

# A descriptive study of factors influencing career choices of first year M.Com students with special reference to Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce (BMCC), Pune, India

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## ABSTRACT

*Before choosing the right career path there are many factors that affect this decision. This research investigates the students' need to invest two years of their lives in pursuing Master's degree in Commerce before pursuing the career of their choice. This investigation was carried out by administering a structured questionnaire using interview technique. Students seeking admission to the first year of M.Com in Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce, a premier institute, were the respondents. This descriptive research gave a useful insight into the minds of the students and revealed that M.Com is treated as a sojourn or a stepping-stone before stepping into the career of their choice which is pre-decided by the students at large. The most important fact is that in majority of the cases, family no longer can influence the decision of the students to pursue a career of their choice. However, students still need the career related guidance from their teachers. Most of all, set career choices are still preferred by the students and not many are willing to choose an offbeat career. Another important aspect that was observed, was the self-assessment of personality and skills of the students. The overall perception of the students about themselves is 'good personality'. In spite of that, to make a successful career, there are other skills that are equally important such as communication, presentation, and language skills that are lacking. Thus students' perception of 'good personality' stays more at a physical level than on 'all-rounder' level. Proper career guidance in this case plays an important role.*

**Keywords:** Career choices after M.Com, mindset of commerce students, factors influencing career choice, self-assessment of skills and personality.

## INTRODUCTION

Finding the right career path is the most important step that is crucial for success in a student's life. Herd mentality, last minute career choices, lethargic or laid-back attitude in general, among students are the most observed trends during the crucial period of stepping into the real world. Career choice should be a well-thought of, informed and planned process. Proper career counseling, selection of subjects of interest, choosing right college that is conducive to the process of career planning play an important role. With extensive teaching experience of under-graduate and post-graduate students, for the researcher, it was interesting to note the mindset of students, particularly, Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) students that are keen on pursuing Master of Commerce (M.Com), since that is a major turning point in choosing a wise career. What are the factors that affect students in choosing their career? There is a big difference in a 'job' and a 'career'. Let us look at the definitions of both.

### Job:

The work that you do regularly for fixed hours to earn money.

### Career:

According to Oxford dictionary career is an occupation undertaken for a significant period of person's life and with opportunities for progress. Thus investing and dedicating time becomes the crux of a successful career.

### The aims and objectives of this study are as follows -

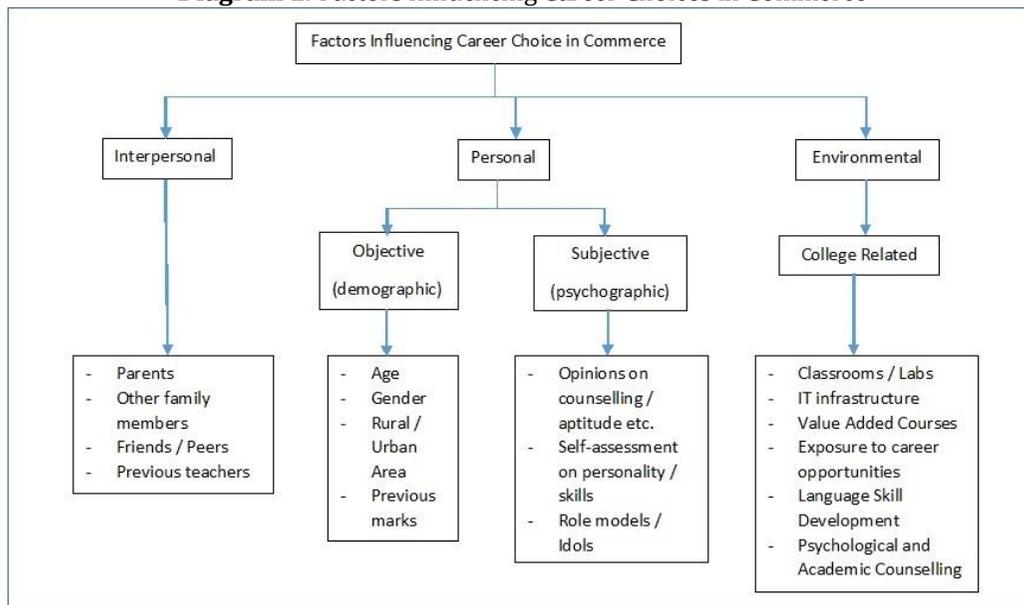
- 1) To understand the preferences of M.Com students in a given set of career choices.
- 2) To understand self-assessment of skills of the students needed for career of their choice.
- 3) To find out the opinions about environmental factors (*refer diagram 1 below*) that would contribute to making a successful career of their choice.
- 4) To make appropriate suggestions that would impact the interpersonal, personal and environmental factors positively for successful chosen career.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

