

Perceived Determinants of Career Choice of MBA Graduates: A Case of Higher Management Academic Institutions, Pokhara, Nepal

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between occupational stress and turnover intention among private school teachers in the Kathmandu Valley, with a particular focus on the moderating effect of leadership style. Teaching in private institutions often involves high workloads, low job security, and pressure to meet performance standards, leading to increased stress levels and the possibility of teacher turnover. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 300 private school teachers and analyzed using correlation and moderation analysis. The results indicate that occupational stress has a significant and positive impact on turnover intention, suggesting that higher stress levels increase the likelihood of teachers intending to leave their jobs. Furthermore, the findings reveal that leadership style significantly moderates this relationship. Specifically, transformational leadership was found to weaken the positive link between occupational stress and turnover intention, indicating that supportive and inspiring leadership can buffer the negative effects of stress. These findings emphasize the importance of effective leadership in managing occupational stress and retaining teaching staff. The study offers practical implications for school administrators and policymakers to foster healthier work environments and adopt leadership approaches that reduce stress and enhance teacher retention in private educational institutions.

Keywords: Academic institutions, career choice, management, MBA graduates, Nepal.

Background

Career choice is one of the crucial decisions a graduate must make in their life, as it determines future earnings, status, career identity, and long-term well-being. Career choice is shaped by a focus on individual interests and skills, labor market demand, employer expectations, family and social factors, and the educational environment (Devkota et al., 2022). The right career decision is crucial for students starting their professional education, as it will significantly impact their future success and professional life. Strong knowledge, comprehensive information, proper guidance, matching personality types, and other intrinsic and extrinsic factors must form the foundation of graduates' career choices (Ahmad et al., 2017). Research and surveys conducted by employers in the area indicate that a large number of MBA graduates get employment soon after graduation. They have both supply side and demand side. Supply-side factors, such as skills, interests, and family pressure, and demand-side factors, such as industry hiring practices and employer demand for skills, are driving factors influencing their job choices (Pokhara University, 2018). Communication skills, teamwork, and flexibility are especially valued by employers and strongly influence MBA graduates' perceptions of various career options (Wang et al., 2024).

Intrinsic, extrinsic, and institutional factors can be used to improve career services in universities, academic programs, and employer recruitment procedures, and to help graduates make superior career choices that align with both their personal objectives and labor market demands. Career preferences often differ across educational backgrounds due to personal, social, and economic factors. Personal motivation, skill level, promotion opportunities, socio-demographic factors, and intentions to become an entrepreneur affect career choice (Montano & Valdez, 2024).

Recent studies indicate that career choice is influenced by multiple factors. Experiments conducted in Nepal and other global settings highlight that a combination of individual, institutional, and socio-economic factors influences career choices. The study conducted by Zhang et al. (2025) concludes that career choice is significantly and favorably correlated with internal, external, interpersonal, institutional, and environmental factors. Understanding these factors should be learnt by the university, policymakers, and students to enhance the career guidance, planning, and employment outcomes (Jafrin et al., 2025).

A prior study by Wang et al. (2024) extensively examined the factors influencing career choices among students and graduates, focusing on the roles of extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal factors. A study by Montano and Valdez (2024) identifies the effect of motivation, skills, and promotion opportunities on the career outcomes of MBA graduates. Núñez et al. (2025) explore personal motivation, risk-taking tendency, and aspiration as independent factors and state that these factors motivate graduates to pursue entrepreneurship rather than the traditional job market. Additionally, a few studies emphasize the value of institutional assistance, including career counseling, the academic setting, and teacher influence (Mtemeri, 2022).

The systematic review of existing empirical studies on graduate job selection by Purohit et al. (2020) establishes that intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional, and socio-demographic factors are the most important. Similarly, Barron and Gravert (2022) indicate that personal interests and self-confidence are intrinsic aspects that are significant in career choice. However, most of these studies tend to focus on selected variables in isolation rather than providing a comprehensive analysis that integrates intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional and career decision self-efficacy factors within a single framework.

The majority of research has been conducted in developed nations, with few studies focusing on developing-country contexts such as Nepal, particularly among MBA graduates. Hence, a thorough, context-specific analysis that incorporates intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, and institutional factors, as well as career decision self-efficacy, remains limited. Therefore, this study is significant for policymakers, offering insights into universities and other educational institutions. This study aims to examine the influencing factors of career choice among MBA graduates in Pokhara.

