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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Factors Predictive of University Students' Job Values and Their Influences on Future-Oriented Employment Preferences: A Ghanaian Perspective

Majoreen Osafroadu Amankwah  · Mohammed-Aminu Sanda 

### ABSTRACT

**Background/purpose** – This study explored factors that are predictive of the job values of graduating Ghanaian tertiary students and the influences of such factors on their future-oriented employment preferences.

**Materials/methods** – Guided by a survey design, quantitative data were collected from 994 third-year and final-year students from a public university in Ghana. While principal component analysis was employed in order to identify factors predictive of students' job values, one-sample *t*-test was used to establish the significance levels of job value factors identified as premium. Independent sample *t*-test then determined the level of variation in the job value factors according to gender and job preference.

**Results** – The findings showed that job security and good pay are considered the most important. While job designs with an attractive economic motivation package (e.g., job security plus good pay) were shown to matter more to male students, attractive psychological motivation (e.g., autonomy and independence) was seen as more important to the female students that participated in the study. Unlike male students, the female students tended to place a higher premium on jobs with convenient working hours.

**Conclusion** – Collectively, Ghanaian students will likely opt for formal employment as against self-employment due to their association with the stable provision of extrinsic and psychological motivation packages in their future employment. This paper aims to provide useful insights and to help improve our understanding of future-oriented employment dynamics of graduating university students in the context of a developing country.

**Keywords** – University education, graduating students, job values, employment preference, Ghana.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding what motivates people is believed to be a century-old puzzle (Laurie, 1996). Levy (2013) argued that motivating employees may be a challenge, but keeping them motivated is an even greater challenge. One antidote to this long-standing debate of effectively motivating employees so that they become productive, is gaining fundamental knowledge of their job values. Taking cognizance of this concept will help employers not to apply a one-size-fits all approach to attracting and motivating future employees. Riggio (2014) advanced this argument by noting that not all employees are motivated by the same rewards, hence, managers must be aware of this and organize tailor-made motivational strategies to attract future employees. Calls are therefore being made for motivation to be individualized, which is highly possible if job values are taken into consideration (Riggio, 2014).

It is considered important to evaluate people's job values as these values represent the characteristics that people consider paramount in a job (Clark, 2010); thus, employees' values are relevant to the understanding, measurement, and improving of job quality. Furthermore, understanding job attribute preferences can help with informed job allocation, which then enhances job rewards leading to increased positivity in work attitudes and behaviors (Karl & Sutton, 1998). The argument here is that; when compatibility exists between employees' job expectations and experiences, job satisfaction is more likely to be considered high, whereas turnover intentions and actual turnover will be more likely to reduce. Additionally, cultural differences warrant the need for job values to be examined considering different contexts due to the uniqueness of each country and region. Therefore, the unique features of today's Ghanaian society constrain the generalizability of western literature related to job preferences.

The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to explore and identify factors that are predictive of the job values of Ghanaian university students preparing for graduation, and the subsequent premium placed on such factors towards identifying their future employment preferences. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following three research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: Which job factors are Ghanaian university students more likely to put a high premium on?
- RQ2: Which job factors are Ghanaian university students more likely to put a high premium on based on their gender?
- RQ3: Which job factors relate to Ghanaian university students' preferences for either self-employment or formal employment?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employees' job preferences are formed from several sources, which include gender, education, religion, life-stage, life-focus, and may also differ and their order of preference change over the course of a person's lifetime due to changes in their societal, cultural, or life circumstances, as well as the experiences they encounter (Ismail et al., 2019). Ismail et al. (2019) argued that cultural, social, economic, and political factors, for example, may create contexts which influence a person's alignment with different job value factors, both before and after entering the workforce. Jin and Rounds (2012) defined work values as that which individuals consider important in their jobs. In other words, it is the relative importance that

individuals place on various aspects of their job, including the desirability of the work setting and work-related outcomes (Ros et al., 1999).

