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Personal Factors Influencing Career Choices of Final Year Hospitality Students

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Abstract: Experienced workers keep changing their job, but organizations still prefer them to fresh graduates. To start their first job, fresh graduates need to make wise career decisions as a starting point for a future industry career. Undergraduate students need to know how to tailor their future careers to their personalities without denial of the quality of life for their career advancement. Thus, this study aims to identify the personal factors and the most influential factors in career choices in the hospitality industry. By focusing on the final-year hospitality undergraduates at UiTM Terengganu and encouraging them to plan their career choices, 148 respondents participated in the survey using an online questionnaire. Resultantly, the most significant personal factor influenced the students' career choices. The present results improve the body of knowledge in the existing literature, particularly regarding personal factors and career choices. In addition, the study findings could strengthen undergraduate students' awareness towards building a future career that suits their personality while maintaining the quality of life for their career advancement. This study reflects undergraduate students' situation and encourages them to choose their career path. Besides, these findings could assist the counsellor in expanding their knowledge and impact their future career. Future research might attempt to expand the scope to other hospitality students and the new norms of the post-Covid-19 phase.

Keywords: career choices, personal factors, hospitality

Introduction

The unemployment rate in Malaysia before the Covid-19 phase measures the number of people actively seeking a job as a percentage of the workforce. In September 2019, the unemployment rate in Malaysia stood at 3.3 per cent and persisted from the previous year's corresponding month (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). This situation is perhaps influenced by the fresh graduates willing to take a changing job since they are expected to compete with experienced labourers. Although experienced workers keep changing jobs, organizations prefer them more than fresh graduates (Kaur, 2017). Therefore, fresh graduates need to make prudent career decisions to start their first job as a beginning point of a future career in the industry.

Undergraduate students need to know how to tailor their future careers to their personalities without denial of the quality of life for their career advancement. Thus, this study aims to determine the personal factor and the most influential factors in career choices in the hospitality industry among final-year hospitality bachelor students at UiTM Terengganu. Several factors affect the interest in career choices, such as gender, parental influence, job opportunities (Serhan et al., 2016), and personal interest (Koech *et al.*, 2016). As cited by Korir (2012), the factors that influenced career decisions included personal interest, background, level of education, information,

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and attitudes towards the career. Students need to acquire knowledge, information, data, and guideline to make the right decision because career choices are one of the future achievements.

Furthermore, the career needs to suit their personality and interest because it will help the students to develop and expand their career activity (Afaq Ahmed *et al*., 2017). According to Serhan *et al.* (2016), Malaysian students are not too fussy about choosing their career path, and this might contribute to the difficulty in finding a job. However, some are attracted by specific organizations' changes, such as high salaries, benefits, and allowances (Hewitt, 2010). Some factors encourage people to change their job from the hotel industry to other industries since high qualifications are not required to work in the hospitality industry; thus, employees are made to receive low wages (Richardson, 2008). Wallace (2011) also highlighted interest as one of the crucial factors influencing job mobilization in the hospitality industry. This standpoint was based on a previous study in which employees' more profound interest in their careers contributed to career satisfaction despite their previous hardships during work. This study perhaps could help prevent the students from choosing the wrong future path and career. In improving the quality of life, this study might provide in-depth views of the students in understanding the right path of aiming for their future career in industry. A suitable syllabus could be designed for academicians to assist students in their future working environment. Besides, the study findings will be relevant to the counsellor in expanding their knowledge and understanding of the significant impact on their future study and career.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mclaren *et al.* (2011), a career can be defined as something that an individual needs to have or wants, and they feel passionate about and appreciated when the job is done. Career guidance was utilized as a way for neediness during the commotion over the economy's downfall in society (Sinkombo, 2016). Nyamwange (2016) posited that a career can be characterized as the decisions made in advance and may affect career or employment. Furthermore, Jawitz *et al.* (2000) stated that a career is usually observed as a course of continuous situations that make up a person's work. It is a course or progress through life and is generally related to the arrangement of careers that have been performed during working hours (Nyamwange, 2016). The definition includes two parts: 1) The accessibility of options, which reflects an objective reality, and 2) the action of preference, which includes a subjective procedure. If a reference to career "choice" is made, the availability of career choices and the elements of choosing a career should be analyzed.

