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A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN UITM SEREMBAN

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Abstract:

Career choices significantly impact students' futures, yet many struggle to make wise decisions. Students often base their employment decisions on a range of factors that shape their lives. This study investigates factors influencing career choices among undergraduate students in UiTM Seremban. The research objectives were to: (1) identify the preferences for career types across different faculties, (2) determine the relationship between factors influencing career choice and (3) identify the most significant factor influencing career choices. Through convenience sampling, an online questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 361 students. The collected data were analysed using Multiple Linear Regression analysis with factors of Family Influence, Economic Considerations, Personal Interests and Self-Efficacy. The Multiple Bar Chart showed that students from the College of Computing, Informatics, and Mathematics (KPPIM) favoured jobs in the private sector, students from the Faculty of Sport Science and Recreation (FSR) showed the highest preference for government sector employment, and self-employment was mostly preferred by students from Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies (FSPPP). Furthermore, the F-test demonstrated that all four factors significantly influence career choices. In contrast to other factors, personal interests appeared to be the only insignificant variable. Moreover, the t-test analysis resolved the most important factor influencing career choices was family influence. The results revealed the importance of addressing family influence and other factors to better match students' career

choices with their goals and available market opportunities. Nevertheless, future research could benefit from recruiting probability sampling techniques such as stratified sampling, as well as incorporating other relevant variables like peer influence, starting salary, and job security. Overall, this research contributes to understanding how to improve career satisfaction and reduce youth unemployment by guiding students towards informed and fulfilling career paths.

Keywords:

Career Choice, Undergraduate Students, Career Satisfaction, Multiple Linear Regression

Introduction

One's career decision has a big impact on how someone's life turns out in the future. A person's choice of career is the result of several decisions she makes about it over the course of her life, rather than a single decision made at one point in time (Samarakoon & Weerasinghe, 2021). In agreement with Lucanus (2021), career decisions are crucial because they set the path for an individual's economic security. Furthermore, they are also the foundation of all significant decisions, college decisions, internship decisions, and first careers. As a means of developing skills, students have been exposed to careers since their freshman year of school to build skills for future employment. For instance, China made it very evident in 2014 that students should choose courses that are appropriate for their future study and development as well as set higher standards for their own interests and future professional advancement when they proposed a new policy to reform the New College Entrance Examination (NCEE) (Ross & Wang, 2021). However, student's perceptions of occupations might change over time and might be affected by their interests and lifestyles.

In tune with Supriatna et al. (2020), an individual's capacity to choose all actions that support or are connected to future a student's career is known as career choice ability. University students take the initiative to plan their own careers, which is the primary cause of their poor sense of career planning since they are unaware of career cognition and career orientation (Cai & Wang, 2022). Moreover, students' ambiguity suggests that they still lack a firm perspective toward the emotional states, irrational responses, and personality traits required to choose a line of work and enter the workforce (Ran et al., 2022). Indirectly, this indicates that the choice of a major at university is part of a career decision, and this is an essential subject matter that many researchers have inquired prior to enrolling (Agyiriwah Afful, 2019).

In recent years, university graduates are more disoriented and uncertain about career life on account of many of them still lack career direction, not preparing ahead of time, or even avoiding career planning (Chiew et al., 2023). In consequence of the increase of recent fresh graduates and lower-level skilled workers with years of experience, the labour market is getting more and more competitive. As according to Babagay-Llacer (2021), making the correct career decision will enable a person to thrive as a productive individual, which is especially vital in the competitive world. As a result, it is crucial that university students undertake job exploration in order to choose a career path, as these choices will have a significant influence on their entire future.

When it comes in deciding on a career, students may encounter several challenges. Generally, students desire to work in fields that reflect their values, passions, and skills, however this is not always attainable. Regardless of students' forethought, several factors can still impact their career decisions. Hence, in order to ensure that students are satisfied with their profession choices, it is essential to carry out research on foundational issues related to career choices and to ascertain students' career path. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the preference on the type of career choice of students between faculties, to determine the relationship between factors influencing career choice of students, and to determine the most significant factor influencing career choice of students.

Literature Review

This study aims to provide light on the primary elements that shape students' career decisions, the dependent variable of this study with a focus on independent variables including family influence, economic considerations, personal interests and self-efficacy.

