



Original Article

Recipients and NonRecipients of Career Counselling: Insights of Pakistani Professionals and Career Counsellors

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Abstract

Career counselling is integral for high school students in shaping their future professional journey. Counsellors provide sessions encouraging healthy thought processes that could help make positive decisions regarding emotional and professional concerns. This qualitative research explored the perspectives of nine Pakistani professionals who had received career counselling as students and six professionals who had not received it and how successful they were in their professional lives. Additionally, this study examined the perceptions of five career counsellors regarding career counselling as a mandatory part of the school curriculum. Findings showed that most participants without career counselling could not decide what career pathways to choose because of a lack of guidance. In contrast, those who had received counselling were better prepared for professional lives and had successful careers. Moreover, counsellors consider that career counselling should be mandatory for guiding students to successful professional tracks. Therefore, this research posits that career guidance should be implemented in schools with clear policies monitored and accompanied by detailed career advice.

Keywords: Career counselling, Curriculum, High school students, Professional pathways

1. INTRODUCTION

Education aims to empower individuals with knowledge that promotes personal development. Thus, having appropriate knowledge about different areas of interest is necessary when choosing career paths for the future (Reardon et al., 2017). Careers are often difficult to choose, and many people struggle to decide what they want to do with their professional lives. To help solve this problem, career counsellors are becoming increasingly important in both the workplace and schools (Akhtar et al., 2021). Providing career counselling in schools clarifies which careers suit each individual best when considering factors such as personality type, work environment preferences and even students' educational inclination (Yuen et al., 2018). The professionals who give advice are psychologists or career counsellors with extensive experience dealing with these issues. According to Karataş & Kaya (2015), counsellors build an important relationship with each student to support them in making decisions.

Career guidance has been robust in developed countries, specifically in the UK, USA, Europe and Japan (Badawai, 2008; Sulatana, 2017; Zahid et al., 2020). It has benefited these developed nations' economic and educational strategies by strengthening the relationship between education and the labour market and has enhanced people's ability to connect with educational systems (Hooley, 2014; Zahid et al., 2020). Unfortunately, career counselling is still a new and emerging field in developing countries, including Chile, Romania, Poland, Philippines, South Africa, Srilanka, Bangladesh and Nigeria (Abubakar, 2018; Zahid et al., 2020; Van de Ventor, 2006; Watts & Fretwell, 2004). Many factors like political, infrastructural,

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economic, social, and cultural, influence the status of career counselling in these countries (Abubakar, 2018; Watts & Fretwell, 2004; Zahid et al., 2020).

In the Pakistani educational milieu, students consider career counselling important, yet the opportunities available are few and far between (Yakoob et al., 2017). There is no centralised body for regulating career counselling at any level of education, nor is it included in national educational policies, except for Pakistan Vision 2025, wherein it is stated that career counselling should be practised in educational institutions (Akhtar et al., 2021; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Yakoob et al., 2017; Zahid et al., 2020). Although some universities and colleges have started providing counselling services to their students, there is little information about how widely used these services are because limited research has been conducted in recent years. (Dogar et al., 2011; Khan, 2010; Qurrat-ul-Ain & Khattak, 2012; Yaqoob et al., 2017).

Purpose & Research Questions

The main purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the influence on the careers of Pakistani professionals who have had career counselling as students. The purpose was also to examine the influence on careers of those Pakistani professionals who have not had career counselling as students. Linked to these objectives, a further aim of this study was to understand whether career counselling should be a mandatory part of the high school curriculum.

RQ1. How did career counselling influence the career path of Pakistani professionals?

RQ2. How did the absence of career counselling affect the career path of Pakistani professionals?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of career counsellors about making career counselling a mandatory part of the school curriculum?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is presented as follows to discuss the development and importance of counselling in detail.

Counselling

Counselling is a professional association between a trained counsellor and an individual who seeks help to manage and overcome personal challenges, mental health problems, emotional struggles, relationship difficulties, life transitions, personal development, career choices and self-improvement (Corey, 2019). Counselling provides a conducive and non-judgmental environment for individuals to explore their thoughts and feelings. The counsellor uses various therapeutic techniques and approaches to facilitate self-awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, and emotional regulation (American Counseling Association, 2021). Counselling is based on the cooperative and dialogic interaction between counsellors and their clients (Brown, 2011; Coudray, 2020; Hooley et al., 2020). Furthermore, counselling aims to help individuals understand their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and develop coping strategies to address their concerns and improve their overall well-being (American Counseling Association, 2021).

