



Influences on Career Pathways and Aspirations of B.S. Human Ecology Undergraduates

Johana S. Aganinta, Inero Ancho,* , Rufo Gil Albor, Daisy Pelegrina, Phrygian Almeda

Department of Human and Family Development Studies, College of Human Ecology, University of the Philippines Los Baños

ABSTRACT

Choosing a career path is a significant decision that shapes a student's future direction and life trajectory. This study explored the different factors influencing career choices among selected B.S. Human Ecology students at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. Unlike degree programs with a singular focus, Human Ecology introduces students to a wide range of fields, including Human and Family Development Studies, Human Settlements Planning, and Social Technology. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected from third and fourth-year students through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed four primary categories influencing career decision-making: economic factors, personal factors, social influences, and institutional factors. The results showed that most students entered the program with broad or unclear goals. Over time, their interests became more specific as they were exposed to major courses, fieldwork, and guidance from professors. Many students shifted from general aspirations to clearer career goals such as becoming development workers, educators, planners, or professionals in public health. Their long-term goals often reflected a mix of personal values and practical needs. The study highlights the important role of academic programs in shaping student career decisions and supports the need for programs that help students discover and align their interests with real opportunities. These findings may help universities create better support systems for career development, especially in interdisciplinary courses like Human Ecology.

Keywords: Career Aspirations; Career Choice; Career Decision-Making; Influences; Human Ecology

* Correspondence: ivancho@up.edu.ph

Received: 10 July 2025 **Accepted:** 14 October 2025 | **Published:** 10 December 2025

Introduction

In today's economy, choosing a career is no longer a straightforward path of aligning one's skills with available opportunities. It is a complex process influenced by a multitude of factors that can either lead to career uncertainty and indecision or, alternatively, help students clarify their path and make informed career choices (Ajayi et al., 2023; Azhenov et al., 2023; Bohara et al., 2022; Edwin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Career uncertainty and indecision have become problems faced by students globally. B.S. Human Ecology students also face these challenges. These issues arise as students grapple with choosing a career path that not only suits their interests but also offers long-term stability and fulfillment. These problems often stem from various personal and external factors, including personal interests, intellectual capacity, familial expectations, societal needs, and the evolving job market (Puebla, 2022; Twang, 2022; Zhang, 2022; Fu, 2019). For many, career confusion disrupts their educational experience and can lead to pursuing paths that may not align with their true passions (Barayuga & Ramirez, 2021).

A career is defined as a field of or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement, especially in public, professional, or business life. However, despite this clear definition, the process of selecting and pursuing a career is anything but straightforward, especially for students. Career aspiration—what one hopes or dreams to become—is not the same as career choice, which involves a more concrete and committed decision based on a realistic assessment of one's goals, capabilities, and circumstances. Many students enter college with aspirations shaped by personal interests or societal ideals, only to face conflicting pressures or limited information when making actual career decisions. These challenges often disrupt educational experiences, leading to misalignment between students' passions and their chosen academic paths (Barayuga & Ramirez, 2021). Research has shown that students, beginning in high school, are expected to make early decisions regarding their future careers. For instance, in the Philippines' K-12 curriculum, students must select from various academic tracks, including Academic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood, and Sports and Arts, each designed to prepare them for specific career paths (Caballes et al., 2022; Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d.). This choice is their first step toward career development.

In the Southeast Asian context, particularly the Philippines, educational reforms such as the K–12 program have aimed to enhance students' preparedness for both academic and vocational futures. However, despite these efforts, career uncertainty remains prevalent (Nazareno et al., 2020). Instead of solely critiquing the policy, this study emphasizes the need to understand how these systemic changes have impacted students' career development pathways. Notably, dropout rates, although fluctuating, remain significant. For example, between 2007 and 2013, elementary dropout rates rose from 5.99% to 6.81%, and secondary rates increased from 7.45% to 7.82%. While recent data shows a decrease in tertiary dropout rates from 40.98% to 35.15% in 2023–2024 (Sarao, 2023), economic constraints and program inefficiencies persist as barriers to long-term educational attainment (Parreño, 2023).

The selection of an undergraduate degree program has the most impact on an individual's career path. This choice will shape a student's academic journey by offering specialized knowledge, skills, and experiences that are relevant to their chosen career path (Alsayed et al., 2021; Abe & Chikoko, 2020). It is often driven by a student's initial career interest and aspiration that is associated and aligned with the specific field of study offered by the degree program (Dahl et al., 2024; Bowers-Brown, 2019). Other common factors that influence students' choice of degree program include parental influences, affordability, external influences, practicality, and socio-economic problems (Sadjail et al., 2022). A study conducted by Cortes et al. (2023) found that among student characteristics, the influence of significant people, marketing factors, fixed university characteristics, university image, perceived program quality, and perceived career opportunities, only student characteristics significantly influence students' intention to enroll in a degree program.

Career decision-making is more complex than simply choosing an occupation; it involves understanding one's skills, strengths, weaknesses, desires, needs, and knowledge about one's capacity and potential for development. It is the expression of oneself, encompassing attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and motives, to ensure an effective plan for a future career and its alignment with personal expectations (Mohammed et al., 2021).