Therefore, alternative career courses must be available for career choices, and an individual tendency should also be obtainable between these careers. The reliance on education and involvement in several fields of career "choice" is an exceedingly contestable phenomenon, given the rigidities of supply and demand in career markets and the persistence of structural and regulated types of discrimination in employment. The restricted and dynamic nature of available career paths in actual life makes career "choice" in the pure form. For example, a free and uncontrollable career choice based on individual will is an uncommon commodity, a naive assumption, or even a misguided faith.

Choosing a decent career is a desire of each undergraduate or graduating student. So career picking is a massive test for students seeking a future job (Ahmed & Bhatti, 2016). According to the studies by Submit *et al.* (2017), many professional career choices are available in this modern era. The right career choices are crucial and essential in forming a student's future. Those seeking a career should manage the problem from their choice that could revolve around the estimates of their long-term interests, limits, and conditions. As described by Koech *et al.* (2016), career choice is a mind-option choice for college students since it decides the types of students expected to seek a job in the future. As students took the initiative to settle their career decisions, they confronted the issues of coordinating their professions' tendencies with their capacity for academic execution. Fizer (2013) stated that choosing the correct career process is becoming essential for youthful understudies. The students need to consider many factors while choosing their careers.

Interest

Some students choose their studies based on their interests while others rely more on the high demand for occupation and high salaries, probably because they think it is more important to their life and future. According to Korir (2012), students tend to choose their studies and career paths based on their interests and personality, which suits their careers. As cited by Melissa Venable (2011), Holland's Career Typology is the most widely used theory to join the variety of personality and career fields. This theory starts with a categorization system suitable for personality characteristics and personal priority to job characteristics. The Holland Codes comprise six varieties of personality or careers that help describe the widest variety of careers. According to Afaq Ahmed *et al.* (2017), studies could be designed separately depending on the diverse culture that sums up the relationships between the variables selected for the study. For example, in Kenya, the variety of personalities and interests in the subject is one factor that influences several students' career choices. However, similar research conducted in South Africa, where the demographics and culture are separate, revealed that the most critical factors influencing students' career choices were monetary effects (Fatima Abrahams *et al.*, 2015). As stated by (Edwards & Quinter, 2011), employees interested in their careers tend to achieve good work performance, are more satisfied with their outcomes, and are motivated to achieve positive workflow. While this may be strongly influenced by previous academic performance, intrinsic interest remains a primary factor if the person aims to succeed, satisfy, and achieve career goals.

Family Tradition

As children become teenagers, they start to solemnly consider their futures, often looking to their parents as role models or career advisers (Alphonse, 2016). The parental technique can either motivate youngsters to explore various possible careers or to obey their parent's expectations. The parents' career is more likely to influence the career their children will take up in the future. This was best captured by William (2016), who stated that it is not surprising that many people are the third or fourth generations of their families to work in the same career. They have developed an interest and built an opinion regarding their parents' careers, which makes it easier for them to join the industry. For example, in the hotel industry, parents working in their hotel might give a chance for their children to join them. The jobs given could increase their children's expectations or satisfaction. Through the parents' views, the children see the early benefits and such careers might be favoured over others. Contrary to parents complaining about their jobs or finding it difficult to support their families on job earnings, the children are more likely to find more fulfilling or higher-paid roles. Moreover, according to Clutter (2010), from a family-therapy view, a teenager reaches a stage of differentiating the skill required to maintain themselves while being emotional in interacting with the family's desire for their child to take part in a big role. These events influence their decision-making regarding future careers (Alderfer, 2004). Based on a previous review, teenagers who cannot effectively dissociate from their families are not free to make their own choices based on their personal information and wishes, and instead, they are more likely to do what they think their family anticipates of them.

