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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CAREER COUNSELING: AN ESSENTIAL PROGRAM FOR THE YOUTH OF KARACHI

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#### ABSTRACT

To know yourself, your strengths, weaknesses, do's and don'ts is the most challenging task everyone has to face. To accomplish that task several psychometric tests are available but after finding the answer, "who are you?" the next step is finding the compatible career that can only be achieved by career counseling. Career counseling is required in order to build a pathway for students towards a career that not only provides a foundation to a successful profession but also compliment their interest, skills and talents. This research presents the findings of a study conducted to explore the significant need of career counseling among the students of different departments in University of Karachi in year 2019. The research method used includes data analysis, in depth interview and the survey through Judgmental sampling technique. Career counseling provides students the answer to explore and find the domain in which their expertise should be placed. The research aims to highlight the confusion and uncertainty students face while deciding for their career, when they have to choose their respective field without consultation and guidance. This research is used as a tool to identify that majority of the students is not aware with their life goals and objectives. Students are not properly educated about outcomes of the specific programs they are enrolled in, the scope and career opportunities in these fields, merely because of proper career counseling which is missing both at school and college level in Pakistan. In the absence of career counseling the students have no choice but to choose their field either under influence of others or simply based on availability. Thus, the research emphasizes the importance of career counseling among students.

## INTRODUCTION

Life on Earth has its roots in the concept of Pluralism where no two organisms look alike. According to this popular concept, people do not seem to be equal in every respect. It is evident from people's physique, temperament, intelligence as well as in wealth and social position that diversity prevails. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences urge for accommodating human diversity in how learning take place.

Each type of intelligence encompasses a certain characteristic and a student excelling in any one of these characteristics reflects his/her inclination to achieve success in that area. The issue arises when students are all measured on the same scale and are made to follow specific path which the society believes are road to a successful profession for instance in developing south Asian countries e.g. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh etc. the professions considered as a benchmark for students are medicine, engineering, business and other profession relating to science whereas arts is not consider as an acceptable choice here the students capabilities, interest, talent, skill set and level of intelligence is not taken in consideration those students who luckily fit in the bracket set by society are appreciated while the ones that even if they possess extra ordinary skills or talents in other domain are looked down upon.

According to Syed Walayat Ali from The Nation news, "Pakistani youth of the twenty-first century is living in an era of unemployment, frustration and mental illness due to our higher education institutes that have become fail to deliver quality education and the most important, a good career counseling even in renowned universities of Pakistan. Youth of Pakistan gives blind shots in every fields; he does not know about his strengths, he does not know what he wants or what he can be. He is totally following parental paths that leads him towards failure and damaged his personality as well as future. So, it becomes so much necessary for the Higher Education Commission to appoint career counselors in all educational institutes of Pakistan that can give path to the youth of Pakistan."

#### In the words of Albert Einstein:

"Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

The solution to this problem lies in the form of Career Counseling.

The concept of constructing one's career is most fully expressed in a recently formulated seminal paradigm called a life-design counseling theory. It conceives of career in very broad terms, if people's contemporary careers are contextual (or, strictly speaking, career development opportunities are contextually conditioned), dynamic (it is a dynamic process), non-linear, multi perspectival and comprised of personal patterns (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239). "Career Counseling is an information processing step that is required in order to step forward in the career". (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey & G.Niles, 2014) Career Counseling is a scientific process which must be carried out by a seasoned and certified counselor. Counselors must provide information on all aspects of career that will help students to achieve their goals and hence advance with their career. The job of career counselor is similar to that of a doctor. They first evaluate the expertise and aptitude of the student, design appropriate course outline for advancement in his/ her career, mentor the student about his/her career and ignite their energies to achieve what they are aiming at. The focus of this study is to investigate the current practices and their role at different educational levels of Karachi, Pakistan. In Pakistan a student before joining any profession must go through three levels of educational institutes i.e. a school level (grade 1-10), college level (grade 11-12) and a university level (grade 13 onwards).

**Career Counseling in Pakistan:** Student life is generally missed once a person comes in Professional life. Student life is considered the best phase of one's life as it is full of charm and joy. At the same time study life has challenges and issues of its own. Pakistan, as a developing nation is not new to the challenges of student life. Here, the students face problems of finances, poor transportation system, language barrier, incompetent policy makers and much more. Also, students here don't enjoy much freedom of selecting their career studies. Normally parents impose their choices which may not be a good choice for the child or may not come in his comfort zone. This is a dilemma of our society that children are imposed to follow the dreams of their parents. A student may want to be a journalist or a photographer, but is forced to study engineering merely on choice of his parents. This forceful study deteriorates performance and creates a loss of direction for future. This trend of enforcement should however be stopped.