Review of Literature

Theoretical review

Career choice theories are methods for making career decisions based on individual characteristics, environmental conditions, and social pressures. These theories can be useful in explaining the career choices of MBA graduates, since the latter are influenced by internal factors, external rewards, social integration, and organizational encouragement. Past research has shown that career choice cannot be explained by a single theory; multiple theories provide a better explanation (Super, 1990).

The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) focuses on the connection among personal characteristics, environmental influences, and how individuals present themselves. This theory emphasizes self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and individual objectives in career decision-making. It is especially relevant to the present work because it demonstrates how intrinsic motivation, interpersonal support, institutional support, and self-efficacy interact to influence MBA graduates' career decisions (Lent et al., 1994).

Self-determination theory concerns the role of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation in career choice. According to the theory, people tend to select their professions to satisfy their needs for autonomy, competence, and personal satisfaction. For MBA

Graduates, the theory helps explain why some are more concerned with personal interest and fulfillment, while others are more influenced by external rewards such as salary, job security, and promotion opportunities (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Human capital theory describes career choice from an economic perspective. It states that people invest in education and skills in the hope of earning more and having a better career in the future. Given that MBAs have spent a lot of time and money acquiring their education, they are more likely to take jobs that offer better pay, job security, and opportunities for promotion. This theory underscores the importance of extrinsic variables in determining careers (Becker, 1993).

Empirical Review

Intrinsic factors and career choice of MBA graduates

Intrinsic factors are personal characteristics and internal motivations that influence a person's career choice. When it comes to improving career engagement and development, motivation, attitude, and work-related interests are consistently identified as significant factors (Nyamwange, 2016). Intrinsic factors also include interest, self-worth, commitment, confidence, and a sense of purpose, which encourage people to pursue careers that align with their personal objectives and skills (Wang et al., 2024). The following hypothesis is proposed based on the above facts:

H₁: Intrinsic factors positively influence the career choice of MBA graduates.

Extrinsic factors and career choice of MBA graduates

Extrinsic factors are external incentives and work circumstances linked to a career that affect how graduates make career choices. Choosing a career is a crucial step for university students that has a big impact on their future professional paths, sense of fulfillment, and employment stability. The work environment and prospects for professional advancement are key factors influencing students' career decisions (Wang et al., 2024). Similar to this, career decision-making is significantly

influenced by a number of factors, including family preferences, advice from teachers, job prestige or dignity, job security, compensation, scope of promotion, scope of pension, scope of professional development, students' personal interests, academic majors, educational attainment, and career development trainings (Siddiky & Akter, 2021). Based on the above evidence, we can propose this hypothesis:

H₂: Extrinsic factors positively impact the career choice of MBA graduates.

Interpersonal factors and career choice of MBA graduates

Interpersonal skills encompass the capacity for effective communication, teamwork, and the development of productive professional relationships. These abilities also include the capacity to manage stress and challenges (Wang et al., 2024). Interpersonal skills are one of the key elements in determining a person's career decision. Before entering the workforce, graduates should evaluate and enhance their interpersonal skills, as the workplace is complex and these skills are crucial for successful interactions with coworkers, supervisors, and clients or customers (Wang et al., 2024). Based on the above review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Interpersonal factors positively influence the career choice of MBA graduates.

Institutional factors and career choice of MBA graduates

Institutional factors refer to the role played by educational institutions and organizational structures in career decisions. Research suggests that higher education leadership should implement experiential program design, concentrate on internship and practicum experiences related to students' majors, focus career services in higher education institutions on career preparation, and look into resources beyond the current counseling services in order to improve college graduates' placement (Zhou et al., 2023). Similarly, research on universities states that course design, teaching quality, extracurricular activities, and employment

guidance services significantly influence graduates' employability and career preparation (Zhang et al., 2025). Research indicates that effective institutional support and well-organized career services positively affect graduates' career choices and outcomes. Considering the above statements, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H4: Institutional factors positively impact the career choice of MBA graduates.

