



Course Selection and Career Preparedness of Graduating Students in a Private University in Bacolod City, Philippines

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Abstract

The transition from academic life to the workforce presents a critical challenge for graduating students, often influenced by both internal motivations and external circumstances. This study aimed to determine whether students' motivations for choosing their academic programs, such as passion, financial stability, affordability, family influence, and peer influence, significantly relate to their career preparedness. Anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory, the research surveyed 371 graduating students from a private university in Bacolod City using a structured online questionnaire. Career preparedness was measured using the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSES-SF), while course choice motivation was assessed through Likert-scale items. Descriptive results indicated high levels of career preparedness, but only moderate levels of motivation across all categories. Inferential tests revealed no significant differences or correlations in career preparedness based on sex, age, or motivation factors. The findings suggest that while students are generally prepared for career decision-making, their motivations for course selection are not strong predictors of this readiness. These insights underscore the need for institutions to implement structured career development programs that move beyond initial academic motivations and focus on holistic, skills-based preparation.

Keywords: Education, Career Preparedness, Course Choice Motivation, Quantitative Method, Western Visayas, Philippines

1. Introduction

Transitioning from university to the workforce can be both psychologically and practically stressful. Geirdal *et al.* found that 25.2% of new graduates experienced psychological distress, which declined to 17.3% after three years of employment ^[1]. However, a persistent gap remains between students' perceived and actual career readiness. According to the OECD ^[2], students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to career planning and work experience, while only 34% of U.S. students felt confident in their job market skills, with many not using career services ^[3]. Internships, by contrast, significantly improve employability, with 81% of participants reporting enhanced job-readiness ^[4]. Career readiness in Asia has gained traction amid shifting global job market demands. Phan *et al.* ^[5] found a disconnect between accounting education and employer expectations in Southeast Asia, while Xiaoqing and Noordin ^[6] observed misalignment between student expectations and labor realities in Chinese universities, stressing the need for integrated career development programs. In contrast, Pickett ^[7] reported that some students feel confident in their transition skills. These studies highlight both shared and country-specific challenges, emphasizing that effective career preparedness relies on tailored guidance strategies. While confidence may be present, access to structured career development remains essential for true readiness. The transition from education to employment presents ongoing challenges for Filipino students. Ochoco and Ty ^[8] found that career adaptability is shaped by self-concept and available resources, while Castro ^[9] reported high anxiety levels among graduates tied to low self-efficacy in decision-making. Aguilar and Torres ^[10] stressed the importance of social and emotional readiness, and Raquel *et al.* ^[11] noted gaps in problem-solving and creativity skills despite student awareness. Beringuel *et al.* ^[12] and a national report by PIDS and CHED ^[13] both pointed to limited experience, communication barriers, and an education-employment mismatch as key obstacles.

These findings underscore the urgent need for enhanced career guidance, updated curricula, and psychosocial support in higher education [12, 13].

In Negros Occidental, research has identified key factors influencing the employability of graduating students, particularly at the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos (UNO-R). Magallanes found that active involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities enhances work readiness skills [14]. A tracer study by UNO-R supported this by showing that graduates whose academic training aligned with industry needs had better employment outcomes. Conversely, those with mismatched qualifications struggled to find relevant jobs. These findings stress the importance of aligning curricula with labor demands and fostering student engagement to better prepare graduates for the workforce [15]. While much of the literature on career readiness centers on self-efficacy, maturity, and preparation behaviors, there is limited focus on how students' motivations for choosing a course, such as interests, finances, family, or peers, affect their career preparedness. This study addresses that gap by exploring the link between course choice motivation and workforce readiness. By shifting the lens toward motivational factors, the research extends beyond traditional skill-based perspectives. Its findings aim to inform policies and counseling strategies that align academic decisions with personal goals. Ultimately, this approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of career readiness as a multifaceted construct.

While career readiness has been examined through the lenses of self-efficacy, maturity, and skills development, limited attention has been given to how students' motivations for choosing their academic programs influence this preparedness. This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between course choice motivations, such as passion, financial constraints, family, and peer influence, and career preparedness among graduating students. By focusing on these underlying drivers of academic decision-making, the research aims to provide a more holistic understanding of how students prepare for the workforce. The findings are expected to inform targeted interventions in career counseling and educational policy, supporting more personalized and effective guidance strategies for future graduates.