This study aligns with the broader field of human development, focusing on the study of human growth, development, and adaptation throughout the lifespan. Career development is a crucial aspect of human development as individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood, shaping their identities, relationships, and overall well-being. In the context of human and family development studies, understanding career choices involves examining how

students' developmental stages and family dynamics shape their aspirations and decision-making processes. For many students, their career choices are influenced by a combination of personal interest, financial reason, and family dynamics (Yunusa et al., 2022). The integration of family studies into the career decision-making process offers helpful information about how students' personal relationships and family roles influence their academic outcomes and career aspirations. A study revealed that parental involvement in education resulted in fewer behavioral problems, better school attendance, increased academic achievement, better adaptation at school, better acquisition and demonstration of social skills, development of a strong feeling of self-worth, and the development of a lifelong love for learning (Oranga et al., 2023).

The B.S. Human Ecology program is unique in its integrative design. As the only program of its kind in the Philippines, offered by the University of the Philippines Los Baños, it draws from diverse fields such as human and family development, environmental planning, social development, and nutrition (College of Human Ecology, n.d.). This interdisciplinary approach equips students with broad competencies but also creates ambiguity when students attempt to define a clear professional trajectory. Given this diversity, BSHE students may find it more challenging to identify a specific career path compared to those in highly specialized programs, such as Nursing or Pharmacy. While this flexibility is an asset, it can also lead to uncertainty, especially when institutional or social guidance is lacking. A 1998 BSHE graduate, Julie Hung, shared that her training in human ecology provided the analytical, communication, and project management skills that later enabled her to shift from a pre-med track to a career at JPMorgan. Her experience illustrates both the potential and the ambiguity embedded in interdisciplinary training. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the B.S. Human Ecology program, choosing a career path becomes all the more challenging. Unlike degree programs with a singular focus, such as B.S. Nursing, B.S. Chemistry, and B.S. Pharmacy, students in the B.S. Human Ecology program are exposed to a diverse range of fields, ranging from nutrition and family studies to community studies and resource management (Amparo et al., 2019). While this variety of courses equips students with a versatile foundation of knowledge, skillset, and a well-rounded understanding of human interactions in their environment, it can also lead to a sense of ambiguity when it comes to identifying a specific career path that aligns perfectly with their interests.

This ambiguity highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the career choices of B.S. Human Ecology students. While various studies have explored career uncertainty, decision-making processes, and influencing factors across different disciplines, limited research has focused on how these influences operate within the context of Human Ecology education. Rather than identifying the specific career paths students choose, this study seeks to examine the

underlying motivations, experiences, and contexts that shape their evolving decisions. Understanding these factors not only help students make more informed career decisions but also assist educators and policymakers in developing targeted interventions and support systems that are responsive to the needs of B.S. Human Ecology students.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted at the College of Human Ecology (CHE), University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), the only institution in the Philippines offering a Bachelor of Science in Human Ecology (BSHE) program. UPLB's interdisciplinary curriculum and CHE's strong foundation in human and family development, environmental planning, and social technology made it a purposeful setting for exploring the factors influencing the career choices of human ecology students.

A phenomenological research design was employed to understand students' lived experiences and the underlying motivations that shape their evolving career interests. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of how students' academic, social, and personal experiences influence their decision-making.

Participants were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Eleven students in their 3rd or 4th year of the BSHE program, who had already declared their specialization in Human and Family Development (HFD), Social Technology (ST), or Human Settlements Planning (HSP), were included. The selection process ensured that they had adequate exposure to the program and could offer informed perspectives. The decision to have 11 participants could be justified by aiming for data saturation, since the focus is on the depth, richness and emergence of themes. Participant demographics varied by sex, age, year level, and specialization, reflecting diverse viewpoints within the program's bounds. The final sample consisted of 8 female and 3 male students, aged between 21 and 24 years old.

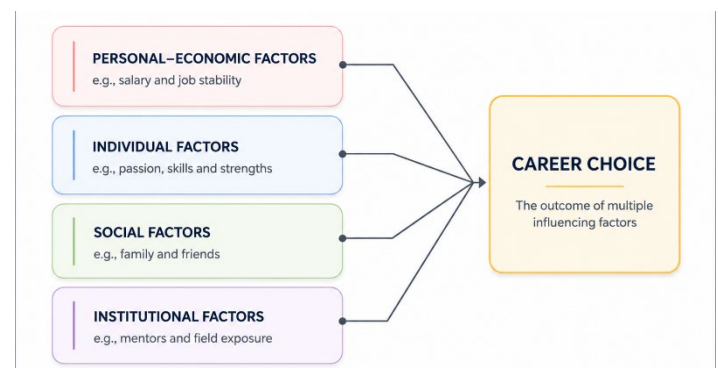
Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide reviewed and approved by experts in human development and qualitative research. Interviews lasted from 48 minutes to over an hour, depending on the depth of the discussion. These sessions were conducted either face-to-face or online via Zoom or Google Meet, depending on the participant's preference and availability. Each interview was recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. This process involved several stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the final analysis. The analysis followed an inductive

approach, with codes emerging directly from the data to reflect participants' authentic voices and experiences.