'Career interests are developed, future career objectives are formed and the foundation for one's future career is laid in adolescence', says the author of a research article 'Career Decision Making in Adolescence'

that appeared on the website Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in. 'Interest in the subject is the most dominant factor influencing career choices of students. Interest in the subject also is related to with the personality type', say the authors KaziAfaq Ahmed, Nimra Sharif and Nawaz Ahmad in their research 'Factors influencing Students' Career Choices: Empirical Evidence from Business Students'. Another research paper 'Factors Influencing Career Choices of College Students Enrolled in Agriculture' by Darren Fizer, University of Tennessee, Martin, published in December 2013, studied mainly the factors family, passion, salary, past experiences, race, gender and role model. This research paper focuses mainly on the present mindset of the students seeking admission for M.Com in BMCC and various factors that influence their career choice. So in order to prepare questionnaire, the researcher decided to categorize the important factors influencing their career choice into (1) interpersonal, (2) personal and, (3) environmental factors.

**Diagram 1: Factors Influencing Career Choices in Commerce**



(Source: Elena E. Karpova, Iowa State University, Article in International Journal of Fashion Design Technology & Education, July 2010)

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative, empirical research. A questionnaire was prepared in order to collect data from aspiring M.Com students seeking admission in BMCC. The questions were mostly multiple choice type and a few questions were open ended. The questionnaire was administered using interview technique and the responses were recorded by the researcher. Therefore, there were no questionnaires that were incomplete or missing. In all 102 students had taken admission in the first year of M.Com course constituting the population for this research study, out of which over the course of 3 days of admission, the sample collected was of 99 students. The sampling method adopted for this study was purposive, non-probability sampling method.

The key questions in the questionnaire had focused on – (1) the career choice of students, (2) the interpersonal factors influencing the decision of taking admission for post-graduation in Commerce, (3) seeking admission particularly in BMCC for post-graduation, (4) aspirations of the students, (5) expectations of the students from their college and college teachers and, (6) personal psychographic information. Students were asked to self-assess themselves on important skills through questions to see if they indeed were able to assess themselves well and understand the importance of these skills from career point of view.

Statistical tools used for analyzing the collected data are mean, mode, range, standard deviation, chi-square test, coefficient of association.

**OBSERVATIONS**

Some general observations of some of the experienced teachers from BMCC were noted.

1. Retaining the attention and interest of the students in the subject becomes a challenge for the teachers at times.

2. Even though new innovative teaching techniques are often employed, students do not wish to take advantage of this.
3. Students are more interested only in the syllabus, the topics to be covered, exams, and marks, thus the degree becomes more marks-oriented and not performance-oriented or even knowledge-oriented.

While collecting data, it was observed and noted that the respondents were very keen on giving the information asked in the questionnaire and wanted to share their experiences and aspirations as well!

### DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

The following information describes the profile of the students who had taken admission for M.Com in BMCC.

The number of male students who sought admission for M.Com was found to be 52 and number of female students was 47. The break-up of male female students from rural and urban areas, after applying chi-square test, showed that both urban and rural students were equally keen in seeking admission in BMCC. Urban students however dominated the admission for M.Com as expected (85) as against rural students who were only 14 in number. It was noted that out of 99 students only one student had done BBA course and rest of them had done B.Com course prior to taking admission to M.Com course. The average marks of the student was found to be 70.68% and the standard deviation in the marks was found to be 6.89. This indicates that all the students have earned first-class or distinction in their previous examination. Thus, the level of M.Com students can be said to be that of above average intelligent students.

During analysis of data on self-assessment of skills of these students, following interesting things came to light.

The Likert scale used in the self-assessment was Poor, Adequate, Good and Very Good

Table 1: Self-assessment of skills

Sr. No.	Skill	Range
1	Communication skill	Adequate to Good
2	Computer skill (Excel, Word, Power Point, Tally etc.)	Adequate to Good
3	Presentation skill	Poor to Good
4	Leadership skill	Adequate to Good
5	Personality	Good to Very Good
6	Language skill	Adequate to Good
7	Additional Language skill (Regional / International)	Poor to Good

From the above table it can be interpreted that communication skills, computer skills and language skills need to be improved considerably which in turn will definitely help improve their presentation skill and overall personality which will in turn hone their leadership skills. The researcher observed that some respondents who rated themselves as 'good personality' were full of confidence but actually did not have conventional 'good personality'. This confidence is a major ingredient needed for the success in the chosen career but these respondents simultaneously lacked in other essential skills for a successful career.

64 respondents out of total 99 said that they have no knowledge of any additional regional or international language. These 64 included all rural 14 students and rest urban students. Rural students had a problem due to lack of foreign language teachers in their previous colleges while urban students did not take up the languages due to ignorance on importance of knowing additional language(s).

