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Investigating Key Attributes Influencing Generation Z Students' Selection of Career Services in Higher Education Institutions: A Conjoint Analysis Approach

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigated Generation Z students' preferences for higher education career services in Davao City, Philippines, using conjoint analysis. Data from 554 valid participants, aged 18-29, revealed "Degree of Personalization" as the most crucial attribute. This was closely followed by "Extent of Assistance" in job placement and "Scope of Training," indicating a strong preference for direct, tailored support and comprehensive skill development. Students overwhelmingly favor "High Personalization," "Advanced Support," and "Comprehensive Training," underscoring their demand for robust, impactful services. These findings offer critical insights for Philippine institutions to strategically enhance career service design and delivery, aligning with student expectations for quality and improving employability outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of higher education is increasingly characterized by the imperative to bridge the gap between academic achievement and professional readiness. Recent literature emphasizes the critical role of university career services in enhancing student success and graduate employability, as institutions grapple with documented mismatches between graduates' skills and employers' needs, necessitating stronger university-industry collaboration (Abelha et al., 2020; du Plessis et al., 2024). This challenge has prompted higher education institutions to intensify their focus on developing employability competencies and integrating real-world concepts into curricula (Dlamini & Dlamini, 2025; Tight, 2023), while recognizing the importance of self-perceived employability in building student confidence (Duggal et al., 2023). Research consistently demonstrates that graduate attributes such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership significantly impact employability outcomes (Zakari et al., 2022), though the evidence base for the effectiveness of employability programs remains limited, highlighting the need for more robust, large-scale studies (Scandurra et al., 2023).

Career services in higher education have evolved to play a multifaceted role in enhancing student employability, career readiness, and institutional reputation through comprehensive programming that encompasses career education, job interview training, resume preparation, and employment opportunity facilitation (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Terzaroli & Oyekunle, 2019). These services contribute substantially to human capital development by facilitating employability competencies (Manlagaylay, 2022) and helping students navigate increasingly complex and dynamic labor markets (Hora, 2019). The value proposition extends beyond individual student outcomes to encompass benefits for employers and institutions through improved education quality, enhanced staff recruitment, and strengthened institutional assessment capabilities (Gjorgjevska et al., 2016). However, persistent challenges in service delivery and utilization patterns have emerged, particularly the concerning trend that students from equity groups underutilize these services despite potentially benefiting the most from such support (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017).

The emergence of Generation Z as the dominant cohort in higher education has introduced unprecedented complexities in career service delivery and expectations. Students born between the late 1990s and early 2010s exhibit distinct characteristics that fundamentally reshape educational and career service paradigms. As digital natives with exceptional technological fluency, Generation Z students maintain high expectations for personalized and technology-supported learning experiences (Humphries et al., 2018; Alruthaya et al., 2021). This cohort demonstrates pronounced values for experiential learning, creativity, and entrepreneurship, coupled with a distinctive willingness to embrace innovation without fear of failure (Petrelli et al., 2023). Furthermore, Generation Z exhibits strong social consciousness, consistently prioritizing diversity, inclusion, and environmental concerns in their academic and career decisions (Wajdi et al., 2024). Within higher education contexts, these students expect responsive and innovative approaches that leverage digital technologies and

provide engaging learning experiences (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2017), while simultaneously demanding high levels of customization and elevated customer service standards (Carter, 2018).

Contemporary research reveals significant challenges in the effectiveness and utilization of traditional university career services that underscore the phenomenological necessity for this investigation. Documented barriers include persistent language and cultural obstacles, insufficient awareness of available services, and student discomfort in accessing institutional support systems (Harryba et al., 2012). The systematic underutilization of career services by students from equity groups, despite their potential for greatest benefit, represents a critical service delivery failure (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017). Perhaps most significantly, research identifies a fundamental mismatch between existing career service models and contemporary student needs, with services demonstrating particular inadequacy in integrating students' diverse backgrounds and interests during counseling interactions (Chin et al., 2018). The rapidly evolving labor market demands necessitate a comprehensive shift in career services' operational approaches, with emphasis on developing comprehensive graduate employability frameworks (Brown et al., 2019).