Coding was done manually using Google Docs and Google Sheets. Themes were developed through iterative reading, categorization, and refinement, guided by reflexive practices (examining the researcher's own influence of the research process) and analytic memos (tool for reflection and interpretation of thoughts and insights) that tracked insights and reduced bias. Though the primary researchers conducted the coding independently, reflexivity and transparency in the analytic process helped enhance the credibility of findings. A pilot interview was also conducted to refine the guide and approach. Thematic saturation was considered to be reached when no new themes or significant insights emerged from the data. This procedure ensured that the findings were both rich and comprehensive, grounded in the actual experiences of participants. While no formal qualitative analysis software was used, the process was rigorous and transparent, with the researcher maintaining reflexivity and methodological consistency throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

The decision-making process surrounding career choices is complex and multifaceted, with various internal and external factors influencing the outcome. This section identifies four central



themes that help explain these influences.

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Career Choice of B.S. Human Ecology Students

The first theme, "Finding Security in Practical and Financially Stable Careers," points out the relevance of financial security and job stability in shaping students' career decisions. Many students are drawn to professions that offer a reliable income and long-term career stability, considering these factors essential for their future success. The second theme, "Aligning Passions and Strengths for a Fulfilling Career," discusses the importance of aligning one's career with personal interests and innate talents. Students seek professions that resonate with their passions, aiming for fulfillment and long-term satisfaction. The third theme, "Guided by Bonds: The Influence of Peers and Family," explores how close relationships, especially with family and peers, shape students' career paths. The support, guidance, and expectations from these social networks often guide their professional choices. Ultimately, "Lessons Beyond the Classroom: The Impact of Academics and Fieldwork" highlights how academic learning and fieldwork experiences enable students to gain a deeper understanding of their career interests. These experiences allow them to explore real-world applications of their studies, helping them refine their professional aspirations.

Themes	Descriptions
Finding Security in Practical and Financially Stable Careers	This theme reflects how the pursuit of financial security and career stability influences students' career decisions. Students are often drawn to professions that provide reliable income and job security, considering practical aspects as vital factors when making long-term career choices.
Aligning Passions and Strengths for a Fulfilling Career	This theme highlights how students seek careers that align with their personal interests and natural abilities. By focusing on professions that resonate with their passions and strengths, students aim to find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work, which significantly shapes their career aspirations.
Guided by Bonds: The Influence of Peers and Family	This theme demonstrates the impact of social relationships, particularly with family and peers, on career choices. The guidance, expectations, and encouragement from close social circles influence students' career paths, shaping their decisions based on these relationships and the support they receive.
Lessons Beyond the Classroom: The Impact of Academics and Fieldwork	This theme emphasizes how academic experiences and fieldwork contribute to shaping students' career interests. Exposure to real-world settings through fieldwork and the application of classroom knowledge allow students to explore different career paths, providing them with a clearer understanding of their professional interests.

Table 1. Factors influencing the career choice of BS Human Ecology Students

In understanding the factors that influence career choices among BS Human Ecology students, one prominent theme that emerged from the data was the importance of economic factors,

particularly financial stability and job security. This theme aligns with the broader understanding of how economic considerations guide the decision-making processes of students, often leading them to prioritize careers that promise financial rewards and long-term security. The respondents' statements reflect a clear trend: economic stability and a reliable income are crucial to their sense of career fulfillment and personal success (Barnes et al., 2022).

A significant number of participants emphasized the role of salary in their decision-making process. Participant 1, for instance, noted, *Apart from being indecisive, practicality over passion prevailed at that time, and money was one of the motivations, but not just for myself but also for my family.*

This statement highlights that, for some, financial factors take precedence over personal passion, especially when there is a need to provide for one's family. The desire to ensure economic security for themselves and their loved ones becomes a driving force in career choice, sometimes overriding a pursuit of passion or personal fulfillment. Participant 1 also adds that, initially, the importance of money was viewed as purely essential, but over time, the perception of its role has evolved, as *now, it seems like it's not as important as before (Participant 1)*. This shift suggests that, while salary remains a critical factor, it is not the sole determinant of career satisfaction in the long run.

The idea of aligning one's career with practical economic considerations is echoed by other respondents. For example, Participant 2 emphasizes the importance of *"salary and job stability"* in their decision-making process, stating, *I've always leaned more on to careers that are capable of sustaining my wants and needs in the long term.* (Participant 2). This quote reflects a pragmatic approach, where students weigh the long-term benefits of job stability and a sustainable income. This pragmatic view is commonly shared among individuals seeking to balance their financial goals with career aspirations, highlighting a shift toward a more realistic view of what a career should provide in terms of financial returns (Xing et al., 2019).

Another dimension of this theme revolves around the work-life balance that is often closely tied to salary and job stability. Respondent P2 shared, *"I would not also strip me away too much time from the family that I plan to form in the future, so work that's sustainable but doesn't take too much time from myself and my family."* (Participant 2). This concern highlights that, while financial compensation is essential, students also value careers that offer a healthy balance between work and personal life. The concept of job sustainability, which encompasses the ability to balance work and family responsibilities, is increasingly recognized as a crucial aspect of career planning (Bridgstock et al., 2019). This trend reflects the growing

importance of not only the financial aspect but also the emotional and familial dimensions of career satisfaction.

Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized the necessity of a "reasonable" salary and job stability, asserting that *"How can I live in the future if I don't have a decent salary, especially with life getting more and more expensive?" (Participant 5)*

This sentiment echoes the concern that inflation and the rising cost of living make financial stability even more urgent for future career choices. The recognition that *"my salary is still low, and I feel like it won't be stable in the future (Participant 5),"* illustrates a common worry among students—financial uncertainty can undermine career satisfaction, especially if long-term stability is not guaranteed (Barnes et al., 2022).

