

Utilizing the social cognitive career theory in understanding students' choice in selecting auditing as a career: evidence from Ghana

Auditing as a
career

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Abstract

Purpose – The study uses social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to explore the driving and restraining factors that students consider in selecting auditing as a career.

Design/methodology/approach – Considering the aim of this study, a qualitative research was preferred with the objective of gathering in-depth and enriched empirical data; hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventy-five fourth-year undergraduate accounting students of six top-ranked universities in Ghana that offer accounting programmes.

Findings – The findings of the current study unearth the constructs of the SCCT that students' decision to consider a career in audit is driven by outcome expectations (high earnings/monetary incentives and social prestige associated with the job), as well as self-efficacy belief (possession of ethical values). Further, the study finds that self-efficacy beliefs (job stress and accounting stereotype) were the factors restraining students from considering auditing as a career. The results finally show that the students who would choose auditing as a career in future are in one way or the other, preparing for the achievement of their goals.

Research limitations/implications – The SCCT framework utilized focuses on the three main constructs: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals. There are a number of related factors that may influence students' career choice decisions. These may include personal characteristics and contextual influences; a change of the theoretical framework may help discover other important personal and contextual factors that this current study could not unearth.

Practical implications – The study indicates, on the contrary, that students have negative perceptions about auditing as a career option; they consider the career as stressful, tedious and monotonous. These misconceptions make it less likely for a student to pursue auditing as a career. Educators can aid students in their decision to pursue a study in accounting and become auditors by displaying and reinforcing the positive outcomes that come with the position of an auditor.

Originality/value – The findings of this study add to the existing literature by delving deeper into the self-selection factors that influence a student's desire to become an auditor. Furthermore, the current research is exceptional in that it applies the SCCT to the aim of becoming an auditor. Although other research studies have looked into factors that may influence a student's decision to pursue a profession as an accountant, these studies have mostly been quantitative, limiting the students' ability to explain why those factors encourage or dissuade them.

Keywords Enabling, Restraining, Career, Auditing, Accounting students, Social cognitive career theory

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the literature on accounting education has concentrated considerably on the factors that may affect students in choosing an accounting subject

as their major (Jackling *et al.*, 2012; Bekoe *et al.*, 2018; Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020) and factors that influence accounting students to pursue a career in accounting (Said *et al.*, 2004; Law, 2010; Owusu *et al.*, 2018a, b). Building on previous studies, the main purpose of this research paper is to explore the enabling and constraining factors that may influence students to pursue a career in accounting, with particular emphasis on auditing.

Exploration of the audit profession and the factors that may influence undergraduate students to pursue careers primarily in emerging-market countries, as opposed to more developed countries, is essential as investors increasingly look to these markets to diversify their investment portfolios (Francis *et al.*, 2013). Although the audit profession has been criticized by Bhaskar and Flower (2019) for the fact that the auditing standards of the Big Four are still of poor quality and, most frequently, the independence of auditors is compromised by conflicts of interest. The career still remains attractive to students due to factors such as incentives, professional training, professional recognition, social values, work environment and job market (Ramdani *et al.*, 2019). To this end, a career in audit is now well established as an elite professional occupation in most parts of the world, and most of this status has been achieved through an association of educational qualifications (Djatej *et al.*, 2015). Auditing is equally important because a company's specific information may be misleading in the absence of auditing. This would result, on the one hand, in the poor management of a firm's limited resources. On the other hand, misleading information would misinform shareholders in their investment decisions, leading to a misallocation of resources to the economy (Baiman and Rajan, 2002).

Bedi *et al.* (2019) point out that auditing lends credence to management disclosures that, in turn, add value to the organization. For example, according to a survey conducted by Global Upside (2014, p. 1) in the USA, the number of young people studying accounting in colleges is small, and once they graduate, they go on to pursue other careers outside of accounting. This crisis is not unique to the USA, as Chen (2012) also observes that China has a considerable shortage of qualified accountants. Similarly, according to a 2007 survey conducted by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), Africa is one of the most challenged continents to meet the rising demand for qualified accountants. Van Zyl and de Villiers (2011) discovered, for example, that in South Africa, the demand for qualified accountants to pursue careers in the auditing sector and financial management outnumbers the supply. Furthermore, while the demand for qualified accountants in Botswana was estimated to be 3,000 by the end of 2009, only 20% of the demand could be met by the number of professional accountants available, 67% of whom were expatriates (Mbekomize, 2015).

The Observance of Standards and Codes, Accounting and Auditing's (ROSC, 2014) study in Ghana showed that while the number of qualified accountants increased by around 254% from 2004 to 2014 (from 1,089 in 2004 to 3,851 in 2014), the estimated demand for qualified accountants is well above the level of about 8,000. As a result, despite an enormous increase in the supply of qualified accountants in Ghana, the demand for qualified accountants in various sectors of the economy far outstrips the available supply (ROSC, 2014).

In order to meet the country's growing demand for qualified accountants, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ghana (ICAG) established a training school for students interested in chartered accounting certification (Owusu *et al.*, 2018a, b). The accountancy profession in Ghana has always had a good reputation, which has led to users' respect for the profession (ROSC, 2014), until the recent collapse of some major financial institutions in the country, which forced the national accounting body (ICAG) to reprimand some of its members who were serving as external auditors for their roles in the scandal, which has reawakened the profession's reputation. Regardless of the scandals, the importance of auditors cannot be

overemphasized as they play a critical and growing role in ensuring a firm's financial position is truly and fairly represented (Holt *et al.*, 2017). In addition, recruiting high-quality employees who are a good fit for jobs remains a persistent challenge for the auditing profession (Dalton *et al.*, 2014; Holt *et al.*, 2017). These insights shed light on the context in which role and tasks are carried out, and they may boost educators' appreciation of soft skill development as part of their teaching pedagogy in order to mould students' minds as they consider pursuing a career in accounting related fields.

A review of previous studies reveals that extensive research has been conducted on factors that influence the choice of career in accounting in many different contexts (Mauldin *et al.*, 2000; Jackling and Calero, 2006; Ohiwerei and Nwosu, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2017; Holt *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017; Owusu *et al.*, 2018a). While these prior studies were effective in identifying influential factors, they were largely inconclusive about whether intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors or influence of third parties are dominant in accounting career choice. For instance, Ohiwerei and Nwosu (2009) conducted a study in Nigeria and identified the influence of teachers as the most important factor affecting students' choice of career in accounting. In support, a study carried out in the USA by Mauldin *et al.* (2000) also identified the influence of third parties such as instructors' to be the most significant factor that influences students' choice of career in accounting. On the contrary, Strasser *et al.* (2002) found that an intrinsic factor such as the personal interest of students is a major driver of their choice of career in accounting. In support of the findings of Strasser *et al.* (2002), Umar (2014) also found that a genuine interest in the field is one of the essential factors influencing the students' choice of career.