Career Counselling

Career counselling supports individuals in identifying and exploring their career-related goals, interests, values, and skills. It aims to help individuals make informed decisions about their education, training, and career choices and assists to develop a plan to achieve those goals (Lent & Brown, 2019; Savickas, 2013). Additionally, it is a collaborative, ongoing process that helps individuals understand and manage their career development and achieve their goals through self-exploration, decision-making, and action planning (Savickas & Porfeli, 2021; Walsh & Osipow, 2015). Career counselling is also an interpersonal process in which a career professional helps an individual or group of individuals clarify, specify, implement, and adjust career goals and plans (Niles & Bowlsbey, 2021). In addition, it is a one-on-one encounter between a practitioner and a client. The main goal is to assist the client in making career-related decisions and resolving career-related problems (Savickas, 2019). Choosing a particular path can combine career counselling and personal inclination that will vastly shape an individual's career (Baruch, 2004; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Malik & Kiran, 2012).

According to Akhtar et al. (2021), there are four main parts to career counselling:

- Assisting in developing self-awareness in areas such as interests, values, abilities, and personality type

- Linking to resources to obtain a better understanding of jobs and occupations
- Assisting in becoming active managers of career paths via the decision-making process to afford choices that are well suited to individual interests
- Choosing a career that complements their interests, values, abilities, and personality styles

Thus, counselling is a systematic way to help students counter emotional and social issues by educating them and giving them direction (Yakoob et al., 2017).

Theories of Career Counselling

From a management perspective, it is all about the person–job fit theory, which increases job satisfaction among employers when there is more than just personal chemistry between one who completes tasks and the job requirement (Haynie et al., 2020; Maslow, 1943; Muchinsky, 1977; Porter, 1973; Wright & Terrain, 1987). Psychometrics were also introduced to propose suitable vocations through scientific psychology theories and tools to identify the best fit between individuals' personalities, interests and available career pathways (Ali et al., 2019; Applebaum et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, self-knowledge, personal interests and career information should come before making decisions so that individuals recognise professions that are apt for them. This is beneficial because the alignment of personal interests with that of the workplace contributes to a manifold increase in performance (Akhtar et al., 2021; Holland, 1992; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Yakoob et al., 2017; Zahid et al., 2020).

Leung (2008) has reviewed the following five most famous career-related theories impacting counselling:

- Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities in the Work Environment, which was developed in 1959
- Theory of work adjustment, which was developed in 1965
- Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, which was developed in 1981
- Self-concept theory of career development, which was developed in 1990
- Social cognitive career theory, which was developed in 1994

Importance of Career Counselling

Research has shown that career counselling can help make better career choices, improve job satisfaction and reduce work-related stress (González-Morales et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019). Additionally, career counselling offers greater resilience and adaptability in the face of career challenges and transitions and assists individuals in setting realistic career goals (Lent et al., 2018; Whiston, 2017). Furthermore, it can help individuals manage career transitions and make informed decisions about further education, training, or job changes (Gati et al., 2014).

College is a time of exploration and maturity for many students, and one of their first tasks is determining what they want to do in life. Schools need to ensure that all students know about every possible option so they can make an informed decision regarding their futures. One way schools can help them make these decisions is by offering career counselling; this key intervention leads to successful college transitions and increases decision-making skills that positively impact mental health factors (Akhtar et al., 2021; Brown, 2015; Folsom et al., 2005; Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Walker & Peterson, 2012; Yakoob et al., 2017; Zahid et al., 2020). Career guidance and other career-related interventions are important in preparing people for the difficult choices students need to make over time throughout their lives (Reardon et al., 2017). Students face challenges and go through mental distress in choosing careers; hence, professional advice is crucial prior to making any decisions regarding future professional paths (Choi et al., 2011; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Maree, 2018; Metheny & McWhirter, 2013).

Psychologists and guidance or career counsellors understand students' issues and work towards building a close relationship with every student by supporting them on their journey towards maturity as individuals. Thus, professional counselling has become imperative and has developed a link between counselling theories and practice (Hanioglu, 2018; Karataş & Kaya, 2015; McMahan, 2001).

