

**“THE CATALYSTS OF CHOICE”: FACTORS INFLUENCING IN THE CHOICE OF
SPECIALIZATION AREAS BY MANAGEMENT UNDERGRADUATES IN
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA**

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Several studies have suggested that to enhance the quality of management degree programs for increased employability, the decisions and perceptions of students regarding specialization areas must be studied. Accordingly, this study was conducted within the Faculty of Management, University of Peradeniya to pursue two objectives: to explore the contextual factors affecting the selection of specialization and to classify such contextual factors. Employing a qualitative interpretive methodology, specifically adopting a case study strategy, the investigation employed Thematic Analysis on data derived from semi-structured interviews with 24 students in their second and third years, representing diverse ethnic and gender demographics. The study found three major arenas, the self, the people, and the information, as the influencing factors in choosing specialization areas. First, students' self-image of who they are, self-motivation of what is driving them, self-management of their working style, and social self of whether they are collectivist or individualist have been the most crucial factors. Second, close relations have been influencing at a minimal level, whereas both the academic community and industrial community influence highly. Finally, influences from the information about specialization areas have been short-term oriented, whereas influences from the information about job prospects have been long-term oriented. This study highlights key factors shaping specialization choices, aiding informed decisions, and minimizing undue influences. It advocates for better awareness among undergraduates, encourages early exposure in secondary schools, and suggests universities enhance outreach efforts.

Keywords: *Choice of career, choice of specialization, faculties of management, management education, management undergraduate*