Moreover, the majority of these prior research studies relied on various statistical methods to predict students' choice of career choice (Mauldin *et al.*, 2000; Umar, 2014; Owusu *et al.*, 2018a; Bekoe *et al.*, 2018; Ng *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017). Studies based on mathematical philosophy do not allow participants an opportunity to describe their perceptions, and further give reason for their position of the matter under investigation (Simpson *et al.*, 2020; Tetteh *et al.*, 2021a, b). The phenomenon of students' career selection and the factors affecting it is not a purely positive phenomenon, and it is argued, that by utilizing a formal theoretical framework and employing a qualitative approach, valid conclusions can be drawn accordingly (Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020). Unlike many past studies that relied predominantly on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and theory of planned behaviour (TPB), this study uses the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to explain the dominant factors associated with students' decision to pursue auditing as a career. As research into accounting as a major and career choice continues to develop, there is a need for accounting education to move from a mathematical robotism to qualitative research that is grounded in theory (Apostolou *et al.*, 2013).

In particular, the aims of this paper are twofold. First, it strives to explore the dominant factors associated with students' decision to pursue auditing as a career. Earlier studies (see, e.g. Law, 2010; Papageorgiou *et al.*, 2014; Plant *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017; Hatane *et al.*, 2021) argue that the context in studying and pursuing accounting related career is distinct across emerging economies. Papageorgiou *et al.* (2014) add that even though contexts differ, notions of the changes in incentives or rewards associated with different career streams persist, and this influences accounting career choice of students. Individual differences, according to Hatane *et al.* (2021), play a significant effect in deciding the choice of a desirable employment. Based on the aforementioned assertions, we argue that accounting students are more likely to be influenced by both self-efficacy beliefs and outcomes expectations to consider pursuing a career in the profession of accounting.

The second objective of the paper is to explore the methods and techniques that accounting students are using to exercise their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in order to pursue a career in auditing in future. In Ghana, an auditor must be a professional

accountant and a full member of the ICAG. To become a full member, there are several pathways of study and experiences required. Hence, there is a need to explore and share with the rest of the emerging economies the efforts being made by undergraduate accounting students in Ghana to pursue a career in audit as we learn from each other and to think about ways in which soft skill requirements for early-career in auditing can be to contextualize (Plant *et al.*, 2017).

This current study contributes to the existing literature by reasoning on the trajectory of inductivist to address the aforementioned gaps. This is crucial for the Ghanaian society and the accounting profession which is witnessing an increasing number of students enrolling in accounting related programmes to know what is informing students' choice in making that decision (ROSC, 2014). For instance, prior research works in the accounting career path in Africa have revealed that discussions about career pathways have gained momentum in the field of career development to aid young people in mapping out their career choices in order to achieve meaningful and productive futures (Papageorgiou *et al.*, 2014; Plant *et al.*, 2017; Owusu *et al.*, 2018a). This study adds to the scholarly discussion about the accounting profession's future concerns and factors influencing students to consider career in audit in an emerging economy. It also gives the accounting regulatory body, professional accounting bodies, educators and other stakeholders an idea to look at the auditing job requirements and improve the negative image of accounting students for the profession's benefit in Ghana and other emerging economies experiencing similar contextual factors. Theoretically, the current study's contributions are to build on the body of research utilizing the SCCT research model to help explain a student's motivation to pursue a career choice of becoming an auditor.

1.1 Educational and socio-economic context of Ghana

Ghana is an interesting research context for a variety of reasons, including the internationalization of education, transnational education in developing countries, regional competition and globalization (Global Competitiveness Report, 2019). In addition, due to the country's abundant financial resources and unique socio-political structure, it cannot be classified as a less developed country, particularly when compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Simpson *et al.*, 2020). Ghana's fast economic growth in recent decades has created a situation in which demand for qualified accountants far exceeds supply of qualified Ghanaians, necessitating the need for additional qualified accountants (ROSC, 2014).

Moreover, the majority of tertiary institutions offering a degree in accounting also offer courses to students interested in sitting for professional accounting certification. This is because the basic educational prerequisite to become a student of ICAG is a high school certificate examination, termed in Ghana as the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (Owusu *et al.*, 2018a). In order to become a certified accountant, after the student has successfully passed the professional exams, the student must enrol as a member of the ICAG and be granted a professional accountant certification after at least three years of practice in the area. This suggests that, from a social learning perspective, this approach to pursuing a career in accounting, particularly auditing, is based on ongoing collaboration and communication between educators, employers and the professional body in order to develop first and foremost, work-ready graduates and second, competent audit practitioners.

For instance, most firms including the Big 4 audit firms hire accounting graduates from Ghanaian tertiary institutions that provide undergraduate and postgraduate academic degrees in accounting or, more precisely, internal auditing (ROSC, 2014). Graduate unemployment, on the other hand, has become one of Ghana's most significant issues in the last decade (Baah-Boateng, 2015). Lack of job opportunities has affected young people more than any other group in Ghana's economy during the present economic and financial crisis (Baah-Boateng, 2015; World Bank, 2020). Ghana's youth employment dilemma, according to the World Bank (2020), is broad and necessitates a comprehensive, intentional

and consistent response. On the other hand, the criticism of unemployed graduates in Ghana has taken a neoliberal turn, with graduate students being seen as lazy, uninterested in entrepreneurship and unable to help themselves (World Bank, 2020). The humanities and liberal arts have been accused multiple times for graduates' lack of employability, as many believe they do not provide graduates with "practical" employment skills. Could it be for this reason that students in Ghana are enrolling in accounting programmes in tertiary institutions, with the hope to use their soft skills in accounting to become entrepreneurs if they are unable to find gainful jobs in the corporate world?

Although some existing studies in the context have looked into the factors that influence students' decision to pursue a career in accounting (see e.g. Owusu *et al.*, 2018a; Mbawuni and Nimako, 2015), the findings do not provide a comprehensive understanding of why those factors motivate or demotivate them to pursue a career in auditing. These are key concerns that must be addressed in the Ghanaian environment and in the accounting profession.

