

Patterns of Inequality in Higher Education: The Case of Students Field Choice

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Abstract

In an expanding higher education system that focuses on access, understanding the dynamics of the inequality in the effort to provide educational opportunity to the majority is central. The main objective of this study is to investigate the pattern of field choice and the factors that influence students' field choice in two purposefully selected colleges. A total of 125 first year students, 45 from Law school in College of Law and Governance and 80 from Language departments (one foreign and one local language department) in College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication (CHLJC) participated in the study. The result indicated that students in Law school have better socioeconomic status and achievement than the students in the language departments. Similarly students in law school seem to consider practical factors while students in the CHLJC consider interpersonal factors as most influential in their field choice. The existing differences in the students' background and the factors they considered in their field choice process are found to be a continuation of prior inequalities and further perpetuate inequality in the higher education system in Ethiopia.

Keywords: higher education, field choice, inequality

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Introduction

Higher education is a very recent phenomenon with about sixty years old in Ethiopia. Some fifteen years ago admission to higher education in Ethiopia was very competitive due to the limited number of Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) and limited spaces in each institution. As a result, only few numbers of high achievers got the limited seats in these limited higher learning institutions. The high achievers were also given the opportunity to choose higher institutions, though their assignment to the available HLI was done through Ministry of Education (MOE). The students were choosing their field of specializations once they have joined the institutions based on their first year cumulative grade points. Thus, the important decision was made by the system in a form of assignment that was mainly resting up on the students' grade point average. However, due to the limited available spaces in each field of study, the students' chance of getting what they chose depends on their results. Currently in Ethiopian there are about 40 plus government universities and a number of private university colleges, the expansion of tertiary education is an observable trend as in most developed countries, and has provided opportunities for formerly excluded groups. As a result, obtaining a university admission has become increasingly simple and unquestionable for those who have joined the preparatory school. For instance, the transition rate from grade twelve is about 84% in 2014/15 (MOE, 2016) and the experiences in 2016-2017 reveal that the pool of students who would be eligible for university study has been insufficient.

Students who have scored the required result in the university entrance examinations are being assigned by MOE into the available universities in the six bands (Band 1: Engineering and technology, Band 2: Natural and computational sciences Band 3: Medicine and Health sciences, Band 4: Agriculture and life sciences, Band 5: Business and Economics and Band 6: Social sciences and Humanities) as per their choice and results. However, Law is an exception where students were directly assigned to by the MOE. Then once they are in the bands they are expected to make choices of fields of studies as soon as they arrive at the university they are assigned in.

Though university degrees were considered as an important path ways for better positions in life, recently it is observed that graduates in certain fields of studies are not in a position to secure jobs soon after their graduation (Mandefro, 2012). The context seem to be against the belief that education is supposed to enhance the earnings potential of the poor, both in competing for jobs and earnings and as a source of growth and employment in itself. Thus, not the graduation that matters rather the field that the students graduate from is central to their future of the students. Students are being challenged by the objectives and the logical process of decision making process of field choice (Murtagh, Lopes and Lyons, 2011). Though students' field choice is guided by their academic achievement their main reason of choosing the field they are studying might be related with job security. However students in Ethiopia are not given the right to choose their field of studies they want rather they are given options to choose from. MOE operationalizes their choice through assignment in bands which is guided by the students' academic achievement of the previous grades and the potential national demand of future work force of the country. The academic achievement in previous grades and results of higher education admission exam of the students what the MOE uses as base for assignment seems to be the result of several academic and non-academic factors which are rooted in the existing socioeconomic differences (Paulsen, 1990). The existing approach of student assignment in the HLI is considered as one of the forms of social inequalities which is a challenge for inclusive and democratic nation building (Habtamu, 2004) and a point of

dissatisfaction for many according to a publication of Ethiopian Press Agency on January 20, 2019 .

Statements of the Problem

In some countries, the expansion of higher education reduced inequality in enrolment, but mainly in fields that carry limited advantages in the job market (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005). Historically, sociological theories tell that the education acquired by different social groups varies, according to period, both in quantity and quality. However, there is limitation in addressing field of studies as an element of educational inequalities.