While economic stability is a priority, many participants, such as Participant 9, acknowledged the need for balance. Participant 9 shared that, although they are passionate about their chosen field, they consider *"job stability, salary, and work-life balance in my decision-making process."* (Participant 9). This balance highlights the ongoing negotiation between pursuing a meaningful career and ensuring that the financial aspects of that career align with one's personal and family needs. Furthermore, P10's statement that salary is a critical factor due to their plans for further education, *"Since I plan to take my master's, I need to work alongside it to pay for my bills (Participant 10),"* indicates that career decisions are often shaped by practical realities, including future academic aspirations and the financial independence needed to support them.

This theme is not just about individual decision-making but also reflects broader economic realities. Many participants considered the long-term viability of their chosen careers in light of the global economic situation. The emphasis on salary and stability is likely influenced by the increasing uncertainty in the job market and the rising cost of living. For instance, Participant 7's focus on job stability, particularly avoiding contractual employment, reflects a broader societal concern about job insecurity and the desire for long-term career security in an uncertain economic climate. Participant 7 stated, *"Of course, for me it's important because I wouldn't want to work in a contractual job, because we all know how difficult it is to work in such conditions."*

This highlights that career choices are increasingly viewed through the lens of economic survival and long-term financial health, rather than solely passion or interest in a particular field (Xing et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Aligning Passions and Strengths for a Fulfilling Career

Career choices are not solely shaped by external factors such as job market trends, financial considerations, or institutional support. Intrinsic factors—such as one's personality, strengths, passions, and interpersonal skills—play a pivotal role in aligning an individual's career to their personal attributes. This theme delves into how personal factors influence career choices by exploring the alignment between one's passions, skills, and personality traits with their career aspirations. The self-efficacy concept, which refers to the belief in one's abilities to perform tasks and overcome challenges, is fundamental in understanding why individuals thrive in certain careers. This chapter discusses how students' self-perceptions, intrinsic motivations, and personality traits shape their career trajectories and aspirations, highlighting that individuals are more likely to excel and experience fulfillment when their chosen careers align with their personal attributes.

One of the most significant intrinsic factors influencing career choice is personal passion and interest. Individuals tend to be drawn to professions that pique their curiosity, aligning their personal interests with their work. This is evident in the quotation:

"I think I just have an interest in how the human brain works, how they come up with their decisions and other stuff like that. For me, I'm really interested in learning more about psychology and how I can apply it to the people in my life and also to my future patients. What interests me the most about psychology is the connection between a person's present behavior and their upbringing (environment, family dynamics, peers, relationships)." (Participant 10)

The individual here expresses a clear passion for understanding psychology, specifically how human behavior is influenced by environmental and familial factors. Such passion is a crucial driver in career decisions, particularly in fields like psychology, where personal curiosity directly informs the decision to pursue the profession. Studies have shown that aligning one's career with personal interests can lead to greater job satisfaction, engagement, and motivation. The quotation underscores how a deep personal interest in understanding human behavior becomes a guiding force in choosing a career path.

In addition, the individual's desire to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios, especially with future patients, highlights the importance of aligning personal passions with practical applications. This resonates with the concept of "vocational identity", where individuals' interests and passions serve as a compass guiding them toward fulfilling careers that allow for personal expression.

Another crucial personal factor in career decision-making is the need to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Career decisions are not solely based on professional growth or financial rewards

but are also influenced by the desire for personal well-being. The following quotation highlights this:

"And of course, we need work-life balance and to ensure that I maintain my personal well-being, which ultimately helps me be more effective in the career I want and allows me to support my family and community in the long run." (Participant 9)

Here, the individual expresses a desire for a career that allows them to balance professional demands with personal needs. Work-life balance is increasingly recognized as an essential factor for career satisfaction and longevity. When individuals choose careers that allow them to maintain personal well-being, they are more likely to be productive, committed, and engaged in their roles. The need for flexibility in work hours and the ability to engage in personal activities, such as spending time with family or pursuing hobbies, ensures that individuals are not overwhelmed or burnt out by their professional roles.

Moreover, work-life balance plays an essential role in fostering self-efficacy. When individuals are able to manage both work and personal life effectively, they feel more competent in handling career challenges and responsibilities. As this individual indicates, achieving work-life balance not only contributes to personal well-being but also enhances their ability to support their family and community in the long term, further reinforcing the idea that career choices are deeply intertwined with personal values and goals.

For many individuals, the desire to help others and make a positive impact is a fundamental motivator in their career decisions. This intrinsic drive is often aligned with personal values and a sense of purpose. The following quotation reflects this:

"One of the factors or aspects in the human ecological framework is developing human potential, and believing in the potential for human-centered practices in improving life has motivated me to pursue this career." (Participant 9)

This individual's aspiration to pursue a career centered on improving human well-being illustrates how personal values align with career choices. The intrinsic desire to make a positive impact on others is a driving force for many students pursuing careers in health, social work, education, and related fields. When individuals feel that their career can help improve others' lives, it often leads to greater job satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment.