The rest of the paper is organized accordingly. The following section analyses both the theoretical and empirical literature on the subject with a view to developing research frameworks on driving and retaining factors. Section three presents and justifies methods and approaches for the research. Section four presents and discusses the findings. The conclusions, contributions and directions for future research are discussed in section five.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical perspective

Numerous factors that explain students' career choices in a variety of professions have been studied in the literature using a range of theories, including the TRA, TPB and SCCT. The TRA forecasts the attitude of an individual towards an action and the expectations of such an action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977). On the other hand, the TPB expands the TRA to include perceived control as a factor influencing behaviour (Porter and Woolley, 2014). However, there are a number of limitations to both the TRA and the TPB, which serve as a foundation for future research. For example, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) conclude that the TRA does not account for the fact that specific conditions that allow persons to do a behaviour are not always available to them. Because the TRA focuses on individual decisions, it is restricted in its ability to predict behaviours that require access to certain opportunities, abilities, conditions and/or resources. Similarly, regardless of intent, the TPB assumes that the person has acquired the opportunities and resources necessary to be successful in performing the desired behaviour. It ignores other factors that influence behavioural intention and motivation, such as fear, threat, mood or previous experience (Alam and Sayuti, 2011). The SCCT aims at understanding career interest, career choices and advancement towards career goals. This study employs the SCCT because it extends the other psychological theories to further explain the methods with which individuals exercise their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations towards developing their career.

SCCT, as defined by Wang *et al.* (2007), holds that a person's self-efficacy beliefs and career expectations influence his or her career choices and goals. SCCT theory has been used frequently in the past literature to examine career choices and career development. The major constructs that underpin SCCT are self-efficacy, outcome expectation and personal goals (Flores *et al.*, 2010; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017). Self-efficacy talks about an individual's ability to have confidence in a particular field due to certain exposure such as the environment, training and personal interest. It is observed that one's self-efficacy can play a vital role in how one approaches a goal, tasks and challenges. Moreover, a positive outcome expectation of an individual regarding a particular career will enable him or her to undertake a particular course due to its positive or favourable consequences or results of such course (Mandzik, 2011). Lastly, personal goals refer to the determination of an individual to participate in a

certain task or to reach a certain future result (Ng *et al.*, 2017). The theory's goal construct explains how a person exercises his or her self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations towards pursuing a career in future, which is one of the aims of this current study.

2.2 Driving and restraining factors students consider in the selection of audit as a career

Prior research has shown that career choice in accounting-related jobs is influenced by a variety of values that are broadly defined as intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Jackling and Calero, 2006; Jackling and Keneley, 2009; Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020). The following section offers a detailed overview of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors found in previous research that influence the actions of the students in the selection of accounting-related profession. It should be noted that these factors influencing career choice in accounting are drawn from the SCCT. For instance, Schoenfeld (2017), used the SCCT model as a useful tool to explain how accounting students' career interests, goals, and intentions are related to their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. The results showed that the goal to become a certified public accountant was influenced by self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The succeeding subsections present and discuss the constructs of the SCCT.

2.2.1 Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a set of beliefs and thoughts about one's ability to perform at a desired level. According to Schoenfeld (2017), the likelihood of engaging in any activity is influenced in part by one's conviction in one's ability to achieve a desired degree of performance. Self-efficacy governs human behaviour, and it is a powerful predictor of the path of action one will take, the amount of effort one will put forth in achieving a goal, and the tenacity one will show when faced with setbacks or challenges (Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020).

Intrinsic factors are aligned to self-efficacy beliefs (Jackling and Keneley, 2009; Law, 2010; Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020). Self-efficacy beliefs are not influenced by external factors such as pressures, rewards or enforcement. Prior studies have discovered that personal interest in accounting, numerical inability and the perception that a career in accounting is tiresome and boring are the key intrinsic factors that influence students' career choices in accounting-related professions (Jackling and Keneley, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2017; Awadallah and Elgharbawy, 2020). For example, a study by Said *et al.* (2004) shows that interest in the accounting profession is one of the factors driving students' career choices in pursuing an accounting-related profession. In addition, the McDowall and Jackling (2010) study shows that students who find accounting fascinating and would like to pursue accounting-related jobs have a positive attitude towards the accounting profession. The authors further clarify that if students are interested in a field, they are likely to be successful because interest in the field will give rise to a high degree of motivation. On the other hand, stereotype is a factor that discourages individuals to take up a career in an accounting-related profession (Wells, 2017; Smith, 2014). For example, the study of Bryman and Bell (2015) discovered that most students see accounting-related professions as boring. This is consistent with the Wells (2015) research, which describes how students see the accounting profession as tedious and boring.

Job stress has also been perceived as a trigger of job dissatisfaction among auditors (Ivancevich and Matteson, 2002). Sanders *et al.* (2009) describe auditing as a high-stress profession. Stress may be caused by the pressure to excel under serious budget and time constraints. Auditing can often require lengthy business trips and sometimes changing locations of workplace (Yan and Xie, 2016). For example, Germanou *et al.* (2009) observed that students feel that the accounting profession is stressful and that accountants frequently work under pressure to meet deadlines.

Numerical inability is another restraining factor, and this has to do with the inability of a person to perceive, process and calculate numbers (Uyar *et al.*, 2011). Uyar *et al.* (2011) argue that computational skills could affect the future career of learners in accounting and auditing. Certain accounting students perceive careers that involve handling numbers more desirable

than other students. Learners with computational deficiencies regard accounting as a less desirable career (Allen, 2004). In addition, the findings of the study by Jackling and Calero (2006) indicate that students are less likely to be involved in a profession such as accounting when they conclude that accounting requires a good number of skills.

2.2.2 Outcome expectations. Individuals are motivated to achieve their goals by their expectations of the outcome. Rather than self-efficacy asking the question “Will I be able to achieve this?”, “What will happen or be the outcome if I do this?” is what outcome beliefs are concerned with (Gore and Leuwerke, 2000). This means that students will be more interested in a career choice, and this interest will lead to the establishment intended career goal if they expect positive outcomes.

Extrinsic factors are anticipated outcomes and incentives that students believe will result from pursuing a career in accounting (Jackling and Keneley, 2009). These factors come from the outside of the individual. This means that a student may be extrinsically inspired to pursue a career because of the expected rewards, even if he dislikes the task. Prior research suggests that the extrinsic factors that affect students in their careers in accounting are mainly high salary scale job prospects (Jackling and Keneley, 2009; Korkki, 2010; Awadallah and Elgharrawy, 2020). Other authors (e.g. Baiman and Rajan, 2002; IFAC, 2006) have recognized auditing as a respectable profession. Any individual who pursues a career in auditing is supposed to demonstrate personal qualities such as reliability, responsibility, timeliness, courtesy and respect. IFAC (2006) further adds that auditors provide reasonable assurance as to whether a company’s financial statements are free from material misstatement due to error or fraud.

Ethical value is another attribute that comes with a career in audit. Ethics is a set of moral principles that govern the profession. International bodies and reports (IFAC Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2006; Cadbury Committee Report, 1992; The Greenbury Committee Report, 1995; The Hampel Committee Report, 1998; The Smith Report, 2003) have been issued to guide the accounting profession against unethical conduct. Students believe that the most important factor is good ethical principles and the knowledge of a client’s work environment, followed by personal intellect, motivation and leadership skills (Zinko *et al.*, 2012; Rodgers and Al Fayi, 2019).