However, choice of fields of study constitutes an 'axis of stratification' in higher education because fields differ with respect to prestige and economic payoffs (Davies and Guppy, 1997). In addition, researchers argued that field of studies have implications in future life of individuals role in labour market outcomes (Kalmijn & Van der Lippe, 1997), lifestyles (Van de Werfhorst & Kraaykamp, 2001), and political orientations (Nilsson & Ekehammar, 1986). One might observe socially stratified field of study choices because the socio-economically advantaged usually seek out qualitative differences at every level of schooling and use their resources to gain access to the most lucrative fields (Lucas, 2001). All these educational outcomes are results of a decision that was made during the field choices. John (2000:22) argued, "*there is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking, gut wrenching and rest-of-your-life oriented or disoriented-than the choice of a major*". This decision is complicated in an Ethiopian context where achievement is a base for categorization and field choice is limited within the categories.

Several researchers considered different factors that affect the decision in field choice (Falk, Dunn and Norenzayan, 2010). However, while analyses of field of study choices have recently received more attention in the literature in the west (Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor 2008) and very few studies in Ethiopian context are more concerned on the field and future career choice (Muhdin, 2016; Habtamu, 2004), it is very unlikely to find a study that systematically describe the patterns in field or departmental choices and the resulting inequality where merit is claimed to be a base for student assignment in different field of specializations. In addition, there are observable differences among students in different departments in their achievement but there is no explanation for why students choose one rather than the other. Thus, investigating the patterns and factors considered in the field choice of the students probably shades light on some of the factors contributing for the educational inequality beyond the current justification which is merit. Such studies will be used as a starting point for policy intervention and educational planning.

Research Questions

This study will try to address patterns and factors in the field choice of students at Addis Ababa University. Thus this study will answer the following questions

1. What are the patterns of field choices of students?
2. What are the factors that influence students' field choice?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the patterns and factors in students' field choice in Addis Ababa University. The specific objectives of the study are to

1. describe the patterns of field choice among the students
2. identify factors considered as influential in the field choice by the students

Scope of the study

This study tries to address the current situation of students in the College of Law and Governance and College of Humanities, Language studies, Journalism and Communications in their field choice at Addis Ababa University. The first college has students with high university entrance examination results assigned directly by the Ministry of Education in one field of study i.e. Law while the other college has students from Ministry of Education in a band where students later chose among 6 field of studies once they joined the University.

Significance of the study

To begin with, the study contributes in shading light on the patterns of education inequality and educational achievement. Second, this study will help field of studies to consider their students recruitment mechanism and its effect in creating equal educational opportunities. Above all the study will be useful as baseline document to see potential policy interventions in creating equal educational opportunity for the society and using human resources appropriately through student assignments mechanisms.

Review of Related Literature

Decision Making

It has been one of the most important issues for students to make the decision to choose one field of study rather

than the other once they are eligible for as a result of their results. This could be driven by either the dream or the passion one has. Dietz (2010) argues that passion has to take the lead to drive one's life than the career drives it. However, any decision for future life is not as such easy and down to earth. And one of such decision is field of study choice which according to Murtagh, Lopes and Lyons (2011) involves not only objective and logical process but also emotions, intuitions and cognition which are "other than rational factors". As a result decision making process in field choice is linked to enjoyment which is perceived happens from the outcome that addresses emotion and rationality (Falk, Dunn and Norenzayan, 2010).

The decision making process in field choice mainly considers potential results and current perceptions which are results of prior exposures. These might be gained from someone who had the experience of the field or from the knowledge one has about the field to be chosen. Ma (2009) states that personal experience, environment and competences influences field choice. Similarly, Porter and Umbach (2008) underscores role of the feeling of belongingness in the field as corner stones of the choice. On the same vein, Fass and Tubman (2002) argued that these factors are results of the interpersonal relationship that an individual has. Thus the field choice process is being influenced not only by the personal factors but also the interpersonal relationship in the social context. On the other hand, Beggs, Bantam and Taylor (2008) who argued that field choice is the most commonly mentioned life regrets believes that decision making in field choice takes current economic situation as a practical guide. These personal, interpersonal and practical factors in decision making in field choice have their root in both the rational and cultural reproduction dimensions of decision making.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational action theory assumes theoretical primacy of individual actors than pre-established sociological groups. Individuals are presumed to have individual goals that all cannot be realized in the world of scarcity and inequality, as a result the individual must select one rather than the other. Their selection is rational and the most ideal ways of achieving the preferred goals. It assumes that individuals are conscious decision makers whose choices are influenced by various factors involving cost benefit analysis (Hedström and Stern, 2008).

