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Reasons underlying the choice of History as a major subject at Universities: the case of undergraduate students at the National University of Lesotho

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Abstract

In this era, where technology shapes our societies, History as a school subject has come under scrutiny, with debates about whether there is still a need to teach it. The dignity of the subject is being undermined by governments questioning its relevance in meeting national needs and goals. Thus, this study aimed to investigate why students continue to pursue History as their major despite the challenges facing the subject. The study adopted a qualitative approach, using oral interviews, group discussions and semi-structured interviews as data generation tools. Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour underpinned the study. The results revealed that personal interests and high school teachers are the most influential factors contributing to students' selection of History as their major. Furthermore, the study found that students often use History as a stepping stone into other careers. In conclusion, the study established that personal interests and high school teachers are key factors influencing students to choose History as their major. The study recommends that all stakeholders regularly train high school teachers, as they are at the forefront of influencing students. Additionally, the National University of Lesotho should collaborate with teacher training colleges to actively market the History subject on the most widely used platforms.

Keywords: History; high school teachers; personal interests; qualitative approach; social cognitive career theory; theory of planned behaviour

Introduction and background

In this era, where technology shapes our societies, History as a school subject has come under scrutiny, with debates about whether there is still a need to teach it. The dignity of the subject is being undermined by governments questioning its relevance in meeting national needs and goals. However, History plays a pivotal role because it teaches valuable lessons about the past, extending across regional, national, and cultural boundaries (Boadu, 2016). Boadu further argues that, by studying the past, History brings significant issues to our attention, enlightens us about the present, and helps us make predictions for the future. History does not study the past in isolation but rather makes connections between past achievements and failures, laying a foundation for a better future (Popa, 2022).

Globally, several factors have led to a decline in the popularity of History in school curricula, primarily due to poor teaching practices (Kraft & Lyon, 2024). As a result, History has come under scrutiny as a subject, with questions regarding its continued relevance in today's world. In the past, all public high schools in the United States offered world and American History for two years, and the subject received significant attention. However, today this is no longer the case, as the duration has been reduced to one year (Agwanda, 2019).

Additionally, this issue has extended to universities, where there has been a decline in student enrolment in History courses (Berg, 2019). A 2014 study revealed that the uptake of undergraduate History studies dropped significantly over four consecutive years—by 9% overall and by 13% in top European universities

(Brookins, 2018). This decline was linked to the emergence of new majors, such as business and communications, as well as the financial crisis (Agwanda, 2019). These new majors sparked significant interest, especially among females. Overall, the 2014/15 admissions dropped by 19% compared to the 2009/10 admissions. In the 2017/18 academic year, fewer History graduates were reported compared to the 2014/15 period. A 2019 study in Europe found that History accounted for only 5.3 degrees per 1,000 graduates (Agwanda, 2019).

In Ghana, History is often viewed as one of the "useless" subjects. According to Boadu (2021), it is one of the most compromised subjects in the country. Statistics show that History had fewer enrolments, with a 70% increase compared to government studies (230%), economics (160%), and sociology (140%) between 2000 and 2005. This downward trend continued from 2007 onwards, with only 9% of students choosing History compared to other subjects in the Arts. The problem was even more pronounced at the university level, where only one final-year student graduated with honours in History during the 2015/16 academic year at the University of Cape Coast (Boadu, 2016).

Similarly, Apau and Adu-boahen (2019) reported that in Ghanaian colleges, the number of students enrolling in History courses is decreasing, and its place in the curriculum is uncertain. The subject was replaced with social studies in junior secondary schools, and in high schools, it was made an optional course. This shift has further discouraged students from majoring in History at the university level. Indeed, there is a significant problem facing the subject that needs to be addressed before it becomes obsolete.

The same issue exists in Nigeria, where History is perceived as unimportant, with a focus on scientific and technical courses. The subject has been criticised for not aligning with national goals, and it was removed from the primary and junior secondary school curricula, replaced by social studies (Unya, 2019). Further, there was a proposal to stop training History teachers in colleges, as primary and junior secondary teachers were considered capable of teaching the subject (Katsina, 2013, as cited in Unya, 2019).

History is no longer a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria, leading many students to choose government studies over History, resulting in low enrolment. At the university level, History is also losing popularity due to newly introduced courses, such as African Studies, Diplomacy, International Relations, and Strategic Studies. The government, through policymakers (Agwanda, 2019), has contributed to the declining interest in History among students, and this trend is expected to continue.

South Africa faces similar challenges with History as a subject. According to Fru (2015), learners majoring in History are often regarded as incapable of handling more "sophisticated" courses. In some cases, sponsors have refused to renew scholarships for students majoring in History, forcing them to change their majors. Additionally, some secondary schools have eliminated History entirely (Fru, 2015).