2.2.3 Career goals. Within the SCCT, goals are broadly defined to include plans, aspirations or intentions. Goals are the determination to engage in a particular activity (Ng *et al.*, 2017). The theory’s goal construct as mentioned earlier also explains how a person exercises his or her self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in order to pursue a career in future, which is one of the aims of this current study. In this study, career path and career choice could be used interchangeably to represent a goal. An accounting student’s career path refers to the career choice he or she makes after graduation. Accounting students can pursue careers in audit, tax, management accounting, financial accounting, finance and other fields. Accounting students commonly pursue audit and tax careers, according to Dalton *et al.* (2014). This means that defining a clear aim to become an auditor can assist the student in organizing and directing their behaviour in a consistent manner, increasing the likelihood of achieving desired goals.

According to Ng *et al.* (2017), students are able to plan their career goal if they have better career exposure. In this study, career exposure refers to students’ exposure to information related to career. Ng *et al.* (2017) add that professional accounting bodies are the institutions that mostly expose accounting students to an accounting-related career. Said *et al.* (2004) argue that it is important for students to be exposed to the nature of the work being carried out by accountants in order to help them choose the type of accounting profession they want to pursue. This suggests that, with greater exposure to career-related information, one can make better choices in their career choices. For instance, previous research has revealed that professional bodies mostly expose students to career choice (Ghani *et al.*, 2008; Hutaibat, 2012;

Ng *et al.*, 2017). Ng *et al.* (2017) found that undergraduate accounting students are more influenced by intrinsic motivation and career exposure in selecting their career paths. Furthermore, Hutaibat (2012) carried out a study to examine the factors influencing students to be interested in pursuing accounting careers. The study found that accounting students prefer public sector accounting as their career choice to management accounting because of a lack of seminars, workshops and tutorials organized by their universities. The theoretical framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

The framework postulates that career choice in audit results from self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. The building blocks in this figure also imply that learning experiences of a student could influence the student's confidence in his/her ability to become an auditor (self-efficacy). Similarly, learning experiences of a student could also influence the outcome expected if the student becomes an auditor (outcome expectations). The figure further postulates that higher self-efficacy could also lead to higher/lower outcome expectations. In addition, Figure 1 implicates that the stronger the self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations students develop, the more likely they will develop interest and finally pursue and remain committed to the achievement of a career goal in audit. Finally, the figure shows that, it is likely a student with higher self-efficacy or outcome expectation will end up pursuing a career in audit without necessarily having interest in the profession.

As pointed out earlier, previous research in the area has looked into the factors that influence students' decision to pursue a career in accounting (see e.g. Owusu *et al.*, 2018a; Mbawuni and Nimako, 2015; Ng *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017); however, these studies utilized the quantitative approach which does not provide a comprehensive understanding of why those factors motivate or demotivate students to pursue a career in accounting. Therefore, building upon the research from the career literature, this study, like other studies, uses the constructs of the SCCT but employs a qualitative approach to explore the factors influencing students to consider a career in audit in an emerging economy, particularly, Ghana to further our understanding of why a student would pursue a career as an auditor.

3. Methodology

Qualitative approach was adopted for this study. According to Yilmaz (2013), the qualitative research method is based on open-ended questions that allow respondents to freely express their views and unbiased opinions on a topic or subject matter, whereas the quantitative research method is based on the computation of data using numbers and diagrams. This study sought to "explore" and describe driving and restraining factors that students consider in selecting auditing as a career and the basis of these factors, implying that qualitative research is preferred over quantitative research because quantitative research tends to "explain" causal relationships between variables (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach to understand the factors that students consider when deciding on auditing as a career, as well as the basis for these decisions. In

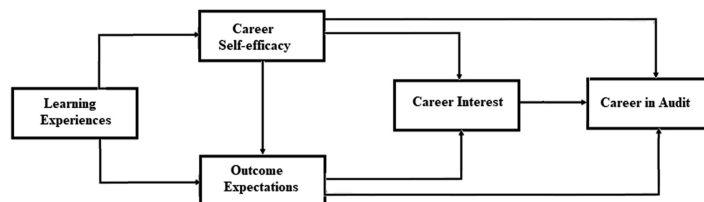


Figure 1.
Theoretical framework

Source(s): Adapted from Schoenfeld *et al.* (2017)

addition, a qualitative approach was used since the study aimed at seeking more in-depth understanding of behaviours, motivations and attitudes of the students (Walsham, 2006). Further, the students' motives were not only needed but why they have these views and how the views could subsequently influence their choices of major career were likewise necessary for this research.

This research was conducted based on the interview with respondents who were final year undergraduate accounting students of six top-ranked universities in Ghana that offer accounting programmes (see Appendix 1 for further information on the university inclusion criteria). The targeted respondents were students in their final year of a four-year degree programme who have not only read auditing and assurance courses for two semesters, but were also ready for immediate entry into the profession. This is because in the 6th and 7th semesters of the 8-semester programme (four years), the students studied audit and internal review and audit and assurance, respectively, so if they did not understand the task of an auditor at all, they might have a fair idea of what it means to pursue a career in the field. Since a qualitative research approach necessitates a data collection method capable of exploring the factors students consider when deciding on audit as a future career, interviews as a data collection method were preferred over administering a questionnaire (Creswell, 2014).

The sample size was not pre-determined at the commencement of the study since qualitative research requires that the researchers cease interviewing once they have acquired enough information, at a point of theoretical saturation (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Rowlands *et al.*, 2016). In-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with seventy-five respondents using the purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique was employed to allow the study to focus on students who have read auditing courses in their respective universities. The researchers resolved that a subjective selection as compared to random selection is more appropriate taking into consideration the exploratory nature of the study, an idea which is supported by Yilmaz (2013). Besides, the purposive sampling method was used to select students who can adequately provide useful information to aid the research (DeVaney *et al.*, 2018).

By interviewing the 75th person, the theoretical saturation point was reached, the point where much information was gathered to proceed with the research without conducting anymore interviews. On the average, interviews took between 28 and 60 min. Depending on the agreement with the participants, the interviews were recorded through a combination of tape-recording and note-taking and subsequently transcribed after each session as soon as possible.