The fact that conscious decisions involve the evaluation of the cost –benefit analysis of certain routes of education was addressed by Boudon (1974) who discussed the primary and secondary effects of social stratification in the process of decision making. The primary effects of stratification are the differences in academic ability resulted from family backgrounds which are cultural inequalities. Thus, the difference in test achievements and the result of the comparative advantages are categories of the primary effect in Boudon. The decision in the field choices is informed by the intellectual ability (Fass and Tubman, 2002) which is mostly influenced by the level of parental involvement in the students' school life. The secondary effects concern the educational choices made by students and their parents about the cost and benefit that are related with the educational choices at a certain level of transition. One important reason for parental involvement in the choice of fields of studies for their children is that they tend to ensure that their children avoid downward mobility and makes their children follow their footsteps (Dietz, 2010). Downward mobility which is referred as 'relative risk aversion' (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997) underscores the value of maintaining ones status quos than aspiring for farther distance of prestige. Field choice is affected by cost benefit analysis which depends on the knowledge they have about the field to be chosen. The knowledge about the field of study is in turn dependent on the social backgrounds that create aspiration difference among students of different background. For Boudon, difference in social class has root and impact in the individuals' investment and educational choice which are results of the individuals.

The rational choice framework argues that students make conscious educational decisions which are guided by both primary and secondary effects. Similarly Goldthorpe and his collaborators (cf. Goldthorpe, 2000a) established the importance of economic resources for educational choice. He further argued that economic resources have critical weight for students' academic achievement, even if direct economic costs of education are much reduced in societies in which education is cheap or even free, and there is growing prosperity and increasing family earnings (Goldthorpe, 2000a). Variations in parental economic resources should be an important source of inequality in educational attainment, because richer families most easily can invest on their children's education. What is more not only current economic situation will affect educational choice, but also future economic prospects (Goldthorpe, 2000a). Economic resources and relative risk aversions are further related to primary effects and secondary effects. On the contrary, Gorsline, Holl, Pearson and Child (2006) indicated that it is not only the investment but also the need to make more money to the family contributes in better achievement. The hard work to be out of poverty also affects educations choice (Pringle, Dubose and Yankey, 2010)

The models formulated by Boudon and Breen and Goldthorpe disregards the implications of social class to field choice in higher education and rather focus on the relationship between social class and levels of educational participation (e.g. choosing between a prestigious academic track and a less prestigious vocational track). In the Ethiopian context where students' field choice is mainly dictated by achievement and their

preference is secondary, investigating the situation considering the rational choice theory as one element is relevant. However, rational choice theory has to be supplemented with cultural reproduction theory.

Cultural Reproduction Theory

Bourdieu's work tried to show higher education as a powerful contributor to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality through the development of the core concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus'. Bourdieu (1984) noted that capital, habitus, and field all work together to generate practice, or social action. Capital which is discussed as cultural, economic or social serves as a power resource, or a way for groups to remain dominant or gain status. The concept cultural capital is fundamentally linked to the concepts of fields and habitus. A field can be any structure of social relations (King, 2005). It is a spot of struggle for positions within that field and is constituted by the conflict created when individuals or groups endeavor to establish what comprises valuable and legitimate capital within that space. Therefore one type of cultural capital can be at the same time both legitimate and not, depending on the field in which it is located. It can be seen therefore, that the legitimation of a particular type of cultural capital is completely arbitrary. The power to arbitrarily determine what constitutes legitimate cultural capital within a specific field is derived from symbolic capital.

Habitus is also important to the concept of cultural capital, as much of cultural capital can be derived from an individual's habitus. It is often defined as being dispositions that are instilled in the family but manifest themselves in different ways in each individual. It is formed not only by the habitus of the family but also by the objective chances of the class to which the individual belongs, in their daily interactions and it changes as the individual's position within a field changes (Tittenbrun, 2018).