These values may be grouped according to various dimensions (Lechner et al., 2018), with the most widely used classification centering on the extrinsic and intrinsic nature of such values (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013; Lechner et al., 2018; Sutherland, 2012). According to Arendt (2013), intrinsic values usually focus on defining personal career goals as opposed to individual wealth and security. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, refer to instrumental rewards of a job that are considered external to the work itself, and are therefore usually the by-products of the work (Arendt, 2013) and relate mostly to the working conditions (Halman & Müller, 2006). Essentially, Kalleberg and Marsden (2013) posited that people are more likely to place a higher premium on the job characteristics that they lack, since it could serve as a reference point. For Brown (2002), it was stated that work values tend to influence decisions about people's occupational choices. Although not the only determinant, it is certainly a primary factor. These values direct employees' behaviors (Ismail et al., 2019) and have influence over the level of satisfaction in their jobs (Brown, 2002; Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013; White, 2006). Halman and Müller (2006) indicated that young people place a greater significance on intrinsic values over extrinsic values, and that Africans place a high premium on job security. Furthermore, in a study by Demel et al. (2019) that was conducted among students from various disciplines at five public and private universities in Spain, the Czech Republic, and also in Germany, it was found that the two most important job features were career prospects and having the opportunity to continue one's education. While Wiswall and Zafar (2018) found that students had a higher preference for jobs that provided them with opportunities to work part-time, Lim and Soon's (2006) research in Malaysia found that students preferred long-term career advancement, followed by job security, working environment, and salary, all of which are extrinsic-oriented indices. Iacovou et al. (2004) found that in the United States, students placed a higher premium on growth potential, a job's benefits package, and job responsibility. In a comparative analysis of students in Germany and Croatia, Wust and Simic (2017) found that whilst the students from Germany indicated a higher preference for high-level incomes and job security, those from Croatia mentioned a preference for work that was stimulating and an interest in a job's working conditions.

Several studies on gender differences in work values have suggested that males and females have different preferences. Lechner et al. (2018) in Finland, Sutherland (2012) in the United Kingdom, Tolbert and Moen (1998) in the United States, and Clark (2010) in a study of OECD countries, each confirmed the gendered nature of certain job values. In the Canadian context, Lowe (2007) found that while males placed a higher value on income and career prospects, females put a higher premium on management relations and working within a safe and comfortable environment. In a study by Johnson and Mortimer (2011) that was conducted in the United States, younger-aged female adults were shown to be more intrinsically oriented than their male peers; although further analysis went on to show no significant gender-based difference in their extrinsic work values. In other studies to be found in the published literature, Sortheix et al. (2015) reported that females placed a high premium on flexible work schedules and less demanding jobs, whilst Bridges (1989) found that females preferred greater variety in their jobs than did their male colleagues. While females have been shown to place a higher premium on jobs that would enable them to provide help to their colleagues (Lyson, 1984) and job security (Amankwah, 2019;

Sutherland, 2012), males were found to favor job roles with higher extrinsic rewards (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Machung, 1989).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research design

A cross-sectional survey strategy and quantitative approach were employed due to the study's data being collected at one single point in time, and also that the nature of the research questions demanded a numerical description of the responses gathered from the sample, and thereby allowing for the findings to be generalized. The study population consisted of undergraduate students from the University of Ghana, who were then conveniently sampled as the aim of the study was to solicit data from students who had advanced in their education, may have seriously considered their future career aspirations, and were preparing for working in industry or becoming an entrepreneur. In this respect, the study sample comprised of 596 third-year ("Level 300") and 398 final-year ("Level 400") undergraduate students. The University of Ghana was chosen due to it being the premier higher education institution in Ghana with an approximate student population of 40,000. The university offers higher educational programs in various discipline areas including health sciences, the humanities, education, and both theoretical and applied natural sciences programs.

#### 3.2. Data collection method

##### *Measures*

The study adapted the enhanced version of a 16-item Work Values Instrument, which was originally developed by Vecchio (1989) and later enhanced by Lechner et al. (2018), who classified the items' scale into six-sub dimensions (Extrinsic, Intrinsic, Social, Job Security, Stimulation, and Autonomy). The items in the respective dimensions in Lechner et al.'s (2018) scale have the following composite reliabilities, which can be seen as being generally above the acceptable threshold; Extrinsic dimension ( $\alpha = .690$ ), Intrinsic dimension ( $\alpha = .786$ ), Social dimension ( $\alpha = .826$ ), Job Security dimension ( $\alpha = .738$ ), Stimulation dimension ( $\alpha = .871$ ), and Autonomy dimension ( $\alpha = .872$ ). The items were measured on a six-point, Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from "1 = *Very important*" to "5 = *Not important at all*," plus a neutral option of "6 = *Cannot choose*." In using the adapted Job Values Scale, lower mean scores depict greater importance placed on the value in question.

##### *Procedure*

Data were collected using a close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was sectioned into two parts, with Part A focusing on the respondent's demographics (gender, department, age, ethnicity, nationality, and employment preference), whilst Part B focused on job values such as "good pay," "job security," and "a lot of variety," etc. The data were collected between October 2018 and April 2019.

The study participants were full-time students who were not engaged in any formal full-time or even part-time employment. They were each provided with the questionnaire to complete during lecture hours, with the completed item collected later the same day. In terms of the ethical protocols, the researchers gained informed consent from the participant students prior to the questionnaire's distribution, and were encouraged but not coerced to

complete the questionnaire. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study should they so wish.

