

# Determinants Affecting Culinary Undergraduates' Future Career Decision in Post-COVID Era

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## ABSTRACT

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*The COVID-19 virus represents a threat to the hotel sector, and future crises are still very much a possibility. This study aims to identify factors affecting culinary undergraduates' future career in post-covid era among students to better understand how such a crisis affects the desirability of pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. This study used quantitative methodology based on the positivist paradigm. A self-administered questionnaire was used and distributed to 254 respondents in Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang. The data gathered was analyzed using SPSS version 21. Pearson's Correlation test was conducted on the research variables to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Results showed that all three hypotheses which are salary, self-efficacy, and personal interest significantly influence culinary future career choices among undergraduate students. The authors of this study anticipate that it can benefit aspiring talent in the culinary industry and aid in restoring the appeal of employment in the sector by providing significant leverage points that may be used to help reduce the confusion among undergraduates in choosing a career because of a crisis, like COVID-19. It is recommended that future research to encompass all public universities and their undergraduate student populations to further validate the findings of this study.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Career decision-making is a process that all university students must go through after graduation if they do not intend to continue their education at a higher level. It is the stage at which university students identify the elements that will impact their job choices (Chai et al., (2013). It necessitates careful consideration and extensive research that takes time and is complicated. The decision to stay in the hospitality or culinary industry has been challenged by the recent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The COVID-19 fueled the fire under these conditions (Ahmad & Nasir, 2021). Akkermans et al. (2020) mentioned such pandemics could have short- and long-term effects on career-related experiences and paths. A report by World Meters (2021), there were more than 160 million cumulative definite cases worldwide, with more than 3 million fatalities. As a result, people have been under tremendous pressure, and many have gone through serious psychological distress. The epidemic negatively impacted every element of college students' lives, especially in terms of how it psychologically affected their career goals and other major life decisions. In a similar vein, students are confronted with surroundings that are becoming more and more unpredictable. Their academic performance, educational goals, involvement in the labor market now, and hopes for the future may have been impacted by financial and medical shocks, the switch to online learning, and other factors.

University students' lives have drastically changed recently because of being required to live absent from college, adapt to new living arrangements, and become accustomed to online learning environments. Students' stress levels have probably grown because of the shift to online learning, especially in courses that weren't originally intended for online delivery. In a recent study by Shah et al. (2021), COVID-19 dread has caused university students to worry about their future careers. COVID-19 fear is positively connected with future career anxiety, and the relationship is extremely significant. Given the specific circumstances, it is important to investigate the psychosocial experiences of university students in Malaysia and the ongoing pressure they suffer regarding their future careers. This is especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Students are also under financial and mental strain because many people lost jobs, become homeless, or lost enterprises. Due to factors including academic pressure, the financial crisis, the protracted graduation process, and employment options, university students already experience constant stress. Given the current pandemic situation, can undergraduate students pursue their studies at a higher level or continue with their future careers under constant stress? Although there is similar research on this topic, there is still a lack of study regarding students' factors towards the culinary future career in this post-covid era. Thus, this study aims to examine the determinants of career choices among culinary undergraduate students in a public university.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Culinary Future Career Choices***

Most undergraduates said that the industry's promotion opportunities were inadequate, and that this industry's seasonality made it difficult to find secure work (Kuslivan & Kuslivan, 2000). Making a career decision is a process that everyone must go through, particularly for recent graduates from all types of educational institutions (Chai et al., 2013). It involves considerable complexity, in-depth research that takes time and serious thought. When deciding on a career, salary, benefits, and promotion opportunities, are the top three crucial variables. It is reasonable that recent culinary grads are worried about their future and would like to lead a secure lifestyle, given the state of the economy and employment market (Yen et al., 2013). So far, not many

career fairs are held for undergraduates especially for the hotel industry due to COVID-19. Undergraduate students are not exposed to job information and career opportunities, making them reluctant to pursue their careers. Career fairs are important because they were found to become the most noticed and used career-oriented asset on campus by culinary graduates in previous research (Yen et al., 2013). This would make culinary graduates more aware of the job prospects available and impact their decision-making. However, to examine undergraduate students' future culinary career choices, the previous study only focused on the expectations of culinary students' career choices. A vast and increasing body of literature indicates that students are unwilling to work in the tourism and hotel business due to tourism aspects such as long work and seasonal work (Kahraman & Alrawadieh, 2021). Additionally, students' future tendencies are influenced by the nature of the hospitality and tourism industry as well as by personal factors such as internships, expectations, effectiveness, job adaptation, enthusiasm for work, work experience, money, possibilities for advancement, and education (Kahraman & Alrawadieh, 2021).