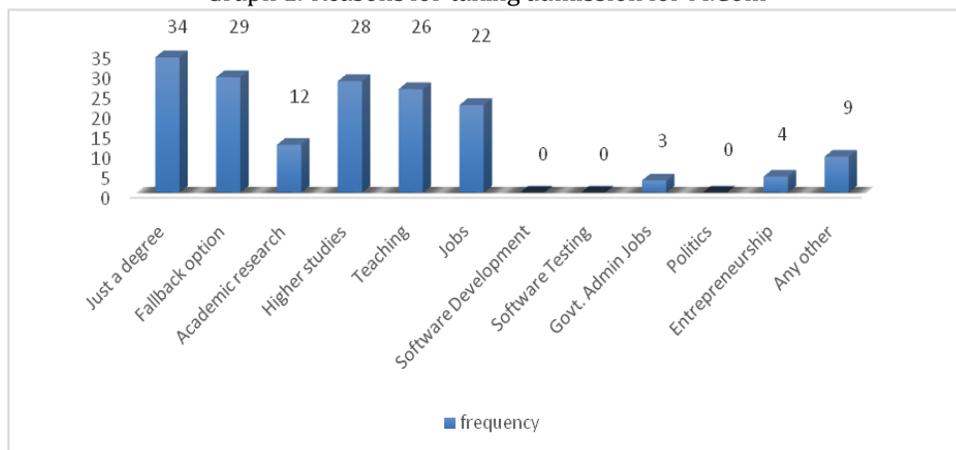
Supportive skills such as playing sports, participating in cultural activities, reaching trainer's level in their chosen activity, having additional technical skills like Tally, Diploma in Taxation Law, learning new languages were listed by the students. One student had particularly mentioned about his convincing power! These activities, skills ranged from good to very good and definitely will be supportive and complementary in their chosen career.

Upon further investigation, it was found that 54 urban students and 12 rural students cited BMCC as the 'best college' for seeking admission. One of the reasons could be that BMCC offers more number of specialization courses such as Costing, Statistics than any other urban or rural colleges and the knowledge that is being offered is up-to-date. Out of 54 urban students, 20 students sought admission in BMCC due to 'familiarity' of college, ambience and learning experience since they were past students of BMCC.

BMCC has become autonomous recently which seems to have attracted the attention of some urban students who are aware of the merits of autonomy and expect value added courses and teaching that is a distinct factor of importance from career point of view.

The expectations of students, especially the rural students, had been plain and simple and were mainly based on their experiences with their previous colleges. Some of these expectations were – (1) upgraded knowledge, latest trends, (2) accessibility of teachers, (3) they wanted teachers to understand them, support them and cross the language barrier, (4) proper guidance and mentoring. The urban students were not much different in their expectations, except that they were already exposed to the technical world and therefore had cited (1) innovative teaching methods, (2) internship, (3) interesting assessment patterns, (4) practical-oriented teaching, as their expectations from teachers and the college as well.

Graph 1: Reasons for taking admission for M.Com



Do students think that M.Com is just a sojourn or a stepping-stone towards pursuing career of their choice? Yes!! That is very evident from the above graph which depicts M.Com being mainly treated as just a post-graduate degree or a fallback option when students are simultaneously seeking other career options like appearing for CA, MPSC, UPSC, Banking and, other competitive exams.

It is interesting to note that quite a few number of students also seem to be interested in higher studies. These students were mainly interested in seeking admission in foreign universities for variety of courses and needed 16 years of basic education from India. As a result, M.Com turned out to be a safer and best bait to complete it. The next popular reason turned out to be teaching. Most of the students feel that they can secure a well-paid job in higher education institutes by clearing NET or SET examination along with necessary Master’s degree in their subject and hence teaching is one of the most sought after career choice. Along with teaching, academic research is also a preferred career option and plays a major role since academic research also adds to the qualification of being a teacher. Another popular notion is that teaching and academic research go hand-in-hand. Only 1 student out of 99 seemed to be interested in pure research.

Upon asking on their aspirations about their choice of a career, many students seemed to have known only limited and routine options typical to Commerce stream. Jobs in banks, financial institutes, private or public companies, doing CA (Chartered Accountant) or CS or at the most pursuing MBA after M.Com were the classic routine ‘career’ choices. Researcher observed and noted that there has been a huge confusion between a ‘job’ and a ‘career’ and both were alternately used by the students during the interview.

Software development and software testing are very alluring, interesting fields that need the expertise of students with commerce background as SME (Subject Matter Expert). These fields seem to be totally ignored by M.Com students as good career options. The reasons could be that either they are totally unaware of these opportunities or that they are interested only in pure commerce subjects such as accountancy, costing and management. Lack of exposure to new career avenues could also be the reason behind it.