#### *Data analysis method*

The data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. In the descriptive analysis, the adapted Job Values Scale was factor analyzed using the perspectives of principal component analysis in order to identify factors that could predict job values. Job value mean ratings were also analyzed so as to establish the premium levels of job value factors in terms of both gender and employment preferences among the study's participants.

In the inferential analysis, one-sample test was performed to establish the levels of significance of the job value factors identified as premium. Independent sample tests were conducted, firstly to establish the level of variation in the job value factors identified as premium by males and females, and secondly to establish the level of variation in the individual job value factors' job preference determination. IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Version 2.3) was used as the analytical tool in the study.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Demographic analysis of study participants**

Out of the 1,100 questionnaires that were distributed, 994 were returned fully completed, representing an 85.8% response rate. Of the respondents, 496 were male (49.9%) and 498 female (50.1%), and their ages ranged mostly from 18 to 30 years old. The students were from 16 regions throughout Ghana (96% combined), as well as a few international students (4%). While 54.5% of the respondents aspired to be employees working for others, 20.12% aimed to become entrepreneurs, whilst the remainder were as then undecided.

### **4.2. Analysis of factors predictive of students' job value**

In order to assess whether the measured factors in the adapted Job Values Scale were predictive of the students' job values, principal component analysis was conducted. The estimated Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value for personal social capital was found to be .826, which exceeds the recommended value of .60 (Forsell et al., 2020; Kaiser, 1974). The estimated chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) value from the Bartlett's test is 18,940 ( $p = .000$ ,  $df = 153$ ), which is considered to be highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). These values indicate that the correlation pattern of the job value factors was good, and therefore the job value indicators were considered appropriate for factor analysis.

Factor analysis was then performed in order to identify and segregate the factors perceived by the study participants as predictive of tertiary students' job values. Principal component analysis was also conducted as an extraction method to characterize the various predictive factors of the job values. Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was used as the method of rotation which converged in six iterations. The rotated component (C) matrix with the factor loadings/regression values ( $r$ ) is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Regression estimates for rotated component matrix of job values

Job Value Characteristics	Components' Regression Values (r)				
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
Where I can work together with others	.706	.130	.074	-.034	.085
Good interpersonal relationship with supervisor	.703	.013	.136	.133	-.054
Good interpersonal relations with co-workers	.690	.138	.177	.165	-.113
Work where I can help other people	.471	.098	-.025	-.066	.215
Respect	.411	.288	.073	.307	-.108
Work that is interesting	.025	.785	.087	.063	-.012
Exciting work	.347	.687	.058	.195	.075
Work that is important and valuable to me	.039	.668	.256	-.094	.056
A lot of variety	.359	.558	.007	.162	.145
Being able to use my skills	.176	.082	.794	.020	-.015
Good advancement	-.056	.003	.696	.332	.018
A lot of opportunities to learn new things	.249	.261	.485	.040	-.089
Good match between my job requirement and abilities	.106	.307	.484	-.024	.328
Good pay	.016	.008	-.055	.791	.051
Job security	.258	.026	.227	.618	-.069
Convenient work hours	-.028	.313	.276	.500	.133
A lot of autonomy	.021	.065	.018	.038	.726
Work where I make decisions independently	.021	.023	.004	.014	.689

As can be seen in Table 1, in the factor extraction, 14 items spanning five components showed factor strength with factor loadings greater than .50 (Forsell et al., 2020; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). These are; (i) "Work where I can work together with others" ( $r = .706$ ); "Good interpersonal relationship with supervisor" ( $r = .703$ ), and "Good interpersonal relations with co-workers" ( $r = .690$ ) in Component 1 (depicting "participatory work environment" job design); (ii) "Work that is interesting" ( $r = .785$ ), "Exciting work" ( $r = .687$ ), "Work that is important and valuable to me" ( $r = .668$ ), and "A lot of variety" ( $r = .558$ ) in Component 2 (depicting "employee-job fit" job design); (iii) "Being able to use my skills" ( $r = .794$ ) and "Good Advancement" ( $r = .696$ ) in Component 3 (depicting "innovative work environment" job design); (iv) "Good Pay" ( $r = .791$ ), "Job security" ( $r = .618$ ), and "Convenient Work Hours" ( $r = .500$ ) in Component 4 (depicting "attractive economic motivation" job design); and (v) "A lot of autonomy" ( $r = .726$ ), and "Work where I make decisions independently" ( $r = .689$ ) in Component 2 (depicting "attractive psychological motivation" job design).