Other influencers of career paths

Although this study does not directly assess the impact of the other influencers on students' careers,

but literature reveals that often, students are forced by parental expectations or societal norms to abandon their ambitions in favour of parents' dreams (Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Sharif et al., 2019; Zubair, 2012). Pakistani students seldom get professional career-related help because career counsellors are lacking. Even if career counselling is available, students seldom opt for it because it is undervalued and not accepted by the majority (Watts & Sultana, 2004; Zahid et al., 2020). Political instability, economic, social, and cultural factors such as parental and peer pressure and the dearth of career counselling policies and services are other significant factors that contribute to ambiguity and confusion among students while making career decisions for the future (Keshf & Khanum, 2021).

International Empirical studies

Sink and Stroh (2007) conducted large-scale research in the United States, and findings revealed that primary students who have attended the same school for three or more years do better academically when a guidance and counselling program is in place. Furthermore, students who stayed in the same school for numerous years and participated in a well-implemented counselling program performed better academically and were satisfied with their career choices.

Cabral and Abanto (2021) conducted a study in the Philippines to assess students' awareness regarding the evaluation of career guidance services being offered. Results showed that school administrators, teachers and students believed that guidance services were moderately implemented, although they are very important. Based on the findings, the researchers prepared a self-help module entitled "Career Counselling Module for 21st Century Learners" to teach students more about what to do and where to go after high school.

Wong (2017) conducted a study in Hong Kong, which highlighted that career counselling was initially given little attention and was not seen as vital to students' success. This was because assisting students in choosing a professional route was not considered an "academic" topic, and the government had no overall career education strategy or rules. However, a policy was developed in 2014, resulting in administrative support for career guidance instructors. This new academic framework did away with the tradition of secondary students being streamed into either science or the arts, as students were allowed to choose optional topics from various sciences, arts, and humanities.

Micheal Kassotakis (2021) conducted a study to provide an overview of career counselling and guidance development in Greece. They outlined its organisation in both the education and labour market sectors. The study identified that importance is given to locating career guidance within the context of the major socio-economic, educational and cultural factors. It critically examined the impact of the economic crisis on Greek society in general and on the implications for career guidance in particular. The findings concluded that career counselling must be key in better preparing students to transition from high school to post-secondary education. The study identified some of the most pressing issues and challenges that those involved in designing, delivering, and researching career guidance must address.

National Empirical studies

Minhas and Ahmed (2020) conducted research with students and employees to explore the significance, availability, and quality of career counselling; the findings revealed high value but low availability of career counselling and guidance services. Thus, the study highlighted that the students had to rely on other resources, including teachers, friends and family, to make career choices. The study recommended that career counselling be made available to colleges nationwide so that students can decide their future career paths.

Additionally, Jasmineen (2016) reported that career counselling started getting recognition in the year 2000 in Pakistan, when private schools began to focus on its importance. This research also credited schools that offered Cambridge and other international qualifications for introducing career counselling. This research showed that some private schools introduced career counselling departments, while teachers and management staff were assigned duties to deliver guidance and counselling sessions.

Another study was conducted by Malik and Kiran (2012) at NUML University to explore the need for career counselling at the university level. Descriptive research was conducted with a sample size of 171. Findings demonstrated that students realised a need for career counselling at the university level to select suitable courses, and subsequently, choose future career paths.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research conducted on career counselling has been mostly quantitative in nature. Thus, an in-depth qualitative investigation was needed to understand the scenario. Qualitative research requires deep connection and empathic listening skills. This enables researchers to establish bonds of trust with participants and make them comfortable enough to explain their opinions (Angen, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Jones et al., 2006; Manning, 1992). In this study, the qualitative approach was more appropriate as participants' lived experiences are best understood when they describe their journey and express their concerns, and even their body language plays an important role in the qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Roulston et al., 2003).

Hence, this study extensively explored counselling needs by taking first-hand information from both groups of professionals, i.e. those who had had career counselling as students and those who were not exposed to it as students. Moreover, even the perceptions of career counsellors were explored to get an insight regarding their standpoint on career counselling being incorporated as a mandatory part of the curriculum.

The interviews were conducted at the workplace of the professionals, who are the participants of this study. Also, the data were collected from career counsellors at their workplaces, which comprised schools and colleges. Participants were chosen via purposive sampling, a technique whereby the identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals is made based on their proficiency and information regarding a phenomenon of interest. (Bernard, 2002; Cresswell & Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

For this research, 15 professionals were short-listed; nine had acquired counselling, and six had not. Five career counsellors were also interviewed. The sample for this research was selected keeping in mind the following characteristics:

- Professionals must have been working for at least three years
- Professionals must have acquired counselling either in school, college or university
- Professionals who had never acquired counselling in any form ever
- Career counsellors who have been in schools or colleges for at least five years.