This motivation to serve and uplift others also connects to the concept of "career calling," which refers to the belief that one's career is a vocation or a meaningful life purpose. Career callings are often aligned with intrinsic values, where individuals see

their work as a means to contribute to the greater good, which fuels both motivation and self-efficacy in their chosen paths.

An individual's personality and strengths significantly impact their career choices. These factors influence not only the type of work one is drawn to but also how effectively they engage with colleagues, clients, and the tasks at hand. One respondent shares:

"When it comes to interacting with people, I developed my confidence through performing, which has made me adaptable to the path I want to take. So, my experiences have helped boost my confidence, and as a result, I feel like I can conquer anything" (Participant 8).

The individual attributes their confidence and adaptability to experiences in performance, which have helped them develop interpersonal skills that are crucial in their chosen career. This aligns with the idea that individuals are more likely to succeed in careers that match their personality traits and interpersonal skills. For example, individuals with high levels of extroversion or strong communication skills may gravitate toward careers in teaching, counseling, or sales, where these skills are necessary for success.

Furthermore, self-efficacy is reinforced when individuals believe their strengths, such as interpersonal skills and adaptability, align with the requirements of their chosen career. As highlighted by this individual, their confidence in interacting with others bolstered their belief in their ability to succeed in a profession that requires these skills. Bandura's (2020) social cognitive theory emphasizes that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping career choices and outcomes, especially when individuals perceive their strengths as an asset in their professional journey.

The work environment is another important factor when considering career options. Many individuals prioritize a positive and supportive work environment over high salaries or prestigious job titles. One respondent illustrates this sentiment by stating:

"I think the most important thing when it comes to getting a job is the work environment. I wouldn't sacrifice, for example, a huge salary, even millions, if my boss is toxic." (Participant 6)

This individual emphasizes that a healthy and positive work environment is more important than monetary compensation or a high-status position. The importance of the work environment is closely tied to personal well-being and job satisfaction. A toxic work environment can lead to stress, burnout, and decreased job performance, while a supportive and collaborative environment can enhance motivation, engagement, and overall job satisfaction.

By prioritizing a positive work environment, individuals align their career choices with their personal values and needs, ensuring that they can thrive both personally and professionally. This decision reflects the importance of compatibility between one's personality and the organizational culture, as individuals are more likely to succeed in environments that resonate with their values and interpersonal preferences.

Throughout these discussions, the concept of self-efficacy remains central to understanding how personal factors influence career decisions. The alignment of one's passions, strengths, and personality with their chosen career enhances their belief in their ability to succeed, which in turn drives career success. As illustrated in the various quotations, individuals who feel that their careers resonate with their personal values, interests, and strengths are more likely to experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. Self-efficacy not only motivates individuals to pursue their careers but also plays a critical role in their ability to navigate challenges and achieve long-term success.

In conclusion, personal factors such as passion, personality, strengths, and work-life balance significantly influence career decisions. When individuals align their careers with their intrinsic motivations, they are more likely to experience satisfaction, success, and personal fulfillment. Career choices are intertwined with one's values, passions, and abilities, and self-efficacy plays a critical role in how individuals navigate their career paths. By understanding and leveraging their personal attributes, individuals can make informed career decisions that promote long-term well-being and success.

Theme 3: Guided by Bonds: The Influence of Peers and Family

Career choices are rarely made in isolation. For many students, the support and guidance from family members, friends, and peers have a significant influence on their decisions. These social factors can either bolster confidence or introduce doubts, often shaping the paths that individuals eventually take. In this section, we will explore the role of peers and family in career decision-making, drawing on personal experiences shared by respondents and analyzing the influence of these relationships on their choices.

Peers, particularly friends, were frequently mentioned as impactful sources of career guidance. One respondent explained how her friends encouraged her to dream bigger. Initially, she wanted a simple office job in the Philippines, but after discussing her future with friends, she was motivated to consider more ambitious paths, like pursuing a master's degree abroad and possibly working as a diplomat. She said, *"They impacted my career choice in a way that made me dream higher because before, I only wanted an office job here in the Philippines. But*

then, my friends encouraged me, especially Vashti, who wanted to do an MS abroad and eventually become a diplomat. This somehow encouraged me to dream and achieve more, thinking that maybe I can still pursue further studies. (Participant 1)"

This shows that friends can provide both emotional and motivational support, pushing individuals to think beyond their initial limitations. The influence of close friends can encourage a person to challenge themselves, often leading to more ambitious career goals (Bridgstock, Grant-Imaru, & McAlpine, 2019).

Family plays an equally significant, if not more critical, role in shaping career choices. One participant shared that her family, especially her mother, viewed her chosen field of study as a tool for service to others. She recalled, *"Maybe it's because of my mother's involvement in church duties. So, when I told them about the things I would be doing after graduation in human ecology, they always said that maybe entering human ecology was the tool God gave me to serve others." (Participant 1)*

Her family's perspective provided a sense of purpose and validation, encouraging her to continue on the path that seemed divinely inspired. The impact of family support in career decision-making often provides a sense of security, especially when one feels uncertain about their career choice (Xing et al., 2019).

Another respondent also acknowledged the strong influence of her family, particularly her guardian, who encouraged her to pursue law. *"My guardian wanted me to pursue law, so their interest also influenced my career choices, and that's why I'm considering law as well." (Participant 4)*

This example shows how familial expectations can have a direct impact on career decisions, especially when there are established legacies within the family. The family often serves as a pillar of support, although it can also create pressure, as was the case for this respondent.