The methodological gap in understanding student preferences for career services represents a significant limitation in current research paradigms. While recent studies have demonstrated Generation Z's well-defined career expectations and development plans, influenced by complex intrinsic and extrinsic factor interactions (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Acheampong, 2020), the application of sophisticated preference measurement techniques remains largely unexplored. Conjoint analysis has proven valuable in investigating student preferences across various higher education contexts, including e-learning environments (Kuzmanović et al., 2019), hybrid teaching scenarios (Feubli et al., 2023), and faculty attributes (Mithula & Rajan, 2019), yet its application to career service preference structures remains notably absent from the literature. This methodological limitation is particularly pronounced in Southeast Asian and Philippine contexts, where cultural, economic, and educational factors may significantly influence preference formations (Jayatissa, 2023).

This study addresses these interconnected challenges through a comprehensive examination of Generation Z students' career service preferences in Davao City's higher education landscape. The research contributes to knowledge enrichment through three distinct dimensions: first, by capturing a unique and understudied sample of Filipino Generation Z students in a regional context that has received limited scholarly attention; second, by introducing conjoint analysis methodology to career services research, representing a novel application that enables quantitative preference modeling; and third, by generating empirically-based insights that can inform evidence-driven service design and resource allocation decisions across higher education institutions. The investigation seeks to identify the most and least preferred attributes influencing Generation Z students' selection of career services in higher education institutions and determine optimal combinations of service attribute levels. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to explore key factors that

influence Generation Z students' career service choices in Davao City while identifying which combinations of career service attributes demonstrate greatest appeal to this demographic, ultimately providing actionable recommendations for enhancing institutional career service effectiveness and student satisfaction outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT)

Multi-Attribute Utility Theory represents a sophisticated decision-making approach that systematically evaluates alternatives based on multiple attributes, combining individual utility assessments to derive comprehensive overall utility measures (Mateo, 2012). This theoretical foundation plays a fundamental role in conjoint analysis by providing the mathematical framework necessary for quantifying individual preferences across diverse service attributes (Ostrom & lacobucci, 1995). The theoretical elegance of MAUT lies in its capacity to facilitate complex decision-making processes by systematically segmenting choices into distinct value dimensions and alternatives, subsequently guiding their methodical recombination into coherent overall judgments (Camasso & Dick, 1993). The versatility and robustness of this theoretical approach have been demonstrated through its successful application across numerous fields, including healthcare information services (Kim, 2016), human services planning (Camasso & Dick, 1993), and software architecture evaluation (Lee et al., 2005).

The mathematical sophistication of MAUT enables the decomposition of preference functions into both additive and multiplicative forms under varying conditions of certainty and risk, providing researchers with flexible analytical frameworks suitable for diverse decision-making contexts (Dyer, 2016). The method's theoretical appeal stems from its inherent simplicity in solving multi-attribute problems while simultaneously offering substantial flexibility for decision-makers navigating complex choice environments (Alinezhad & Khalili, 2019). Furthermore, the theoretical framework's practical utility extends to estimating user interests and preferences (Schäfer, 2001) and analyzing architectural trade-offs among quality attributes in software development contexts (Lee et al., 2005), demonstrating its broad applicability across diverse research domains.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that posits self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals as the primary constructs driving career development processes (Lent & Brown, 1996). The theory's foundational construct of self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capability to perform specific tasks successfully, exerts significant influence on career choices and professional aspirations (Ye, 2021; Schoenfeld et al., 2017). Complementing self-efficacy, outcome expectations represent the anticipated results or consequences of particular actions, playing a crucial role in shaping career-related decisions and behavioral patterns (Gore & Leuwerke, 2000; Feldt & Wölfel, 2009). Personal goals, which emerge from the dynamic interaction between self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations,

serve as the primary drivers of career-related behaviors and decision-making processes (Lent & Brown, 1996; Ye, 2021).