### 4.3. Analysis of premium levels of job value factors

To answer the first research question as to which job factors are Ghanaian university students more likely to put a high premium on, the mean ratings of their response scores were analyzed using one-sample *t*-test. The mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*), standard error mean (*SEM*), *t*-values, degree of freedom (*df*), probability level (*p*), and mean difference (*MD*) estimates of the students' premium-level ratings of the job value factors are shown in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, the students' premium ratings for the job value factors based on the five-job design characterization identified from the principal component analysis are as follows.

For the job value factors that are characteristics of the “participatory work environment” job design, the students perceived job situations that prompted a good relationship with their co-workers (*SEM* = .007) to be of the highest premium, followed by job situations which facilitate co-worker interaction (*SEM* = .009), and those that prompt a good relationship with their supervisor/s (*SEM* = .012). This implies that, for the students, job designs entailing collaborative and cooperative working are deemed to be of significant importance.

For the job value factors characterized by the “employee-job fit” job design, the students perceived job situations which exact excitement (*SEM* = .008), interest (*SEM* = .008), and self-importance (*SEM* = .008) to be of high premium, followed by job situations which require the performance of a variety of tasks (*SEM* = .010). This implies that, for the students, job designs that incorporate employee innovation and independence are deemed to be of significant importance.

For the job value factors characterized by the “innovative work environment” job design, the students perceived job situations that encourage employee creativity (*SEM* = .008), followed by job situations which prioritize and ensure worker advancement to be of the highest premium (*SEM* = .009). This implies that, for the students, job designs with a good policy for employee career growth and development are deemed to be of significant importance.

For the job value factors characterized by an “attractive economic motivation package” job design, the students perceived job situations which make provisions for job security to be of the highest premium (*SEM* = .005), followed by job situations attracting a good salary (*SEM* = .006), and arrangements for convenient work hours for employees (*SEM* = .007). This implies that, for the students, job designs incorporating structures and policies to enhance the quality of the employees' work life is deemed to be of significant importance.

For the job value factors characterized by an “attractive psychological motivation package” job design, the students perceived that job situations which provide employees with a lot of autonomy to be of the highest premium (*SEM* = .023), followed by job situations that empower employees to make independent decisions (*SEM* = .029). This implies that, for the students, job designs incorporating policies that allow employees to take responsibility for designing their own jobs are deemed to be of significant importance.

**Table 2.** One-sample test statistics for students' premium level ratings of job value factors

Job Design	Job Value Factors	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	Test Value = 3		
					<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Participatory environment	Where I can work together with others	1.556	0.720	.009	-154.825	5963	.000***
	Good interpersonal relationship with supervisor	1.381	0.899	.012	-139.115	5963	.000***
	Good interpersonal relations with co-workers	1.309	0.575	.007	-227.274	5963	.000***
Employee-job fit	Work that is interesting	1.351	0.624	.008	-204.204	5963	.000***
	Exciting work	1.379	0.647	.008	-193.456	5963	.000***
	Work that is important and valuable to me	1.313	0.633	.008	-204.967	5963	.000***
	A lot of variety	1.500	0.733	.010	-158.065	5963	.000***
Innovative environment	Being able to use my skills	1.260	0.622	.008	-215.941	5963	.000***
	Good advancement	1.303	0.695	.009	-188.626	5963	.000***
Attractive economic motivation	Good pay	1.168	0.441	.006	-321.096	5963	.000***
	Job security	1.140	0.377	.005	-380.629	5963	.000***
	Convenient work hours	1.311	0.541	.007	-241.094	5963	.000***
Attractive psychological motivation	A lot of autonomy	2.400	1.752	.023	-26.430	5963	.000***
	Work where I make decisions independently	2.300	2.277	.029	-23.744	5963	.000***

Note:  $N = 994$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*  $p \leq .01$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  significance level (2-tailed)

#### 4.4. Analysis of job values attribution and premium level based on gender

To answer the second research question as to which job value factors male and female Ghanaian university students are more likely to consider as being premium, the mean ratings of their response scores were analyzed accordingly. The mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*) and standard error mean (*SEM*) estimates, and also the independent sample tests of the students' premium level ratings and for self-employment and formal employment ratings of the job value factors are presented in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively. As can be seen in Table 3, the male and female students' premium ratings for the job value factors, based on the five-job design characterization identified from the principal component analysis are as follows;

For the job value factors characterized by a "participatory work environment" job design, the female students perceived job situations which facilitated co-worker interaction to be of higher premium than did their male student counterparts. Though the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = .848$ ;  $p = .357$ ), the *t*-test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on this job value factor was found to be very significant ( $t = 3.035$ ;  $p = .002$ ). The same can be said for job situations that prompt a good relationship with both co-workers and supervisors, with female students perceiving them to be of higher premium than did their male colleagues.