Nobody declines the role of parents in making future of their children. Parents can educate their young ones with the scope, problems and opportunities of every field and let the decision of selection remain in hands of children. Students feel lost and stray after passing their matriculation examination as they get perplexed about the selection of their advance studies. Pakistan for a very long time has faced issue of very few choices for career selection. The famous choices were either engineering or medical. The third option was to become a teacher. This issue has its roots deeply associated with lack of career counseling. We are short of professional career counselors in Pakistan. There exist only few institutions which properly hire career counselors/advisors to educate their students about future prosperities. It is also important on part of students that they acquire some basic knowledge of different fields and professions before taking up their final decision. Students should have open and welcoming doors to consult their teachers, parents and friends in this regard, especially to those who are already attached with the profession they are interested in.

This practice can help minimize the ratio of students being forcefully driven to specific professions and will also maximize academic performances.

## METHODOLOGY

**In-depth Interview:** Initially in-depth interviews were conducted by the students of University of Karachi randomly in order to find the basic understanding of the objective of the research and to explore the students' perspectives on career counseling. In this research an interview sessions were conducted with 0.001% of the students from 40,000 enrolled students of the University, interview questions includes

- Were they aware of career counseling program
- Did they ever attend any of the counseling program
- If no, do they feel they should have taken the program
- If yes, then did the program help them

The response indicated that most of the students were aware of the program, but they did not have any opportunity to avail it.

**Questionnaire:** Later for the survey, simple questionnaire was developed consisting of close ended queries. The questionnaire was further improved with the useful insights of psychologist Nayab Farrukh, and later the data was collected by visiting departments and collecting samples.

**Response Rate:** A sample set of diverse departments has been taken under consideration. Out of 53 departments of University of Karachi around 20% departments from various faculties have been selected. No institute is included in the sample as institutes and its student has relatively different approaches. The graduate and undergraduate students of University of Karachi enrolled in different departments of different faculties were selected based on Judgmental and Convenience Sampling. Current active strength of students is around 40,000 of which 0.01% sample were selected from the total population.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A series of questions were asked in the questionnaire in order to estimate the need and understanding of career counseling of students and impact on students of the decision of choosing a career field without consultation.

These questions are divided in three segments in order to find the following

- Clarity of aim and vision among students
- The interests of students in their respective field
- The need of career counseling

### Age Bracket

45% of students are in the age bracket of 18-20 while 37.5% of students are in the age bracket of 21-23 and only 16.7% of students are in the age bracket of 24 and above as usually students enter in the university around the age of 18 and pass out in 4 to 5 years. This result indicated majority of students that filled this questionnaire either just started their course or are about to complete it. At this stage the students are ideally supposed to be focused with clear understanding of their future goals as this is the foundation that will support their career ahead.

**Table 1. Representing the response rate from different departments of University of Karachi**

Departments	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Public Administration	56	14.0%
Karachi University Business School	32	8.0%
Visual Studies	30	7.5%
Political Science	20	5.0%
International Relations	26	6.5%
English	24	6.0%
Mass communication	32	8.0%
Geology	18	4.5%
Physics	40	10.0%
Pharmacy	56	14.0%
UBIT (Department of Computer Science)	66	16.5%
Total	400	100%

**Clarity about Aim and Vision:** *“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.”*

– *Albert Schweitzer*

Some days prove to be easier than others—they’re full of inspiration, we’re full of excitement, and creative energy flows through us with ease. Other days present a challenge, and we struggle just to get through the project or the day, without any real intention about who we are and what our purpose is. Brendon Burchard is one of the most respected motivation and marketing trainers in the world. As I was listening to one of his podcast episodes the other week, I heard something that stuck with me: if we want to be successful in anything, we must be clear. However, you define success, and whatever you’re trying to succeed at, clarity makes all the difference. Like Billy Cox said, “Clarity is power. The clearer you are about what you want the more likely you are to achieve it.” If we were to analyze the qualities of high performers, we’d find that clarity of intention is a common denominator in their successes. They are clearer (about three things in particular) than most other people are, and this gives them an edge.

**Query1.1: When asked about the clarity of aim in life, following results came forward:** The dilemma that majority of the students have no clear idea about their aim or are uncertain about it. Only 7% students seemed to have some clear directions. This indicated the lack of clarity about their aim at university level. This shows that they were not guided properly in high school about their career choices and personality traits and are still unclear about them. Thus, this emphasizes the importance of career counseling program that even at the level where they are about to mark the start of their professional life, they are unclear about their aim and future. Just imagine an aimless youth! Alas! What would be the future of our country?