Grade Attained

It is normal for most students who work hard to come out with flying colours, which is reflected in their results. However, the question is how far their academic results suit the industry or future career. Based on a previous study (Korir, 2012), students agreed that academic performance is not crucial for their future. The surveyed students stated that technical schools provide more excellent skills to perform in the industry, and most technical students are more suitable because the hospitality industry is more into the operation area and skill acquisition is of substantial value. Besides, some people perceive that good grades are not necessary for the operation section of hospitality, such as hotels; instead, good skills are more desired. According to Zwick (2012), the grades awarded to a student at the end of their studies are important ways of ability and productivity when they find their first career. Therefore, most studies have proven that students who achieved good grades in their final exams could also get better grades in their academic studies (Jirjahn, 2007; Dooley *et al.*, 2012). This

might be because good school grades show high intrinsic motivation, the person's capabilities, and parental input during the period before the academic study.

Lifestyle

According to Mtshokotshe and Vallabh (2017), an unhealthy lifestyle is being practised by most departments in the hotel and tourism industry as they have to work irregular hours. The front desk employees need to stand for a long time in their high heels, representing an example of a destructive lifestyle in the industry, as these practices negatively impact employees' bodies and health in the long term. The management team must act and ensure all employees are healthy because of its massive impact on career and productivity in the workplace. Freund de Klumbis & Musters (2005) stated that one of the latest lifestyle changes is the increase in the working women population, higher tendencies for families to have fewer children because parents are busy, and an overall decrease in birth rates. These changing lifestyles were also supported by Tourisfseci, Case, Women, The, & Government (2010), where females must improve themselves to work and support household expenses.

According to Bohle *et al.* (2004), employees have to sacrifice themselves while working in the industry because of long working hours and the rotation of shifts which make them develop health-related sleep disturbance. The same study also found that most hospitality employees usually work more than 49 hours per week. As Anbazhagan (2013) stated, employees' lifestyle is peculiar as they tend to experience more pressure and stress on workload while trying to balance their job and family life. Operation management requires interacting with customers' needs and tolerating the workload and customer requests. Previous researchers also highlighted the importance of positive influence towards employees, and the management also needs to help with distress towards employees. Examples are to provide decent wages and a suitable workload for the employees (Fizer, 2013). Dorsey *et al.* (2003) posited that speciality-related lifestyle has increased awareness among United States medical students, by increasing numbers to radiology and anesthesiology guides and decreasing totals to general surgery and family practice programs. Studies have also recommended that a so-called controllable lifestyle has determined students' strength-choosing criteria. Furthermore, all these studies supported a controllable lifestyle which comprises the following criteria: personal time free of practice requirements for leisure, family, and avocational activity and control of total weekly hours spent on professional responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to measure the factors influencing career choices among Final Year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management at UiTM Cawangan Kampus Dungun, Terengganu. The study was conducted using a quantitative research data design with an online questionnaire as the research instrument. Utilizing a structured questionnaire, all the data were collected online using Google Forms. Furthermore, data collection was completed using a descriptive research design. Descriptive research is employed to describe a phenomenon, current situation, or the characteristics of a group of organizations, people, and others.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Respondent's Background

A total of 148 respondents completed the questionnaire as of June 2019. Most of the respondents were females (65.1%, 99) compared to males (32.2%, 49). Most respondents (85.5%, 130) were between the age of 21 to 23 years old, whereas 18 respondents were between 24 to 26 years old. Moreover, 103 (67.8%) respondents were in Foodservice Management (HM242) and the remaining 45 (29.6%) from Bachelor in Hotel Management (HM240). The proportion of respondents at semesters 5 and 6 was 53.9% (82) and 66% (66), respectively.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics data