The social distribution of 'cultural capital' is considered as an explanation for social inequalities in educational attainment and participation in higher education. According to Bourdieu, acquaintance with the dominant culture in the society is an element of cultural capital. Therefore, the academic achievement, the criterion to assign students in different fields, resulted from the experienced difference of the cultural capital of the social classes.

In addition, fields of studies in higher education have their own values and behavioral essentials that are relatively accessible to certain groups of individuals that have the cultural capital and certain dispositions as a result of their background. Thus students from a social class that comes with certain cultural practices and values choose a field with established practice and culture. As a result groups which have not acquainted with it develop either fear of failure or may not consider it as appropriate to them. Only students who have the parental background that can provide the exposure for the cultural practices and values develop the sense of belongingness in the field (Porter and Umbach, 2008). This contributes to the educational reproduction which definitely reflects social inequality. As a result, according to Bourdieu, higher education allocates individuals in to occupational positions so as to legitimize social inequalities.

Practice evidenced that certain field of specializations are more privileged and considered to be lucrative due to their social and economic role in the society. Thus not only access for higher education but also the fields to be studied in higher education are sources of inequality. This further leads to the reproduction of educational inequality.

Field Choice in Higher education

In recent years policy makers have advocated choice in education as a means to enhance equality of educational opportunity (Plank and Sykes, 2003). Many developing countries are involved in expanding higher education opportunities so that students have better chance of participation in higher education. However, according to Sianou-Kyrgiou, and Tsiplakides, (2009) various studies show that the access in higher education has helped mainly certain groups (the middle classes and 'the most privileged students'), and that inequalities in higher education choice have been continuous and common. The expansion of higher education creates a new status diversification in the choice of fields of studies. Privileged groups who usually do better in school can use the opportunity to go to the privileged areas of specialization that has significant pay off in the society. Thus, choice could be a stratifying rather than an equalizing mechanism in the educational attainment process. For example, in Israel, the expansion of higher education reduced inequality in enrolment, but mainly in fields that carry limited advantages in the job market (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005).

According to Gabay-Egozi, Shavit, and Yaish (2009) interest has grown in choice-related explanations of educational stratification. One of the main debates in the literature on educational stratification is about the push and the pull factors for educational attainment. Push factors refer to the various structural and social constraints that determine students' educational attainment, while pull factors refer to choice. These concepts are also treated in Boudon's (1974) distinction between primary and secondary effects. The former are factors responsible for the association between social origins and students' academic ability and performance; the latter are factors that account for educational choices controlled by the class differences.

Thus, field choice is a result of both primary and secondary effects. To begin with students choose a field

that they feel they are relatively good at. Being good at certain field might be a result of the invested time and energy of the individual in the prior academic exercise. The time and energy investment highly depends on the students' social background and family support they receive. According to Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung (2003) relative gain in arts and humanities subjects is associated with parental background, whereas mathematics and sciences achievements are seen as result of school practices and experiences. For instance, Uerz, Dekkers, J. M., and Béguin, (2004) indicated that students from a family that has a culture of reading have a comparative advantage in literacy and arts and has better achievement in the subjects. This condition helps the students to establish a kind of attitude and inclination towards a certain subject and in turn will have an effect on their academic achievement. As a result, they take their established belief that is reflected on their achievements as reason for their choice of a certain field of specialization and join departments where they have comparative advantage. For instance, students with better results in language related subjects feel that they have comparative advantages in humanities than those who have less result in such subjects. However, the issue of stereotypes of personality in field choice is found to be wrong and out dated (Pringle, Dubose and Yankey, 2010)

Therefore, comparative advantage which is resulted from primary effects of social origin that caused the difference on the students' achievement could help either to choose or to avoid certain fields of studies in higher education. Thus the choice of departments in higher institution though determined by test results of the previous grades, the test results were influenced by parental factors.

Second, though the students are choosing a department that they feel that they are good at, there are also some issues related to the future prospect of their career and academic exercise that they consider while choosing the departments. These are the pull factors or the secondary effects. Among those who have the highest results to compete for the given field of studies some might not want to come into that field of study due to factors they considered important. Their choice may be based on the availability of information that the students have about the field of study they are competing for or about the field of study that they do not want to compete for. What is very common is that there are certain fields of studies in the higher learning institutions only those who have the interest or those who chose it to be their first choice are joining. This argument is in line with what Bourdieu indicated as field. This indicates that though test result is a criterion to join certain field of study, interest is very basic in order to compete for that field of study where the students have the required test result (Yazici and Yazicic, 2010).