As the interviews were conducted one after another, the researchers took note of key points that were mentioned by the interviewees. After all the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed after the researchers listened to the recordings several times for clear understanding. During the transcribing process of the data, key focus was paid on information that was essential to answering the research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Tetteh *et al.*, 2021a, b). In line with the qualitative approach, data were analysed using thematic techniques by pulling the central themes from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Creswell, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Audio tape details were transcribed. We read through the transcribed interviews and compared them with the audio recordings to determine similarities. We then generated codes that may be relevant to answering the research objectives/questions (see Appendix 3 for the interview guide) (Miles *et al.*, 2014). After identifying the codes, we began to categorize the codes into corresponding themes. This process first produced two driving and restraining factors (themes) which are in line with the SCCT constructs namely self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The analysis also revealed career pathway as the third theme which is also consistent with the goal construct of the theory underpinning the study. In addition, we

reviewed the themes to determine whether the research objectives were addressed (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Finally, we merged the analytical narrative and data extracts, and contextualized the analysis in relation to the SCCT and related empirics.

Qualitative research reports must provide the reader with sufficient quotations from participants (DeVaney *et al.*, 2018), thus direct quotations depicting the participants' depth of feelings, experiences, thoughts about what motivates or demotivates them to consider a career in audit, as well as steps taken to achieve the career goal were presented in the findings as proffered by Yilmaz (2013), Tetteh *et al.* (2021a, b). The reason for including verbatim quotations from participants is to enable the reader to better understand the context of responses and to gain clarity on the researchers' interpretation of the data (DeVaney *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, since the study did not employ any specific instruments for measurement; it is vital for readers to understand how the researchers ensured that their findings are reliable and credible. In order to achieve reliability, we devoted extra attention to the data gathering and analysis process. The degree to which the data gathering method or analysis procedure produces consistent conclusions represents the study's reliability (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). In contrast to quantitative research, where reliability and validity are the two most essential indicators used to assess the quality of a study, qualitative research is assessed based on its trustworthiness (reliable and credible) (Bryman and Bell, 2015). For example, according to Yin (2015), the goal of reliability in qualitative research is to ensure that the findings of one study is generalized (resulting in the same conclusion) if undertaken by different researchers under similar conditions. To further achieve credibility, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed as a means of avoiding misunderstandings or misinterpretations of information provided by the interviewees (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The emergent themes were then used to structure the research findings presented in the next section.

4. Findings and discussions

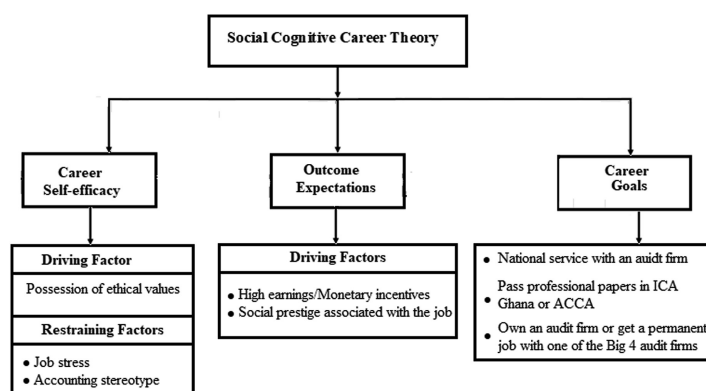
4.1 Demographics of respondent

The results of the interview showed that 20 of the respondents were from the University of Professional Studies, Accra, 15 from the University of Ghana and 13 from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. It was also noticed that 12 of the respondents were from the University of Education Winneba, 10 from the University of Cape Coast and the remaining 5 from Kumasi Technical University. In total, 42 of the 75 interviewees are male and 33 are female.

To address the objectives of the study, three broad themes emerged during the analysis of the data. This section presents the findings and discussion in relation to these three key themes: (1) driving factors influencing students' selection of career in audit, (2) restraining factors influencing students' selection of career in audit and (3) future plans of students towards the selection of career in audit. In addition, the results of the study are presented and interpreted in light of the three constructs of the SCCT that suggests that an individual's intention to pursue a career goal is collectively shaped by either self-efficacy or outcome expectations or both as shown in Figure 2.

4.2 Driving factors influencing students' selection of the audit profession

This section discusses in detail the driving factors that encourage students to pursue the auditing profession. In this study, the use of a well-established SCCT theoretical framework on career choice was applied to the decision to become an auditor. The framework postulates that career intentions result from self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and goals (Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, two of the driving factors influencing students to



Source(s): Authors' Own Construct

Figure 2. Influential factors on career in audit and audit career goals

consider selecting a career in audit manifested from the outcome expectations, while one factor emerged from the self-efficacy construct of the theory. The results revealed that outcome expectation (high earnings, monetary incentives and social prestige associated with the profession) and self-efficacy (possession of ethical values) are the factors that will motivate students in the selected universities to achieve select a career in audit. The three succeeding subsections present and discuss the findings on the outcome expectation construct.

4.2.1 *High earnings and monetary incentives.* Many students felt that studying auditing would result in taking up leadership roles, and that audit jobs would make it possible for them to have financially secure careers. On this theme, some respondents hinted that

I think audit is a great profession that can get me a lot of money, there is a need for auditors that means that there is a ready market for your services and it is a respectable job. (RF 18)

On this same theme, another respondent explained that

The profession for me I think there is much money involved. I am related to two people, one an uncle and the other my father's friend and from the way they talk and behave I think there is money in it because I knew how they started. (RM 31).

It was also revealed by one of the students that

The salary is very necessary. I read about the four big audit firms and their graduate recruitment of which they earn about GHS1,500 [USD 260] monthly. It is a really good start for me so I will pursue a career in audit no matter how stressful the job. (RM 36)

The perceived high level of income tends to be a motivating factor for students to pursue auditing as a career. For instance, the respondents confirmed that there is money in pursuing a carrier in auditing; that is why most auditors are rich. They added that auditing had a ready market in Ghana, and since it is mandatory by law, auditors have a steady flow of income and are also very rich. The findings also revealed that auditors make a lot of money due to the high charges, and this makes it a well-paying job. The findings suggest that money was the most common and very first reason why these students would ever want to pursue auditing as a career. The position of the respondents confirms [Zinko et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Schoenfeld et al.'s \(2017\)](#) position that auditing provides a financially secure career. The findings are also in agreement with the assertion that high earnings and monetary incentives are perceived to be the best thing about auditing. Also, the findings regarding the acceptance of the profession

despite the demand of the job implies that the students have come to accept that for highest paying jobs, there should usually be a tradeoff between the high salary and job satisfaction (Korkki, 2010). In addition to the confirmation of empirical studies, the findings confirm the assumptions of the SCCT that an individual who assumes that positive outcomes will result from the performance of a particular behaviour will most likely have a positive attitude towards that behaviour (Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017; Ng *et al.*, 2017). This suggests that the student who believes that auditing as a career will earn them high salary are most likely have a positive attitude towards the profession.