In Lesotho, History has also been side-lined. The number of schools offering the subject has decreased over the years (Fru, 2015). Raselimo and Mahao (2015) confirm that the emergence of new subjects, such as Life Skills, has put pressure on subjects like History, Geography, and Religious Studies. This pressure results from poor pedagogical practices, which fail to engage learners. As a consequence, the government has sought to replace History with subjects that address national needs and goals. This issue affects teachers, pre-service teachers, and student teachers.

While previous studies (Boadu, 2016; Apau & Adu-boahen, 2019; Agwanda, 2019; Unya, 2019; Brookins, 2018) have highlighted a decline in History enrolment as a major subject, it remains unclear why some students at the National University of Lesotho continue to choose History as their major. According to Owino and Odundo's (2016) study in Kenya, students choose to study History due to personal factors such as individual interest, a positive attitude toward the subject, career goals, and talent. Their study also found that social influences from parents, peers, friends,

lecturers, and teachers play a role in students' decisions to major in History. Additionally, factors such as career guidance, counselling, and future career prospects influence students' decisions.

A similar study by David (2016) in Kenya found that most students pursued History because they had a positive attitude toward the subject. It seems that only if students possess a positive attitude toward History can they be expected to pursue it as a major. However, considering global trends and the current situation in Lesotho, do students at the National University of Lesotho have a positive attitude toward History?

History appears to be a priority for students who have a positive attitude toward it. This was supported by Owino and Odundo's (2016) study, which found that most students pursued History because they had a positive attitude toward the subject. It appears that a positive attitude toward a career choice is crucial, as it determines whether an individual will pursue that career.

Furthermore, Unya (2019) notes that some students choose History as a career subject to learn about their roots, identity, and citizenship, gain knowledge of the past, become future leaders, understand the world around them, and learn about their ancestors. Some study History hoping for future job prospects and to avoid the mistakes of the past. Several factors influence the decision to study History, and it seems that students have various expectations and interests in doing so. However, the situation at the National University of Lesotho remains unclear.

In a study that aimed to identify the main sources of information students use when choosing a university career and assess the usefulness of these sources, Areces, Mariiz, Alvarez and Roca (2016) found that students relied on three key sources: close personal contacts (family, friends, parents), external sources (campus visits, open days), and media (radio, television, press, and internet). In a similar vein, Cox & Furst (2019) and Rababah (2016) also acknowledge that media plays a significant role in influencing students' career choices. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the reasons why pre-service teachers at the National University of Lesotho choose History as their major despite the challenges facing the subject.

Problem statement

History is currently taught in only a few government schools in Lesotho, while private and church schools do not offer it at all (Ntabeni, 2006). Even in these few government schools, History is gradually being replaced by newly emerging subjects, implying that it is either seen as unimportant or its value in secondary education is not recognized.

Despite these challenges, there is still a steady intake of students enrolling in History as their major at the National University of Lesotho each year. It remains unclear why these students continue to choose History as their major, especially given the subject's declining prominence in the education system. Previous studies have focused on the general challenges facing the subject in Lesotho and the perceptions of teachers and student teachers (Fru, 2015). As a result, this study aims to address the gap by investigating the reasons why pre-service teachers choose History as their major, even while the subject's relevance is in question.

Significance of the study

This study will contribute to the existing body of literature on student choice in tertiary education, particularly in the context of major selection. The results may also be useful to the management of the National University of Lesotho and the Department of Education in improving how they disseminate information to students regarding career choices. Additionally, the findings may assist policymakers in formulating strategies to promote History as a subject in secondary schools. Moreover, the study will contribute to the ongoing debate on the factors influencing students' decisions to choose one major over another.

Research Objectives

Main Research Objective:

The study seeks to investigate why pre-service teachers choose History as their major, despite the subject's declining relevance in secondary education.

Sub-Research Objectives:

1. To identify the factors that influence students' decisions to choose History as their major.
2. To explore the sources of information that students use when deciding to major in History.
3. To understand why History has become the priority career choice for these students.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

Why do pre-service teachers continue to choose History as their major, even though the subject's importance is in decline?

Sub-Research Questions:

1. What factors influence students' decisions to choose History as their major?
2. What sources of information do students rely on when choosing History as a major?
3. Why has History become the priority career choice for these students?

Literature review

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two key theories: the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing students' decisions to major in History.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) and is rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. It emphasizes the interconnectedness between individuals, their environment, and behavioural variables that predict a person's interests and career choices (Milner-Bolotin et al., 2016). SCCT highlights how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, and environmental influences play a significant role in shaping an individual's career decisions.