## **2.2 Salary**

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our world in numerous ways, which leaves a lasting impact on various aspects of our lives, including the job market. As we navigate the post-COVID era, individuals must carefully consider multiple factors when choosing a career path. Among these factors, salary is one of the crucial considerations that play an essential role in financial stability, personal fulfilment, and overall career satisfaction. Salary is a set sum of money or other remuneration given to employees in exchange for work they have completed for the company (Achim et al., 2019). Financial stability is vital to our lives, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused widespread economic uncertainty. Choosing a career with a competitive salary provides individuals with the means to secure their financial well-being and adapt to future challenges. A survey conducted by Nadaan (2022) stated 46% of individuals consider salary the most important factor in their career decisions. A higher salary can offer a sense of security, ensuring individuals have the resources to weather unforeseen circumstances and build a strong foundation for themselves and their families.

The importance of work-life balance and overall well-being has become more apparent in the post-COVID era. Thakur et al. (2020) indicates that higher-paying jobs offer better work-life balance. A career with a competitive salary can provide individuals with the financial means to invest in self-care, leisure activities, and quality time with loved ones, fostering a healthier and more fulfilling lifestyle. Because of that, this might also influence career choices among students. Students prefer to review the compensation a business gives to have a solid financial income in the future because they are generally conscious of the inflation happening, especially during Malaysia's post-COVID period. From previous studies, many graduates from tourism-related universities choose to quit the industry altogether (Rosyidi, 2021). The problem occurs when there is a perception of low professional satisfaction, a bad working environment, low compensation, and high staff turnover (Anandhwanlert & Wattanasan, 2017). The Herzberg theory states that compensation is essential for continuous existence since it actively combats employee dissatisfaction. One of the financial obligations that an employer or organization has to an employee is salary, which impacts the employee's short- and long-term financial situation for both the employer and the individual (Wen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, hoteliers were overly concerned about the introduction of the minimum wage because they had to comply with it (Minister of higher Education, 2012) Plus, aside from the basic compensation, which might appear to be low, it was only one aspect of a worker's overall salary. This situation happens in Sarawak, where the salary of a chef is being compared to

Singapore. A news article in *The Star* (2012) quoted John Teo, chairman of the Malaysia Association of Hotels Sarawak, about a permanent staff shortfall of 40% in the hospitality sector in Sarawak. The Covid-19 pandemic is also significantly affecting the tourism industry globally (Gössling et al., 2020). The epidemic has resulted in tourism workers losing revenue and quitting employment (Hakim, 2020). There are few studies on culinary students' career preferences and job-searching behaviors. While salary alone should not be the sole determinant, it should be carefully considered alongside other factors to make an informed decision about the career path to pursue in the post-COVID era. This has turned into a potential issue for recruiters since businesses can squander money-seeking eligible individuals endlessly despite the rise in student enrolment and the expansion of job opportunities in the sector.

H1: Salary significantly influences culinary future career choices among undergraduate students.

### ***2.3 Self-efficacy***

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically transformed the global job market, leading to extensive disruptions and revaluations of career choices. In this post-COVID era, selecting a career path requires careful consideration of various factors. Self-efficacy, or the conviction that one can succeed in a particular endeavor, stands out as one of the key factors. In other words, the ability to control one's behavior and direct it is known as self-regulation, which is greatly influenced by one's confidence level (Elias & MacDonald, 2007). This confidence is the standard phrase for self-efficacy. Also, self-efficacy, known as career choice adaptability, is an individual's self-belief within the process of choosing and comparing several option career paths that he or she will best pursue by gathering facts and data about oneself and the environment in addition to the opportunities that exist with mature self-confidence (Munir & Sugiharto, 2021). Self-efficacy controls how people feel, think, and encourage themselves to complete tasks. There is insufficient study on how the extended COVID-19 issue affects students' self-efficacy, career interests, and aspirations (Birtch et al., 2021). Individuals with high career self-efficacy can overcome career difficulties and short-term problems and adjust to career constraints (Chan, 2018). Career self-efficacy is the most important element influencing university students' career decisions and it connects favorably with work satisfaction (Kautish et al., 2022).