Proposed research questions were explored through open-ended semi-structured interviews with the professionals and the career counsellors. The interviews were conducted in English and hence were transcribed in English conveniently. Initial codes were assigned to repetitive and iterative data in the transcribed interviews and themes were then generated by aligning similar codes together. Thematic analysis was conducted following the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2017). Thematic analysis can uncover patterns among and across data (Braun & Clark, 2017; Saldana, 2013).

Ethical considerations

The consent of the participants was taken before interviewing them. Their permission was sought before recording their interviews, and they were assured that confidentiality would be maintained and that their names would not be revealed.

4. FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the findings based on the thematic analysis. The themes were generated from professionals who acquired counselling, followed by themes generated from professionals who were never exposed to counselling and finally, themes generated from the counsellors' perceptions.

Professionals who acquired career counselling

The themes generated from interviews conducted with those professionals who acquired career counselling are the following:

Parents as agents of career development

Seven out of nine participants who underwent career counselling also highlighted parents' perspectives regarding their careers. One of the professionals acknowledged that he met with the counsellor and explained his family dynamics before deciding which way to go. Another professional said he listened to the advice both from family members and from the counsellor when making a career choice. Some statements from interviews will shed further light on this:

“I wanted to go abroad for umm further studies, and study from a top business school in the US, but unfortunately, I was diagnosed with diabetes, and my family restricted me to pursue my higher education from Karachi only. I was devastated because I always wanted to go abroad for higher studies. With the help of my career counsellors, I was able to shortlist some good business schools in Karachi. Eventually, they convinced me that some local options were also good enough, so I enrolled in IBA. Today, Alhamdulillah [by the grace of God], I am running my business successfully.”

One of the participant's said, “Although I belong to a family of doctors, I had good career counsellors at my A-level college. Looking at my personality, they guided me to chartered accountancy, which I did easily. I even got merit in a few CA exams, which motivated me further. Today, I am a qualified chartered accountant working at my dream organisation, and I can safely say that career counselling, rather than my family's advise, got me where I am.

Another participant expressed how his family forced him to pursue a career he was not interested in even though he had received counselling advice. However, his family forced him not to follow the counsellors' guidance. Later, he managed to strike a balance between the two and stated, “I always wanted to become a businessman and start my own business, but my family insisted and forced me to become a doctor. Although my college counsellor was of the opinion that I should not be opting for medical subjects as I was scoring low marks in them and had no interest in becoming a doctor, I was forced to become one. Although a doctor, I run my business for surgical items.”

Role of teachers in career development

All nine candidates credited their teachers in their career development and underscored that teachers play a vital role in guiding students. It has been observed that lots of students seek their teacher's advice regarding their career pathway, and thus, the counselling given by teachers matters a lot to these children.

As per one of the participants, “I was very good at accounting. It was my favourite subject. My accounting teacher was my favourite teacher and always told me, “Beta tum CA karna [you should do CA, my child].” I think I did CA because of him. He recognised my abilities early in my school life, and I will forever be indebted to him for making me what I am today.”

Another comment from a respondent was the following: “I think teachers should be part of the career counselling process because they have experience; they can tell you better and determine the right path for you because they know you well.”

Another participant highlighted his teacher's role by saying, “Although I have received professional counselling from a career counsellor, I always sought advice from my teacher regarding my career pathway. I even discussed with him the university I planned to select and the courses I would opt for there, so much so that I sought his guidance when switching jobs. My teacher has been my mentor but the counsellor also guided me.”

Innate abilities, inherent strengths and weaknesses

Career counselling helped these professionals explore their strengths, weaknesses, inclinations and aptitudes. Then, they aligned those abilities with career options that best fit those abilities. All the professionals interviewed agreed that seeking professional career counselling broadens the horizon and aligns personality with the career pathway. One of the professionals commented, “Since I was good at art and made good drawings, my counsellor suggested I pursue my career as a fashion designer, which turned out to be the best decision of my life. Today, I design clothes for a popular brand and am very successful.”