Career decision self-efficacy and career choice of MBA graduates

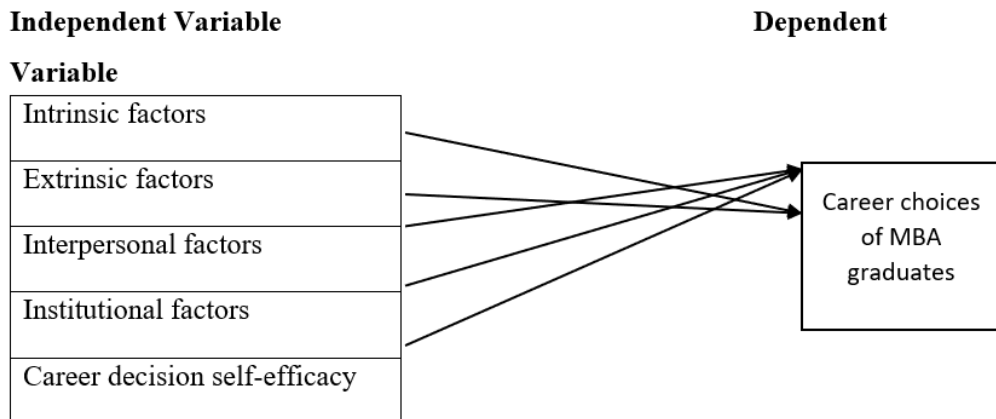
Career decision self-efficacy refers to the personal conviction in one's ability to succeed in career-related decisions, such as assessing personal strengths, setting career goals, acquiring relevant information, solving career problems, and planning one's career (Wang et al., 2024). Prior studies show that stronger career decision-making self-efficacy encourages students to actively participate in career planning and increases their self-efficacy. It addresses college graduates' employment challenges and boosts their confidence in career decision-making, thereby increasing their employability (Zhou et al., 2023). Career decision-making self-efficacy, alongside career adaptability, is a crucial psychological tool for influencing people's career development (Zhang et al., 2025). Based on these, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Self-efficacy positively impacts the career choice of MBA graduates.

Based on the above literature, the following conceptual framework is developed to investigate the effects of intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional, and career decision self-efficacy factors on the career choices of MBA graduates.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework of the study



Research Methods

This research employs a quantitative, explanatory research design to investigate the factors that guide career decisions among MBA graduates in the Pokhara Valley. The primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire based on established dimensions of career choice. This study has a population comprising MBA graduates from five universities (three from Nepalese and two from foreign affiliated) in the Pokhara valley: Pokhara University, Tribhuvan University, Purbanchal University, Asia Pacific University, and Lincoln University. The survey was administered to 280 MBA students in Pokhara Valley, and 211 responded, yielding a final sample. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure the representativeness of MBA graduates in Pokhara Valley.

Data was collected via a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument for data collection is a cross-sectional survey conducted among MBA graduates in the Pokhara valley at a single point in time. The questionnaire primarily uses five-point Likert-scale items, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to measure the effects of intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional, and career decision self-efficacy factors on the career choices.

Descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses were conducted on the data using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the construct's reliability, and values above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 indicated adequate internal consistency. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were modified from prior empirical research and globally recognized frameworks. To ensure clarity and relevance, the instrument was pilot-tested among 20 respondents and evaluated by subject-matter experts prior to final data collection.

Results and Discussion

Demographic condition

The demographic characteristics of respondents include gender, age, and marital status, which can influence the career choices of graduates. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic status of the respondents.

Table 1

Demographic condition of respondents

Respondent's details	Responses	Percentage
Gender		
Male	76	36.0
Female	135	64.0
Age Group		
21-25 years	36	17.1
26-30 years	165	78.2
31-35 years	10	4.7
Marital Status		
Single	143	67.8
Married	68	32.2
Job		
Banking	51	24.2

Insurance	5	2.4
Marketing	7	3.3
Teacher	5	2.4
Entrepreneurship	20	9.5
Specialization		
Finance	162	76.8
Human Resource Management	13	6.2
Marketing	32	15.2
Others	4	1.9
University		
Asia Pacific University	13	6.2
Lincoln University	9	4.3
Pokhara University	91	43.1
Purbanchal University	28	13.2
Tribhuvan University	70	33.2
Total	211	100.0

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

Descriptive status

This section explains the descriptive statistical results of the study's independent variables, such as intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional, and career decision self-efficacy, and the dependent variable, career choice of MBA graduates, in a clear and simple numerical way.

Intrinsic factors (IF)

Intrinsic factors include personal interests, skills and abilities, inner motivation, enjoyment of work, and long-term career objectives. Table 2

presents statements examining how personal and internal factors affect the career decisions of MBA graduates.