The pressure to uphold family legacy was a recurring theme. A respondent mentioned how the career paths of her family members initially led her to consider engineering as well. *"In my family, as you mentioned, my brother is in electrical engineering, my sister is in geodetic engineering, and my father is also an engineer. So, all of them followed very objective, science-heavy fields. Initially, I also wanted to pursue engineering just to fulfill their legacy." (Participant 7)*

The family legacy can serve as both a source of motivation and a source of pressure. In this case, the respondent initially saw engineering as a way to meet family expectations, but later realized that it might not be her true passion. This illustrates how family influence, while valuable, can sometimes create internal

conflict if one's own aspirations diverge from family traditions (Bridgstock et al., 2019).

Some respondents highlighted the importance of the support system provided by their families and friends. One participant noted that her family and friends did not dictate her career choice but instead provided support whenever she felt uncertain.

"I think my friends and family know me as someone who's goal-oriented, and if I really want to achieve something, I will do everything for it. They don't dictate what career I should take, but rather, they have been my support system whenever I have doubts and uncertainties about whether I am choosing the right path." (Participant 8)

This perspective emphasizes the role of family and friends as emotional and motivational supporters, offering encouragement without imposing their views on career choices. The reassurance provided by friends and family creates a safe space for individuals to explore their options and make decisions with confidence (Barnes et al., 2022).

Organizational influence was another factor that shaped the career choices of several participants. One respondent noted that her involvement in an organization helped her gain exposure to various career possibilities. *"Aside from that, of course, the organization also plays a role. In our organization, like in HSP, we discuss the different careers that our alumni have pursued. This broadens your view, realizing that a career in HSP can lead to careers like banking, even though it seems far-fetched, but it's achievable." (Participant 4)*

Organizations can expose individuals to career paths they might not have initially considered, helping them realize their potential and broaden their horizons. This illustrates how a support system, even in a professional or academic context, can help solidify career aspirations by expanding awareness and opportunity.

Finally, peers play a significant role in boosting confidence, especially for those who are indecisive about their career choices. One respondent shared that her peers helped her gain confidence by pointing out her strengths and supporting her decisions. *"As for my peers, I think it's just the way they support me. They point out my strengths and how happy I seem doing what I do. So, I gain more confidence to push through with the career I want to take after graduation." (Participant 5)*

This support system not only provides validation but also strengthens the individual's resolve, helping them feel more confident in their career choices. The influence of peers in this context acts as a positive reinforcement of one's capabilities, making career paths feel more attainable and real (Ajayi et al., 2022).

The influence of peers and family is undeniable in shaping career choices. While personal factors such as interests and individual aspirations remain crucial, social factors like family encouragement, peer support, and organizational involvement often provide the guidance and motivation necessary to solidify those choices. Family, in particular, can serve as a source of emotional validation or pressure, while peers often provide much-needed confidence and broaden one's view of career possibilities. Together, these social bonds create a dynamic support system that plays a critical role in shaping an individual's career trajectory.

Theme 4: Lessons Beyond the Classroom: The Impact of Academics and Fieldwork

While classroom learning laid the foundation for knowledge, many students emphasized that it was their fieldwork experiences that truly shaped their career decisions. Fieldwork gave them the chance to immerse themselves in real-world settings, interact with communities, and apply theoretical concepts to actual situations. It served as a "free trial" of the working world, allowing them to experience the challenges and rewards of professional life firsthand.

Participant 1 remarked:

"I think it really was — of all the things that influenced me to choose the path I want to take, fieldwork had the biggest impact. You really see it as a 'free trial' of the hardships of life, but at the same time, there's more enjoyment because it's something new for you as a student." (Participant 1)

This quotation shows how students perceive fieldwork not merely as academic requirements, but as previews of the professional and social realities they will face after graduation. Another participant highlighted that fieldwork helped them realize the real-life application of Human Ecology concepts:

"Most especially the theories that are put into practice through fieldworks... where we become more aware of the things we only used to discuss inside the classroom." (Participant 8)

Through this, fieldwork becomes a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which is helpful for career formation. Kolb's (2019) experiential learning theory supports this, suggesting that learning is maximized when students actively experiment and reflect on real-world experiences. The proactive engagement in fieldwork directly enhances students' self-efficacy (SCCT) by providing opportunities to apply knowledge and succeed in practical scenarios, which is crucial for solidifying career interests.

Beyond the structured curriculum, mentorship from professors and exposure to external speakers within the broader institutional environment were cited as impactful factors. Participant 7 shared:

"I was inspired by my professors who also invited guest speakers in lectures... where they explained their career specializations aside from being an ENP or a graduate of BSHE-HSP." (Participant 7)

This indicates that the informal and formal advising structures, along with the opportunities provided by the college to connect with professionals, significantly broaden students' perspectives. Mentorship thus serves as a form of career guidance, offering students models to aspire toward and making diverse career paths seem more achievable (Chan, 2020). These interactions, situated within the microsystem (direct interaction with professors) and extending into the mesosystem (linking academic life with professional networks), play a vital role in shaping students' career outcome expectations (SCCT).

