents suggest their decision to pursue marketing major was entirely a personal choice but not a decision that was influenced by celebrities, tutors, parents, and relatives. This finding further supports the view that student's interest and personal choice far supersedes the influence of relations or close friends, tutors, family members or celebrities as opposed to Agbanu.2014

Methodology

Primary data are collected through structured questionnaires with closed ended statements measured with Likert's scale (1-4 as strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree, respectively), the sample consisted of 369 management students from different majoring from different universities. Stratified sample was used to select the respondents for the study.

HYPOTHESIS

H_{0a}: There is no significant relationship between the factors* and Specialization area.

★ H₀₁: Personal factors

H₀₂: Academic Quality factors

H₀₃: Jobs related factors

H₀₄: Nature factors

H₀₅: Influence factors

RELIABILITY OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The researcher conducted a pilot testing for the questionnaires. During piloting 30 students were randomly selected and questionnaires administered. After going through the respondents' feedback, it was revealed that the instruments measured what was targeted by the researcher. The Cronbach's alpha used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The Reliability coefficient for the instrument was 0.924; it indicates that the instrument is reliable.

Table 3.4. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.924	62

Source: survey data

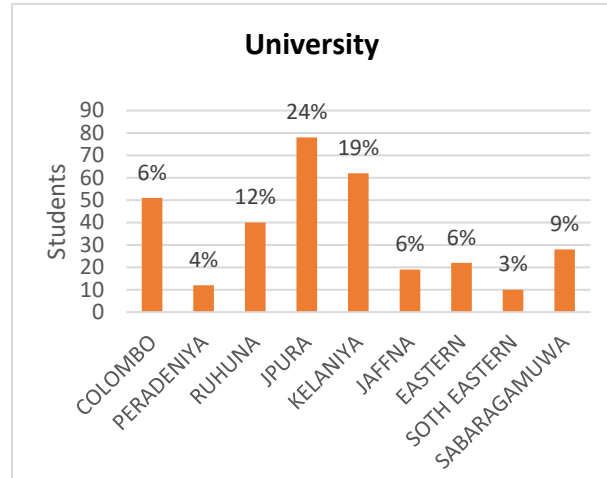
According to reliability test of overall questions result came 0.924 (Cronbach's Alpha) that represent good reliability in questioner. Because that value higher than 0.7 that case reliability is in very good level.

5. Data Analysis

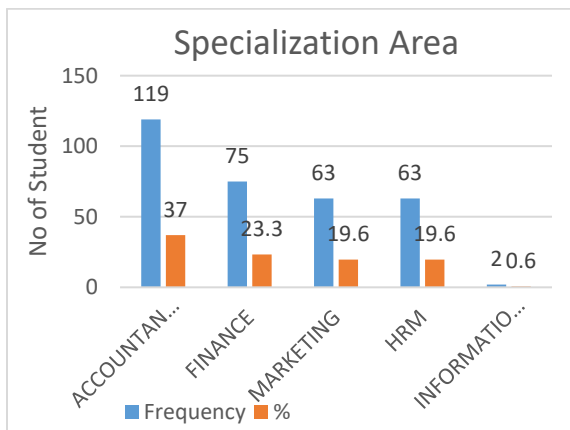
University

It represented 15.8% student from Colombo, 3.7% student from Peradeniya, 12.4% student from Ruhuna, 24.2% student from Jayewardenapura, 19.3% students from Kelaniya, 5.9% student from Jaffna, 6.8% student from Eastern, 3.1% student from South Eastern and 8.7% student from Sabaragamuwa University.

To a large extent influence - 4



Specialization Area



To some extent influence - 3

To a small extent influence - 2

No extent influence - 1

It represented 37% students are reading Accountancy program, 23% students are reading finance program, 20% students are reading Marketing program, 20% students are reading HRM program and 0.6% students are reading Information management program.

To get the result from the researcher, researcher uses the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS-21 Developer). The minimum score of the scale is 07 whereas the maximum is 60.

3.4.4 Data Measure

Mainly questioners will be used to collect information. Evaluations carried upon by the collected information. The unvaried analysis is carried out with the measure of mean and standard deviation. In this study, four point Likert scales will be used to get information.