1.1 Framework of the Study

This study is guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994. The theory highlights how people's career decisions are shaped by the interaction of their beliefs about themselves, the outcomes they expect from certain actions, and the personal goals they set. It emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy (one's confidence in one's ability to succeed), outcome expectations (what a person believes will result from certain choices), and personal goals in shaping career development [16].

In this research, students' career preparedness is viewed through the lens of self-efficacy, particularly how confident they feel in making decisions about their future careers. On the other hand, course choice motivation, including factors like passion, financial concerns, and family influence, can be linked to their expectations about the benefits of their academic choices. These motivations serve as indicators of what students believe their chosen courses will lead to in the future. Through this framework, the study suggests that

students who are motivated by clear, meaningful reasons when selecting their course may be more confident and better prepared to face career-related decisions.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative design incorporating descriptive, correlational, and comparative methods to examine the relationship between course choice motivation and career preparedness among graduating students. The correlational approach determined whether a significant relationship exists between students' motivations for selecting their academic programs and their levels of preparedness for career decision-making. The comparative approach explored potential differences in course choice, motivation, and career preparedness when students were grouped by sex and program. This design was deemed appropriate as it allows the researcher to identify statistical associations and group differences without manipulating any variables, aligning with the non-experimental nature of the study.

2.2 Respondents

To conduct this study, the researchers selected graduating students from a private university in Bacolod City, Philippines, using random sampling. The total sample consisted of 371 students, who were asked to participate in the survey. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection, ensuring that participation was voluntary and confidential.

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Based on sex, there were slightly more female students (189 or 50.9%) than male students (182 or 49.1%). For age, respondents were grouped into two categories: "Younger" (22 years old and below) and "Older" (23 years old and above). The younger group accounted for 181 respondents (48.8%), while the older group comprised 190 respondents (51.2%), suggesting a relatively balanced age distribution.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	n	%
Sex		
Male	182	49.1
Female	189	50.9
Age		
Younger (≤ 22 years old)	181	48.8
Older (≥ 23 years old)	190	51.2
Total	371	100

2.3 Research Instruments

Course Choice Motivation

The variable Course Choice Motivation was measured using a self-constructed set of five single-item indicators. Respondents were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), the extent to which each of the following factors influenced their decision in selecting their academic program: (a) Passion, (b) Financial Stability, (c) Affordability, (d) Family Influence, and (e) Peer Influence.

These items were designed based on common motivational dimensions found in local and international literature regarding career decision-making. However, as each factor

was assessed using a single item, no internal consistency reliability analysis (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) could be conducted. While the items were reviewed for content relevance, they were not subjected to formal validation procedures. As such, they function as proxy indicators rather than validated subscales.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSES-SF)

To measure career preparedness, the study employed the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSES-SF) by Betz, Klein, and Taylor (1996)^[22]. This 25-item instrument assesses students' confidence in making career-related decisions across five areas: Self-Appraisal, Occupational Information, Goal Selection, Planning, and Problem Solving. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater self-efficacy. The CDSES-SF has demonstrated high internal consistency, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 for the full scale, and subscale alphas ranging from 0.73 to 0.83. Validity studies have shown strong correlations with measures of vocational identity and decision-making, supporting its use in educational and career research. This tool provides a reliable measure of students' career decision-making confidence.

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from April to May 2025 using an online survey distributed through Google Forms. The survey was completed off-site, allowing respondents to participate at their convenience. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before answering the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, no identifying information was collected, and all responses were anonymized and stored securely. General ethical guidelines, such as voluntary participation, privacy, and data protection, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis included the computation of means and standard deviations to determine the levels of course choice motivation and career preparedness among graduating students. A Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test was conducted and confirmed that the data were normally distributed, justifying the use of parametric tests. For inferential analysis, an independent samples t-test was used to examine differences in course choice motivation and career preparedness based on sex, while a one-way ANOVA was applied to assess differences across academic programs. To determine the relationship between course choice motivation and career preparedness, an appropriate correlation analysis was conducted. Statistical procedures were carried out in consultation with a professional statistician to ensure methodological soundness.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation

The descriptive analysis provided an overview of participants' levels of career preparedness and their responses across five components of Course Choice Motivation: passion, financial stability, affordability, family influence, and peer influence. The results are disaggregated by sex and age group, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

In Table 2, female respondents reported a slightly higher mean score in career preparedness ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.23$) than males ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.22$). Male participants reported higher levels of motivation from passion ($M = 3.04$) and peer influence ($M = 3.18$), while female respondents scored higher in financial stability ($M = 3.07$) and affordability ($M = 3.21$). Both groups exhibited nearly similar levels of influence from family.