A study by Iroegbu (2015) using Albert Bandura's Model showed that the main proposition was that individuals with high self-efficacy believe in themselves and exhibit high performance, while individuals with low self-efficacy do not have confidence in themselves and end up with low performance. Observing others' successes can serve as a powerful source of self-efficacy. With the advent of remote work and digital connectivity during COVID-19, students have greater access to diverse professional narratives through online classes and sharing sessions. Stories of resilience and adaptation, shared through online platforms or professional networks, provide valuable vicarious experiences that shape students' career choices. Witnessing others overcome challenges can boost individuals' confidence to succeed in a post-COVID career. The COVID-19 crisis thus raises several crucial questions for those involved in the hospitality industry, such as what impact a crisis of this magnitude will have on the professional goals and intentions of the industry's future talent pool (i.e., students of hospitality management), what actions can hospitality educators take to help lessen or minimize the negative effects of a crisis of this magnitude on their students, and what lessons can be drawn from COVID-19. Peer groups, mentors, and career advisors can provide guidance and support, helping individuals recognize their capabilities and encouraging them to pursue career paths that align with their

strengths. During the post-COVID era, such social persuasion becomes even more crucial in mitigating uncertainties and instilling confidence in individuals' career decisions.

Unfortunately, the knowledge of how the negative feelings elicited by COVID-19 affect hospitality management students' occupational attitudes is still in its infancy. A recent study by (Bufquin et al., 2021), the large reduction in hospitality jobs owing to COVID-19 (i.e., mass lay-offs and hospitality business failures) has produced stress and worry among hospitality workers, which may cause similar fear and negative affective reactions to students for their future career choices in the hospitality management. As a result, students studying hospitality management who experience negative affective reactions because of COVID-19's effects on the hospitality sector are likely to be hesitant and concerned about their career choices (Birtch et al., 2021).

H2: Self-efficacy significantly influences culinary future career choices among undergraduate students.

#### ***2.4 Personal Interest***

It is necessary to consider personal interest as a primary factor when choosing a career in the post-COVID pandemic, which has brought about profound changes in the working environment. According to Hayes & Shakya (2013), one of the elements determining career choice is personal interest. Previous studies by Selvanathan et al., (2016) stated that personal interest was one of the most significant factors in career choice among undergraduate students in Malaysia. As cited by Humayon et al., (2018), personal interest relates to the student's personal interest in their chosen careers (Liaw et al., 2017). Furthermore, individuals choose career environments that best suit their personality and interests (Holland, 1996). The post-COVID era has witnessed a rapid transformation of industries and increased demand for versatile professionals who can adapt to changing circumstances. By pursuing a career aligned with personal interests, individuals are more likely to possess the intrinsic motivation to navigate and embrace these changes. Conard (2004) highlighted intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interests, enables individuals to persistently invest effort in their chosen field, leading to enhanced adaptability and resilience.

Moreover, a study by Yen et al., (2013) discovered that graduates with culinary training tend to concentrate primarily on job prospects in the restaurant sector of the food service business. They have limited career interests in other facets of the food service sector. This lack of enthusiasm also contributes to an unbalanced supply in the sector. The career route for culinary students is much tougher than that of other students who chose the hospitality sector as their field of study, in addition to the lack of interest in other food service business segments. Positions in the foodservice industry are notorious for having demanding schedules, uncomfortable working conditions, and low compensation, particularly those in the back-of-the-house operations (Pratten & O'Leary, 2007). Humayon et al., (2018) placed a high value on students' interest in choosing their careers. They observed that a student's interest in a vocation is based on their likes and dislikes.

The professional choice of students is predicted by their lack of interest in activities relevant to their job and occupation. Tekke and Kurt, (2015) also discuss the many phases of behavior change and how people think when choosing a vocation. Aligning personal interest with a career choice promotes adaptability, enhances mental health and job satisfaction, facilitates success in remote work environments, and fosters professional resilience. By prioritizing personal interest, individuals can confidently navigate the evolving job market, contributing to

their overall well-being and long-term career success. According to Jaensch, et al. (2016), having a career aligned with personal interest helps individuals develop a growth mindset, making them more resilient in the face of setbacks and uncertainties. Individuals with this flexibility can pick themselves up after setbacks, learn new abilities, and consider other job options if necessary.