Thus the justification for field choice in higher education can be discussed using the rational choice theory and cultural reproduction theory. These theories were considered as one opposing the other in addressing the issues in educational inequality (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). However, in addressing the issue of field choice the two lines of arguments can be taken as complementary. The rational choices made by students and parents for social mobility (or stability) could be entertained through the cultural influences that made them to aspire certain social position in the community. Both theories contribute substantial issues in understanding students' educational decision-making processes. Rational choice and cultural reproduction perspectives could be connected through Bourdieu's capital that states unequal distribution of capital among the members of a society can be the cause for the inequalities in life odds.

In a context where students make a conscious decision based on cost benefit analysis and choosing fields of studies in higher institutions that they hope helps them to maintain their social status and increases their social security, Bourdieu's conceptions of capital shades light on the factors that affects students aspirations, achievements and cost and benefit which are explained through rational choice theory. In addition, including parental help and guidance social capital has a potential to increase students' success within certain fields of study (Erikson & Jonsson, 1996). Students from a family that have supportive background and experience of certain field and or higher education exposure can benefit from their parental experience and choose a field where they can get the assistance very easily.

Methodology

Participants

Participants of this study were first year Law students from College of Law and Governance, languages students from College of Humanities, Language studies, Journalism and Communications at Addis Ababa University. These students are active students who are currently registered. The two groups of students were selected from the two colleges purposefully. To begin with the students in Law school are assigned by Ministry of Education based on their achievement and their choice while the students in CHLJC are students who were assigned in the Humanities and Social Science band and chose the field. Second, the students in the groups under study are visibly different in their university entrance exam result and could be samples of the two extremes.

Instruments

The questionnaire used to collect data for this study is developed by the researcher based on available literatures and practical experiences of the situation. It was used to collect data regarding the pattern and influences that

affected students' choice of field of studies. It included a total of 27 items, a demographic items, items measuring socioeconomic status, and items measuring the factors that influenced the students to choose their major. For a copy of the survey please see Appendix A.

Students were asked to rank, using a rating scale, the factors that influenced them in their decision of choosing an academic major. They were asked to use a Likert rating scale from 1-4. A neutral mid-point was eliminated so that students would be forced to place themselves on either side of each influence listed. Scores were computed by adding participants' response for each influence and then combined to make the total score for each of the three subcategories.

Results and Discussion

Description of the study participants

The participants of this study were a total of 125 first year students, 45 from Law school and 80 from College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication (CHLJC). These students were those who have completed the questionnaire and returned from a total of 180 first year students of which 60 were in Law school in College of Law and Governance and 135 were in (English department and Affan Oromo department) in CHLJC. Among the 60 students in Law school 10 students were not in class while the questionnaire was administered and another five students didn't complete the questionnaire properly. Similarly among 135 students in CHLJC those who were found on the date the questionnaire were distributed was only 102, and about 28 of them were not able to complete the questionnaire as they were required. This indicates that 75% of Law school first year students and 67% of first year (English and Affan oromo) CHLJC students were represented in the study. Participation was voluntary and the students were informed that this study has nothing to do with their academic exercise.

Table 1. Participant number

School/College	population	Participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Law	60	24	21	45
CHLJC	120	41	39	80

From the total participants 48% were females while 52% were males. The gender proportion in each is somehow similar. 53.3% and 51.2 % of the respondents are male while 46.7% and 48.8% of them are female in Law school and CHLJC respectively. The average age of the participants were 19 and their average university entrance exam result was 435.5 though there is clear difference in terms of the students' university entrance exam results in the two fields of studies. The average university entrance exam results of Law students were 515.7 while the average university entrance exam result for CHLJC students were 393.5.