4.2.2 Auditing as a respectable profession. The data gathered revealed that auditing is a respectable profession, and people in the profession have good standing with society, which explains the outcome expectation construct of the SCCT. The respondents saw auditors to provide reasonable assurance as to whether a company's financial statements are free from material misstatement due to error or fraud. It also came to light that the auditor is perceived as someone of high social and moral standing because of what his work entails and expects him to do. Also, respondents felt inclined to serve as auditors in the future because they considered the job to be a prestigious one which would bring them fame and good standing in their communities. As such, they considered auditors to be well-respected professionals. For instance, one of the respondents hinted that

I think auditors are respected in society and I could recall severally how the auditor in our Church is being given that utmost respect and rapt attention whenever he is about to report on the Church's finance, with regards to this no matter the risk involved I would still want to become an auditor to earn such respect. (RM 14)

Another respondent added,

There is more room for respect since auditors possess more integrity and do not allow people to compromise the system, hence serving as role models to people in society. (RM 35)

Also, one of the students who happens to serve as the Students Representative Council (SRC) auditor of one of the universities stated that

What I admire is the audit. I think the auditor is basically above everyone concerning power, especially what he can seek or request. (RF 40)

According to IFAC (2006), any individual who pursues a career in the field of accounting is supposed to demonstrate personal qualities such as reliability, responsibility, timeliness, courtesy and respect. The inference from the study shows that auditors are seen as part of the elite in society who would not be easily compromised and would probe, critically examine and thoroughly verify information until they are satisfied and then finally give an opinion in the interest of the public to meet the requirement of personal qualities put forwards by IFAC.

It was not surprising to also hear from the accounting students confirming these mandatory attributes to be possessed by the auditor if only they have to occupy a highly respectable position in society. Also, the literature reveals that positive image has several potential ramifications. For instance, earlier study carried out by Zinko *et al.* (2012) also found that auditing provides a financially secure career. They also discovered that the career enhances positive image which leads to obvious professional outcomes such as advancement, pay increase, and strong societal status as well as better home life and happiness. Therefore, it was not shocking to have heard the students wanting to pursue a career in audit to also enjoy all these positive attributes. However, other scholars have contended this assertion because their findings had shown that having a desirable image sometimes allows one to deviate from belief and customs, leading to greater self-reliance and self-efficacy (Zinko *et al.*, 2012). This suggests that the students should consider the trade-off of reputation in the quest of selecting audit as a career in the future.

4.2.3 *Ethical values.* This section reveals how self-efficacy belief such as requirement of exhibiting professional code of conduct plays a role in motivating students to select auditing as a career in the Ghanaian setting. It also shows how important students perceive ethics to be vital and whether it is needed in the auditing profession. Professionals possess ethical values based on the norms and standards of behaviour that those pursuing the profession believe will best help them express their identity and achieve their goals. International bodies and reports have been issued to guide the accounting profession against unethical conduct and to promote proper corporate governance at the workplace. Examples of such a framework and reports are [IFAC Code of Ethics and Conduct \(2006\)](#), [Cadbury Committee Report \(1992\)](#), [The Greenbury Committee Report \(1995\)](#), [The Hampel Committee Report \(1998\)](#) and the most current one which pays much attention to the role of the audit committee which is [The Smith Report \(2003\)](#).

For instance, data gathered from respondents showed that they are being motivated to enter into the profession by the desire to uphold the IFAC ethical code of conduct of the profession such integrity, objectivity, confidentiality, professional competence, and due care and professional behaviour. One respondent was very particular about observing the ethical code of conduct from a religious standpoint that will be the main motive for entering in the auditing profession.

From my religious background, which talks about fairness, peace, and equality so, considering the work the auditors do, it matches hence propels me to pursue the career. (RF 23)

Another respondent claimed that

Auditors want things to be done per the law governing it. They are principled. I know my uncle not to be the principled type until he got a job in an auditing firm. People use to say “when you get used to what you do, you end up being what you do”. (RM 31)

Another respondent emphasized that

I always want the right thing to be done. Deep down me I feel always the right thing must be done and avert that perception that auditors are easy to be manipulated so that I can maintain the prestige, ethical values and respect I have earned since my childhood. (RM 61)

The respondents feel that the auditing profession is a good fit for people who possess ethical and moral values since they are very much needed and would want to correct the perception that auditors are easily manipulated by ensuring that the ethics and proper values are observed by auditors at all times. Although it can be deduced from the responses that the students are likely to be influenced to select a career in audit by both extrinsic and intrinsic ethical values, it was also found that the extrinsic factors rather shape the mindset of the students to develop felt desire (intrinsic factor) to think of selecting a career in audit as a profession in future.

In line with SCCT, the findings confirmed that outcome expectations (extrinsic factors) which are the perceived rewards and image of the profession are likely to influence students to pursue a career in audit. For instance, the accounting students disclosed that they will be driven to pursue a career in audit because of the associated earnings and prestige attached to the profession ([Ng et al., 2017](#)). Similarly, self-efficacy belief (intrinsic factors) such as perceived personal satisfactions expected to be gained from pursuing a career is another driving factor that manifested from the findings. For example, the students want the opportunity to exhibit the inherent ethical values, and they think selecting a career in audit will bring this dream to light. Empirically, the study finding again is in tandem with earlier studies that have found self-interest to influence students' career selection in the field of accounting ([Umar, 2014](#)).

The SCCT framework suggests that outcome expectations are also important determinants of career intentions and goals ([Gore and Leuwerke, 2000](#)). Outcome

expectations are based on the personal beliefs that an individual holds for pursuing a particular career. For students interested in pursuing a career in audit, an important outcome expectation would be the belief that possessing ethical and moral values is a good fit for becoming an auditor. While outcome expectations are cognitive in nature, they shape attitudes and behaviour while serving the purpose of meeting the perceived needs of the person who holds them (Ng *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, they can play a major role in the career goals. This suggests that educators can increase student awareness of the positive tangible outcome expectations revealed in this study such as high earnings, monetary incentives and social prestige associated with the profession to defuse any negative perception accounting students have about the auditing profession.

4.3 Restraining factors in the selection of auditing as a career

This section presents and discusses the disincentives and the reasons why students would not like to enter into the auditing profession. These factors discourage students from pursuing the profession. According to Schoenfeld *et al.* (2017), students report many negative misconceptions about accounting as a career choice, such that it is boring, tedious and monotonous. These misconceptions reduce the likelihood that a student will pursue auditing as a career. The emergent factors can be broadly classified as follows: job stress and accounting stereotype. Both of these factors are manifestations of the self-efficacy (intrinsic factors) belief of the SCCT.