H3: Personal interest significantly influences culinary future career choices among undergraduate students.

### 2.5 Research Framework

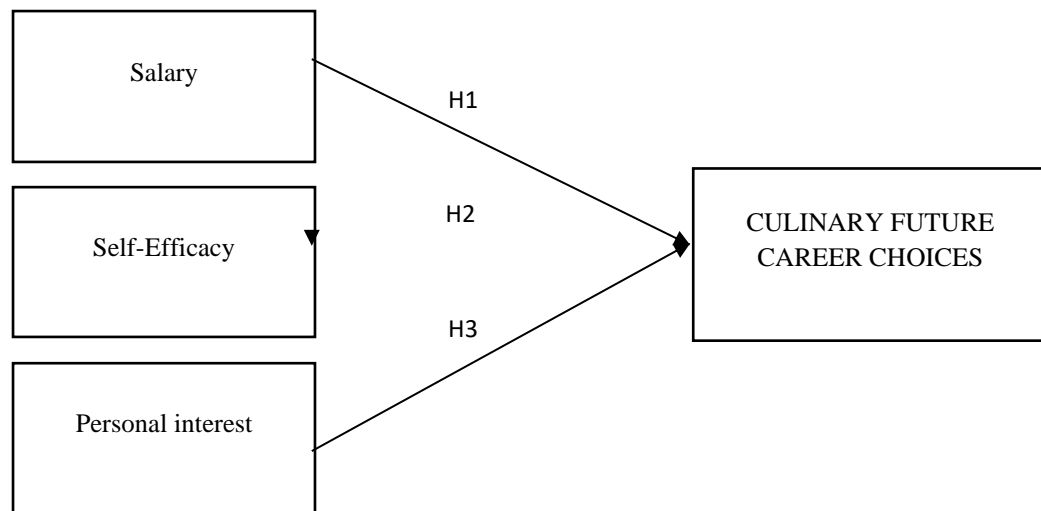


Figure 1: The research framework on Determinants Affecting Culinary Undergraduates’ Future Career Decision in Post-Covid Era Among Students (Bucak & Yiğit, 2021 & Selvanathan et al., 2016).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study is based on a descriptive study that involves collecting data to test hypotheses or answer questions concerning the status of the study objects. A descriptive study also describes situations and events (Nezakati et al., 2011). This study analyses the relationship between salary, self-efficacy, and personal interest in future culinary career choices among undergraduates.

### 3.2 Population and Sample Size

The chosen population for this study is undergraduate students in culinary management from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management in UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang. From Table 3, it can be concluded that the suitable sample size according to the Raosoft calculator and the table Krejcie and Morgan (1970) generalized scientific guideline for sample size decisions is 254.

Table 1: Total Population of Undergraduate Culinary Students in UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang

<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Total number</b>
Diploma	504
Degree	222
<b>Total population</b>	<b>726</b>

### ***3.3 Sampling Design and Data Collection***

The sampling technique for this study is non-probability sampling, which is the convenience sampling technique, where the data can be gathered quickly because subjects are focused, readily available, efficient, and low-cost. A survey questionnaire collected information regarding factors influencing culinary undergraduates toward their future culinary career choices. The research instrument used was a self-administered questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed through an online survey platform and a Google link in social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) among students from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management in UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang. All completed questionnaires were thoroughly checked to identify incomplete responses. Then, the data were loaded into SPSS Version 21 for further analysis.