According to SCCT, students' choice of a major is influenced by several key factors:

- Self-efficacy – A student's belief in their ability to succeed in a specific field. Those with high self-efficacy in History are more likely to major in it.
- Outcome expectations – The anticipated benefits of pursuing a degree in History, such as job opportunities and career growth.
- Interests – A personal preference for History, shaped by prior experiences and exposure to the subject.
- Environmental supports and barriers – External influences such as availability of resources, family support, and societal perceptions of History as a viable career path.

SCCT also considers demographic factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic background, and learning experiences as additional determinants of career choice (Shwartz, Shav, Yehudit, & Dori, 2021). The theory suggests that self-efficacy enhances positive outcome expectations, meaning that students who believe they can excel in History are more likely to pursue it as a major.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was developed by Icek Ajzen (1985) and focuses on the role of intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping individuals' behaviours (Owusu, Essel-Anderson, Ossei Kwakye, Bekoe, & Ofori, 2018). TPB posits that an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour (such as choosing History as a major) is the best predictor of actual behaviour, provided that they also perceive control over their decision (Wang, Liu, & Deng, 2022).

The key constructs of TPB include:

- Attitude toward behaviour – A student's evaluation of whether choosing History is personally beneficial or valuable. If they

perceive History as useful and enjoyable, they are more likely to major in it.

- Subjective norms – The influence of family, peers, and educators on the student's decision. If these social groups support studying History, the student is more likely to pursue it.

- Perceived behavioural control (PBC) – The student's perception of how easy or difficult it is to major in History, considering factors such as job prospects, academic difficulty, and financial stability.

TPB integrates elements of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which suggests that people's attitudes and beliefs about socially expected behaviours influence their decisions (Owusu et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant in explaining why some students choose History despite societal discouragement. If they have a positive attitude toward the subject and feel supported by their social circle, they are more likely to pursue it.

Application of Theories to the Study

These two theories complement each other in understanding students' choices of History as a major. SCCT focuses on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental influences, while TPB extends the analysis by incorporating attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This combination allows for a more comprehensive examination of why students at the National University of Lesotho choose to study History.

Based on these theoretical insights, this study examines:

- Self-efficacy – Do students believe they can succeed in History?

- Outcome expectations – What do students expect to gain from studying History?

- Interests – What personal motivations drive students toward History?

- Attitudes and beliefs – How do students perceive the value of History?

- External influences – How do family, teachers, and societal perceptions affect students' choices?

- Perceived barriers and supports – What challenges or incentives influence students' decisions?

The theories also guided the formulation of research instruments, including semi-structured interviews, oral interviews, and focus group discussions. The study's data collection and interpretation were structured around these theoretical themes, ensuring that findings were systematically analysed within the SCCT and TPB frameworks.

Justification for Using Both Theories

While SCCT provides valuable insight into career decision-making, it primarily focuses on self-efficacy, interests, environmental supports and barriers, outcome expectations, gender, race, socioeconomic background, and learning experiences overlooking the role of attitude towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in career choice. Since this study aims to understand students' attitudes toward History, TPB was incorporated to address this gap. By combining these theories, the study captures both personal motivations and external influences, leading to a more holistic understanding of students' choices.

In conclusion, the Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour were instrumental in shaping this study's research design, data collection, and interpretation. These theories provided a robust framework for analysing the various factors influencing students' decisions to major in History, ensuring that the study comprehensively explores the issue from multiple perspectives.

Conceptual Review

Several factors influence students' choice of major at university or college. This study focuses on key determinants, including social support from family members, friends, peers, teachers, course instructors, and professors. In addition to social influences, the study examines students' interests, self-efficacy, personality traits,

sources of information, and future opportunities such as job prospects, job security, and the prestige associated with certain careers.

Social Influence by Family

Family plays a primary role in shaping students' academic and career choices (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016; Jaradat & Jaradat, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2023; Rababah, 2016; Stair, Danjean, Blackburn, & Bunch, 2016). Parents, in particular, exert strong influence, often encouraging their children to follow specific career paths, especially if they themselves work in a particular field (Sovansophal & Shimizu, 2019). In many cases, students look to their parents for career guidance, and parental support can significantly shape students' decisions (Humayon, Raza, Khan, & Ansari, 2018).

Parents often recommend careers they perceive as stable and lucrative, prioritizing job security and market demand (Sovansophal & Shimizu, 2019). Complementary to that, Humayon et al. (2018) similarly point out that parents often send their children to school with the hope of securing a bright future. However, this raises a critical question: Do students genuinely enjoy the careers their parents choose for them? A misalignment between parental expectations and student interests can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced motivation, and even academic failure.