- ✓ Personal factor minimum score of the scale is 09 whereas the maximum is 36
- ✓ Academic quality factor minimum score of the scale is 12 whereas the maximum is 48
- ✓ Job factor minimum score of the scale is 15 whereas the maximum is 60
- ✓ Nature factor minimum score of the scale is 7 whereas the maximum is 28
- ✓ Influence factor minimum score of the scale is 10 where the maximum is 40

UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The univariate technique was used for evaluating (estimation procedures) the respondents' views. The statistical package of SPSS 21.0 Version was used for this analysis. Frequency distribution analysis was used to present this analysis. The mean values and standard deviation of the variables were taken into consideration in this analysis for evaluating the Factors influence of course selection.

FACTORS ON THE COURSE SELECTION

Table 4.2: Independent Factors

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
JOB RELATED	46.6242	5.73874
QUALITY	36.5683	5.14312
INFLUENCE	28.2422	6.43179
PERSONAL	27.8944	3.61048
NATURE	20.3075	3.15960

Source: survey data

As for the response of Personal factor, the mean value was 27.89 and the standard deviation was 3.61. According to this result, personal factors influence in large extent to the course selection. The standard deviation of 3.61 is low value. This mean data were spread out over a small range of values

When considering the Academic Quality, the mean value was 36.56 and the standard deviation was 5.14. According to this result, Academic quality factors influence in large extent to the course selection. The standard deviation of 5.14 is low value. This mean data were spread out over a small range of values.

When considering the Job related factor, the mean value was 46.62 and the standard deviation was 5.73. According to this result, Job related factors influence in large extent to the course selection. The standard deviation of 5.73 is high value. This mean data were spread out over a large range of values.

As for the response of Natura factor, the mean value was 20.30 and the standard deviation was 3.15. According to this result, Nature factors influence the moderate extent to the course selection. The standard deviation of 3.15 is low value. This mean data were spread out over a small range of values

When considering the Influence factor, the mean value was 28.24 and the standard deviation was 6.43. According to this result, Influence factors influence in the moderate extent to the course selection. The standard deviation of 6.43 is high value. This mean data were spread out over a moderate range of values.

When considering all factors, mean values, and standard deviation, the researcher identified personal factor, academic quality factor and job related factor influence in large extent nature factors and influenced factor influence in the moderate extent to the course selection.

BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The Bivariate analysis was used to investigate the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable. Influence factors and specialization Area were taken as research variables respectively.

		F	Sig.
PERSONAL	Between Groups	2.24	.135
	Within Groups	0	
QUALITY	Between Groups	.090	.764
	Within Groups		
JOBFACTOR	Between Groups	.045	.833
	Within Groups		
NATURE	Between Groups	2.34	.127
	Within Groups	1	
INFLUENCE	Between Groups	4.77	.030
	Within Groups	1	

Correlation analysis was used to test the Hypothesis.

Correlation

Variable	SPECI AREA
PERSONAL Pearson Correlation	0.442**
QUALITY Pearson Correlation	0.328**
JOBFACTOR Pearson Correlation	0.544**
NATURE Pearson Correlation	0.471**
INFLUENCE Pearson Correlation	0.477**

The correlation value between the personal factor and specialization area as 0.442. So it can be clearly stated that personal factor positively influences to the specialization area and it is significant. The correlation value between the Quality factor and specialization area as 0.328. So it can be clearly stated that Academic quality factor positively influences to the specialization area.

The correlation value between the Job related factor and specialization area as 0.544, so it can be clearly stated that job related factor positively influences to the specialization area and it is significant. The correlation value between the nature factor and specialization area as 0.471. So it can be clearly stated that nature factor positively influences to the specialization area and it is significant.

Analysis of Gender Influenced On Independent Variables

Table 4.17. ANOVA

Source: survey data

This table shows the output of the ANOVA analysis and whether there is a statistically significant difference between groups' means. The significance value is 0.135 (i.e., $p = .135$), which is above 0.05 confidence interval. In addition, the calculated F value (2.24) lesser than the critical value (4.15). It shows that there is no a statistical difference in the mean of a personal factor to course selection between genders. According to that, Null Hypothesis was Accepted and alternative hypothesis "There is a significant relationship between personal factors and Gender" is Rejected.

The significance value is 0.764 (i.e., $p = .764$), which is above 0.05 confidence interval. In addition, the calculated F value (0.09) lesser than the critical value (4.15). It shows that there is no a statistical difference in the mean of a academic quality factor to course selection between genders. According to that, Null Hypothesis was accepted and alternative hypothesis "There is a significant

relationship between academic quality factors and gender” was rejected.