Career Choice

It can be hard to choose a career in one field because there are so many options. Students demonstrate their dream careers during their youth, and the decisions made at this stage significantly influence their future aspirations (Chiew et al., 2023). Students from different fields of study have preferences when it comes to selecting a career. As believed by Williams et al. (2021), sport science graduates are particularly drawn to government roles in areas like youth sports programs, community recreation, and public health initiatives, which align with their training and aspirations. Meanwhile, a study by Crawford and Jacob (2021) found that students pursuing technology-based programmes often lean towards the private sector due to better access of tools and resources for development, more diverse job roles, and greater financial incentives. In terms of self-employment, Gibb (2020) went on to explain that just 15 percent of students felt confidence in their capacity to launch a firm right after graduation, demonstrating that entrepreneurial education frequently falls short in providing students with the practical skills to launch and maintain a business.

As believed by Dahlan (2024), career decisions that are not grounded in current interests, skills, values, or realities are considered unrealistic. Such career decisions may be the result of parental wishes, especially when children are obedient and merely accept their parents' decisions. Alternatively, someone can have chosen a career on his own but lacks the necessary competence in career choice. In consonance with Abd Aziz et al. (2024), the career decisions of graduate students are influenced by several sub-factors, where family customs, financial aid options, wage concerns, gender-related variables, and other aspects are strongly linked to the broad categories. These changing aspects make the process of choosing a career more difficult and stressful by adding to its complexity. On that account, university students should therefore take special effort to get a proper understanding of career planning.

Another qualitative approach from a study shows that university students are influenced by a combination of internal and external influences as well as the importance they place on the career itself when choosing a professional path (Felaco et al., 2023). In consideration of the complexity of career choice approach, individuals typically appoint their employment decisions on a variety of elements that shape their lives, including family influence, social status, educational attainment, and cultural background (Mohd Rasdi & Ahrari, 2020). Career

choice should therefore be viewed as a significant dependent variable that is subject to relevant factors.

Family Influence

A study conducted by Quoc Dung (2022) accounted that career supervision help from parents has a role in students' decision to pursue their career paths. Fenu et al. (2021) also agreed that families are important in many societies when it comes to choosing a career because of cultural norms that emphasize honour, filial piety, or the continuation of family customs. As a matter of fact, almost half of participants (49.3%) from a study on factors influencing career choices among medical students strongly agreed according to a poll result, concerning the influence of parents on professional guidance (Soomro et al., 2022). From the same study, more than half of the students also agreed or strongly agreed that family business, expectations, and parental connections affect career choices. In agreement with Malik and Hussain (2020) and Quoc Dung (2022), both findings assert the importance of parental education in influencing university students' career decisions.

For good measure, family-owned enterprises are a notable aspect of Malaysia's economic employment, making a substantial contribution to the growth and development of the nation. From these operations, these businesses frequently combine entrepreneurial spirit, cultural traditions, and familial ties (Wai et al., 2024). Another study consisting of a considerable number of medical students equally believe that their parents greatly influence their professional choices, but some actively involve their parents in their career decision-making (Jasmon et al., 2020). This illustrates that regular parental involvement in children's everyday lives can boost their self-assurance in selecting the ideal career path from a wide range of fascinating profession domains (Nguyen et al., 2023). This outcome is consistent with prior quantitative research by Parola and Marcionetti (2022), showing that the family's role influences career decisions. The results of these studies indicated that parents have significant effects on their children's potential careers.

Economic Considerations

According to Felaco et al. (2023), the primary cause contributing to the unemployment crisis is economic instability where uncertain economic situations and limited resources can hinder career advancement within a specific profession. In this regard, it is easily understood that students may be inclined to choose occupations that offer stable income and good employment prospects. As individuals who have never worked and are set to enter the workforce, students typically select careers with excellent employment prospects (Tantular, Fauzi, et al., 2023). As a result, most students will typically choose careers that offer direct and pleasant career pathways with plenty of career chances. Even if a student has little interest in a given field, they may still be passionately driven to pursue it due to factors including career security, excellent employment prospects, and positive interpersonal interactions (Tantular, Fauzi, et al., 2023). A study on STEM education highlighted that students tend to gravitate toward careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics due to stable employment prospects and higher average earnings (Kocak et al., 2021).