### ***3.4 Survey Instrument Development***

Closed-ended questions were used for data collection. The questionnaire consists of 3 sections as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sources for Measurement Items

<b>Sections</b>	<b>No of Item</b>
A: Demographic Profile	3
B: Independent Variables	
Salary	4
Self-efficacy	5
Personal Interest	4
C: Dependent Variable	
Future Career Choices	4

The respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement statements using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was used as Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5. The purpose of having both positive and negative statements is to control the tendency of certain respondents to mark one or the other end of the scale without reading the items. The survey instrument also included questions related to the learners' demographic details, such as age, gender, and level of education.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability Analysis was used to measure the extent to which the items in the questionnaire are related to each other. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the 17 items' internal reliability in measuring the four variables. Cronbach's alpha varies from 0 to 1, and a value of 0.6 or less indicates unsatisfactory internal consistency reliability.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items
Salary (S)	0.815	4
Self-Efficacy (SE)	0.833	5
Personal Interest (PI)	0.854	4
Culinary Future Career Choices (CFCC)	0.803	4

From Table 3, it indicates that a personal interest score with four items had the highest alpha coefficient of 0.854. Self-efficacy recorded an alpha coefficient of 0.833 and salary of 0.815. Table 3 exhibits that all reliability scores of all constructs are above 0.6.

#### 4.1.1 Descriptive Analysis

A total of 254 respondents' data were analyzed. The descriptive analysis was used to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Gender, age group, and level of education are among the characteristics.

Table 4: Respondent Socio-Demographic Profiles (N=254)

Socio-demographic Profiles	Total <i>n</i>	Percent (%)
<b>1. Gender</b>		
Male	139	54.7
Female	115	45.3
<b>2. Age Group</b>		
18 - 20 Years old	92	36.2
21 - 23 Years old	162	63.8
<b>3. Level of Education</b>		
Diploma	92	36.2
Degree	162	63.8

Table 4 shows the respondents' socio-demographic profiles. It shows that the frequency of males is slightly higher, representing 54.7% (n=139) compared to female respondents, 45.3% (n=115) who were involved in this study. The highest age group of respondents is within the age range from 21 – 23 years old, with 162 out of 254 (63.8%) followed by 18 – 20 years old, with a total number of 92 (percentage, 36.2%). For the level of education, most respondents were degree students, with a total number of 162 out of 254, with a percentage of 63.8%. This shows that most respondents who answered are degree students compared to diploma students, with a total number of 92 with a percentage of 36.2%.



#### 4.1.2 Person Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation was used to measure the connection between the variables. The closer the value of  $r$  to zero, the greater the variation of the data points around the line of best fit. In this analysis, the coefficient  $r$  was used to assess the strength of the relationship between the three variables: salary, self-efficacy, personal interest, and culinary career choices. Table 5 shows the correlation score of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	Coefficient
Salary	0.009
Self-efficacy	0.419
Personal interest	0.633

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The statistical results confirm that salary, self-efficacy, and personal interest have a significant influence on future culinary career choices among undergraduate students ranging from  $r=0.009$  to  $r=0.633$ . The correlation between salary and career choices is significant with  $r=0.009$ , the correlation between self-efficacy and career choices is significant with  $r=0.419$ , and the correlation between personal interest and career choices is significant with  $r=0.633$ . To conclude, all three variables have a significant influence on choosing their career.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed that salary significantly influences future culinary career choices at  $r=0.009$ . However, the correlation in the result was rather weak. A salary is a set sum of money or other remuneration paid to a worker in exchange for work they have completed for the company. Several scholars highlighted that financial benefits are one of the elements influencing students' career choices (Azizah & Purnamasari, 2021). Wijayanti (2001) also voiced the same idea, claiming that financial rewards are the outcomes of performance contracts, which some businesses view as the primary motivator for choosing staff. Students usually will consider financial compensation when selecting a job or career. Salary and income are also one of the factors in deciding whether a worker stays with a company or leaves. Wen et al. (2018) indicated a company or organization's financial obligations to an employee are salary, which may impact the employee's short and long-term financial situation for both the firm and the individual. Employers will prioritize rewarding great performers financially if a firm increases the salary and benefits offered. To summarize from the above statement, salary may influence undergraduates' career choices in the culinary. Students are mostly aware of the inflation occurring during Malaysia's post-covid-era. To have a stable financial income in the future, students tend to overview the amount of salary offered by an organization. Based on the data collected, students as research respondents feel that nominal and basic salaries with benefits are crucial while deciding on a professional choice in this post-COVID era.