Parental Education and Socioeconomic Status

Educated parents tend to provide more informed guidance regarding career choices. They often have greater awareness of emerging job markets and professional opportunities, equipping their children with better insights (Humayon et al., 2018). Conversely, students from families with limited educational backgrounds may struggle to make informed decisions, leading to higher risks of career dissatisfaction or dropout (Owino & Odundo, 2016).

Financial stability also plays a role. According to Lian (2017), students from higher-income families have greater access to educational resources, career counselling, and financial support, increasing their ability to pursue desired majors. In contrast, Ahmed, Sharif, and Ahmad (2017) argue that limited finances can restrict students' choices, particularly in regions where higher education is privatized.

Influence of Teachers, Professors, and Subject Instructors

Educators play a crucial role in shaping students' career choices. High school teachers, in particular, serve as role models, influencing students' academic preferences (Owino & Odundo, 2016; Sovansophal & Shimizu, 2019). Research by Musa and Amadi (2018) highlights that teachers who use engaging teaching methods and demonstrate strong pedagogical knowledge can inspire students to develop a passion for a subject.

Conversely, poor teaching strategies may deter students from pursuing certain fields. Owino and Odundo (2016) argue that ineffective teaching methods can lead to negative attitudes toward a subject, while Sheppard, Brunhaver, and Korte (2018) emphasize that teachers play a pivotal role in empowering students through mentorship and academic guidance.

Influence of Friends and Peers

Peer influence can also affect students' choice of major. Some students select a major because their friends have chosen it, reflecting the broader role of peer pressure and shared interests in career decision-making (Whitehead, 2018). Rababah (2019) asserts that young people highly value their friends' opinions, and their academic discussions and shared interests can shape their subject preferences.

Personal Interests and Personality Traits

Personal interests are a major determinant of career choice. Students who are passionate about a subject are more likely to perform well and find long-term satisfaction in their careers (Ahmed et al., 2017; Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023). When students choose a major aligned with their interests, they tend to excel academically and professionally.

Furthermore, lack of interest in a major can lead to poor performance and low productivity in the workplace. In support, Owino & Odundo (2016) argue that demotivated individuals are unlikely to contribute productively to their communities. Additionally, personality traits

influence career selection. According to Raveenther (2017), students must understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and personality types before selecting a career path. For instance, introverted students may not thrive in careers requiring constant social interaction, such as teaching or sales, while extroverted individuals may struggle in solitary or research-intensive fields.

Future Benefits and Career Opportunities

Future career prospects, salary potential, job security, and the perceived prestige of a profession also influence students' decisions (Abdul, Latif, & Ahmed, 2016; Humayon et al., 2018; Rababah, 2016; Raveenther, 2017; Stair et al., 2016; Vu, 2020). Career decisions significantly impact a person's long-term professional satisfaction and financial stability, making thorough career investigation essential before committing to a major.

Subject Ease and Academic Performance

Students often prefer subjects in which they have performed well in high school. Sovansophal and Shimizu (2019) and Alshahrani, Ross, and Wood (2018) assert that students who excel in a subject are more likely to continue studying it at the university level. Strong academic performance can reinforce confidence and motivation, increasing the likelihood of selecting that major. However, Musa and Amadi (2018) argue that academic success in a subject does not always translate into choosing it as a major.

Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy—a student's belief in their ability to succeed in a subject or career—plays a crucial role in major selection. Research by Johnson and Muse (2023) shows that students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to choose challenging or competitive fields. Similarly, Marshman, Kalender, Nokes-Malach, Schunn, and Singh (2018) argue that self-efficacy influences students' interest levels, motivating them to enrol in rigorous academic programs. Additionally, gender disparities in self-efficacy can affect major selection, with male students often exhibiting higher self-efficacy in certain STEM fields.

Influence of Media

The media, including television, magazines, radio, the internet, and advertisements, also shape students' career aspirations. Rababah (2016) notes that mass media can positively influence students' perceptions of specific careers. Cox and Furst (2019) further argue that students who consume large amounts of media content may develop an interest in professions frequently depicted in films, television shows, and news reports. Similarly, research by Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) highlights the significant impact of social media and digital content on students' career aspirations.

Conclusion

This review highlights the multifaceted nature of career decision-making, demonstrating that students' choice of major is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and external factors. While family, teachers, and peers provide direct guidance, self-efficacy, personal interests, career opportunities, and media exposure also shape students' academic and professional trajectories. Understanding these influences is crucial for educators, career counsellors, and policymakers seeking to support students in making informed decisions about their future careers.