Moreover, classroom learning remains fundamental. Participant 3 described how academic lectures deepened their interests:

"In the HFDS courses, my interest in human relationships and the well-being of individuals was honed and deepened." (Participant 3)

This quote affirms the complementary nature of theoretical and experiential learning. In particular, HFDS subjects cultivated a holistic view of well-being that influenced students' future career aspirations, showcasing how the structured academic environment within the microsystem directly shapes students' personal interests (SCCT).

However, several participants stressed that while classroom experiences were enriching, fieldwork had a greater emotional impact, as Participant 5 observed:

"Our classroom experiences were solid because our professors are really good, but the fieldworks truly changed my perspective and, in my case, shifted my interests, specifically in the career path I will take after graduation." (Participant 5)

This statement reflects how fieldwork's immersive nature can redefine students' visions for their futures. Practical exposure was seen as more powerful than theoretical instruction alone, supporting the view of Ahmed and Khan (2020) that field experiences boost students' confidence and adaptability in real-world settings. Such shifts in interest and perspective are critical examples of the chronosystem at play within career development, as students' experiences over time lead to significant changes in their perceived career pathways.

One participant, Participant 7, highlighted SDS 101 as a particularly transformative fieldwork experience:

"That's where I realized, 'So this is what human ecology is about,' and it made me feel even more connected to it." (Participant 7)

This demonstrates that introductory fieldwork experiences can be critical turning points in developing a strong professional identity, especially when they illuminate the real-world relevance of an interdisciplinary field. This deeper connection often stems from a positive interaction between the microsystem (the specific course experience) and the student's developing personal interests (SCCT).

Lastly, Participant 10 emphasized that through fieldwork and interdisciplinary learning, they became more open-minded:

"After all the lessons and fieldworks, I learned to be more open-minded and realized that there are more opportunities if I do not have tunnel vision toward a single career path." (Participant 10)

This openness aligns with current trends in higher education, where interdisciplinary and flexible career pathways are highly encouraged. This shift towards a broader perspective is influenced not just by coursework, but also by the campus culture that fosters interdisciplinary thinking and the institutional support for exploring diverse career avenues, representing a beneficial mesosystem interaction.

Overall, this theme reveals that while lectures build foundational knowledge, it is the fieldwork and mentorship experiences that significantly reshape and solidify students' career aspirations. Students learn to apply theoretical concepts in tangible ways, gain inspiration from role models, and recognize the diverse possibilities for their future professional lives.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that the career choice and aspirations of BS Human Ecology (BSHE) students are shaped by a dynamic interplay of economic, social, personal, and institutional factors. Among these, experiential learning, particularly through fieldwork and institutional support, along with the alignment of passions, strengths, and values, emerge as the most influential determinants. Economic considerations such as financial stability and job security provide a foundational boundary that delineates acceptable options, while social networks composed of family and peers offer essential guidance and validation. Nonetheless, student narratives consistently highlight the transformative impact of direct engagement and a strong sense of internal motivation in shaping career direction.

Students typically begin by identifying a set of practical, non-negotiable criteria, with financial viability functioning as the

initial filter. Once this baseline requirement is met, the decision-making process becomes centered on achieving personal congruence. Students seek careers that reflect their core interests, allow them to apply their unique abilities, and provide a sense of purpose. Within this process, fieldwork emerges as a critical catalyst for clarifying and reinforcing career goals. It provides opportunities for students to translate abstract knowledge into lived experience, serving as both a form of validation and a turning point for those reevaluating their aspirations. Additionally, exposure to role models through mentorship and organizational involvement within the institutional environment plays a role in refining and expanding career possibilities.

Although pragmatic and relational factors provide essential context, they primarily support a deeper process of personal exploration. Among the themes that emerged, the influence of academic experiences and fieldwork stands out as the most transformative, followed by the importance of aligning personal passions with academic and professional goals. These findings affirm that career interest is not fixed, but rather evolves through sustained interaction with academic content and experiential learning.

Therefore, the BSHE program plays a developmental role by providing a structured environment that promotes discovery, self-reflection, and intentional pursuit of socially relevant career paths. By exploring the evolving decision-making process of students in an interdisciplinary setting, this study contributes to the broader understanding of career development in higher education. It highlights the importance of learning environments that are flexible, reflective, and student-centered, and offers insights that may inform the design of more responsive career guidance initiatives within interdisciplinary programs.