The significance value is 0.833 (i.e., $p = .833$), which is above 0.05 confidence

		Mean	Std. Deviation
PERSONAL	MALE	28.2742	3.52076
	FEMALE	27.6566	3.65425
QUALITY	MALE	36.6774	5.09511
	FEMALE	36.5000	5.18466
JOBFAC	MALE	46.7097	5.84178
	FEMALE	46.5707	5.68751
NATURE	MALE	19.9677	3.04955
	FEMALE	20.5202	3.21593
INFLUENCE	MALE	29.2258	5.69672
	FEMALE	27.6263	6.79368

interval. In addition, the calculated F value (0.045) lesser than the critical value (4.15). It shows that there is no a statistical difference in the mean of a Job related factor to course selection between genders. According to that, Null Hypothesis was accepted and alternative hypothesis “There is a significant relationship between Job related factors and gender” was rejected.

The significance value is 0.127 (i.e., $p = .127$), which is above 0.05 confidence interval. . In addition, the calculated F value (2.34) lesser than the critical value (4.15). It shows that there is no a statistical difference in the mean of a Nature factor to course selection between genders. According to that, Null Hypothesis was accepted and alternative hypothesis “There is a significant relationship between Nature factors and specialization area” was rejected.

The significance value is 0.030 (i.e., $p = .030$), which is below 0.05 confidence interval. In addition, the calculated F value (4.77) higher than the critical value (4.15). It

shows that there is a statistical difference in the mean of a Influence factor to course selection between genders. According to that, Null Hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis “There is a relationship between Influence factors and gender” is accepted.

Table 4.18. Statistical difference between groups’ means.

Source: survey data

This table shows the output of the ANOVA analysis and whether there is a statistical difference between groups’ means. Male group and female group mean values have small gap in the personal factor, Academic quality, Nature and Job related factor. Because of that, the significance value is above 0.05 confidence interval. It shows that there is no a statistical difference in the mean of a those factors to course selection between genders. Influence factor gender group have high gap. Because of that the significance value is 0.030 (i.e., $p = .030$), which is below 0.05 confidence interval. It shows that there is a statistical difference in the mean of a Influence factor to course selection between genders.

Multivariate Analysis

4.4.3.1 Multiple Regression Analysis

The purpose of regression analysis is to find out the significant impact or influence of an

independent variable on the dependent variable (Ndubisi, 2006) in this study, the dependent variable is specialization area and Independent variables are Personal, Job factor, Academic, Nature, and Influencers.

Regression analysis made to find out the equation which describe the relationship between this variable from this analysis the independent variable, regression line was

$$YY = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \dots - \epsilon$$

1. Model Summary

Source: survey data

Adjusted R-value of 0.483, which are in the model done that 48.3% of the observed

variability in course selection can be explained by the differences in both the independent variables namely personal, Job related factor, Academic quality, Nature, and influences remaining 51.7% of the variance in course selection related to another variable, which did not explain.

R² values of 49.1% indicate that there may be a number of variables, which can have an influence on course selection that needs to study this area is indicated as a scope for future research.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
.701 ^a	.491	.483

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Table 4.21: Hypothesis Testing

H01: There is no significant relationship between the Personal factors and Specialization area.	REJECTED	Pearson Correlation
H02: There is no significant relationship between the Academic Quality factors and Specialization area.	REJECTED	Pearson Correlation
H03: There is no significant relationship between the Jobs related factors and Specialization area.	REJECTED	Pearson Correlation
H04: There is no significant relationship between the Nature factors and Specialization area.	REJECTED	Pearson Correlation
H05: There is no significant relationship between the influence factors and Specialization area.	REJECTED	Pearson Correlation
H06: There is no significant difference between the influence factors and Gender.	ACCEPTED	ANOVA

H07: There is no significant difference between the influence factors and gender.	ACCEPTED	ANOVA
H08: There is no significant difference between the influence factors and Gender.	ACCEPTED	ANOVA
H09: There is no significant difference between the influence factors and Gender.	ACCEPTED	ANOVA
H09: There is no significant difference between the influence factors and Gender.	REJECTED	ANOVA

(Source –Developed by researcher)

5. DISCUSSION

When considering the personal information, most of the student intake from Jayawardenapura, Colombo, and Kelaniya. According to that there are most of the respondent also from Jayawardenapura and who are studying in 3rd year and 4th year. Sri Lanka has three major ethnicity groups and Religion groups. The researcher has identified that most of the respondents are Sinhala Buddhist. Because most of undergraduates are, Sinhalese .and who may be depend on state universities rather than private universities.