Methods

Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is primarily concerned with non-numeric data (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it is exploratory in nature, allowing for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights. Unlike structured methodologies, qualitative research provides flexibility, enabling the researcher to remain open to unanticipated discoveries and adjust the study accordingly.

Furthermore, this approach facilitated a deeper understanding of complex topics, attitudes, and personal experiences, making it particularly suited to investigating students' reasons for selecting History as their major. The flexibility of

qualitative research allowed for probing deeper into participants' responses, uncovering insights that may not have been anticipated at the outset. Additionally, qualitative methods provided participants with the opportunity to express their perspectives in their own words, leading to a more authentic representation of their attitudes and motivations. Through tailored research instruments, this approach ensured a balance between structured guidance and open-ended inquiry, fostering an environment conducive to meaningful discussions.

Research Design

A research design serves as a blueprint for systematically extracting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data (Bostley, 2019). This study adopted a case study research design, which involves an intensive and systematic investigation of a specific group, community, or unit (Heale & Twycross, 2017). The case study design was particularly suitable for this research, as it focused on second-year History majors at the National University of Lesotho, who begin selecting their majors in their second year.

The case study approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing students' decisions to major in History. This design provided an opportunity to examine the dynamics surrounding students' choices in depth, ensuring a holistic understanding of their motivations. Moreover, the case study allowed for flexibility in data collection methods, ensuring the integration of practical insights that may inform future educational policies and practices.

Sampling Techniques

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, which relies on the researcher's judgment in selecting participants with relevant characteristics (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The researcher deliberately selected second-year undergraduate students majoring in History, as they had recently made the decision to pursue the subject as their major. Other students were excluded, as they did not meet the study's criteria.

Additionally, convenience sampling, another form of non-probability sampling, was used to facilitate accessibility to participants. Convenience sampling is based on the ease of access to participants (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Since the researcher was already studying at the National University of Lesotho, access to participants was convenient. A total of ten second-year students participated in the study.

Research Instruments

To gain an in-depth understanding of students' motivations for choosing History as their major, the study employed semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and oral interviews with open-ended questions. These methods were selected for their ability to elicit rich, qualitative data and accommodate unanticipated responses.

Interviews provided a platform for participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences in detail, allowing the researcher to probe deeper where necessary. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) assert that the structure of an interview varies based on its purpose, and in this study, different types of interviews were used to capture diverse perspectives. In total, ten participants were interviewed.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher first engaged with lecturers teaching second year History students, presenting an introduction letter outlining the study's purpose and scope. The lecturers facilitated the initial contact between the researcher and the students. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. It was also emphasized that the research was purely academic, with no financial incentives involved.

Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Oral interviews were conducted and recorded, followed by semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, allowing students to express their perspectives in greater depth. The collected data were subsequently analysed using ATLAS.ti software.

Methods of Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, facilitated by ATLAS.ti software. According to Byrne (2022), thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data, identifying patterns, and categorizing themes that emerge. Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage, and Young (2020) affirm that thematic analysis enables researchers to subjectively interpret qualitative data while deriving meaningful insights.

Through an inductive process, codes were generated, leading to the identification of recurring themes, which were subsequently categorized. ATLAS.ti was instrumental in efficiently processing large qualitative datasets, offering reliability and user-friendliness (Hart & Achterman, 2017). This software minimized the burden of manual data analysis, ensuring a systematic and structured approach to interpreting the findings.

Methodological Challenges in Data Collection

During the data collection process, some students were initially reluctant to share their views, particularly in face-to-face interviews. To address this challenge, the researcher opted for oral interviews and rescheduled sessions as needed. Efforts were made to establish rapport with participants, helping them feel more comfortable and willing to share their experiences.