References

- Ajayi, O., Moosa, M., & Aloka, P. (2023). Relationship between career interest and career decision-making of Grade 12 learners in township secondary schools in South Africa. *Athens Journal of Education*, *10*(2), 307-322. <https://doi.org/10.30958/aje.10-2-7>
- Abe, E., & Chikoko, V. (2020). Exploring the factors that influence the career decision of STEM students at a university in South Africa. *IJ STEM Ed*, *7*(60), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00256-x>
- Ahmed, H., & Khan, M. (2020). Impact of experiential learning on students' career decision making: A case of field exposure. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, *7*(2), 197-210. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeced.v7i2.3047>
- Alsayed, A., Rahim, M., Albidewi, I., Hussain, M., Jabeen, S., Alromema, N., ... Jibril, M. (2021). Selection of the right undergraduate major by students using supervised learning techniques. *Applied Sciences*, *11*(22), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app112210639>
- Amparo, J., Saguiguit, S., Mendoza, M., Piadozo, R., & Jimena, C. (2019). Human ecology education for development and sustainability: The College of Human Ecology at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. *Journal of Human Ecology*, *8*(1), 1-21.
- Azhenov, A., Kudysheva, A., Fominykh, N., & Tulekova, G. (2023). Career decision-making readiness among students in the system of higher education: Career course intervention. *Frontiers in education*, *8*(1097993), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1097993>
- Barayuga, T., & Ramirez, D. (2021). Career confusion of ISPSC freshmen college students: A phenomenological analysis. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, *10*(8), 849-851. <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR21818170340>
- Barnes, N., du Plessis, M., & Frantz, J. (2022). Career competencies for academic career progression: Experiences of academics at a South African university. *Frontiers in Education*, *7* (814842), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2022.814842>
- Bohara, S., Gupta, A., & Panwar, D. (2022). Relationship between factors of online marketing and student enrollment decisions in higher education: An analysis using structural modeling techniques. *International Journal of Online Marketing*, *12*(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJOM.299395>
- Bowers-Brown, T., Ingram, N., & Burke, C. (2019). Higher education and aspiration. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *28*(3-4), 207-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2019.1641307>
- Bridgstock, R., Grant-Imaru, M., & McAlpine, A. (2019). Integrating career development learning into the curriculum: Collaboration with the careers service for employability. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *10*(1), 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2019vol10no1art785>
- Caballes, D., Gapad, E., Valdez, M., & Quintos, C. (2022). Exploring between SHS strand and college course mismatch: Bridging the gap through school policy on intensified career guidance program. *CIIT International Journal of Data Mining and Knowledge Engineering*, *12*(10-12), 156-161.
- Chan, C. (2020). Enhancing career guidance in higher education: The role of mentoring. *Education Sciences*, *10*(6), 148. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci1060148>

- Cortes, S., Agero, A., Agravante, E., Arado, J., Arbilon, C., Lampawog, E., ... Tubog, R. (2023). Factors influencing students' intention to enroll in Bachelor of Science in Biology: A structural equation modelling approach. *Cogent Education*, 10(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2273635>
- Dahl, W., Alford, K., Rivero-Mendoza, D., Moreno, M., Emmanuel, S., & Gorwitz, G. (2024). Factors influencing undergraduate students toward choosing a new course. *NACTA Journal*, 68(1), 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.56103/nactaj.v68i1.138>
- Edwin, M., Pulse, H., Alhiyari, N., Salvatierra, D., & Martin, C. (2022). The impact of academic aspirations and career uncertainty on students' college outcomes. *Journal of College Access*, 7(2), 30-49. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1372842>
- Fu, W. (2019). Factors affecting career choice among local and foreign university students in Malaysia. *UTAR Institutional Repository*, 1(1), 2-73. <http://eprints.utar.edu.my/id/eprint/5065>
- Maguire, M. & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: a practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(3), 3351-33514.
- Mohammed, Z., Kumar, S., & Padakannaya, P. (2021). Well-being and career decision-making difficulties among master's students: A simultaneous multi-equation modeling. *Cogent Psychology*, 8(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2021.1996700>
- Nazareno, A., Lopez-Relente, M., Gestuada, G., Martinez, M., De Lara, M., & Roxas-Villanueva, R. (2020). Factors associated with career track choice of senior high school students. *Philippine Journal of Science*, 150(5), 1043-1060. <https://doi.org/10.56899/150.05.15> Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (n.d.). The K to 12 Basic Education Program. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/k-12/>
- Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (n.d.). The K to 12 Basic Education Program. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/k-12/>
- Oranga, J., Matere, A., & Nyakundi, E. (2023). Importance and types of parental involvement in education. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10(8), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110512>
- Parreño, S. (2023). School dropouts in the Philippines: Causes, changes, and statistics. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 4(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.51798/sijis.v4i1.552>
- Puebla, J. (2022). Career decisions and dilemmas of senior high school students in disadvantaged schools: Towards the development of a proposed career guidance program. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 3(5), 888-903. <https://doi.org/10.11594/Ijmaber.03.05.15>
- Sadjail, S., Sansawi, D., & Matolo, M. (2022). Factors influencing students in choosing their college course. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2-5 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6994851>
- Sarao, Z. (2023). Dropout rate in universities, colleges at 35.15% in SY 2023-2024, says CHed. *Inquirer Net*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1839954>
- Twang, A. (2022). High-impact learning experiences and post-graduate outcomes: Exploring the influence on employment, continuing education, and salary. *The SUNY Journal of the Scholarship of Engagement*, 2(1), 1-22. <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/jose/vol2/iss1/2>
- University of the Philippines Los Baños. (n.d.). College of Human Ecology - UPLB. <https://uplb.edu.ph/college/college-of-human-ecology/>
- Xing, X., Huerta, M., & Garza, T. (2019). College and career preparation activities and their influence on post-high school education and work attainment. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 34(1), 8-28. <https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v34i1.a1>
- Yunusa, S., Jaafar, W., Ismail, A., & Othman, W. (2022). The relationships between family, financial reason, self-esteem, and career decision making among undergraduates in Jigawa State, Nigeria. *Malaysian Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 7(5), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i5.1483>
- Zhang, H., Zhang, Y., & Wu, S. (2022). The influencing factors on college students' career choices in the post-epidemic era: Evidence from China. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 22(5), 122-130. <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2022.5.103>