4.3.1 Job stress. This section reveals how job stress plays a role in discouraging students to select auditing as a career in the Ghanaian setting. It also shows how students perceive stress to impede the auditing profession. Many students felt that auditing is a high-stress profession coupled with many challenges as well as increased risk liability and standards overload to keep abreast of. Stress is less intense as they climb up the organization chart, and different factors cause stress at the various position levels or ranks at the workplace. Lower level staff experience the least stress, whereas accountants and managers experience very high levels of stress due to job overloads, time constraints, and personal responsibility for other people's performance at work (Hanson, 2017). Some respondents would only recommend the profession to someone seeking their advice if they knew very well that the person could handle the factors and workload from the job. For instance, one of the respondents hinted that

I worked with an audit firm during my internship, and getting some information with regards to stock needed to conduct our work was stressful, we would have to spend days in office to make sure everything was done by a certain deadline, and at times people come back tired and they have to work on weekends. I do not think I want to work in an audit firm as an audit professional to expose myself to health problems but maybe their financial reporting or tax planning department, yes I will consider it. (RM 74)

Another respondent claimed that

I think that one has to attain a lot of academic qualification before you can become an auditor. It is not a field you can just decide to join without acquiring professional qualification in accounting. The journey is tiring and unbearable. (RF 46)

It was also revealed by one of the students that

There is a lot of things that go into the audit so it is not easy, yes there is a lot of stress attached to it unless you have someone to help you out or a good audit team. (RF 60)

The respondents made it clear that stress was very evident especially in their choice of selecting audit as a career profession due to work overloads. They added that they saw auditors frustrated, easily angered and spending the nights at the office when they had

deadlines to meet with limited time and would only recommend the profession to someone seeking their advice if they knew very well that the person could handle the pressure and workload from the job which confirms the position of [Yan and Xie \(2016\)](#). The study findings also imply that some accounting students would not mind working in the tax planning or consultancy unit or rather provide accountancy service to clients instead of taking the task of an auditor because they perceive career in audit as a job could lead to heart diseases if individuals on the job do not control or find ways to manage and minimize stress. The findings also confirm the assumption of the SCCT that the individual's perceptions of the ease with which the work can be performed affect the career choice decision. This suggests that when the pressure to perform the task of audit is greater and cannot be controlled, the more likely it is that the student will not go in for the career ([Ng et al., 2017](#)).

4.3.2 Accounting stereotype. Stereotypes of the auditing profession may have resulted from any representations of the job description and the auditor ([Wells, 2017](#)). The accounting stereotyping was observed in the interviewed respondents who were of the opinion that the profession was boring, that they would not change the way they did something and that they were one-way. This was the position held by many of the respondents who had their internship with audit firms. Auditing was also seen to be making the company's books straight for the year. One respondent described the audit as

Working with too many figures and doing the same thing continuously which do not involve a lot becomes monotonous. In fact, dealing with mainly accounting figures in excel all the time is a boring career. (RM 63)

Respondent RF18 also emphasized that

During my internship with an audit firm, I did not have the opportunity for innovative thinking. It was merely following rules all the time of which this alone puts me off and would not pursue such a career which does not create room for innovation (RF 18)

Respondent RF15 explains why the accounting stereotype will stay:

Auditing firms do not market themselves, moreover their voice is not heard on issues so I do not think it is something that will change because audit firms do not make noise. Whatever society thinks about them will stay because they do not have a voice for themselves. (RF 15)

Inference from the above findings reveals how respondents believed that auditors had never been allowed to think about new ways of tackling or doing their work. This alone puts them at a standstill and would not pursue a career that does not create room for innovation. Meanwhile, it is found that the media portrayed the accountant as boring according to [Smith \(2014\)](#) in which the author identified twenty-four films portraying the accounting profession, in particular auditing as "nerdy, antisocial," among others. From the observation point of view, students who did not wish to enter the profession were very discouraged from entering the auditing profession because the profession did not allow for learning, growth and was boring. Students want to enter a career that they can love and stay for the rest of their lives without being tagged an accounting police ([Smith, 2014](#)).

4.4 Future plans of students towards selection of career in audit

Within the SCCT, goals are broadly defined to include plans, aspirations or intentions. Goals are the determination to engage in a particular activity ([Ng et al., 2017](#)). Preparation for audit careers requires accounting students to develop a comprehensive understanding of the courses' content to help them develop a variety of expertise and personal values. In order to achieve these objectives, accounting students are expected to participate in a variety of learning activities and to complete a range of professional assessments in ICAG, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), among others, which will test the achievement of

the agreed outcomes. For the majority of students who have been in favour of pursuing auditing as a career in the future, their training takes place through their learning experience at universities. This experience is acquired as a result of combination of academic and professional programmes being mounted by universities, in particular, the University of Ghana and the University of Professional Studies, Accra.

For instance, most of the participants mentioned that accounting was the key to helping them achieve their objectives. All the participants who were in favour of pursuing auditing as a career were talking about working with the big four audit firms in Ghana after graduation. Some of them did industrial attachment with audit firms during their internship. One of the participants described his preparedness as follows:

My Uncle told me I cannot become an auditor without earning a bachelor's degree in accounting that will help me develop the fundamental skills and attributes needed by accounting as an aspiring auditor, so I as a few friends who already sitting for professional papers in accounting to enable me identify the benefits and the challenges that comes with the job. I felt I could manage the challenges in future so I later decided to come to university as a first step to achieving my goal. I had also heard the university blends the classroom work with the professional and I have come to witness it myself. I think I am on the right path because so far, I have equipped myself with some of the technical field experience that will set me up for success (RM 31).

Another respondent also disclosed this:

I know the work of audit requires a lot from we students so I'm building professional ethical values and team working skills. Professional accounting bodies have had seminars and workshops in auditing and other accounting related jobs so I'm now exposed to the career I want to pursue. . .so with hard work, know I will get there one day (RF 19).

Surprisingly, a respondent reported that his goal of working as an auditor began when he was in the third year of a four-year accounting programme because he had had the opportunity to work with an accounting firm and one of the big auditing firms in Ghana, and he intended to do his national service with the same audit firm (see [Appendix 2](#) for further information on national service). This means his goal to become an auditor is rooted although it is possible certain conditions may cause him to have a change of mind in the future. The participant summarized his preparedness as follows:

I decided to intern with accounting firm at the diploma level and with an auditing firm at the degree level, during both internships I was able to get a sense of everything involved in the audit process . . . from understanding a firm environment to evaluating financial reporting risks. In addition, I'm writing the ICAG final part so I think I will get there soon (RM 14)

The future career plans of some of the participants tended to be similar. A few of them plan to work with an audit firm. Some of them had applied to work with the Big four accounting and audit firms or Ghana Audit Service during the course of the data gathering, while the majority planned to do it after being certified as qualified accountants.