**Query 1.2: When asked if they think due to low career counseling trend in Pakistan people less likely to be motivated towards their aims, the responses were:** Query 1.2 shows massive 55% respondents said yes to the statement that low awareness and lack of counseling will lead to low motivation; whereas only 16% students replied no while 29% students were not clear what to respond. This clearly indicates that students believed and are well aware about the fact that career counseling would have played an important role in motivating them towards their goals and aim, and they understand the importance of career counseling however did not get chance to avail any such opportunities or don’t know how and from where they can avail such services. Hence if provided the opportunity, they would have been guided properly and would not have confusion and demotivation regarding their aim or future.

**Query 1.3: When asked whether they did any research before entering the field, the responses were:** 45% of the students did not do any research regarding their field, 30% of the respondents did a little homework and only 25% students did research before choosing their field. This indicates that majority of the students were least bothered by the career choices they were taking or didn’t know about such type of homework and had no idea about the impact these choices could have on them. This fact emphasizes on a dire need for guidance and awareness among students, as going into a field without research could result in chaos in a long run, also the students need to be fully aware about what they are going to study and what their future scope would be before entering any field. This could provide a help to develop their academic vision.

**Interest in their field of Study:** There are many factors that drive selection of Career. These factors include the practical concerns of salary and employment prospects, also the valuable advice from educators and family. Interest is the most important factor in deciding for career prospects. The type of work or industry also counts for pursuing ones interest leading to self-satisfaction and professional achievements. Interest is a powerful tool to trigger process of motivation, energizes learning experience, and hence takes further academic and career pathways.

Motivation is needed for academic success. Interest is two-folded. It is a psychological state of mind where there is focused attention toward an object or topic. It is also an enduring predisposition to re-engage over time. Combining these two definitions, a model of interest development can be made which is four-phase model. This model promotes interest and capitalizes on existing interests. These phases are: attention-getting settings, contexts evoking prior individual interest, problem-based learning, and enhancing utility value. Larger the interest, larger motivation, focused engagements and learning drive can be experienced for students. When asked in an open-ended question, why the students chose their respective field, majority of responses indicated

- It was because their intermediate percentage was not enough to get them admission in their field of interest
- This was the only available course
- They were influenced by others to make this choice.

Only a very few responses indicated interest and whole-hearted personal decision while making the choice. This indicates that students did not participate in the program due to their free will but either were forced or pressurized into taking their respective courses. This is either because of peer pressure or due to parents and elder relatives influence.

**Query 2.1: When asked whether they find the field they are studying interesting, the responses were:** In query 2.1 the results to this response were shocking and played a role of an eye-opener as inquiring about the field of interest was a question of despair. According to the response, 64% have no interest in that field and do not find their field interesting. Whereas 18% find it a little interesting and only 18% students find their field interesting. The lack of interest is bound to have effect on their performance and in a long run could result in misguide and misuse of their potential. There might be several factors resulting in this response. The initial one could be because according to them they did not choose the program themselves but were forced or pressurized into it. This results in the lack of interest. Hence proven the importance of having mentorship for the students they have no idea about how important their subject is and the effect this decision could have on their future.

**Query 2.2: When asked do you think skills and interest plays an important role in achieving your goals, the responses were:** According to the study 73% students skills and interests play a very important role in achieving goals and future objectives, 14% believe to some extent and 13% respond no to the query, regarding interest and goals, whereas there was not a single response who don't know that what role skills and interest play in achieving the career goals. This indicates that according to students, a crucial factor to achieve their goal is to have interest and appropriate skills in what they are aiming. Concluding, the lack of interest could create a big hindrance in their pathway to success.

**Need of proper Counseling:** Keeping in mind the role of guidance and counseling for children, schools have a huge role to play in bringing out the best in children. Although good conduct is coveted, but there comes a time when young minds need directions to polish their personality. Counseling helps to manage and deal with emotional and personal conflicts in a more systematic manner. Right counseling can help reach valuable lessons of daily life. Some sessions should deal with career guidance, an advice to students on the selection of courses and scope of multiple career paths. It's a need of time to prepare our students for life after school and what to expect in the different fields they might opt for:

**Effective guidelines and counseling can yield different benefits in form of:**

- Learning of different ways of dealing with psychological problems which can badly impact their studies. With these sessions, the students can develop certain problem-solving skills to cater with day to day surrounding issues.
- Learning of behaviors and attitudes while coping with peers in different situations during school life. For instance, how to speak, how to overcome differences and different team work issues in a diverse group.
- Learning of different discipline and self-management techniques. Proper guidance will help them reach their goals more efficiently.
- Learning of peace and harmony techniques to achieve conflict resolutions with peers and others in the school community. Learning of accepting and appreciating others of their class.

- Learning bridging techniques to build gap between students and the school administration in case of occurrence of any problems.