Table 2. university entrance exam results

Department/School	minimum	maximum	mean
Law	420	597	515.7
CHLJC	352	454	393.5

It is observed that 65(52%) of the respondents were from urban while 60 (48%) of them are from rural areas. Among those from urban 40(61.5%) are in Law school while only 25(38.5%) are in CHLJC. On the other hand only 5(8.3%) of the students in Law school are from rural areas while 55(91.7%) of the students in CHLJC are from rural areas. Similarly about 92(74.2%) of the respondents had attended government schools while about 28(22.6 %) and 2(3.2%) of them were from private schools and public schools respectively. Among those from government schools 78(84.8%) are in CHLJC while only 14(15.2%) are in Law school and there is no student from private schools in CHLJC while those 28(22.6 %) from private schools all are in Law school.

Table 3. place of origin and school type

Department/School	Place of origin		School type		
	Urban	Rural	Government	Public	Private
Law	40	5	14	2	28
CHLJC	25	55	78	2	0
Total	65	60	92	4	28

In terms of the respondents parental back ground, among the 125 only 8 of them didn't provide any information about their fathers. Whereas 29(24.7%) of the respondents have got illiterate fathers, 33(28.2%) and 17(14.5%) of them have fathers with elementary school education and high school education respectively while 38 (32.4%) of them have fathers with a university education. With regards to their mothers academic background, among 114 students who responded the questionnaire only 31(27.2 %) of them indicated that they have got mothers with a university education while 9(7.8%) claimed that they have mother with a high school education followed by 25(21.9%) who indicated that they have mothers with elementary school education whereas

49(42.9%) of them stated that they have mothers with no education at all. It is observed that almost all (80%) the students in Law school have got mothers who have tertiary education experience while almost all (88.2%) the students in CHLJC have mothers with elementary or not education. Similarly there are only three students have mothers with university education in CHLJC while only 2 students have mothers with elementary education in the school of Law.

Table 4. parental background

Department/School	Fathers academic background				Mothers academic background			
	Illiterate	Elementary	High school	Tertiary	Illiterate	Elementary	High school	Tertiary
Law	1	2	4	30	2	1	3	28
CHLJC	28	31	13	8	47	24	6	3
Total	29	33	17	38	49	25	9	31

There is a very clear difference in the students' parental background in the two groups. Most of the students in Law school have educated parents while only very few of the students in CHLJC have parents with secondary school and above educational background.

The descriptive data of the study participants in the two field of studies indicated that there is a difference between the students in their academic and parental background in addition to the difference in their place of birth. In terms of the students' academic result it is observed that all students in the school of Law have the highest university entrance exam result while those students in the CHLJC have the least university entrance exam result. This supports that students' achievement which is considered as indicators of merit in Ethiopian education system is at the center of the student assignment. It is observed that most of the students in the school of Law were of urban origin while many of the students in the CHLJC were from the rural area. In addition, the highest number of students who had been in private schools is in Law school whereas there are no students from private school in CHLJC. It is true that there is huge difference in the educational investment in the private and government schools in addition to the parental socioeconomic conditions of those who send their children to government and private schools. In Ethiopian context the difference in academic achievement between the students in the two groups can be interpreted as result of their background and academic and environmental investment.

Thus the pattern of students' field choice seems to be dictated by the so called academic achievement which is the result of several academic and non-academic inequalities. The indicators of the difference of the two groups of students (school type, place of origin and parental academic background) necessarily influence the achievement which determines the students' departmental choice and or assignment. Thus it is possible to argue that the pattern indicates that the fields of studies chosen by the students which do also further affect their future life reflect the already existed socioeconomic bias. By implication what the students' inherited from the school and outside the school does follow them in the higher education and after completing the higher education since the higher education field choice denies them the chance to achieve equality.

Factors in field choice

Understanding factors that the participants of the study considers relevant in their field choice were also the second objective of the study. According to the literature, the factors that potentially affect students' field choice are of personal, interpersonal and practical. The data gathered from the respondents indicated the following.