The theoretical sophistication of SCCT is further enhanced by its emphasis on the complex interplay between these core psychological constructs and environmental factors, including both supportive elements and potential barriers that influence career development trajectories (Lindley, 2005; Appling et al., 2022). The theory's empirical validation has been demonstrated through its successful application to diverse populations, including students with disabilities and African American college students, highlighting its cross-cultural and cross-demographic relevance (Appling et al., 2022; Dickinson et al., 2017). Research consistently indicates that SCCT constructs such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal-setting are interconnected and collectively influence career choices and professional aspirations (Schoenfeld et al., 2017; Conklin et al., 2013). Empirical evidence demonstrates positive associations between self-efficacy and outcome expectations with career interests and goals (Dickinson et al., 2017; Ye, 2021), while learning experiences, including performance accomplishments and verbal persuasion, contribute significantly to the formation and development of self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Dickinson et al., 2017).

The theoretical framework acknowledges that perceived barriers can substantially impact career development processes, with research revealing gender differences in coping beliefs and strategies (Lindley, 2005). Additionally, factors such as affective commitment to one's chosen academic major and perceived abilities-demands fit play significant roles in career decision-making processes (Conklin et al., 2013). Understanding these multifaceted theoretical relationships provides valuable insights that can inform career counseling interventions and enhance support systems designed to facilitate students' career development trajectories.

Synergistic Integration of MAUT and SCCT

The theoretical integration of Multi-Attribute Utility Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory creates a powerful analytical framework that comprehensively addresses both the mathematical precision required for preference measurement and the psychological complexity underlying career service selection behaviors among Generation Z students. This synergistic relationship enables researchers to simultaneously capture the quantitative utility assessments inherent in-service attribute preferences while acknowledging the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms that drive these preferences through self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal-setting processes. The MAUT framework provides the methodological rigor necessary for decomposing complex career service preferences into measurable attribute utilities, while SCCT offers the theoretical foundation for understanding why specific service characteristics resonate with particular student populations based on their career development needs and psychological orientations. This theoretical convergence is particularly relevant when examining Generation Z students' preferences for career services, as their digital nativity and personalization expectations align with SCCT's emphasis on self-efficacy

development through tailored learning experiences, while their pragmatic career approach corresponds to MAUT's utility maximization principles. The integration recognizes that students' preferences for specific career service attributes—whether high personalization counseling, comprehensive skill development programs, or extensive digital integration—reflect not merely utility calculations but also underlying beliefs about their capabilities, expectations about service outcomes, and alignment with their career goals. As illustrated in Figure 1, this conceptual framework demonstrates how MAUT's attribute-based preference structure intersects with SCCT's career development constructs, creating a comprehensive theoretical model that explains how Generation Z students evaluate and select career services based on both rational utility assessments and psychological career development needs, ultimately providing a robust foundation for understanding the complex decision-making processes that govern career service preferences in contemporary higher education contexts.