Four-year specialization degree offers only for internal students who are in state universities. Most of them followed the four-year course. On the other hand, today most of the student follow professional courses, after their ordinary level or Advance level. In that case, student who stimuli to select their specialization base on their previous professional qualification. When Consider the mother and father’s occupation most of the fathers are businessperson and mothers’ are not working. Base on those fathers may be influence on course selection rather than mothers.

Today computer literacy and English literacy are mostly important for education. According to the result of analysis also found, undergraduates have good English knowledge and computer literacy.

Personal factor influence in large extent to specialization area selection. Consider the personal factor variables represent student subject interest’s stimuli students to select that specialization area. Academic Quality and Job related factor largely influence to Finance, Marketing and Human resource management, and it moderately influenced to Accounting specialization area. most of the accounting jobs may easy to find because every branch who maintain account section but they do not maintain marketing department, most of the marketing department only available in Head office .

Research findings also further confirm that the nature of Specialization area as a discipline, the Personal factor, and Academic quality, and Job related factors, ranked highest as factors that influence student considerations. In our case, we found that personal interest, nature of the discipline, quality and reputation of lecturers, and job factors ranked in that order of preference for students or non-career factors being more important than career factors.

Research findings show personal factor largely influence on every specialization areas. The result give rise to the idea that interesting of subject and personal attitude under the personal factors may be influence on selection of specialization area. Influence factor moderately influence selection of all specialization area. The reason can be as most of counselors, Role models and faculty teacher.

Nature factor and influence factor moderately influence on Colombo University. The reason may be there are available more facilities, experienced lectures and experienced departments. In that case student do not considering about Nature of degree.

There is a strong positive relationship between job related factor and specialization area. The interpreted results may be because of having ultimate purpose for every undergraduates to find a better job with good salary hence there may be more consideration of job related factor

Consider the gender influence on course selection result shows, gender significantly influence on influence factor. Parents of female students may be mostly influence on decision making, because of limit of powers.

6. Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to identify students' influence behind enrolling in a specialization area offered by universities operating Sri Lanka. In order to achieve this objective, 369 questionnaires were distributed, of which 322 were valid for analysis.

The reliability test was conducted to test the internal consistency of construct validity. The stability of the questionnaire was 0.924 verified by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and factors verified by the Spilt Half coefficient.

Most of the participants in the survey were Jayawardhanepura University Accounting specialization with good professional qualifications. When concerning all data, it represented most of the student have good Computer literacy and English literacy. According to research findings undergraduates consisted with 124 males and 198 females.

Under the research title of factors influencing for the Specialization Area in universities of Sri Lanka, the researcher wants to test whether or not independent factors (Personal, Academic quality, Job related factor, Nature, and Influencers) influence Specialization Area. According to the

output of the research, the researcher would like to suggest the conclusion as follows.

When considering all factors, mean values, and standard deviation, the researcher identified personal factor, academic quality factor and job related factor influence in large extent nature factors and influenced factor influence in the moderate extent to the Specialization Area.

Personal factors influence in large extent to the Specialization Area. Consider the personal factor variables, identified Interesting of subject Personal attitude, Personal Capability, and Future chance indicators are influenced by a large contribution to the personal factor. The coefficient of correlation found Specialization Area and Personal factor have a positive influence to course selection.

Academic quality factors influence in large extent to the Specialization Area. An experienced Lecturer, Qualification of Lecturer, Lecturer Style may be the high influence to Academic quality. The coefficient of correlation found Specialization Area and Academic quality have a positive influence to course selection.

Job related factors influence in large extent to the Specialization Area. Opportunity to be creative, there is potential for career advancement in the field, Social Prestige and Opportunity work dynamic atmosphere indicators are influenced by large contribution to the job related factor. The coefficient of correlation found Specialization Area and Job related factor have a strongly positive influence to course selection. If Job related factor increasing, influence some percentage that specialization area also parallel increasing.

Nature factors influence the moderate extent to the Specialization Area. Nature of degree, introductory course create interesting and Degree Period indicators are influenced by a large contribution to the Nature factor. The coefficient of correlation found Specialization Area and Job related factor have a positive influence.

Influence factors influence in the moderate extent to the Specialization Area. Friends and Mother influence in a large contribution to the influenced factor. According to that data, Friends and Mother may be the high influence of influenced factor. The coefficient of correlation found Specialization Area and Job related factor have a positive influence.

Considering all factors, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of influence factor to course selection between the different gender groups but there is a statistically not significant difference in the mean of Nature factor, Personal factor, Academic quality and Job related factor to course selection between the different gender groups.

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