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed that self-efficacy significantly influences future culinary career choices at  $r=0.419$ . This shows that self-efficacy or the capacity to achieve can motivate the outcomes in the workplace and the career. Furthermore, individuals are motivated to excel and persist through challenging situations when they believe they can manage their actions effectively. High self-confidence or self-efficacy is always necessary for students in educational institutions or graduates of vocational education while making career decisions (Sofyan et al.,

2022). Kustyarini (2020) stated self-confidence stimulates the development of one's capacity for doing work, which results in a sense of confidence. Moreover, self-efficacy plays a vital role as a significant resource, as it has the potential to generate positive career-related results, such as fostering employees' dedication to their careers and enhancing their enthusiasm for their work. Li et al. (2019) indicated that people with higher levels of self-efficacy see fewer obstacles in their career path. They eventually tend to approach career exploration activities with an optimistic outlook. Chui et al. (2022) further pointed out that participating in job-related exploration activities may enable people, including undergraduates, to believe in and expect excellent future career results. When someone has strong self-efficacy or the perception that they can complete a task in each domain, they are more likely to invest their time and resources, create goals, and organize activities to accomplish the objectives of that domain (Birtch et al., 2021). The findings of this study suggest that students majoring in culinary arts are more likely to set goals and develop a "road map for action" to prepare for their careers. As a result, they are also more likely to maintain the continuity of their self-concepts and sense of identity in the hospitality industry. Having positive self-efficacy will motivate students to pursue this career line and continue this profession.

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed that personal interest in the culinary profession positively influences future culinary career choices at  $r=0.633$ . Personal interest was included as one of the influential variables in profession choice (Hayes & Shakya, 2013). The results showed that personal interest was one of the most important elements that affected the job choice of undergraduate hospitality students, and this was true for both the male and female groups. This is in line with Humayon et al. (2018) who discuss the significance of students' desire to choose their careers. They pointed out that a student's interest in a career is based on their likes and dislikes. The professional choice of students is predicted by their lack of interest in activities relevant to their job and occupation. Tekke and Kurt (2015) stated the many phases of behavior change and how people think when choosing a career. In contrast to their familial, career, market-oriented, and university-related characteristics, the data showed that personal interest has the biggest influence. People should take their personal interests into account when making career decisions because 1) People would do better in their areas of interest; 2) People who choose occupations that align with their personal passions are frequently successful; and 3) People may experience higher fulfillment and happiness when working in their areas of interest.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study aims to identify factors affecting culinary undergraduates' future career in post-covid era among students to better understand how such a crisis affects the desirability of pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. The findings revealed that this study's research objectives and questions were addressed. Results showed that all three hypotheses of this study are supported. Thus, all variables which are salary, self-efficacy, and personal interest, have a significant relation with what affects students' career choices. The authors anticipate that it can benefit aspiring talent in the culinary industry and aid in restoring the appeal of employment in the sector by providing significant leverage points that may be used to help reduce the confusion among undergraduates in choosing a career because of a crisis like COVID-19.

It is crucial to emphasize the significance of selecting a career. Selecting the right career path is not only essential for ensuring financial security, a fundamental component of overall well-being but also for fostering employment stability and job security. Moreover, it is vital for industries, such as the hotel sector, to provide benefits like overtime pay and sick pay to undergraduate employees, as this not only attracts talent but also ensures a workforce that is

committed to their roles. The research findings suggest that most respondents prioritize employment opportunities that offer competitive wages and a conducive environment for effective work performance. Ultimately, making informed career decisions and prioritizing job security and financial stability are critical steps towards a more fulfilling and secure future.

There are several limitations encountered in this study. The primary limitation pertains to the small sample size, which was exclusively drawn from undergraduate students at UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang. Consequently, the findings may lack applicability and generalizability to other samples across diverse regions. Enhancing the generalizability of results would be achievable by employing a larger and more diverse sample encompassing various regions of public universities. Thus, it is recommended that future research should encompass all public universities and their undergraduate student populations to comprehensively investigate career choices. For future studies, it is recommended to employ diverse research methods to enhance the depth and breadth of findings. Additionally, future investigations could explore gender-based analyses and incorporate additional layers of data analysis.

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## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

AZ contributed to the main idea and conducted data collection and analysis. NFMK contributed to expanding the idea and literature review. EMAR also contributed to the literature review and grammar. SIIMM contributed to data analysis and findings and ensured all the references were current. FAF contributed to data methodology. all authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None declared.

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