The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed in both scenarios. For job situations that prompt a good relationship with supervisors ( $F = 92.527, p = .000$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on this job value factor was considered highly significant ( $t = 8.493; p = .000$ ). Similarly, for job situations that prompt a good relationship with co-workers ( $F = 26.120, p = .000$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on this job value factor is also highly significant ( $t = 3.467; p = .000$ ). This implies that female students deemed job designs that entail collaboration and cooperation to be of greater significance than do their male colleagues.

**Table 3.** Statistics for male and female students' comparative ratings of job value factors

Job Design	Job Factors	Value	Males			Females			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Mean Equality	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Participatory environment	Where I can work together with others	Good	1.585	0.705	.013	1.528	0.734	.01	0.848	.357	3.035	5962	.002**
			1.480	1.134	.021	1.283	0.558	.010	92.527	.000***	8.493	4332	.000***
			1.335	0.572	.010	1.283	0.586	.011	26.120	.000***	3.467	5962	.001***
Employee-job fit	Work that is interesting	Exciting work	1.375	0.626	.011	1.327	0.620	.01	21.295	.000***	2.955	5961	.003**
			1.436	0.657	.012	1.327	0.632	.01	70.357	.000***	6.720	5951	.000***
	Work that is important and valuable	A lot of variety	1.337	0.583	.011	1.289	0.677	.01	12.143	.000***	2.904	5841	.004**
			1.615	0.813	.015	1.384	0.624	.01	186.524	.000***	12.330	5578	.000***
Innovative environment	Being able to use my skills	Good advancement	1.302	0.763	.014	1.277	0.360	.00	88.257	.000***	5.314	4726	.000***
			1.335	0.705	.013	1.271	0.683	.01	17.585	.000***	3.537	5955	.000***
Attractive economic motivation	Good pay	Job security	1.188	0.444	.008	1.149	0.437	.00	35.303	.000***	3.412	5960	.001***
			1.188	0.434	.008	1.092	0.303	.00	388.228	.000***	9.803	5316	.000***

	Convenient work hours	1.365	0.601	.011	1.257	0.468	.00	192.824	.000***	7.734	5616	.000***
Attractive psychological motivation	A lot of autonomy	2.315	1.126	.021	2.486	2.202	.040	14.234	.000***	-3.7	4453	.000***
	Work where I make decisions independently	2.373	3.041	.056	2.227	1.064	.019	10.543	.001***	2.474	3690	.013*

**Note:**  $N = 994$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*  $p \leq .01$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  significance level (2-tailed)

For the job value factors characterized by the “employee-job fit” job design, the female students perceived job situations which require the performance of a variety of tasks to be of the highest premium more than did their male student peers. The results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 186.524$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on this job value factor are highly significant ( $t = 12.330$ ;  $p = .000$ ). The same observations can be seen for jobs that exact excitement, interest, and self-importance. The results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed in all three scenarios. For job situations that exact excitement ( $F = 70.357$ ,  $p = .000$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 6.720$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Similarly, for job situations that exact interest ( $F = 21.295$ ,  $p = .000$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is also very significant ( $t = 2.955$ ;  $p = .003$ ). Also, for job situations that exact self-importance ( $F = 12.143$ ,  $p = .000$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is also very significant ( $t = 2.904$ ;  $p = .004$ ). This implies that female students deemed job designs that incorporate employee innovation and independence to be of highly significant importance more than their male student peers.

For the job value factors characterized by innovative work environment job design, the female students perceived job situations which prioritize and ensure worker advancement to be of the highest premium more so than did their male peers. The results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 17.585$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the males and females on worker advancement as a job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 3.537$ ;  $p = .000$ ). The same observation is made for job situations that encourage employee creativity. The results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 88.257$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 5.314$ ;  $p = .000$ ). This implies that female students deemed job designs with good policies for employee career growth and development to be of more significant importance than did the male students.

For the job value factors characterized by the “attractive economic motivation package” job design, the female students perceived job situations which make provisions for employees to have convenient work hours to be of the highest premium more than their male peers. The results from the Levene’s test for equality of variances indicated that equal

variances can be assumed ( $F = 192.824$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 7.734$ ;  $p = .000$ ). The same observations were made for job situations that entailed a good salary and job security. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 388.228$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on job security as a job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 9.803$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Similarly, the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 35.303$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on having a good salary as a job value factor is highly significant ( $t = 3.412$ ;  $p = .000$ ). This implies that female students deemed job designs incorporating structures and policies to enhance the quality of employees' working lives to be of more significant importance than for their male student peers.