In another study, Parola and Marcionetti (2022) revealed that a vital part of emerging adults' growth is securing employment and achieving financial independence. This discovery may highlight the importance of employment as a determining factor in taking on conventional adult social roles, such as starting a family. A vital responsibility as people approach maturity is

making the switch from education to the workforce. As stated by Omar et al. (2021), there is a correlation between the nation's economic growth and increases in employment rates and consumer. In contrast, there are researchers who argued that there is no conclusive evidence linking that economic considerations affects students' career choice (Omar et al., 2021). For this reason, the economic considerations proceed to be one of the factors influencing career choice among undergraduate students.

Personal Interests

With today's greater cost of living and economic worries, experts recognize that personal interests might have a factor in students' career decisions (Abd Aziz et al., 2024). Conversely, most people find it difficult to choose the ideal career because it may occasionally be daunting to translate a personal interest into a viable career (Ajayi et al., 2023). A study by Quino (2022) emphasis that although personal interests are valued, they are frequently overshadowed by more powerful outside factors like family support, employment prospects, and financial security.

Nonetheless, Quinlan and Renninger (2022) found that most university students pursuing science had a strong interest that guided their program selection and that there was a correlation between topic interest and career decision-making. The study also revealed that, through students' willingness to follow that interest in their profession, students' interest in their subject was a strong predictor of career readiness. This coordinates with the Holland's Theory of Career Choice, which contends that people are more content and successful in occupations that align with their interests and skill sets (Adig'uzel et al., 2014).

Siddiky and Akter (2021) revealed in another study that students' personal interests play a significant role in determining their profession preferences and decision and that students who had a sense of purpose in their employment were more likely to match their work to their interests, values, and talents in pursuing meaningful work. Furthermore, Abe and Chikoko (2020) found that students' career interests have a significant role in their decision-making process and have implications for policy decisions. The recent findings are consistent with prior studies, Anovunga et al. (2021) and Jemini-Gashi and Kadriu (2022) who also noted that a person's career interest drastically influences their intended career path or growth. To put it briefly, choosing a career involves more than just ensuring that a person's skills match the expectations or requirements of a position. In terms of internal determinants, students' 'interests, personalities, and dispositions were ranked first place among other traits (Egbaria, 2023). It is worth noting that identifying and understanding an individual's interests, values, and personality is seen as a prerequisite for making career decisions.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, which stems from past experiences and linguistic persuasions attributed to one's upbringing, is the self-assured belief in one's capacity to accomplish goals (Abe & Chikoko, 2020). This reflects in Siddiky and Akter (2021) report where an individual's personal ideas about his or her ability to do specific behaviours or courses of action are referred to as self-efficacy. Those who have a high sense of their own abilities are more inclined to explore several job paths and engage in career exploration. Corresponding to Chiew et al. (2023), self-efficacy and career choice have a favourable association. In many circumstances, a person may have "gut intuition" regarding which career choice to select. Individuals' intuitive choices may align with the results of a systematic decision-making process, while others may not (Gati &

Kulcsár, 2021). Not to mention, self-efficacy was found to be positively correlated with career choice and beliefs of college athletes in Taiwan by Chan (2020) who examined the relationship between self-efficacy and career-related variables such as career self-efficacy, career beliefs, and social support. Thus, it is essential to find a relationship between career development and generalized self-efficacy in order to instil a growth mentality that emphasizes the possibility of developing talents and skills by practice and hard work among students.

To conclude, career choice is composed by the association of several factors as the literature review demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the many viewpoints held by other researchers about factors influencing career choice among students.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive research design, prominently a survey research. Additionally, this study employed a cross-sectional design and a quantitative approach. The population of this study comprised of all 5889 students from UiTM Seremban. A sample of 361 students from the faculties of Computing, Informatics, and Mathematics (KPPIM), Sport Science and Recreation (FSR), and Administrative Science and Policy Studies (FSPPP) were selected using convenience sampling, with the sample size determined via the Krejcie and Morgan table. The purpose of using this table is that the researcher may easily compute the sample size based on the known population (Kharuddin et al., 2020). Data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed over Telegram and WhatsApp. A pilot study involving 34 students was conducted to ensure reliability and the overall scale of Cronbach's alpha indicates a very reliable value of 0.931, signifying a good internal consistency. This is supported by Nawi et al. (2020) that adhere to the general rule that an instrument's alpha should be at least 0.70 in order for it to be considered sufficiently self-consistent.