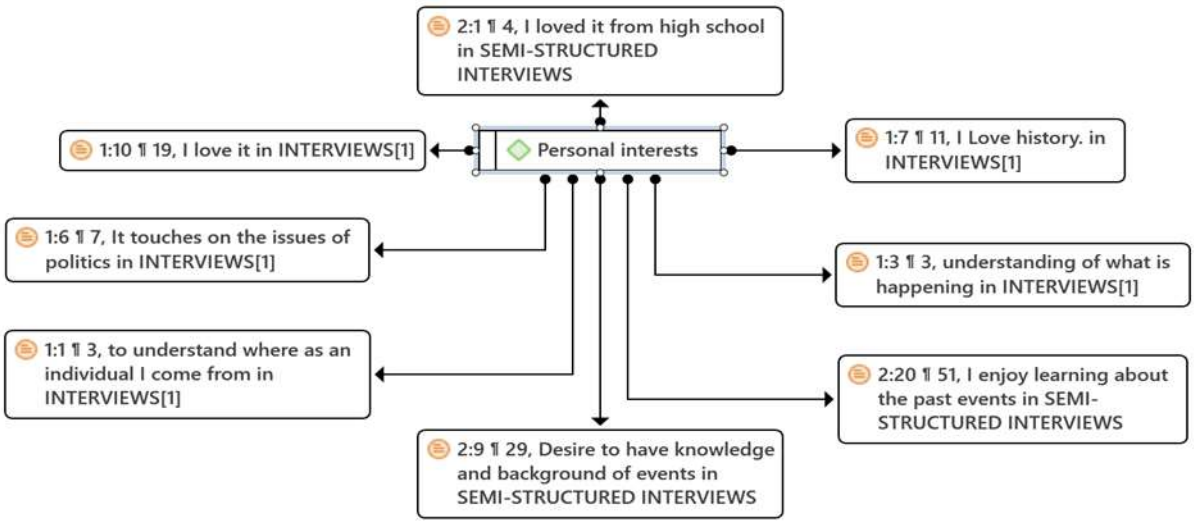
Additionally, delays occurred as students took longer than expected to return completed semi-structured interviews. However, focus group discussions proved beneficial, although some participants were hesitant to disclose critical information in the presence of their peers. Despite these challenges, the methodological adjustments ensured the successful completion of data collection, leading to meaningful insights into students' motivations for majoring in History.

Results

The results are reported under the following categories: family influence, teachers' influence, personal interests, high school teachers' influence, high school grades' influence, media influence, self-efficacy belief, friends' influence, lecturers' influence, and future opportunities. Below is a summary of the data using counts and illustrative quotations. No attempt is made to interpret the significance of the numbers.

Personal Interests

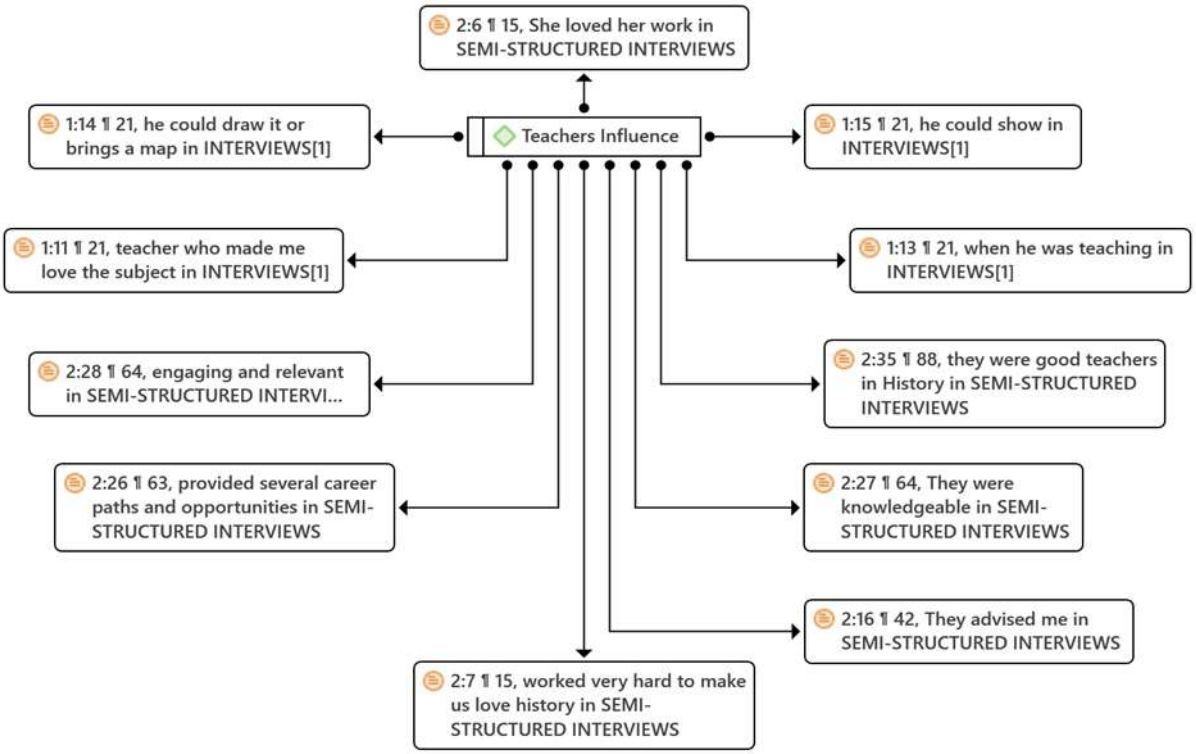
The majority of participants indicated that they pursued the subject due to their personal interest in it. The following codes demonstrate this.