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Interest	I enjoy gaining knowledge and skills in the hospitality industry	4.3716	.70257
	I will choose the working environment that needs to deal with customers	3.6622	1.25386
	I rather start my career that suit my interest with low salaries	3.3851	1.02701
	I prefer the challenging career in the hospitality industry	3.8041	1.02790
	My personality suit the hospitality career	3.7500	1.10580
Family Tradition	My parent encourages me to study the hospitality industry	3.8108	1.12698
	My parent will support my career in the hospitality industry	4.2095	.83506
	My family members working in the hospitality industry	3.3311	1.41127
	A hospitality career is the family tradition	2.8514	1.56216
	My family runs a business in the hospitality industry. (hotel/foodservice/tourism)	2.7230	1.35938
Grade Attained	I have an excellent grade (GPA) each semester	3.5811	.93324
	I have excellent results for hospitality subjects offered by faculty	3.5000	.95831
	I perform well for all subjects' assignments	4.0270	.81605
	My grade attained influenced my career choice	3.5743	.97654
	Good grade, not a requirement to work in the hospitality industry	3.9392	1.06411
Lifestyle	I choose a career that will fit my preferred lifestyle	4.0338	1.18043
	I was able to adapt myself to work on shift hours	3.9324	1.04759
	I prefer the professional uniforms while working	3.7230	1.33412
	I prefer meeting new people by working in the hospitality industry	3.8851	1.23731
	A hospitality career has a good opportunity for career advancement	4.2703	.92284

Based on Table 1 above, the interest factors showed that most respondents enjoy gaining knowledge and skills in the hospitality industry, with a mean score of 4.37. According to Edwards and Quinter (2011), the influence of study experience might be because of what they have learnt and based on their surveys through various careers before they make decisions. This is also reflected in their learning experience. If they have an interest and enjoy gaining knowledge, it can help them decide on what they want to pursue in the future in line with their chosen careers. Interesting in a specific career is crucial in decision-making (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). If forced into a career, individuals might demonstrate low self-esteem and poor performance. This is why being interested in the respondent's career choice is vital to help them show excellent credibility. A lower mean of 3.66 was obtained for the question that respondents will choose the working environment needed to deal with customers. This is because workers might not be confident and believe that people will judge them or lose their self-esteem if they say something wrong. They will be afraid to deal with customers. Additionally, every employee needs to interact with customers in the hospitality industry. For example, if an employee working in the operation department (e.g., front office) lacks confidence, they will feel uneasy to discharge their duties, which might affect their working consistency.

In this study, family tradition factors recorded the lowest score (M = 2.72), which indicates that most respondents do not have any business in the hospitality industry. This could be due to the presence of several competitors. It is challenging to run a business, especially for those lacking experience. According to Levinson (1971), running a family business will always have conflicts. Conflicts are always seen as threatening family unity, which is why negative discussions might be discouraged. The problem is aggravated if each family has a conflict and cannot handle it. Meanwhile, the highest mean was at 4.20 for the question that parent will support their career in the hospitality industry. According to Isaac (2014), parents influence their children's careers most significantly. For instance, the parent's perspective is the most critical factor in giving a cheerful ambience when advising their children. Parents also need to demonstrate a good notion about their workplace and all its

challenges. It will help the children to develop a positive reaction and learn about a variety set of industries. On the other hand, it is best that parents can give children space for their own opinions on such choices as they always support them in collecting all information on various available career choices. Parents can also inform their children about the available chances through informal discussion. For example, parents can explain and let the children know that their career choices are well-paying as long as they work hard (Sinkombo, 2016).

For the grade attained factors, the lowest mean at 3.50 for the question that the respondents had excellent results for hospitality subjects offered by the faculty. This is because all respondents thought they needed to have excellent results in hospitality and other faculty subjects. If the respondents only have excellent hospitality subjects, they do not have any knowledge about other subject information. For example, respondents were taught accounting during Semester 2, which is not a hospitality subject, and this is considered new for respondents lacking any knowledge of accounting subjects. Meanwhile, the highest mean at 4.02 was recorded regarding the question that respondents performed well for all subjects' assignments. This is because when respondents desire to study all subjects, they will pay more attention to them. According to Zwick (2012), grades awarded to students at the end of academics are the primary guide to capability and efficiency when they search for their first jobs.