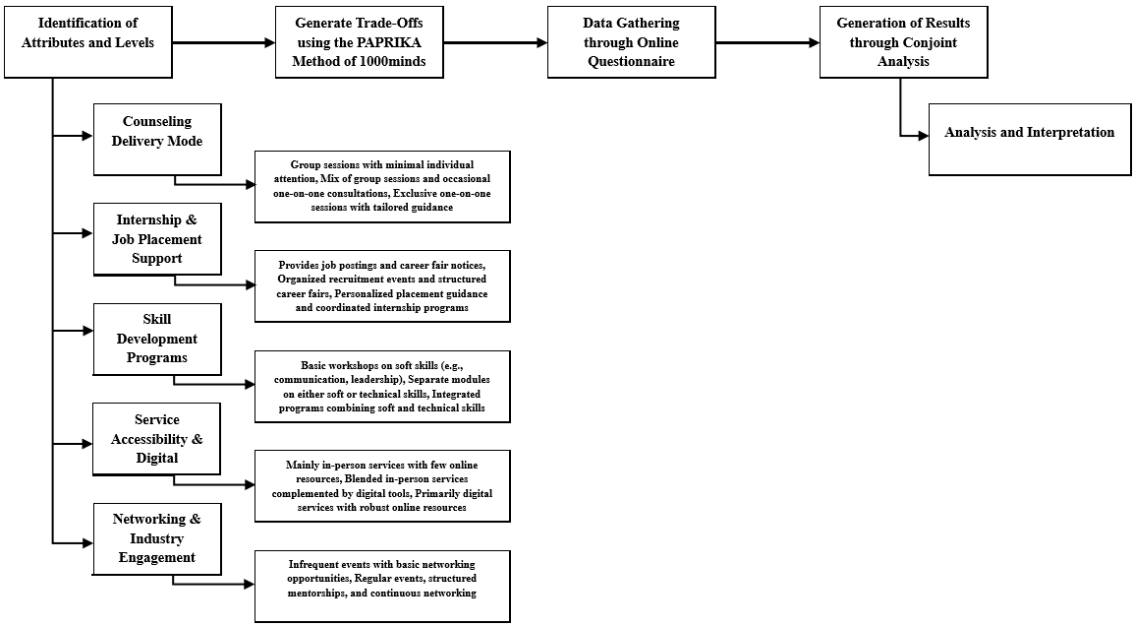


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative conjoint analysis approach to understand Generation Z college students' preferences for career services in higher education. Researchers specifically employed the PAPRIKA method within the 1000minds platform to create trade-off scenarios for participants. Students were presented with various career service options and asked to select their preferred choices for professional development, a method designed to simulate real-world decision-making and reveal their priorities among different service attributes (Lee, 2018).

Before the main data collection, a pre-test was conducted to ensure the consistency of attribute rankings. This involved using Kendall's W and Spearman's rho as reliability indicators to confirm the stability of the preference

data. The study focused on Generation Z college students aged 18 to 29 residing in Davao City. To achieve a representative and diverse sample, a multi-stage sampling technique was utilized, combining purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. This effort resulted in a robust sample of 671 participants.

Data was collected through an online survey on the 1000minds platform, which is specifically designed for PAPRIKA Conjoint Analysis (Hansen & Ombler, 2008). The survey presented participants with hypothetical career service offers that varied across several key attributes: Counseling Delivery Mode (Degree of Personalization), Internship & Job Placement Support (Extent of Assistance), Skill Development Programs (Scope of Training), Service Accessibility & Digital Integration (Extent of Digital Adoption), and Networking & Industry Engagement Opportunities (Frequency and Depth). Participants were asked to rank these options, generating pairwise comparisons and relative importance scores that quantified the intensity of their preferences. The survey ran from Tuesday, April 15, 2025, to Wednesday, June 11, 2025. The survey link was distributed through personal and professional networks, encouraging sharing to ensure a diverse sample while maintaining anonymity and voluntary participation. This choice-based conjoint approach aimed to mirror real-world decision-making, offering insights into the most appealing career service attributes for students.

For data analysis, the PAPRIKA method within the 1000minds platform was employed to identify the most preferred attributes and their optimal combinations. Descriptive statistics complemented the conjoint analysis, summarizing participant demographics and the frequency of attribute selections, thus providing broader context to the findings.

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were integral, ensuring participant privacy and data protection. Informed consent was obtained digitally, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The study adhered to ethical principles of transparency and autonomy, with personal identifiers excluded to preserve anonymity. Responsible data handling was maintained throughout the study.

RESEARCH RESULT

Profile of respondents

A total of 671 participants initially responded to the survey. However, after applying the exclusion criteria of the 1000minds platform, which filtered out responses from participants who repeatedly clicked "they are equal," were inconsistent in choosing trade-offs, repeatedly chose only one side, or answered too quickly, 554 responses were deemed valid for data processing and interpretation.

Table 1. Profile of 554 Valid Respondents

Category	Value	Percentage
Age Range		
18-20 years old	285	51.4%
21-23 years old	242	43.7%
24-26 years old	23	4.2%
27-29 years old	4	0.7%
Gender		
Female	319	57.6%
Male	210	37.9%
Non-binary	3	0.5%
LGBTQ	22	4.0%
Current/Permanent Residence in Davao City		
District 1 (Poblacion & Talomo)	276	49.8%
District 2 (Agdao, Buhangin, Bunawan, & Paquibato)	164	29.6%
District 3 (Baguio, Calinan, Marilog, Toril, & Tugbok)	114	20.6%
Have you used career services at your institution before?		
Yes	257	46.4%
No	297	53.6%
How confident are you in your career plans?		
Very confident	103	18.6%
Somewhat confident	335	60.5%
Not very confident	109	19.7%
Not at all confident	7	1.2%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of these 554 valid respondents. The majority of the participants, 51.4%, were between 18 and 20 years old, followed by 43.7% in the 21-23 age range. A smaller proportion fell into the 24-26 age bracket (4.2%) and 27-29 age bracket (0.7%). In terms of gender, females constituted the largest group at 57.6%, while males made up 37.9% of the respondents. Non-binary individuals accounted for 0.5%, and those identifying as LGBTQ represented 4.0% of the sample.