The diagram above illustrates the influence of personal interests on students choosing History as their major. It highlights students' passion for the subject, their eagerness to learn about past events, and their appreciation for the content, which provides insights into their origins and helps them understand the world around them. Additionally, many students expressed that they genuinely enjoy learning History.

High School Teachers' Influence

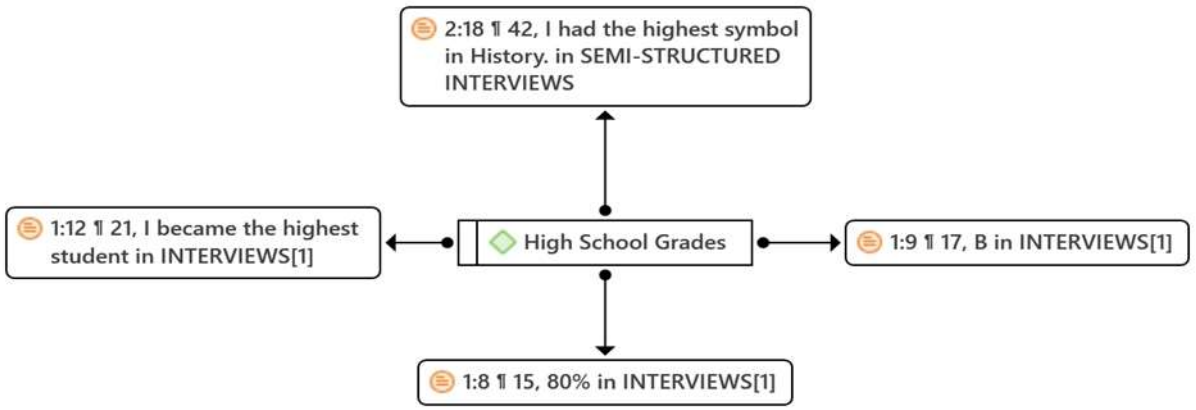
High school teachers play a significant role in shaping students' career choices, either through their teaching methods or by providing career guidance. Their influence can inspire students to pursue History as a major, fostering a deeper interest in the subject.



The diagram above illustrates the influence of teachers on students' choice of History as their major. It highlights how high school History teachers inspire learners through interactive teaching methods, such as drawings, demonstrations, and engaging activities. Moreover, these teachers influence students by offering insights into various career paths and opportunities, providing valuable advice, and demonstrating a strong understanding of the pedagogical content of the History subject.

High School Grades

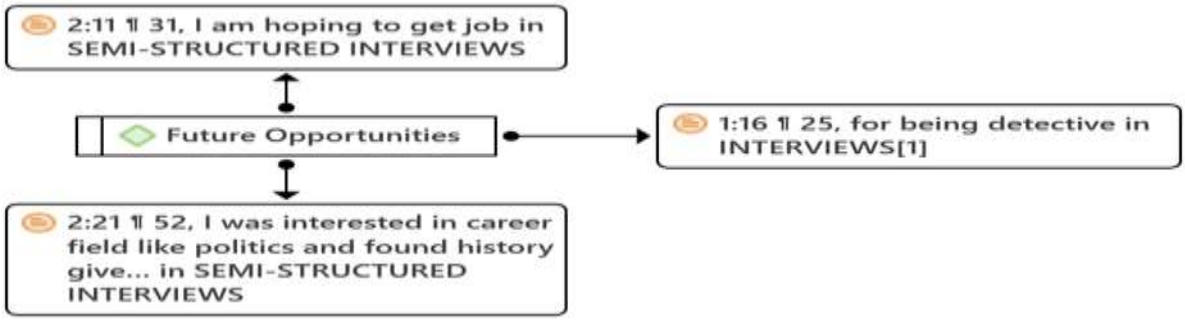
Students are often motivated to pursue subjects they performed well in during high school. Their final examination results, such as the symbols they earned in Form Five, also play a significant role in influencing their choice of major at the university level.



The diagram above illustrates the influence of high school grades on students' choice of History as their major. It shows that students' highest marks, particularly in their final LGCSE examinations, along with better grade symbols, influenced their decision to choose History as their major.

Future Opportunities

Students often select a career by considering the potential benefits and opportunities associated with it. They are influenced by factors such as job prospects, marketability, job security, and the potential for personal and professional growth that the major or career may offer.



The diagram above illustrates the influence of future opportunities on students' choice of History as their major. It shows that potential careers, such as becoming a detective or politician, play a significant role in motivating students to pursue History. Additionally, the hope and expectation of securing a job in the future also heavily influence their decision to choose History as their major.