In Table 3, older students (aged 23 and above) reported slightly greater career preparedness ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.21$) than younger students (aged 22 and below, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.23$). Motivation due to financial stability and affordability was higher among older students, while younger students reported slightly higher influence from peer relationships ($M = 3.13$).

Despite the overall high career preparedness, the motivational domains only reached "Moderate" interpretation levels. This indicates room for improvement in aligning students' academic motivations with more focused and strategic career planning. The moderate ratings could be attributed to a lack of personalized career counseling or limited access to structured career decision-making experiences, especially early in the academic journey.

Research by Ochoco and Ty emphasizes that career adaptability among Filipino students is shaped more by their self-concept and access to career resources than by static motivational factors^[8]. Similarly, Beringuel *et al.* highlighted that emotional readiness and structured guidance significantly influence employability outcomes. These findings support the notion that motivation alone, whether driven by interest or external influence, may not fully equip students to transition effectively into the workforce without deliberate institutional support^[12].

Given these results, institutions should consider enhancing career intervention programs that connect students' course motivations with practical and emotional preparedness. Introducing development-focused guidance early in the academic timeline may ensure that students not only choose their programs for meaningful reasons but also build the competencies necessary to pursue fulfilling careers. Implementing comprehensive career development programs, including personalized counseling, experiential learning opportunities, skill-building workshops, and mentorship programs, can bridge the gap between students' academic choices and their career readiness. Such initiatives can foster a more holistic approach to career preparedness, ensuring that students are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce.

Table 2: Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation by Sex

Variable	M (Male)	SD (Male)	M (Female)	SD (Female)	Interpretation
Career Preparedness	3.54	0.22	3.55	0.23	High
Course Choice Motivation					
Passion	3.04	1.41	2.93	1.45	Moderate
Financial Stability	3	1.39	3.07	1.47	Moderate
Affordability	2.98	1.43	3.21	1.44	Moderate
Family Influence	3.04	1.39	3.03	1.41	Moderate
Peer Influence	3.18	1.47	3	1.38	Moderate

Table 3: Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation by Age Group

Variable	M (Older)	SD (Older)	M (Younger)	SD (Younger)	Interpretation
Career Preparedness	3.55	0.21	3.53	0.23	High
Course Choice Motivation					
Passion	3	1.41	2.98	1.46	Moderate
Financial Stability	3.13	1.41	2.93	1.44	Moderate
Affordability	3.11	1.43	3.08	1.45	Moderate
Family Influence	3.02	1.39	3.06	1.41	Moderate
Peer Influence	3.04	1.36	3.13	1.49	Moderate

3.2 Differences in Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation by Sex and Age

To determine whether significant differences exist in career preparedness and course choice motivation when grouped by sex and age, independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results are summarized in Table 4 (Sex) and Table 5 (Age). As shown in Table 4, there were no statistically significant differences in the levels of career preparedness and any of the course choice motivation factors between male and female respondents. The p-values for all variables exceeded the 0.05 significance level, indicating that sex was not a distinguishing factor in the students' responses related to career preparedness or motivation dimensions. Similarly, Table 5 displays the comparison based on age groups. The results again showed no significant differences in career preparedness and the five motivational factors between older and younger students. This suggests that the students' age group (≤ 22 or ≥ 23 years old) did not substantially affect how they perceived their preparedness for career decisions or what motivated their course choices.

These findings align with the study by Pickett, which noted that students across demographic lines often report similar levels of confidence in career-related skills, even though underlying factors such as emotional readiness or access to support services may vary^[7]. Additionally, Aguilar and Torres emphasized that soft skills and internal factors like commitment and communication readiness, rather than demographic characteristics, are more predictive of employability. The lack of significant difference across age and sex may indicate a growing uniformity in how career preparedness is addressed in higher education, possibly due to shared exposure to institutional resources and standardized career modules^[10].