Regarding residence in Davao City, nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) were from District 1 (Poblacion & Talomo). District 2 (Agdao, Buhangin, Bunawan, & Paquibato) accounted for 29.6% of the respondents, and District 3 (Baguio, Calinan, Marilog, Toril, & Tugbok) comprised 20.6%. When asked about prior use of career services at their institution, a slight majority of respondents (53.6%) indicated they had not used such services, compared to 46.4% who had. Finally, concerning confidence in their career plans, 60.5% reported being

"somewhat confident," 18.6% were "very confident," 19.7% were "not very confident," and 1.2% were "not at all confident".

The demographic breakdown reveals several nuances within the Generation Z cohort surveyed in Davao City. The predominant age group (18-23 years old) aligns with typical undergraduate university enrollment, reflecting the study's focus on current college students. The higher representation of female respondents is also a common trend in various academic surveys. The distribution across Davao City districts indicates a fair spread, with a natural concentration in more urbanized or central areas like District 1. Interestingly, a notable portion of the Generation Z students (53.6%) reported not having utilized their institution's career services previously. This finding underscores a potential gap in service awareness or accessibility, or perhaps a perception among students that these services are not yet necessary for their current stage of professional development. Despite this, the majority of respondents expressed at least "somewhat confident" in their career plans (60.5%), with a significant proportion (18.6%) feeling "very confident". This suggests that while formal career service engagement may be limited for some, many Generation Z students possess a degree of self-assurance regarding their future career paths, potentially influenced by their digital native characteristics and entrepreneurial leanings as highlighted in existing literature. However, the combined 20.9% who are "not very confident" or "not at all confident" indicates a significant segment that could greatly benefit from more tailored and accessible career support. This further emphasizes the importance of understanding their preferences to enhance service design and outreach.

Relative Importance of Career Service Attributes

The conjoint analysis revealed the relative importance of various career service attributes to Generation Z students, as illustrated in Figure 2. The Degree of Personalization emerged as the most important attribute, accounting for 25.2% of the overall preference. This indicates that students highly value tailored guidance and individualized attention in their career service interactions.

Following personalization, the Extent of Assistance provided by internship and job placement support was the second most important attribute, with a weighting of 20.9%. This highlights students' strong desire for robust support in securing internships and employment opportunities. The Scope of Training offered by skill development programs ranked third, contributing 19.6% to overall preference, underscoring the importance of comprehensive skill-building opportunities.

Frequency and Depth of networking and industry engagement opportunities held an 18.0% importance, suggesting that while valuable, it is slightly less prioritized than direct assistance and training. The Extent of Digital Adoption for service accessibility and integration was identified as the least important attribute, accounting for 16.4% of the preference. While still a factor, this suggests that for Generation Z students, the mode of delivery (digital vs. in-person) is less critical than the quality and personalization of the service itself.

These findings suggest that Generation Z students, despite being digital natives, prioritize human-centric and impactful career service attributes such as personalized guidance and direct assistance with placements over purely digital convenience. This understanding is crucial for higher education institutions in Davao City to strategically design and allocate resources for career services that genuinely meet student needs and enhance their professional development.