Other Factors

Factors such as family influence, friends, lecturers, self-efficacy, and media did not have a notable impact on the students' choice of History as their major.

Discussion

For the first research question, the study established that high school History teachers significantly influence students' choice of History as their major. A large majority of respondents indicated that their teachers played a crucial role in their decision to pursue History. They noted that these teachers possessed strong pedagogical content knowledge, which positively influenced their choices. This finding aligns with the results of Alshahrani et al. (2018), which suggest that teachers motivate students to select their majors. Additionally, these results align with the principles of social cognitive career theory.

Moreover, the findings revealed that most students choose History as their major due to personal interest. Participants expressed a strong passion for the subject. This finding contradicts the results of Owino and Oduno (2016), who suggested that students often pursue the subject as a backup option to secure government sponsorship. However, these findings are consistent with Nguyen et al.'s (2023) research, supporting the notion that students are driven by their interests when selecting a major, as articulated in social cognitive career theory (Schwartz et al., 2021).

On one hand, the results are consistent with Owino and Oduno (2016), who found that students tend to pursue History due to their positive attitudes towards the subject. The current findings revealed that many students choose to study History because they enjoy it. Furthermore, these results align with the theory of reasoned action, which posits that an individual's attitudes and beliefs influence their behaviours. According to this theory, if individuals have a positive attitude toward a behaviour, they are more likely to engage in that behaviour (Owusu et al., 2018).

On the other hand, the findings indicated that family, friends, lecturers, and media did not significantly influence students' choices regarding History as their major. This contradicts the findings of Stair et al. (2016), Alshahrani et al.

(2018), and Humayon et al. (2018), which suggested that family and peer influence play a major role in students' decisions. The current findings also diverge from social cognitive theory and the theory of planned behaviour, which posit that social influences, such as those from parents or friends, are significant in students' career choices.

Additionally, the study established that high school grades influence students' choice of History as their major. Some students reported excelling in high school and achieving high grades, which impacted their decision to pursue History. This finding aligns with Sovansophal and Shimizu (2019), who noted that pre-college achievements influence students to pursue careers in related fields. The results are also consistent with social cognitive career theory, which asserts that exposure to careers is influential.

Lastly, the study found that students consider the future opportunities associated with their chosen major. The findings align with the studies of Stair et al. (2016), Vu (2020), and Nguyen et al. (2023), which found that students evaluate the job market before selecting a major. These findings also support the principles of social cognitive career theory, which suggest that students consider outcome expectations when choosing a career or major.

Implications

This study informs the University of Lesotho of the need to market its programs so that high school learners have a clear understanding of what to expect at the university level. It also calls on the History Department and the Bachelor of Education program to promote the subject more widely, including through social media platforms. Additionally, the study implies that History teachers, both in high schools and institutions of higher learning, should reconsider their pedagogical practices through continuous development, reflective practice, incorporating student feedback, differentiated instruction, technology integration, collaboration with colleagues, and building relationships with students. Teachers' pedagogical practices can either motivate or demotivate students from pursuing the subject in the future. Future research could explore students' perceptions of the declining popularity of History as a subject.

Conclusion

The study concludes that personal interests, positive attitudes toward History, and the influence of high school teachers are the most significant factors driving students to choose History as their major, regardless of the challenges facing the subject. Additionally, future opportunities, such as job availability and security, had minimal impact on students' decisions to major in History.

The study also found that high school teachers are the primary sources of information for students as they select their majors at the university level. The information received from teachers in high school remains influential. Furthermore, students' positive attitudes toward the subject lead them to prioritize History at the university level.

The findings established that students view History as a stepping stone to other careers, a perspective that existing literature has overlooked. The study found that students positively opt for History because they hope it will open doors to other career opportunities in the future.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the National University of Lesotho, in collaboration with other institutions of higher learning, provide programs on TV, radio, and social media to market their academic offerings. Furthermore, it recommends that teachers receive continuous training on effective teaching methods, as they play a crucial role in influencing students' decisions to take up the subject. Moreover, the study recommends that the University of Lesotho, along with its personnel, organize inclusive career guidance initiatives to enlighten students, particularly those from rural areas, about potential career paths.

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Author Agreement Statement

The signatory hereby certifies that this text is original, has never been published, and isn't being considered for publication anywhere else at this time.

I attest that I have read and approved the work, and that no other individuals have met the requirements to be included as authors. I also reaffirm that we have all endorsed the authors' indicated order in the work.

I am aware that the only point of contact for the Editorial process is the Corresponding Author.

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I affirm that there are no known conflicts of interest related to this publication, nor has there been any substantial funding for this research that would have affected the results.

Research Ethics

I further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved students has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies and that such approvals are acknowledged within the manuscript.

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