For the job value factors characterized by the "attractive psychological motivation package" job design, the male students perceived job situations which provide employees with a lot of autonomy to be of the highest premium more so than did their female peers. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 14.234$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = -3.787$ ;  $p = .000$ ). This implies that for male students, job designs that incorporate policies that allow employees some level of autonomy is deemed to be of more significant importance than for female students. Similarly, the male students perceived job situations that empower employees to make independent decisions to be of higher premium than did the female students. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicate that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 10.543$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between the male and female students on this job value factor is significant ( $t = 2.474$ ;  $p = .013$ ). This implies that for the male students, job designs incorporating policies to allow employees to be responsible for designing their jobs is deemed to be of more significant importance than for the female students.

#### 4.5. Analysis of job values attribution and students' employment preferences

In order to answer the third research question of the study, being which job value factors guide Ghanaian university students' preferences for self-employment and formal employment, the respondents' scale responses were analyzed accordingly. The mean ( $M$ ), standard deviation ( $SD$ ) and standard error mean ( $SEM$ ), and also the independent sample tests for self-employment and formal employment ratings of job value factors are shown in Table 4. As can be seen in Table 4, the students' premium ratings for the attributions of job values determinant of their employment preferences, based on the five-job design characterization identified from the principal component analysis, are as follows.

For the job value factors characterized by a "participatory work environment" job design, the students preferred self-employment rather than seeking employment within government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which facilitate co-worker interaction and that also prompt good relationships with their co-workers. Though the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances can be assumed for the job situations which facilitate co-worker interaction ( $F = 4.019$ ;  $p = .045$ ), the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between

self-employment and formal employment on this job value factor is not significant ( $t = -0.951$ ;  $p = .342$ ). However, the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that equal variances cannot be assumed for job situations which prompt good relationships with co-workers ( $F = 0.216$ ;  $p = .642$ ), and the  $t$ -test showed that the difference in the premium ratings between self-employment and formal employment on this job value factor is not significant ( $t = -0.551$ ;  $p = .581$ ). On the contrary, the students prefer to seek employment in government institutions or corporate entities rather than self-employment when they perceive job situations which prompt good relationships with their supervisors to be of the highest premium.

The results from the Levene's test for equality of variance (see Table 4) showed that equal variance is assumed ( $F = 16.885$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and that the difference between the two employment preferences is significant ( $t = -1.959$ ;  $p = .05$ ). This implies that students consider self-employment to be of significant importance when they desire jobs whose designs enable collaboration and cooperation amongst employees. However, when they desire jobs whose designs enable collaboration and cooperation between employees and supervisors, the students would rather opt for employment in government institutions or corporate entities. This finding may be due to the students' psychological realization that in the Ghanaian societal culture, though the prevalence of power distance has permeated organizational settings, which are predominantly hierarchical, the notion of interpersonal relations with supervisors is now manifesting in practice.

For the job value factors characterized by the "employee-job fit" job design, the students prefer self-employment rather than seeking out employment in government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which require the performance of a variety of tasks, as well as exacting interest and excitement, to be of the highest premium. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances can be assumed for job situations which require the performance of a variety of tasks ( $F = 51.456$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and as such, the difference between the two employment preferences for this job factor is highly significant ( $t = -6.124$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Similar observation can be made for job situations which exact interest ( $F = 38.232$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and with the difference between the two employment preferences for this job factor also being highly significant ( $t = 3.216$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Also, for job situations which exact excitement ( $F = 40.323$ ;  $p = .000$ ), the difference between the two employment preferences for the job factor is highly significant ( $t = -4.119$ ;  $p = .000$ ). However, when the students desire jobs whose designs exact self-importance, the students gave equal importance to both government and corporate employment, and also self-employment.

**Table 4.** Statistics for students' employment preferences based on comparative ratings of job value factors

Job Design	Job Value Factors	Self-Employment			Formal Employment			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Mean Equality		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Participatory environment	Where I can work together with others	1.5	0.6	.01	1.5	0.7	.01	4.0	.045	-	30	.342
	Good interpersonal relationship with	40	63	7	60	41	1	19	*	0.9	46	
										51		
		1.4	1.4	.03	1.3	0.6	.01	16.	.000	1.9	17	.050
		35	10	6	62	32	0	885	***	59	73	*