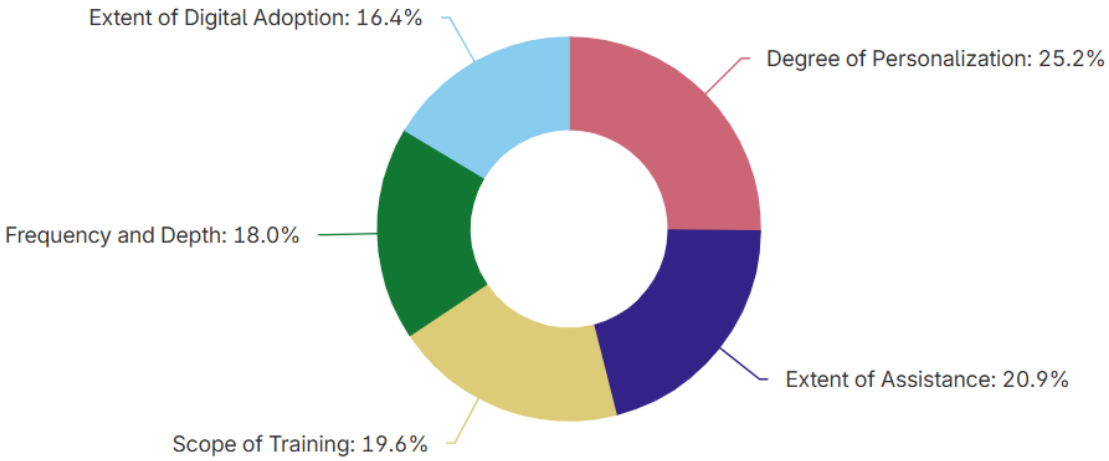


Figure 1. Most and Least Important Attributes

Most and Least Preferred Combinations of Attribute Levels

The most preferred combination of attribute levels, as detailed in Table 2, are as follows: The Counseling Delivery Mode (Degree of Personalization) attribute with the level of "High Personalization - Exclusive one-on-one sessions with tailored guidance" registered a 25.2% mean score for this attribute level. The Internship & Job Placement Support (Extent of Assistance) attribute with the level of "Advanced Support - Personalized placement guidance and coordinated internship programs" received a 20.9% mean score for this attribute level. The Skill Development Programs (Scope of Training) attribute with the level of "Comprehensive Training - Integrated programs combining soft and technical skills" garnered a 19.6% mean score for this attribute level. The Networking & Industry Engagement Opportunities (Frequency and Depth) attribute with the level of "Extensive Networking - Regular events, structured mentorships, and continuous networking" had an 18.0% mean score for this attribute level. The Service Accessibility & Digital Integration (Extent of Digital Adoption) attribute with the level of "Extensive Digital Integration - Primarily digital services with robust online resources" recorded a 16.4% mean score for this attribute level. The total mean utility for the most important attributes sums to 100%.

Conversely, the least preferred combination of attribute levels, each registering a 0% mean utility, are: Counseling Delivery Mode (Degree of Personalization) - "Low Personalization - Group sessions with minimal individual attention". Extent of Assistance - "Basic Support - Provides job postings and career fair notices". Scope of Training - "Limited Training - Basic workshops on soft skills (e.g., communication, leadership)". Extent of Digital

Adoption - "Minimal Digital Integration - Mainly in-person services with few online resources". And Frequency and Depth - "Limited Networking - Infrequent events with basic networking opportunities". The total mean utility for the least preferred attributes is 0%.

These results, as observed in Table 2, strongly suggest that Generation Z students in higher education institutions in Davao City have a clear and consistent preference for highly robust, comprehensive, and personalized career services. They value direct and tailored support, extensive training for a wide range of skills, and significant opportunities for industry engagement. While they are digital natives, their preference for extensive digital integration indicates a desire for well-developed online resources rather than a simple online presence, suggesting they expect digital tools to enhance, not replace, high-quality, impactful services. Conversely, any level of basic or limited service in any of these attributes holds no appeal, reinforcing the need for institutions to invest in and deliver high-quality, comprehensive career development support to effectively meet the needs and expectations of this demographic.