The questionnaire's components were consists of three sections namely Section A, B and C. Section A composed the respondents' demographic data whereas Section B comprised the dependent variable, Career Choice. Meanwhile, the independent variables of Family Influence, Economic Considerations, Personal Interests and Self-Efficacy influence were then formed the basis of Section C. Both nominal and interval scales were applied in Section A including students' gender, age, faculty, current academic undertaking, cumulative grade point average (CGPA), importance of a career plan as well as their preference on the type of career choice. Whereas an ordinal scale with a 5-point Likert scale was used to generate Sections B and C. Section B which consists of 5 questions were adopted from Assenga (2019) and Lupas Jr and Farin (2021) meanwhile the 20 questions for Section C were adopted from multiple sources such as Soomro et al. (2022), Vaghela and Matimbwa (2019), Liu et al. (2023), Nguyen et al. (2023) and Siddiky and Akter (2021). Data analyses were then performed using SPSS Version 27, employing Multiple Linear Regression to evaluate relationships between variables. The t-test determined which influencing elements were most important, while the F-test evaluated the overall significance of the model. The validity of the regression model was confirmed by carefully examining the assumptions of independence, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, normality, and linearity. This systematic approach enabled the identification of key factors affecting career choices and provided insights into how these factors shape students' decisions.

This research adopted a conceptual framework consisting of independent variables, namely Family Influence, Economic Considerations, Personal Interests, and Self-Efficacy; and one dependent variable, Career Choice of students in UiTM Seremban illustrated in Figure 1.

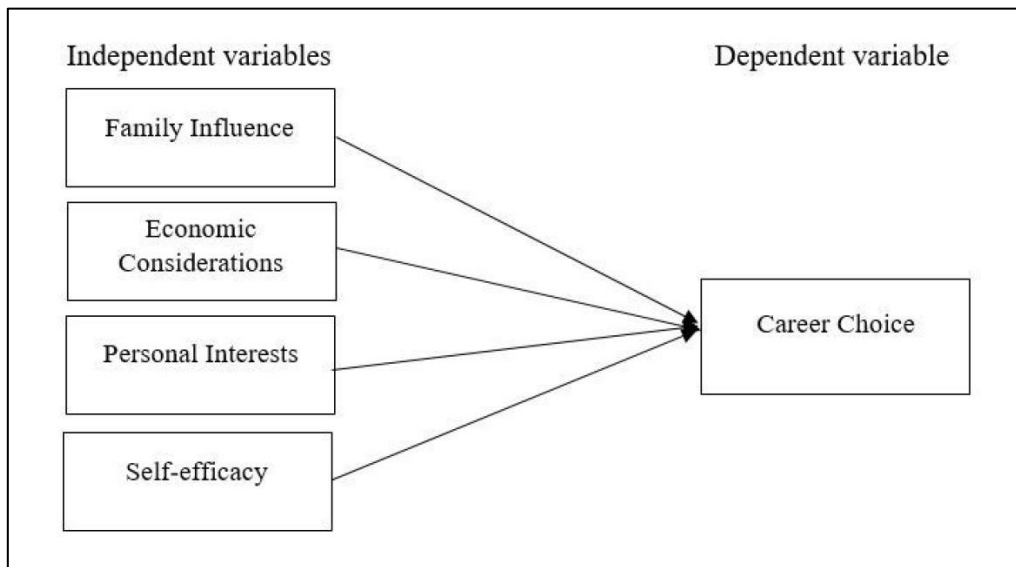


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Career Choice

Source: (Wong, 2019)

Results and Analysis

The first objective, to identify students' career choice preferences across faculties, is accomplished by using a Multiple Bar Chart to show how students from various faculties differ in their job choices, giving a better understanding of how academic fields affect employment preferences.