As mentioned in the introduction, doing a ‘job’ is by far the most common aim in pursuing M.Com degree. Not a single student showed the inclination towards politics and hardly 2 students showed serious interest in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship ideas however were neither unique nor original. Starting a car-wash unit or continuing with family trading business or owning and running an electronics shop, were the ideas they had about entrepreneurship.

While analyzing data it was brought to light the fact that parents and other family members, including grand-parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, and cousins held reigns over the students in their career choices. Family either forces their ward or influences them by leading by example. Good 56 students out of 99 admitted to being greatly influenced by their family. Other family members contributed almost 50% in influencing as much as the immediate family! 13 students said that previous teachers too influenced them in

their career choices. Only 13 students said that they followed their friend's advice or were victims of peer pressure in the choice of their career.

Case of following a role model? Hardly 3 students said that family members, friends, peers or previous teachers did not influence them. Instead, people they worked with or came in contact with impressed them, influenced them. Again a case of following people who are much like their role models?

But the most important fact was that a whopping 33 students said that taking admission to M.Com course or selecting their career path was entirely their choice!. The large number of students, almost one-third of the sample, are thinking on their own and choosing career or courses of their choice! Is it indicative of a good trend? While interviewing these students who said that the decision to do M.Com is entirely their own choice seemed firm in their decisions and had a purpose in mind. They did not seem to be 'job-oriented' but were 'career-oriented'.

Besides the skills mentioned in Table 1, a student needs to develop or acquire additional knowledge and skills. He or she also needs to make an informed choice. Therefore the researcher thought of understanding the student's inclination towards (1) value added courses, (2) aptitude test, (3) counselling and, (4) regular parent-student-teacher meeting. The data revealed that large number of students, 89 out of 99, were in favor of value added courses. 82 students said that they would prefer an aptitude test before choosing a career. 90 students said that they would need academic counselling and 84 students said that they would like to have regular parent-student-teacher meeting mainly because the parents were not aware of the new avenues of career. The coefficient of association between rural/urban students and the need for counselling revealed perfectly negative association between these two factors! Thus the fact that more number of rural students expressed their need to get career counselling or guidance than the urban students was validated. This may have the base in the cultural, demographic factors along with the exposure to the outside world. 'Importance of students counselling sessions and other interventions to provide them with updated knowledge and information to create interest in right choices' as quoted in the research paper by KaziAfaq et al, holds true.

Researcher also asked them about their role model or idols in life. It revealed some of the prominent names from all walks of life like their own family members and previous teachers, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Swami Vivekanand, Dr Ambedkar, industrialists like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Mukesh Ambani and the likes. The prominent sports personalities who made it to the list of idols were MS Dhoni, Mary Kom, Virat Kohli and, Messi. Other prominent name that needs special mention is Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw. It was heartening to note that today's youth look up to these stalwarts and want to imbibe their qualities and philosophies in their own life.

**Based on the above discussion, researcher feels that a successful career follows below mentioned path.**

**Independent decision making capacity ->Being exposed to various career avenues -> Selecting the right career avenue -> Investing time & dedication in the chosen career -> Successful career**

Such offbeat paths as software development and testing need to be explored and students need to be made aware of them as good career options. Other offbeat career choices are available to explore such as KPO, BPO, Finance and Planning, SME, Transition Managers in big MNCs.

The data has given enough evidence to show that herd mentality, last minute career choices, laid-back and lethargic attitude in general which were thought to be prevalent in the society are slowing deviating.

Students are increasingly becoming aware that career choice should be an informed and a planned process. For the same, they are ready to seek necessary skills and support from the teachers and the institutes they take admission in.

#### **SUGGESTIONS :**

Regular practices like interactive sessions with industry stalwarts during course of their under-graduation, individual counselling sessions, internship, handling latest technology, presentations, research need to be implemented and taken to a higher level for the benefit of the students.

Based on the data analysis, following suggestions can be made.

- The teachers need to make the assessment of students in such a way that students can be categorized on the basis of their capabilities and capacities and be sent for upgrading their skills.
- Value added courses should be made available to the students at a nominal cost or free of charge.
- Job Fares, job fests should be conducted regularly in the college along with campus interviews. Job fares can help younger students to be exposed to the new upcoming job or career opportunities.

- Career counsellors need to be made available to these students so that they can plan their career in advance and work towards it.
- Incubation Center should be made functional to help entrepreneurs in every which way possible.
- New career avenues should be discussed with the students.
- Regular parent-teacher-student meeting has been unanimously approved by the students. Such meetings would help parents be exposed to the new avenues and help support their children in it. Students know what their personality is, what hurdles they have to cross. Finally it is the responsibility of parents and teachers equally to help them realize their dreams by providing the necessary support. This would also make the Master's degree knowledge-oriented rather than examination-oriented.

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