Table 5. Factors affecting field choice

Factors	Law	CHLJC
My parental	2.11	2.38
My current and former Teachers	2.02	2.90
My peer/ friends	1.91	2.52
My family members other than my parents	2.04	2.83
My personal interest in the field of study	3.04	1.30
My aptitude /skill/ in the field	2.73	1.78
My belief that I am good at the field of study	2.77	1.28
My belief that the field is easier than others	1.44	3.05
The employment potential (job opportunity) of the field	2.73	1.46
The career earning potential (well paid job)	2.80	2.40
The future education opportunity in the field	2.71	2.84
The career prestige	2.84	2.03

As can be seen from the table students rating of the factors that affects their field choice shows mean difference. Students in the school of Law considered peer pressure (M=1.91) and belief that the field is easier than others (M=1.44) as less influential in their field choice while they considered career prestige (M=2.84) and

career earning potential(M=2.80) as the influential factors in their field choice. What the respondents considered as less influential, peer pressure and belief that the field of study is easier than others are interpersonal and personal factors respectively while what they considered as influential, career prestige and career potential earnings are practical. On the contrary, students in CHLJC considered that their personal interest (M=1.30) as less influential while their teachers which is interpersonal (M=2.90) and their belief that the field is easier than others which is personal (M=3.05) as influential factors in their field choice.

Students from the school of Law have indicated that the belief that the field of study they choose is easier than other fields has less influence in their choice (M=1.44) while students from CHLJC indicated that their belief that the field of study is easier than other has high influence in their choice (M=3.05). Though some students in CHLJC considered that the field of study they choose is being provided in the language they know, they expressed that their knowledge about what they are studying while they are in the department is very limited. While they rated that the field is easier than others influenced them highly, the influence of their belief about being good at it (M=1.28) and the influence of their personal interest in the field (M=1.30) are rated low. The summary of the factors in the three categories shows that there is a difference between the students in Law school and CHLJC in terms of the factors they considered as influential in their field choice.

Table 6. Overall factors affecting field choice

Factors	Law		CHLJC		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Personal	2.51	0.79	1.85	0.49	2.09	0.69
Interpersonal	2.02	0.88	2.66	0.72	2.43	0.83
Practical	2.76	0.97	1.81	0.47	2.15	0.83

It can be observed that students in Law school considered practical factors (M=2.76,SD=0.97) as most influential while students in the CHLJC considered the practical factors(M=1.81,SD=0.47) as the least influential factor in their field choice. Similarly students in the School of Law considered the interpersonal factors (M=2.02,SD=0.88) as the least influential factors while students in CHLJC considered interpersonal factors(M=2.66,SD=0.72) as the most influential factor. These indicate that students in school of Law seem to take the awareness they have about the practical environment they are expected to have after the university education as a factor while they were choosing their field of study while the students in CHLJC seem to rely on what others tell when they were choosing their field of study.

The personal factors mean score was 2.51(SD=0.79) for School of Law and 1.85(SD=0.49) for CHLJC. The personal factor score for school of Law and CHLJC were compared using an independent sample t test. There were significant difference between the personal factor of school of Law and CHLJC $t(123)=4.38, P=0.00$. The interpersonal factors mean score was 2.02(SD=0.88) for School of Law and 2.66(SD=0.72) for CHLJC. The interpersonal factor score for school of Law and CHLJC were also compared using an independent sample t test. There were significant difference between the interpersonal factor of school of Law and CHLJC $t(123)=5.66, P=0.00$. The practical factors mean score was 2.76(SD=0.97) for School of Law and 1.81(SD=0.47) for CHLJC. The personal factor score for school of Law and CHLJC were compared using an independent sample t test. There were significant difference between the personal factor of school of Law and CHLJC $t(123)=7.34, P=0.00$.

These indicate that students in the school of Law rely on the practical contexts while they were choosing the field of study whereas students in CHLJC rely on the interpersonal relationship they have. Thus the main base for the decision that the students made in their field choice were different for the two groups. Students in the school of Law who had better parental background and high achievement in the University entrance exam were analyzing the practical contexts and the outcome that they can harvest at the end of the university education while the students in CHLJC who have lower university entrance exam result and from parents with low academic background were relying on the information they got from people around them. The overall finding seem to agree with Jacob, Klein, and Iannelli (2015) who argued that the social-origin differences have role in entering high professional and managerial occupations in the developed countries too.

Conclusions and implications

The finding of the study indicated that there is a difference in the students' academic and parental situation of the two groups of the respondents. What is more, parental background and academic achievement in the University entrance exam are important recurrent point of difference between the students in the two groups. The pattern seems to substantiate what Marginson (2016: 421) argues that prior social inequalities determines whether those from rural or uneducated families can improve their social position while "higher education provides a stratified structure of opportunity" with students from educated and urban families are improving "high value position within higher education" at the expense of merit. Thus the expansion in higher education in Ethiopia seems to fail to reduce the inequalities and rather modified the form of the inequalities.