Table 2

Intrinsic factors

Codes	IF Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
IF1	I chose a career based on my personal interests.	1.85	0.993	Low
IF2	My skills and abilities guide my career decisions.	2.18	1.437	High
IF3	I chose a career that supports my long-term goals.	2.30	1.448	High
IF4	I enjoy the type of work involved in my preferred career.	2.24	1.432	High
IF5	I feel internally motivated to follow my chosen career.	2.27	1.459	High
Average		2.17		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The results indicate that graduates perceive IF as a crucial contributor to career choice, with the highest mean score for long-term goals (Mean = 2.30). Studies conducted by Dogan et al. (2025) also show that intrinsic motivation, along with knowledge of sustainable career engagement, reinforces long-term dedication to sustainability-focused careers.

Extrinsic factors (EF)

An extrinsic factor refers to salary and income potential, opportunities for promotion and growth, job market availability, and the job's social status. Table 3

presents a statement on extrinsic factors that assess the impact of external benefits and job-related conditions on career selection.

Table 3

Extrinsic factors

Codes	EF Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
EF1	Salary and earning opportunities influence my career choice.	2.35	1.387	High
EF2	Job security is important in deciding my career.	2.34	1.389	High
EF3	Promotion and growth opportunities affect my decision.	2.38	1.377	High
EF4	Availability of jobs in the market influences my choice.	2.14	1.336	Low
EF5	The prestige or social status of a job matters to me.	2.34	1.368	High
Average		2.31		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The results indicate that graduates view EF as an essential element for career choice, with the highest mean score in promotion and growth opportunities (Mean = 2.38). This supports the study by Khalid and Rauf (2020), which states that external rewards, including financial benefits and professional growth opportunities, are key determinants in the career decision-making process.

Interpersonal factor (IPF)

Interpersonal factors include the influence of peers, teachers, mentors, role models, and societal expectations on career decisions, which helps to understand how social

relationships and opinions affect the career choices of MBA graduates. Table 4 represents the statement related to interpersonal factors.

Table 4

Interpersonal factors

Codes	IPF Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
IPF1	My family's opinion affects my career choice.	2.43	1.186	High
IPF2	My friends influence the type of career I want to pursue.	2.32	1.187	High
IPF3	I consider advice from teachers or mentors while choosing a career.	2.17	1.276	Low
IPF4	People I look up to (role models) inspire my career choice.	2.26	1.321	Low
IPF5	Social expectations influence the career I want to choose.	2.29	1.348	Low
Average		2.29		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The results indicate that graduates view interpersonal factors as a crucial component for career choice, with the highest mean score for family's opinion for career choice (Mean = 2.43). This supports the study by Wang et al. (2024), which states that parental support, family expectations, and social interactions are interpersonal factors that significantly influence graduates' career choices. The result is also consistent with the study by Koçak et al. (2021) and Fernandes and

Rawatlal (2024), which contends that graduates' career growth and decision-making processes are strongly correlated with family support and influence.

Institutional factors (INS)

Institutional factors comprise support from teachers, career guidance and counselling services, internship opportunities, academic programs, and the institution's overall learning environment. Table 5 presents statements on institutional factors to evaluate the role of educational institutions in shaping students' career choices.

Table 5

Institutional factor

Codes	INS Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
INS1	Guidance from my college/teachers helps me choose my career.	2.42	1.365	High
INS2	Career counselling at my college influences my career choice.	2.28	1.332	High
INS3	Internship opportunities provided by my college affected my decision.	2.32	1.359	High
INS4	The courses/programs offered by my institution influence my career interests.	2.12	1.350	Low
INS5	The overall learning environment of my institution shapes my career preference.	2.04	1.307	Low
Average		2.23		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The results indicate that graduates consider institutional factors essential for career choice, with the highest mean scores for guidance from college/teachers (Mean = 2.42). This supports the study by Mtemeri (2022), which shows that teachers and career counseling schools help students make better career decisions, broaden their perspectives, and influence their career choices. And also similar to the study by Fernandes and Rawatlal (2024), which states that graduates' career choices are influenced by the positive and supportive attitudes of instructors, lecturers, and career exposition representatives.

Career decision self-efficacy (SE)

Career decision self-efficacy assesses MBA graduates' confidence in selecting a suitable career, comparing available options, making decisions despite challenges, recognizing personal strengths, and planning future career paths. Table 6 demonstrates the statements of career decision self-efficacy.