I have already applied to KPMG to do my national service and I have been assured of being picked because I am left with two papers in ACCA to qualify. If even I do not get KPMG, I will prefer another accounting firm. I have to take the initiative because I can't allow my future to be wasted if I'm posted to go do unrelated audit work. (RM 09).

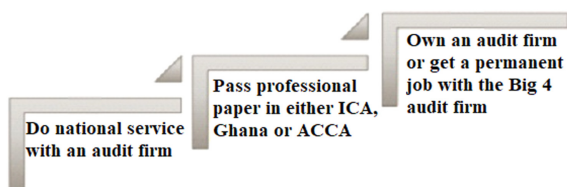
In short, some of the participants have enrolled in the ICAG and ACCA, and others are planning to work with the big four audit firms in Ghana. These are all stepping-stones to achieving their bigger goals in the long run. Nearly, all participants in support of the profession have collectively anticipated their future career in a common pattern. The pursuit begins with short-term plans to bigger ones in the long term, as shown in [Figure 3](#).

The findings on this then shows that the respondents who are in favour of selecting auditing as a career choice are one way or the other preparing towards the achievement of their goals. For instance, the study revealed that the students were aware that acquiring the requisites knowledge and skills in accounting and having being mentored by an audit firm can smooth out the journey to becoming an auditor. The study also revealed that some of the students were aware that possessing professional ethical values and being able to work as a team, and having excellent knowledge in the use of accounting software could enhance their chances of meeting their career goals in auditing. It also came to light that students first identified contributing and inhibiting factors that would influence their career choice. Past studies conducted by Ghani *et al.* (2008), Hutaibat (2012) and Ng *et al.* (2017) have also concluded that career exposure has an influence on career path. This is in line with the findings of this study. The respondents have had sufficient information on the auditing career, and some of them have settled on pursuing the profession as their career. It can be deduced that the exposure was obtained from accounting firms, as well as through career talks provided by professional accounting bodies and counselling by those in the field.

5. Conclusion

This study provides an understanding of factors that influence accounting students to consider the selection of a career in audit. The SCCT theory was applied to gain an understanding of how self-efficacy and outcome expectations affect the career goal in auditing. The results of this current study reveal that outcome expectations such as high earnings and monetary incentives, and social prestige associated with the auditing profession, as well as self-efficacy belief (possession of ethical values) were the factors driving students to consider a career in audit. On the other hand, self-efficacy beliefs such as job stress and accounting stereotype were the intrinsic factors restraining students from considering audit as a career. The findings also show that the respondents who are in favour of considering auditing as a career choice are one way or the other preparing towards the achievement of their goals. It would seem that the pursuit of becoming an auditor, with the additional requirements needed to earn this designation, would require strong self-efficacy according to the study findings.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature (see e.g. Gore and Leuwerke, 2000; Brown *et al.*, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017) by delving deeper into the self-selection factors that influence a student’s desire to become an auditor. Furthermore, the current research is exceptional in that it applies the SCCT to find out the factors that influence students’ desire of becoming auditors. Although other research studies have looked into factors that may influence a student’s decision to pursue a profession as an accountant, these studies have mostly been quantitative (e.g. Ng *et al.*, 2017; Schoenfeld *et al.*, 2017), limiting the students’ ability to explain why those factors encourage or dissuade them. Thus, the SCCT remains one of the useful theories that helps to explain the factors that influence students’ selection of a career in the field of accounting.



Source(s): Authors’ Own Construct

Figure 3. Pattern of the students’ future career path in auditing

The findings also have implication for the accounting profession and, more specifically, accounting programmes that attempt to recruit the “best and brightest” (Fedoryshyn and Hintz, 2002). An important self-efficacy belief for students interested in pursuing a career in auditing is the belief that having ethical values, which is a requirement of a professional accountant, will assist students in pursuing the career with professional care and skills, as well as being objective with their judgement on the job. The study indicated, on the contrary, that students have negative perceptions about auditing as a career option, such that they consider the career is stressful, tedious and monotonous. These misconceptions make it less likely for a student to pursue auditing as a career. Educators can aid students in their decision to pursue a study in accounting and become an auditor by displaying and reinforcing the positive outcomes that come with the position of an auditor.

This present research study is subject to limitations. The SCCT framework utilized focuses on the three main constructs of self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals. There are a number of related factors that may influence students’ career choice decisions. These may include personal characteristics and contextual influences; a change of the theoretical framework may help discover other important personal and contextual factors that this current study could not unearth. In addition, individual characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level and gender could be explored. Within the accounting profession, factors influencing women to pursue a career in audit can further be examined, and this could help explore accounting education’s contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 5 – gender inequality, since a prior study has found women to have lower self-efficacy beliefs than men when deciding on a numeric-related career as their major (Inda *et al.*, 2013). Further, it is acknowledged that the context of this study may limit the transferability of these findings to other contexts outside Ghana. Thus, this paper emphasizes the need for comparative studies between other emerging economies to further our understanding of factors influencing students’ consideration of audit as a career using the SCCT framework.

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Appendix 1

University inclusion criteria

The University of Ghana (UG), the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) and the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration are located in the country's capital, while the Kumasi Technical University (KsTU) and the University of Cape Coast (UCC) are located in the regional capital of Ashante and Central Region, respectively. Although, the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) is not located in the regional capital of the Central Region, it has satellite campuses in the regional capitals of the country. In addition, KsTU and UCC also have satellite campuses in the country's capital. There are three key reasons for limiting the study to the six universities. First, all the universities have similar socio-economic patterns. Second, the face-to-face interview approach that we employed served as a constraint to expand the research to other geographical areas. Finally, the National Accreditation Board mandates all degree accounting programmes in the country to include two auditing courses in designing the programme content.

Appendix 2

National service and internship explained

- (1) Ghana's National Service – It is a one-year mandatory employment programme for all tertiary graduates under the age of 40. The scheme was introduced in 1973 as a requirement for tertiary graduates upon completion of their first degrees.
- (2) An internship is a period of work experience offered by an organization to tertiary students in Ghana for a limited period of time.

Appendix 3

Interview guide questions

As a final year accounting student, it is required by the institutions that you would have successfully studied Audit and internal review and advanced audit and assurance in your 6th and 7th Semester respectively.

- (1) Can you tell us your experience as far as auditing as a career is concern?
- (2) What is your general perception about the auditing profession?
- (3) Based on your experience and most importantly as an accounting student, would you like to pursue a career in audit?
- (4) If yes, what would inspire you to choose a career in auditing, and why will such factors affect your career decision?
- (5) If no, what are the inhibiting factors that will prohibit you from joining audit careers, and why are those factors important to limit your career selection?
- (6) What are your plans towards the profession?

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