Table 2. Most and Least Preferred Combination of Attribute Levels

Attribute	Level	Mean Score
Degree of Personalization	Low Personalization	0.0%
	Moderate Personalization	14.4%
	High Personalization	25.2%
Extent of Assistance	Basic Support	0.0%
	Intermediate Support	11.4%
	Advanced Support	20.9%
Scope of Training	Limited Training	0.0%
	Moderate Training	8.1%
	Comprehensive Training	19.6%
Frequency and Depth	Limited Networking	0.0%
	Extensive Networking	18.0%
Extent of Digital Adoption	Minimal Digital Integration	0.0%
	Moderate Digital Integration	9.9%
	Extensive Digital Integration	16.4%

Additionally, the reliability of the attribute rankings was confirmed through Kendall's W, which was calculated at 0.765. This value suggests a substantial level of agreement among participants regarding their preferences for career service attributes. From this Kendall's W, the mean Spearman rank correlation was approximated at 0.764, further validating the consistency and stability of the preference data collected in the study. These strong reliability indicators confirm that the captured preferences accurately reflect the underlying priorities of the Generation Z students surveyed.

DISCUSSION

This study utilized conjoint analysis to empirically investigate the preferences of Generation Z students, aged 18-29, in Davao City concerning career services in higher education, thereby illuminating critical attributes influencing their choices. The analysis of the respondent profile, predominantly comprising younger Generation Z individuals within this age bracket, aligns precisely with the targeted demographic of current college students. While an initial pool of 671 responses was gathered, the rigorous application of exclusion criteria by the 1000minds platform ensured that only genuinely engaged and consistent responses were deemed valid, resulting in a robust sample of 554 participants. This meticulous filtering process, supported by a Kendall's W of 0.765 and a mean Spearman rank correlation of approximately 0.764, underscores the high internal consistency and reliability of the preference data, indicating that the captured student choices are dependable and accurately reflect their underlying priorities. The observation that a notable portion of these students had not previously utilized institutional career services highlights a potential disconnect between existing offerings and student awareness or perceived relevance, even among those expressing a degree of confidence in their career plans. This paradox suggests a cohort that may be self-reliant due to their digital fluency, yet harbors significant, unaddressed needs for targeted and effective career support.

The core findings, derived from the relative importance of attributes, unequivocally position the Degree of Personalization as the paramount factor influencing Generation Z students' preferences for career services. This attribute, commanding the highest mean utility, signifies a profound demand for individualized attention and tailored guidance. This resonates directly with the intrinsic characteristics of Generation Z, as highlighted in the introduction, where they are described as digital natives with "high expectations for personalized and technology-supported learning experiences" and a "demand for high levels of customization and elevated customer service standards." This preference for personalized engagement transcends even the practicalities of job placement and digital accessibility, indicating that for this cohort, the human-centric aspect of career development, where services are adapted to their unique needs and aspirations, is paramount. This aligns with the tenets of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), where personalized support can significantly bolster self-efficacy beliefs and shape positive outcome expectations, thereby directly influencing career choices and professional aspirations. Following closely in importance are the Extent of Assistance in internship and job placement support and the Scope of Training offered by skill development programs. These preferences reflect Generation Z's pragmatic and entrepreneurial approach to career readiness, valuing tangible support in securing real-world opportunities and comprehensive skill enhancement that integrates both soft and technical competencies. This aligns with the broader academic discourse on employability, which stresses the imperative for institutions to bridge the gap between academic achievement and professional readiness, emphasizing the development of

comprehensive graduate attributes. The strong preference for "Advanced Support" and "Comprehensive Training" further illustrates their desire for substantive, impactful interventions rather than superficial offerings.