**Query 3.1: When asked if they think their chosen field of study is contributing to achieve their goals, the responses were:** 56% of the respondents in query 3.1 replied in negative and only 20% students responded in positive whereas the remaining 24% students were confused about whether field they are in is contributing towards achieving their goals. This indicates that students do not believe the field they are studying will aid their future goals, this element combined with lack of interest could affect the enthusiasm and willingness to perform well. Ideally there should not be any confusion at this level, but the confusion indicates that there was a lack of guidance and the effect of which might be very damaging. This could affect the youth and in larger domain the nation in a long run.

**Query 3.2: When asked if there is a need for proper counseling, the responses were:** According to the survey results in query 3.2, 66% responded in yes that there is a dire need for career counseling, whereas only 8% believes that there is no need of career counseling while selecting the field of study and 14% believe career counseling is good but not necessary. Thus, in the light of the students' opinion regarding career counseling it seems to be an essential need for most of them. This need of students can be fulfilled by initiating career counseling program in schools and colleges so that when students make career choices, they would have a clearer vision and career path.

**Query 3.3: When asked how much (in PKR) per person do you think a career counselor should charge for its time and guidelines, the responses were:** The reason of this question is to figure out the level of seriousness students take for career counseling and how much they are ready to invest in it. In query 3.3, 17% suggested 500 Rs. for career counseling session, where 46% suggested 1000Rs. and 25% suggested 2000Rs. is a good investment and only 13% of the students in UOK are ready to invest who suggested 2000 Rs. or even more. The results seem positive as majority believes career counseling is a worthy investment and is considered important for students. This is a good sign that students are willing to invest in a program but at the same time it's a very depressing fact that students are not provided the opportunity to make them better and to improve their skills. Hence we must understand the demand of career counseling and work towards providing proper counseling.

**Query 3.4: When asked if they feel they should have taken a career counseling session before entering this field, the responses were:** In query 3.4, 44% students feel they should have taken career counseling before deciding their field, where as 29% of the university students feel that somewhat should have taken career counseling and 22% students stated they don't feel that they required career counseling before the selection of their field. The findings showed that majority of the students who are currently studying in UoK have regret for not being properly guided and they might blame it in case they did not achieve the required success in life to the factor of not being in the best fit scenario.

**Query 3.5: When asked do they regret their career choices, the responses were:** Sadly query 3.5 showed 46% regret

choosing their current field whereas 24% have slight regrets which make 80% of the current enrolled students in the state of regret for being in the department they are studying. Furthermore 3% are in the state of shock and only 27% of the students have no regrets. This is not a good indication and suggests the students were not very selective and careful while choosing their field and this ultimately resulted in career selection regret. This could've been avoided, had they done proper research and received proper guidance and counseling sessions.

## Conclusion

According to the in-depth interview's students were aware of the career counseling program but were unable to benefit from it due to the lack of availability. The result from the research with respect to all three segments indicate

- Lack of clarity of aim and vision among students.
- Lack of interest in their field.
- A dire need of career counseling among students.

As we can clearly see most students even though at a mature age are still uncertain about their career choices and have yet to figure out their aims and goals not only this but they seem to be a massive lack of interest of students in their respective fields this could be the consequence of majority of students not having pre-hand precise understanding about the field they chose and seemingly the design they made was based not on the basis of research but under the influence of other or merely the availability of the course. The days of carrying a bulky profile in print format and knocking doors for jobs are long gone. The world has considerably changed with digitization and technology. Professional requirements dictate all careers and hence interest is a driving factor behind the choice of career. Be it the job of a teacher, an engineer, a doctor, a tutor, a sports coach or anything else you need to have complete knowledge of what the stream entails whether you possess the skills to excel in these fields if there is a demand of the field and if you'd be interested in doing what it takes. One of the aspects that suggest obvious confusion among students is that when asked if they are aware of their aim and goals, majority responded in negative and when asked if their field aids in achieving their goal the response was also negative. Though the students do show interest and are aware of the importance of career counseling and are even willing to pay a certain amount to get benefit from it but lack the opportunities of platforms providing career counseling programs.

## Recommendation

This research paper suggests the need of an institute-based career counseling program that provides guidance for students at both the government and private schools / colleges in order to meet the demands and challenges of the modern high-tech market across the globe. A lucrative career can be achieved by understanding your aptitude and performance metrics are not good indicators of aptitude. Career counseling can transform the life of a student to the life of a responsible practitioner. Therefore, we strongly recommend that career counseling forums should be established by government and private sectors both to provide counseling services. These services must include workshops, trainings, group counseling/discussions, psychometric tests, personality assessments etc.

There must be easy access to these forums which can stimulate the students to further participate positively in the society, as then they start from real identified strengths and comfort zone.

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