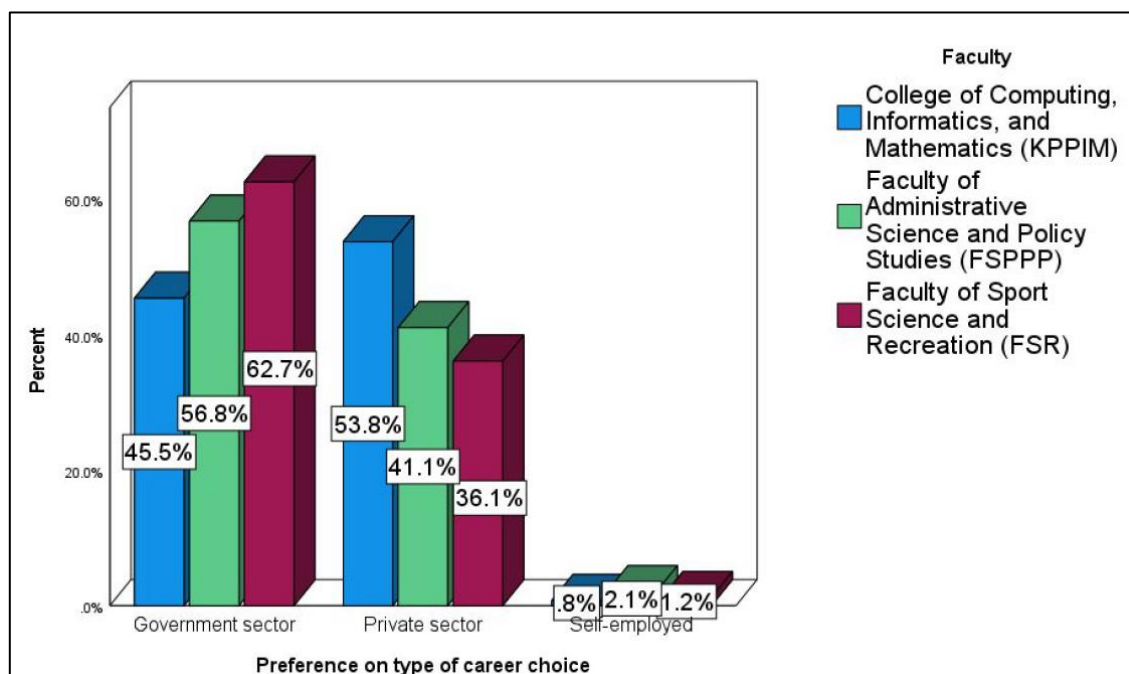


Figure 2: Multiple Bar Chart of Students' Preference on The Type of Career Choice between Faculties

Based on Figure 2, FSR students have the highest preference for government sector jobs which amounted at 62.7 percent. In many cases, government professions align well with the goals of sport science graduates, such as promoting physical fitness, organizing public sports programs, and advancing community health and this finding is in line with what Williams et al. (2021) found. Meanwhile, FSPPP follows closely with 56.8 percent, while students from the KPPIM have a lower preference for this sector, with 45.5 percent. On the other hand, the private sector is most favoured by students from KPPIM, with 53.8 percent compared to the other faculties. This result positively validates a study by Crawford and Jacob (2021). As opposed to that, students from FSPPP and FSR strike to appear less inclined toward private sector jobs, with 41.1 percent and 36.1 percent respectively. This may reflect the nature of opportunities available to these faculties, as computing and IT fields often offer private-sector-driven career paths. Across all faculties, self-employment is the least preferred option, with percentages below 3 percent. The leading faculty being 2.1 percent, students from FSPPP have a slightly higher inclination toward self-employment but the preference is still insignificant compared to other sectors. This is because students may believe that they are lacking the leadership qualities, business prospects, or entrepreneurial skills necessary to be successful working for themselves as mentioned by Gibb (2020) that supports the idea that entrepreneurship is not a primary focus for students in these faculties or might not be strongly encouraged within their programs.

Understanding students' career preferences across faculties provides a foundation for exploring the factors that shape these choices. Following this analysis, the second objective examines the relationship between these influencing factors and students' career decisions, offering deeper insights into the key determinants of their career paths.

Table 1: ANOVA Table

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	25.276	4	6.319	41.871	<0.001
Residual	53.725	356	0.151		
Total	79.001	360			

Based on Table 1, the F-test results of $F = 41.871$ and $p < 0.001$ confirm that the factors family influence, economic considerations, personal interests, and self-efficacy collectively have a significant relationship with students' career choices. This suggests that these factors are meaningful predictors of career decisions.

Table 2: T-test of Each Variable

Variables	t	Sig.
Constant	6.840	0.000
Family Influence	6.618	0.000
Economic Considerations	3.267	0.001
Personal Interests	1.119	0.264
Self-Efficacy	2.098	0.037

Upon the regression coefficient of each variable in Table 2, family influence, economic considerations, and self-efficacy appear to be significant variables influencing students' career choices, leaving out the personal interests' variable. The family influence variable is clearly significant, as seen by its p-value of 0.000. This result is consistent with those of previous

studies (Malik & Hussain, 2020; Fenu et al., 2021; Quoc Dung, 2022) which emphasized families frequently offer the tools in terms of financial assistance, connections, or emotional support required for career growth, making their opinions extremely significant. According to statistics, children spend around eight hours in school and the remaining 16 hours at home in Malaysia (Singh et al., 2013). As a result, children are significantly dependent on their families and indirectly, families will thus help students decide on their future career paths.