Table 6

Career decision self-efficacy

Codes	SE Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
SE1	I am confident that I can choose the right career.	2.29	1.420	High
SE2	I feel capable of comparing different career options.	1.92	1.281	Low
SE3	I can make a good career decision even if I face difficulties.	2.12	1.306	High

SE4	I am confident in my understanding of which career suits my strengths.	2.07	1.354	Low
SE5	I can successfully plan the steps needed for my chosen career.	2.16	1.402	High
Average		2.11		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The results indicate that graduates perceive career decision self-efficacy as important for career choice, with the highest mean scores for confidence level (Mean = 2.29). This supports the study by Lee et al. (2022), graduates with an outstanding career decision-making self-efficacy have a strong belief and confidence in their capacity to prepare for and make career decisions. Su et al. (2024) confirm that students' actions, confidence, and career decision-making processes are significantly impacted by career decision-making self-efficacy.

Career choice (CC)

Career choice is the job or career path that MBA Graduates adopt after they leave the Study program. Table 7 presents statements regarding graduates' career choices to assess their perceptions.

Table 7

Career choice

Codes	CC statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perception
CC1	I feel confident about my chosen career path.	2.21	1.416	High
CC2	My chosen career fits my goals and interests.	2.15	1.420	Low

CC3	I believe my career choice will give me a good future.	2.15	1.420	Low
CC4	I have enough information to choose the right career.	2.18	1.369	High
CC5	I am satisfied with the career choice I plan to pursue.	2.18	1.404	High
Average		2.17		

Note. Calculation based on field survey, 2025.

The descriptive statistics indicate a positive perception of career choice among graduates, with mean values ranging from 2.15 to 2.18 on a five-point scale. The highest mean score (2.21) reflects strong agreement that individuals confidence supports career choice. This finding is consistent with the study by Jackson and Wilton (2016), which states that greater self-confidence among graduates increases their likelihood of making wise professional decisions and transitioning smoothly into the workforce.

Inferential analysis

Correlation and regression methods were applied to conclude career choice. The relationship between the dependent variable (i.e., career choice) and the independent variables (i.e., intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, interpersonal factors, institutional factors, and career decision self-efficacy factors) is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Correlation matrix

Variables	IF	EF	IPF	INF	CC	SE
IF	1					
EF	.559**	1				
IPF	.542**	.559**	1			
INS	.666**	.542**	.666**	1		
CC	.485**	.553**	.485**	.500**	1	
SE	.496**	.580**	.496**	.517**	.725**	1

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

Note. Based on data analysis using SPSS.

Table 8 shows that graduates' career choice is positively connected with various factors of career choice. Career decision self-efficacy has the highest value of 0.725, so it most strongly affects the career decisions of MBA graduates. Extrinsic factor has a value of 0.553, indicating a positive relationship with career decision. The institutional factor has a value of 0.500, also indicating a positive relationship. Similarly, intrinsic factors and interpersonal factors have the same value of 0.485, indicating a positive link. All these results are significant at the 0.01 level, which means they are strong and reliable. This suggests that MBA graduates are more likely to make clearer and stronger career choices when they are motivated internally, supported externally, influenced by social networks, guided by institutional resources, and aided by career decision self-efficacy.

The regression was estimated using intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, institutional, and career decision self-efficacy factors as independent variables, with career choice as the dependent variable. The regression analysis of graduates' career choice is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardize		Standard			Collinearity
	d coefficients		Coefficients			Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance VIF
(Constant)	.624	.223		2.794	.006	
IF	.092	.056	.105	1.642	.102	.524 1.907
EF	.148	.066	.140	2.259	.025	.549 1.822
INS	.072	.054	.086	1.320	.188	.494 2.024
IPF	.060	.057	.069	1.055	.293	.493 2.029
SE	.595	.063	.565	9.479	.000	.596 1.677

Dependent variable: Career choice

Predictors: (Constant): IF, EF, IPF, INF, and SE

Note. Based on the data analysis using SPSS.

The regression coefficients indicate that extrinsic factors and career decision self-efficacy significantly influence the career choices of MBA graduates, whereas intrinsic, institutional, and interpersonal factors do not show a statistically significant independent effect, as indicated by p-values below 0.05. Furthermore, the tolerance and VIF values fall within acceptable limits, indicating no multicollinearity problem and confirming the reliability of the regression results.