However, the findings contrast with studies like Castro, which noted variations in anxiety and self-efficacy levels between different student subgroups^[9]. This discrepancy may reflect institutional differences or suggest that demographic variables exert only indirect influence when broader psychosocial or environmental factors are at play. For instance, academic self-efficacy has been identified as a crucial mediator in the relationship between various factors and academic outcomes^[17]. Moreover, Malik and Hussain found that parental education and financial conditions significantly influence career choices among university

students, indicating that while sex and age may not directly impact career preparedness, other demographic variables could play a role^[18].

Given these insights, educational institutions need to recognize that while sex and age may not significantly influence career preparedness and course choice motivation, other factors such as parental background, socioeconomic status, and access to resources might. Therefore, a more holistic approach that considers these variables could be beneficial in designing effective career guidance and support programs.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test Results for Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation by Sex

Variable	t	df	p-value
Career Preparedness	-0.332	369	0.74
Course Choice Motivation			
Passion	0.759	369	0.449
Financial Stability	-0.501	369	0.616
Affordability	-1.57	369	0.117
Family Influence	0.121	369	0.904
Peer Influence	1.227	369	0.221

3.3 Correlation Between Course Choice Motivation and Career Preparedness

To explore the relationship between students' course choice motivations and their career preparedness, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. As seen in Table 5, none of the five motivational factors, passion, financial stability, affordability, family influence, and peer influence, showed a statistically significant correlation with career preparedness. The Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from $r = -0.012$ to $r = 0.073$, with all p-values exceeding 0.05. This suggests that students' underlying motivations for selecting their academic programs are not directly associated with their perceived readiness to make career-related decisions.

The absence of significant correlations between Course Choice Motivation and Career Preparedness indicates that the reasons students choose their academic programs—be it passion, financial considerations, affordability, family, or peer influence—do not directly translate into a heightened sense of readiness for their future careers. This finding aligns with the notion that while initial motivations play a role in course selection, they may not sufficiently equip students

with the necessary skills and confidence for career decision-making. Research by Siddiky and Akter emphasizes that career preparedness is influenced more by experiential learning and institutional support than by initial academic motivations^[19]. Their study suggests that students' career decision confidence is often shaped by how aligned their academic experiences are with career aspirations, rather than the motivations behind course selection.

Furthermore, the role of self-efficacy in career preparedness cannot be understated. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory posits that self-efficacy – belief in one's capabilities to execute actions required to manage prospective situations – is a critical determinant of how people think, behave, and feel^[20]. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to engage in proactive career planning and decision-making, regardless of their initial motivations for course selection. The findings also resonate with the work of Jaung and Moon, who found that while career choice motivation influences major satisfaction, it does not necessarily impact career identity or preparedness^[21]. Their study underscores the importance of ongoing support and interventions throughout the academic journey to foster career readiness.

Given these insights, educational institutions should implement comprehensive career development programs that extend beyond addressing students' initial motivations for course selection. These programs should provide personalized career counseling services to help students align their academic experiences with long-term career goals. Additionally, institutions should integrate experiential learning opportunities such as internships, cooperative education, and project-based learning to help students acquire real-world skills and improve their employability. Offering skill-building workshops on resume writing, interview preparation, and professional networking can further enhance students' confidence and readiness for the workforce. Finally, establishing mentorship programs that connect students with professionals in their chosen fields can offer valuable guidance and practical insights, helping bridge the gap between academic preparation and career execution.

By focusing on these areas, institutions can better support students in developing the competencies and confidence necessary for successful career decision-making, irrespective of their initial motivations for course selection.

Table 5: Career Preparedness and Course Choice Motivation
Pearson Correlation

CCM Factor	Pearson's r	p-value
Passion	0.004	0.934
Financial Stability	0.073	0.159
Affordability	0.063	0.23
Family Influence	-0.012	0.814
Peer Influence	-0.009	0.866