With regards to the factors that the students considered as influential in their field choice, the difference observed between the two groups of students reflect the difference in their source of information and about education and life. Students may choose the field that they may not be interested in or may not wish to be in it due to the inadequate information they have about it. In this research context and in Ethiopian culture the information we have about something depends on the exposure we have to it through someone who has experience of it before us. Mostly parents and teachers can be considered as basic source of information. In the context of students from rural area and less educated parents the main source of information about further education are the teachers or someone close to the students who is a student who has gone through the process before. Therefore the socio economic conditions of the students that they have gained from their parents seem to contribute for the unequal provision of information which in turn forces the students to rely on what they can easily access. Here, HEI should play a role in providing equal information to their potential students who aspires to join them. This could reduce the information gap and provide equal information access to everybody. Thus one area of intervention to manage equality in higher education is to develop an information dissemination scheme.

Similarly it is observed that factors to make decision to choose one rather than the other are also dependent of the individual's context. Those form the well informed group considers the practical implications of their choice in their future academic and attempt for upward mobility while those who are making their decision based on the interpersonal and personal conditions attribute their choice to the achievement which is further influenced by other nonacademic factors. As a result, students consider the outcome of their choice as their decision and they do accept whatever comes on their own way and they consider their success and failure as legitimate. So inequality is being legitimized by choice (Dougherty, 2018)

To conclude, the difference in the two groups has implication on achievement and dominant group's culture, what is considered as appropriate and measured in education. Similarly though there is equality of rights and equality of educational opportunity, the effect it has on in reducing exiting inequality is not worthy rather it is "effectively maintained inequality" (Lucas, 2001). The educational decisions are no longer just about whether to acquire more, but rather what type of education to pursue which is issue of field study choice "a second axis of stratification" after having access for higher education (Duru-Bellat , Kieffer, & Reimer, 2008). Therefore, according to Iannelli, Gamoran & Paterson (2018) folks of lower social backgrounds were concentrated in the lower-status sectors of higher education, and in that logic inequality was preserved even during the expansion.

The implication of this finding is that expanding higher education is one thing but addressing issues of inequality in the expanding system is another thing. Thus in order to benefit from the fruits of education the Ethiopian higher education system need to look into student assignment and choice of field of specialization as an area of critical focus in the policy development processes. All students with diverse backgrounds need to be informed and supported at a high school and elementary school level so as to make them competent to achieve equal access to outcomes of higher education. This requires addressing socioeconomic issues that contributes to achievement at lower level and reserving opportunities for those who are deprived of such things due to poverty and predetermined social differences.

Though this study has its own limitation in its scope, it shades light that creating access to higher education through expansion is not the final point to bring about educational equality, rather it produces another form of inequality. Higher education policy makers and institutional leaders need to focus on student's field choice and the process of student assignment in the future.

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Dear respondents

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey. You are not required to write your name. However, you are kindly requested to provide your genuine responses for the questions below. Your responses will be used only and only for the research purpose that will address issues of field choice and inequality in Higher education.

Thank you again,
 Fekadu Mulugeta (PhD)

I. Personal information

1. Age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Place of origin (make a tick)(A) Urban _____ (B) Rural _____

II. Academic background

1. School you come from (make a tick)(a) Government ____ (b) Public _____ (c)Private _____
2. Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Result _____

III. Parental background

1. Parental highest level of formal Education
 (A)Father _____ (B) Mother _____ (C)guardian _____
2. Family best estimate of total monthly income (In average in Birr) _____
3. Parental occupation
 (A) father _____ (B) mother _____ (C)guardian _____

IV. Factors in your field of study choice

Please rate the following factors that affected your choice of the field of study you are in currently from 4 extremely influential to 1 not at all influential.

Factors	1	2	3	4
My parental				
My current and former Teachers				
My peer/ friends				
My family members other than my parents				
My personal interest in the field of study				
My aptitude /skill/ in the field				
My belief that I am good at the field of study				
My belief that the field is easier than others				
The employment potential (job opportunity) of the field				
The career earning potential (well paid job)				
The future education opportunity in the field				
The career prestige				
Other (if any) _____				