The hypothesis was tested using the coefficient table above, which includes the independent variables as predictors. The summary of the hypothesis testing is presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	P-Value	Decision
H1	0.102	$P > 0.05$ (Rejected)
H2	0.025	$P < 0.05$ (Accepted)
H3	0.188	$P > 0.05$ (Rejected)
H4	0.293	$P > 0.05$ (Rejected)
H5	0.000	$P < 0.05$ (Accepted)

Note. Based on the authors' calculation.

Table 10 shows that the career decision self-efficacy factor has the most substantial positive impact ($\beta = 0.595$, $p = 0.00$) on graduates' career decisions. Extrinsic factor also has a positive and substantial effect (with a β of 0.148 and significance of 0.025). Career decision self-efficacy and extrinsic factors mainly influence graduates' career choices, whereas intrinsic, interpersonal, and institutional factors have a lesser or negligible effect. The result is consistent with the study by Zhang et al. (2025), which reveals that career choice is strongly and favorably correlated with environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, and internal factors. In addition, a study by Zhou et al. (2023) finds that students with higher career decision-making self-efficacy are more likely to actively engage in career preparation and selection activities.

Career choice has recently become an extremely complex science, with so many variables influencing it. Making the appropriate career choice is crucial to ensuring that people have fulfilling lives, are inspired at work, and achieve exceptional productivity, all of which pave the way for the success and sustainability of

organizations (Nyamwange, 2016). Career choice is a crucial step that can have a substantial effect on a person's life and future prospects (Wang et al., 2024). A graduate's career choice is significantly impacted by various factors, including peer groups, environment, career guidance counsellors, and parents or guardians (Omar et al., 2021). A variety of elements interact to affect a person's career choice. According to the study of Siddiky and Akter (2021), students' career decisions are significantly influenced by a number of factors, involving family preferences, advice from teachers, job prestige, job security, compensation, opportunities for advancement, pensions, professional development, personal interests, academic majors, educational attainments, and career development trainings.

The findings indicate that intrinsic factors do not have a statistically significant effect on career choice. A study by Joshi and Rawat (2025) also reports that economic pressure can weaken the impact of intrinsic motivation on career decisions. Extrinsic factors have a significant and positive influence on the career choices of MBA graduates. The result is consistent with the study by Jafrin et al. (2025), which found that financial incentives and career growth opportunities are major determinants of career choice among management graduates. Interpersonal factors do not significantly influence the career choices of MBA graduates. This finding contrasts with studies by Fernandes and Rawatlal (2024), which highlight strong social and family influence on career choices. The results show that institutional factors do not have a statistically significant impact on career choice. This finding partially contradicts earlier studies by Barron and Gravert (2022), which emphasized the importance of institutional support in improving career awareness and employability. This study is consistent with the findings made by Purohit et al. (2020) that self-efficacy improves confidence in decision-making and career planning. Even in difficult job market conditions, self-efficacy helps graduates assess career options and move toward suitable career paths.

Conclusion and Policy Implication

The career choices of MBA graduates are influenced by multiple interrelated factors: intrinsic, extrinsic, interpersonal, and institutional factors, as well as career decision self-efficacy. These factors play significant roles in shaping graduates' career decisions. Extrinsic factors and career decision self-efficacy are the most dominant factors that assist graduates in their career choices. Institutional support, effective career counseling, and confidence-building initiatives may facilitate career choice decisions. These findings support career choice theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory, emphasizing that intrinsic motivation, external reward, institutional and interpersonal support, and self-efficacy interact to influence the career decision of MBA graduates. This study highlights the need for MBA graduates to focus on self-awareness and personal development when making career decisions, and for universities and academic institutions to strengthen career guidance and counseling services. Policymakers and educational planners may strengthen industry-academic collaboration to enhance the quality of higher education and employment opportunities. This study is limited to a primary quantitative study of five higher education institutions in Pokhara Valley to investigate the determinants of career decision-making among MBA graduates.

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Data availability statement

Data will be available on request to the corresponding author.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI) assisted technologies

We declare that Grammarly was used as AI for grammatical correction.

Authors' contributions

Sabina Ghimire: Data collection, data analysis, validation, and original draft preparation. **Bharat Ram Dhungana:** Conceptualization, research design, draft review, supervision, and project administration. **Dipika Sunar Budhathoki:** Literature review, research design, and original draft preparation. **Chet Narayan Subedi:** Resources, data analysis, and validation. **Tara Nath Acharya:** Literature review and original draft preparation. All authors have approved the final manuscript before submission.

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