In the matter of the second variable, it appears to be also significant as its p-value of 0.001 is less than significance level. This finding is inconsistent with Omar et al. (2021) because there is a chance that in times of economic downturn or uncertainty, students may prioritize careers that are perceived as more stable and recession-proof, like technology-based or public administration, over careers in fields that are more susceptible to market fluctuations as mentioned by Kocak et al. (2021). Currently, since social media platforms are heavily used in Malaysia, young generations are drawn to career that have an easy job and fast earning income such as social media influencers.

While the third variable are widely believed to be a significant factor in career choice, this variable is unfortunately insignificant for this research on account of its p-value being 0.264. This result supported by Quino (2022) that found out many students give preference to occupations that have greater earning potential over ones that are only in line with their personal preferences. Due to risk aversion, students may very likely avoid careers that align with their interests to steer clear of atypical occupations such as entrepreneurship, which could carry higher risks in terms of job security, financial success, or societal approval. Fear of failing in such fields can push students to follow more conventional career paths where success seems more accustomed.

The fourth variable has a profound impact on students' career choice with p-value of 0.037. Students are likely to concur that self-efficacy affects their career choice because they understand the relevance between their self-efficacy and their capacity to act on their career intentions. This resilience enables self-assured students to be more inclined to investigate professional possibilities, take chances, establish lofty objectives, and stick with their chosen fields. This supports the findings of several research, including those by Chiew et al. (2023) and Chan (2020), which found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and profession choice.

The three variables of family influence, economic considerations and self-efficacy are then included in the model since the regression coefficient test indicate that they are significant. The final model obtained is as follows:

$$Y_i = 1.358 + 0.296X_1 + 0.196X_2 + 0.109X_4$$

where Y_i = Career Choice

1. 358 = y-intercept

0. 296 = Coefficient of X_1

0.196 = Coefficient of X_2

0.109 = Coefficient of X_4

X_1 = Family Influence

X_2 = Economic Considerations

X_4 = Self-Efficacy

The analysis of relationships between influencing factors provides a basis for identifying the most significant one. The third objective focuses on determining the most significant factor influencing career choice of students. Corresponding to the t-test results in Table 2, the analysis reveals that family influence is perceived as the most significant factor influencing career choice with the largest t-value of 6.618. This proves that family influence is a central factor in shaping students' career choices as mentioned by Fenu et al. (2021). This is especially true and relevant in Malaysia since most children will live with their family until their reached 17 years old and naturally, family is often the first point of contact for career advice and emotional guidance, making it a requisite influence in career decision-making.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For undergraduate students, choosing a career is crucial since this pressure arises from various aspects, all of which play a role in shaping the student's experiences, opportunities, socioeconomic standing and level of employment fulfilment. This research has achieved its three objectives in diving into the factors influencing career choice among undergraduate students. These findings highlight the essential role of practical concerns in moulding career preferences, underlining the necessity of understanding these dynamics to assist students in choosing informed and rewarding career choices.

The first recommendation is that future research could benefit from recruiting probability sampling techniques, such as stratified sampling. This sampling category assists in justifying the use of probability sampling methods by ensuring that different subgroups such as students from different faculties, socioeconomic backgrounds, or academic years are adequately represented (Arbab et al., 2022; Kairan et al., 2024). This strategy can provide more precise and extensive information about how the four factors vary across different sectors of the student population. Furthermore, the use of probability sampling does not diminish the value of non-probability sampling in previous studies but instead builds upon it by expanding the scope and depth of the research (Nandram & Rao, 2023).

The second recommendation is that future research should incorporate relevant variables such as peer influence, starting salary, and job security. Peer pressure, especially in social and academic settings, is a key factor influencing job choices, as demonstrated by researchers such as Rubineau et al. (2024) and Giang and Nhung (2022). Alternatively, studies by Ahmed et al. (2022) and Nguyen et al. (2023) agreed that starting salary and job stability were now more important factors when choosing a career, particularly in light of uncertain and challenging economic conditions. Incorporating these factors would offer a more wide-reaching perspective of the various factors influencing profession choice since they offer both short-term and long-term advantages without undermining the significance of the aspects now being studied.

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