Conversely, while still contributing to overall preference, the Frequency and Depth of networking and industry engagement opportunities, and particularly the Extent of Digital Adoption, were identified as less critical drivers when compared to personalization or direct assistance. This finding regarding digital adoption is particularly nuanced and insightful, given Generation Z's inherent technological fluency. Rather than indicating a disregard for technology, its lower relative importance suggests that robust digital integration is likely an expected baseline for this generation. These students, accustomed to seamless digital interactions in all aspects of their lives, anticipate accessible online resources and efficient digital service delivery as a given, rather than a distinguishing feature that significantly sways their choice between service providers. The consistent 0% mean utility for the least preferred attribute levels universally reinforces that any form of minimal or basic service offering—such as low personalization group sessions, basic job posting support, limited skill workshops, or infrequent networking events—holds no appeal for this cohort. This stark contrast between the most and least preferred combinations underscores a fundamental mismatch between traditional, generalized service models and the specific, high-quality, and individualized expectations of contemporary students. This aligns with the introduction's assertion of a "fundamental mismatch between existing career service models and contemporary student needs," and the methodological gap in understanding these preferences. The application of Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT) provides the robust quantitative framework for decomposing these preferences into measurable attribute utilities, while SCCT offers the critical psychological lens to understand why these preferences exist, linking them to students' beliefs about their capabilities, anticipated outcomes, and evolving career goals. The synergistic integration of these theories thus explains how Generation Z evaluates and selects career services based on both rational utility assessments and their psychological career development needs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study provides compelling empirical evidence that Generation Z students in higher education institutions in Davao City, ranging from 18 to 29 years old, exhibit a distinct and strong preference for career services characterized by high personalization, advanced assistance in job placement, and comprehensive skill development. While extensive digital integration is valued, it is perceived more as a foundational expectation rather than a primary differentiating factor in service choice. The consistent rejection of basic or limited service offerings across all attributes underscores a clear demand for high-quality, impactful interventions.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that higher education institutions in Davao City:

Elevate Personalized Support: Institutions must strategically invest in and scale models that facilitate highly personalized career counseling, offering exclusive one-on-one sessions and tailored guidance. This could involve enhancing professional development for career counselors in individualized approaches, exploring AI-driven personalized pathway recommendations, and adopting caseload management systems to ensure deeper student-advisor relationships.

Strengthen Practical Employability Support: Resources should be directed towards providing "Advanced Support" for internship and job placement, which includes personalized placement guidance, proactive employer matching, and coordinated internship programs that are integrated into academic pathways. Concurrently, develop and robustly promote "Comprehensive Training" programs that transcend basic workshops, offering integrated modules combining essential soft skills with in-demand technical competencies relevant to the local and global job markets.

Optimize Digital Infrastructure as a Complement: While not the sole determinant, "Extensive Digital Integration" is highly preferred. Institutions should ensure their online career service platforms are not merely functional but exceptionally intuitive, comprehensive, and offer seamless access to all resources, appointment scheduling, and virtual networking opportunities. These digital tools should serve as a powerful complement to, rather than a replacement for, high-quality human interaction and tailored guidance.

Reconfigure Underperforming Offerings: Given the students' clear rejection of minimal or basic service levels (0% mean utility), institutions must critically assess and systematically reconfigure any existing career service offerings that fall into these lower tiers. Resources should be reallocated to enhance services towards the preferred, higher-utility levels, ensuring that all provisions genuinely meet student needs and drive engagement.

Enhance Strategic Outreach: Addressing the observed gap in prior service utilization, institutions should develop targeted and impactful outreach strategies. These strategies must effectively communicate the tangible benefits of personalized, comprehensive, and advanced career services, specifically highlighting how they align with Generation Z's career aspirations and address their anxieties, particularly for those who report lower confidence in their career plans.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study, while offering significant insights into Generation Z career service preferences in Davao City through the application of conjoint analysis, is subject to certain limitations that open avenues for future research. The findings, derived from a specific urban context in the Philippines, may not be directly generalizable to other geographical regions or countries, given potential variances in educational systems, labor market dynamics, and cultural influences on career development. Future research could pursue comparative studies across different cities within the Philippines or other Southeast Asian nations to explore such contextual differences.

Methodologically, while conjoint analysis excels at quantifying preferences, it inherently provides less depth on the underlying psychological or experiential reasons why certain attributes or levels are preferred. Therefore, integrating qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of students' motivations, expectations, and lived experiences with career services, further anchoring the findings in the tenets of SCCT. Additionally, longitudinal studies could trace how Generation Z students' career service preferences evolve throughout their academic journey and into their early professional lives, identifying any shifts in priorities. Exploring mediating or moderating factors, such as socioeconomic status, academic major, or prior work experience, on these preferences could also offer valuable insights. Finally, given the identified preference for extensive digital integration, future research could specifically investigate the effectiveness of particular technological innovations or AI applications in delivering personalized career services and their impact on student engagement and career outcomes.

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