Table 1 also shows the lifestyles factor with the lowest mean of 3.72 for the question that respondents prefer professional uniforms while working. If they are uncomfortable working in the uniform, they prefer to wear the dress code while working. For example, they may prefer to work in administration more than the operational area, or may want to work in operational but wearing the same uniform always is either uncomfortable or boring. In contrast, the highest mean of 4.27 was documented for the question that a hospitality career has an excellent opportunity for career advancement. This is because the hospitality industry can become the most significant opportunity for respondents or others seeking a job. According to Stefanesc (2012), the tourism and hospitality industry is among the most significant sources of careers in various places worldwide. The industry has spread a need to guide professionals and attempted to shape the new developing curriculum.

Correlations Analysis

Table 2. Correlation Analysis between Career Choice and Variables of the Study

	Interest Factor	Family Tradition	Grade	Lifestyle
1. Career Choice	.670**	-.511**	.408**	-.428**

Note. **. r is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the relationship between career choice and interest factors. The result shows that 0.670 is a positive moderate linear relationship between semester and interest. Besides, career choice has a negative moderate linear relationship (r = -0.511) between semester and family tradition. Career choice also has a positive moderate linear relationship (r = 0.408) between the semester and the grade attained. Table 5 shows a negative moderate linear relationship (r = -0.428) between semester and lifestyle.

DISCUSSION

The study objectives revealed that personal factors such as interest, family tradition, grades attained, and lifestyles influenced the career choices among the final year hospitality bachelor students at UiTM Terengganu. A similar result was reported by James & Denis (2015), in which interest factors were the most important variables influencing career choices among their respondents. A previous review by Baines (2009) also showed that interest factors had the highest impact on career choices among students. This was further supported by James & Denis (2015), where the personal interest of hospitality and tourism students significantly affected their career choices.

The findings of family tradition factors aligned with the reports by Borchert (2002), who stated that people tend to engage in family tradition work because of salary and parental influence. This is also attributed to parents' desire for their child to earn a good salary and a better job. Zapalska & Brozik (2007) argue that if a family has a tourism and hospitality-related business, they will focus more on the family business because they already have

the business skills, which is more convenient for them. Moreover, such a family receives more income while handling the business, like leisure. Korir (2012) stated that grades attained for hospitality are not required because more theoretical work is not needed. According to Tourisfseci et al. (2010), lifestyle can be influenced by income and socioeconomic status. Besides, a previous study posited that one of the factors that people consider while choosing their career is family concern and having a good lifestyle to balance responsibility to family and their work commitment (Beauregard, 2008).

In this study, the most influential factor in career choices in the hospitality industry was the interest factor. Based on the study by Fizer (2013), some mature students already know what they want in their lives. Hence, such students will go the extra mile to achieve their dream careers. However, students will constantly evolve differently due to various effects beyond their control. They will also evaluate their career ways and potential challenges associated with their career choice.

The highest mean score (4.37) showed that the respondents slightly agreed that they enjoy gaining knowledge and skills in the hospitality industry. Seventy-four respondents (47.4%) strongly agreed, and only two (1.4%) disagreed with this question. Harackiewicz & Hulleman (2010) reported that being interested in anything or a career means that respondents are responsible for it, and it also highlights the significance of such a career choice and most times, they develop positive feelings towards it.

The correlation tests indicated a moderate and positive significant correlation between career choice and interest factors. As stated by Albion & Fogarty (2002), career interests are typically expressed as manners or activities and are a means by which individuals achieve their values and meet their needs. Furthermore, evidence suggests that individuals with different interests perceive career choices differently and with varying degrees of success. This result is also supported by previous studies of Anojan & Nimalathasan (2013). They were reporting the influence of personal factors, especially students' interests, on career choices.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, most of the respondents are willing to study in the hospitality industry based on their preferences and interest, but some pursue this industry because of their families and not for themselves. Most respondents selected interest factors as the most crucial variable influencing their career choice decision. These findings will improve the current literature regarding the factors influencing career choices among students in the hospitality industry, as well as assist researchers in elucidating other potential factors in future studies. Moreover, students willing to further their studies can seek help and suggestions from counselling personnel on the areas that align with their interests. Parents are also advised to encourage their children to explore more in their interests and keep supporting them.

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