3.4 Theoretical Analysis

This study hypothesized that students' career preparedness is shaped by the motivations behind their course selection, as informed by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the interplay between personal factors, contextual influences, and self-efficacy in shaping career-related behaviors. However, the absence of statistically significant correlations between course choice motivation and career preparedness suggests only partial support for the theory in this context. While SCCT posits that internal drivers like passion or perceived financial viability should influence

self-efficacy and preparedness, the findings imply that such motivations, at least as measured in this study, may not exert a direct or strong enough influence. This may be attributed to the limited depth of the motivational items or the uniformly high exposure to institutional career resources that minimize variance in preparedness. Therefore, while SCCT remains a valid theoretical lens, the current results underscore the importance of incorporating additional psychosocial or institutional variables, such as self-regulation, mentoring quality, or access to experiential learning, to fully capture the complex processes underlying career development in higher education.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between course choice motivation and career preparedness among graduating students in a private university in Bacolod City. Guided by Social Cognitive Career Theory, the research explored whether personal and external factors influencing academic course selection, such as passion, financial concerns, and social influences, are associated with students' confidence in making career decisions. Findings revealed no significant differences in career preparedness when grouped according to sex, age, or academic program, nor significant correlations between motivational factors and preparedness levels. These results suggest that while motivations for choosing a course may inform academic direction, they do not necessarily predict how ready students feel to navigate the transition into the workforce.

The study highlights the need for educational institutions to reinforce structured, skill-based, and experiential interventions that go beyond students' initial motivations. By investing in comprehensive career support systems, schools can better prepare students for employment challenges, irrespective of their reasons for choosing a particular course. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on employability and educational effectiveness, offering valuable implications for student support services, institutional policy, and future academic inquiry.

5. Limitations of the Findings

While this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between course choice motivation and career preparedness, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the data were collected from a single university within one region of the Philippines, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations across other regions or institutional contexts. Additionally, although efforts were made to ensure conceptual clarity, the measurement of course choice motivation relied on single-item indicators for each factor. This approach, while aligned with demographic profiling, may have constrained the depth and dimensionality of the data collected for this variable. Lastly, the timing of data collection—administered shortly before graduation—could have influenced participants' perceptions of their career preparedness, as students may have felt either heightened anxiety or overconfidence due to the immediacy of entering the job market. These contextual and methodological limitations suggest that findings should be interpreted with caution and that future studies might benefit from multi-institutional sampling and more robust instrument designs.

Another limitation of this study is the use of self-constructed, single-item indicators to measure the construct of Course

Choice Motivation. While these items capture key motivational dimensions, the lack of multiple items per construct limits the ability to assess internal consistency and may reduce measurement reliability. Consequently, the results related to motivation should be interpreted with caution, and future studies are encouraged to develop or adopt multi-item, validated scales for a more rigorous assessment.

6. Practical Value of the Paper

The findings of this study are particularly relevant to students and guidance counselors, as they offer evidence-based insights into the role of course choice motivation in shaping career preparedness. These results may inform enhancements to existing career development programs, allowing guidance personnel to tailor their strategies according to the motivational factors that influence students' academic decisions. By incorporating these insights, counselors can help students bridge the gap between academic choices and career planning more effectively.

Moreover, the study may serve as a valuable reference for institutional decision-makers, particularly members of the school board, in designing or refining academic and career guidance policies. Recognizing the limited predictive power of motivational factors on career preparedness, educational leaders may consider implementing more structured interventions, such as career counseling modules, experiential learning opportunities, and mentoring initiatives, to better equip students for the transition to employment. Finally, by highlighting the disconnection between course motivations and actual career readiness, this research encourages a reevaluation of how universities support students' long-term success. Should the recommendations be implemented, institutions may see improvements in graduate employability, reduced student anxiety about post-graduation life, and more meaningful academic-to-career trajectories—ultimately contributing to better outcomes in both individual and institutional development.

7. Directions for Future Research

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted among graduating students from a single university in Bacolod City. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between course choice motivation and career preparedness, future research should be conducted across multiple universities within the Western Visayas region. Expanding the geographic scope and institutional diversity would reduce sampling bias and improve the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, future studies are encouraged to utilize a larger and more demographically diverse sample, potentially including students from various year levels and academic programs. This broader sample could help identify patterns across different academic stages and specializations.

Moreover, it is recommended that future research employ more standardized and validated instruments to measure course choice motivation. While the current study used single-item indicators as part of the demographic profile, employing multi-item scales could enhance measurement reliability and allow for deeper analysis of motivational constructs.

Lastly, future investigations may consider incorporating additional variables such as perceived education quality, which could influence both academic motivation and career

readiness. By including such factors, future researchers may develop a more holistic understanding of the educational and psychological mechanisms that shape students' transition from university to the workforce.

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