		supervisor										
Employee- job fit	Good interpersonal relations with co-worker	1.302	0.596	.015	1.312	0.568	.009	0.216	.642	-0.551	5710	.581
	Work that is interesting	1.312	0.516	.013	1.365	0.661	.010	38.232	.000***	3.216	3491	.001***
	Exciting work	1.325	0.568	.014	1.398	0.674	.010	40.323	.000***	-4.119	3236	.000***
	Work that is important and valuable	1.311	0.787	.020	1.314	0.571	.009	0.371	.543	-0.156	5710	.876
Innovative environment	A lot of variety	1.410	0.633	.016	1.533	0.767	.012	51.456	.000***	-6.124	3303	.000***
	Being able to use my skills	1.230	0.535	.014	1.268	0.634	.010	13.872	.000***	-2.254	3229	.024*
	Good advancement	1.307	0.580	.015	1.300	0.723	.011	0.069	.793	0.300	5710	.764
	Good pay	1.172	0.461	.012	1.166	0.434	.007	1.046	.307	0.454	5710	.650
Attractive economic motivation	Job security	1.151	0.394	.010	1.136	0.372	.006	7.125	.008**	1.294	2613	.196
	Convenient work hours	1.296	0.559	.014	1.317	0.537	.008	1.385	.239	-1.283	5710	.200
Attractive psychologica l motivation	A lot of autonomy	2.277	1.167	.030	2.446	1.948	.030	1.122	.290	-3.211	5710	.001***
	Work where I make decisions independently	2.173	1.045	.027	2.354	2.634	.041	4.253	.039*	-3.709	5685	.000***

Note:  $N = 994$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*  $p \leq .01$  significance level (2-tailed); \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  significance level (2-tailed)

Yet, the result from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = 0.371$ ;  $p = .543$ ), and that the difference between the two employment preferences ratings is not significant ( $t = -0.156$ ;  $p = .876$ ). This may be due to the students' individual psychological expression of emotional-self and goal-orientation, which strongly influence their selection of work environment that they deemed comforting.

For the job value factors characterized by innovative work environment job design, the students prefer self-employment rather than seeking employment in government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which encourage employee creativity to be of the highest premium. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 13.872$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and that the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment

preferences is significant ( $t = -2.254$ ;  $p = .024$ ). On the contrary, the students will likely seek self-employment rather than employment in government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which prioritize and ensure worker advancement to be of the highest premium. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = 0.069$ ;  $p = .793$ ), and as such, the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences is not significant ( $t = 0.300$ ;  $p = .764$ ). This implies that students will consider self-employment to be of significant importance when they desire jobs whose designs enable innovation and creativity among employees. However, when students desire jobs whose designs enable employee career advancement and development, they would rather opt for employment within government institutions or corporate entities. This finding may be due to the students' psychological realization that in the Ghanaian industrial environment, there appears to be minimal opportunities for growth for those who are self-employed, thus creating the scenario whereby individuals face income stagnation when self-employed for long periods of their work lives.

For the job value factors characterized by the "attractive economic motivation package" job design, students will likely opt to be self-employed rather than seek employment within government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which make provisions for employees to have convenient work hours to be of the highest premium. However, the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = 1.385$ ;  $p = .239$ ), and as such, the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences is not significant ( $t = -1.283$ ;  $p = .200$ ). This may be due to the students' psychological realization that in the Ghanaian industrial environment, some organizations, especially government-oriented institutions, have work arrangements that are basically routinized with operational schedules that are rarely flexible. On the contrary, the students will likely seek employment in government institutions or corporate entities rather than opt for self-employment when they perceive job situations that entail job security to be of the highest premium.

Though the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances can be assumed ( $F = 7.125$ ;  $p = .008$ ), the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences is not significant ( $t = 1.294$ ;  $p = .196$ ). This implies that students will consider formal employment to be of significant importance when they desire jobs whose designs enable the continuous and long-term service of employees. However, when they desire jobs whose designs enable employee flexible work life, the students would rather opt for self-employment. But, when they desire jobs whose designs include a good salary, the students give equal importance to both government or corporate employment and self-employment. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = 1.046$ ;  $p = .307$ ), and as such, the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences is not significant ( $t = 0.454$ ;  $p = .650$ ). This may be due to the students' individual psychological belief that financial reward for being self-employed and those received when employed by government institutions or corporate entities at the post-first degree does not differ all that much.

For the job value factors characterized by the "attractive psychological motivation" job design, students will likely prefer self-employment rather than seek employment in government institutions or corporate entities when they perceive job situations which



provide employees lots of autonomy, and empower employees to make independent decisions to be of the highest premium. The results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances can be assumed for job situations which empower employees to make independent decisions ( $F = 4.253$ ;  $p = .039$ ), and the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences for this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = -3.709$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Though for job situations which provide employees a lot of autonomy, the results from the Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 4) showed that equal variances cannot be assumed ( $F = 1.122$ ;  $p = .290$ ), but the difference in the premium ratings between the two employment preferences for this job value factor is highly significant ( $t = -3.211$ ;  $p = .001$ ). This implies that students will consider self-employment to be of significant importance since the job designs enable autonomy and entail minimal supervision, and which thereby provide space to showcase their acquired competences.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the job orientation preferences of Ghanaian university students, as well as any differences that exist between their values, gender, and employment aspirations. For these future job seekers, job value factors characterized by an attractive economic motivation package job design (job security and good salary) mattered most, having been ranked highly by the students, which corresponds to the case of students from Germany in a study by Wust and Simic (2017). This finding suggests that these students place considerable emphasis on social status, image, and financial success, which is also consistent with the finding that Africans place a high level of preference on job security (Halman & Müller, 2006). On the other hand, students putting less premium on job value factors characterized by an attractive psychological motivation package job design (autonomy and independence) could possibly be as a result of the high uncertainty avoidance culture of the Ghanaian setting. Being self-employed can usually mean a person has considerable independence and autonomy, but is ranked low because students seem threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (as may be the case in creating and starting a new business). As start-ups easily embrace innovation, students being risk averse may explain why many did not place a higher value on autonomy and independence. Additionally, it could also mean because being aware of their lack of experience, they are willing to understudy and learn from experienced employees, and a possible reason they did not rank working independently and autonomy that highly. Students' preferred to be self-employed in order to benefit from being able to perform a variety of tasks, creativity as well as exacting interest and excitement is on the right path in that, this form of employment can likely offer them the opportunity of designing jobs with these features since, as self-employed, they will be in charge of all activities, especially at the existence and survival stages.

Worthy too of mention is that autonomy and independence were highly valued by those students aspiring to become self-employed, features that could enable them to properly design jobs with features they consider to be most relevant. Some job values characterized by the employee-job fit (excitement, interest, and self-importance) job design were considered important, but not as much as job security and good pay. It is possible that the current state of the Ghanaian economy confirms the assertions that the students' preferences could have been prioritized due to social and economic factors (Ismail et al., 2019). The ranking of these values could be explained within the problematic rewards

hypothesis, which asserts that people will place a higher value on job attributes they do not currently have (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013). This is because, in the Ghanaian context, the perception of job insecurity is high, a situation which is viewed by Ismail et al. (2019) as having the tendency to influence peoples' values. Findings from the current study mirror that of Lim and Soon (2006) in Malaysia, who found that factors such as long-term career advancement, job security, working environment, and salary were highly valued by students. Opportunities for promotion were also preferred, and which concurred with the studies of Demel et al. (2019), Iacovou et al. (2004), and also Lim and Soon (2006). This is not surprising, however, because promotion generally comes not only with increased responsibilities, but also with increased benefits in terms of more salary, prestige, and status.

With the exception of autonomy, which was highly preferred by the male students, the female participants notably placed a higher preference on all other job features. This, however, differs from other studies, such as by Lechner et al. (2018) and Tolbert and Moen (1998), in that job values tend to be gender-based on some dimensions, but not all. Specifically, the current study found that convenient working hours, good salary, and job security; all attractive economic motivation job design factors, were valued highly by the female participant students, which confirms the findings of Sortheix et al. (2015). This does, however, differ from the results reported by Johnson and Mortimer (2011) where no significant gender differences were found for the same job values. Furthermore, the findings contradict both Lowe (2007) and Machung's (1989) findings, where high income and career prospects were valued more by males. Although attitudes are slowly changing, women in Ghanaian society still bear the greatest share of household and familial care responsibilities, hence their desire for greater flexibility in working hours is not considered out of place. One possible explanation for females desiring greater job security could be due to the need for income stability in order to support both themselves and their spouses. These findings could be attributed to the uniqueness of the Ghanaian context and the educational attainment of the respondents.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study provide some useful insights into job features that meet the future employment aspirations of university students in Ghana. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that, from the Ghanaian perspective, potential job applicants will be attracted to organizations that are able to provide them with job features such as job security and good pay. Also, jobs that can provide convenience, encourage creativity, self-importance, and offer interest are more likely to be considered as attractive. However, jobs that offer attractive psychological motivation (independence and autonomy) are considered to rarely matter unless the job-seeker has entrepreneurial aspirations. By implication, employers should take heed to focus on the job features that are considered important, and less so on those seen as offering less important values. In this way, the general employment performance problems related to poor motivation in the Ghanaian labor market could start to be resolved.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study, being cross-sectional in design, does not show causal relationship but still serves the purpose of explaining the values of the participants. However, the relevance of the values to specific job behaviors was not investigated; therefore, future research could

investigate the impact of job values on specific work-related behaviors. Obviously, since many researchers believe that values can change and be reorganized due to societal, cultural, and life experiences, future studies could employ a longitudinal approach in tracking any changes in the values of students after they have started work.

## DECLARATIONS

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