Influence of Career Counsellors

With their exposure and expertise, career counsellors can help an individual identify multiple options and alternative career pathways. They are better guides than parents, peers and even teachers. Each interviewee had the same opinion about career counsellors, underscoring that they are imperative in directing the career pathway. One of the interviewees commented, “I think career counsellors are very important because when we were students, our parents fully controlled our mind, and the only career options were either to become a medical doctor or pursue engineering. In such cases, students are deprived of many other options and do not get exposure. Career counsellors are God Send to help you make informed decisions.”

An excerpt from an interview of a participant elaborates further on the influence of career counsellors: "Since I was a commerce student, I always thought I would do CA or ACCA until I got exposed to career counselling. After meeting my counsellor for the first time, I realised that I have an alternative route to this field; I can do ACF from IBA or LUMS and yet will be able to do my chartered accountancy. I am very thankful for taking career counselling and getting admission to IBA. I would not have been satisfied if I had gone for ACCA or CA. Prior to that, I even had no idea about IBA. Career counselling helped me a lot. If I had not gone to the IBA, I would be struggling in CA."

Another participant clarified the picture even further by saying, "After analyzing my analytical skills and love for computers, my counsellor told me to research Data science, which could be a good career pathway for me. At first, I was like, I do not even know what data science is, I wanted to do engineering or shift to commerce; that was my concern, and because of this, I went to the counsellor. Today, I owe my success to him for telling me to look beyond what I thought were the only two career pathways for me."

Peer pressure

It has been observed that many students choose a certain career because their peers were pursuing it, without even realising whether it is in their best interest. They choose a certain career pathway because all their friends are doing it. Seven professionals who had acquired career counselling confessed that peers influenced their decision-making ability. If they had not acquired counselling, they would have likely been doing whatever their friends were doing, as one of the candidates mentioned "As most of my friends were doing engineering, I chose to do engineering and took pre-engineering subjects in my A levels. However, then I realised I was not interested in this field. Fortunately, I got career counselling, and with the help of counsellors at my A levels, I changed from pre-engineering to commerce."

Professionals who did not acquire career counselling

The themes generated from interviews conducted with those professionals who did not acquire career counselling are:

Parents as agents of career development

All those who did not acquire counselling considered their parents the most important influencers in their careers. One of them said, "In our family, boys become chartered accountants and girls are forced to become doctors, which decided my fate as a doctor. Although I never wanted to be a doctor, I had no choice. I am a practising doctor, but I still wish I had been a fashion designer."

Another professional commented, "My father always wanted to be an engineer, but he forced me to fulfil his dream since he could not become one. Despite being an engineer, I am running my father's business today. I always wanted to do an MBA, but I knew I did not have what it requires to be a successful engineer."

However, another participant said, "Since we have a family business, I had no choice but to join it. Although the business is successful, I always regret not being able to design houses. I wish I had been an architect; I wish some counsellor would have convinced my parents to let me do what I am passionate about."

Peer pressure

Four out of six who did not acquire counselling also indicated that their friends motivated them to choose a certain career. As one of them commented, "One of my brothers was inspired by his friend. He did CSS and suggested I go to the World Times Institution. This was the next imposition. I was not ready for it, but I was just excited enough."

Another participant commented, "Since all my friends were doing BBA, I was also admitted to the same program. I work in a multinational, and I am quite okay with what I have. All of us are well settled, still share a great bond, and have great memories to cherish."

Educational trajectories

Many individuals of school-going age do not think much about their careers. They lead the life as it comes their way, especially those from the upper middle class or elite families. They do not pay much heed to what they should do with life in future. They live the life in present moment. One of the participants commented, "Since I knew I would eventually join my father's business, I did not worry much about my

career aspirations. All I cared was to do well whatever I was doing. So, whatever opportunities I kept getting, I availed those and tried applying them to my business. The business is doing quite well, so I would have done the same even if I had availed counselling.”

Another participant explained his take on the matter in the following way: “I joined the first university I got admitted to. At that point, I had not thought about what I would do in future, I took things as they came. Career was not my concern, as I knew I would eventually get married. Never knew life would take such a turn, and I would have to work. If I had known, I might have thought about doing something different after seeking counselling.”

Traditional career choices and job security

Those who did not acquire counselling had limited knowledge of career options. Moreover, they also identified that they had career-related stress and did not want to experiment with their lives. One of the professionals commented, “I did engineering as I wanted a stable income, and I was sure once I finished engineering, I would get a job. Even if I had acquired counselling, I would have done the same.” Yet another participant’s perspective is obvious from the following quote from his interview: “I could not afford to experiment with my career. My family was already struggling financially, and I did not want them further burdened. and since CA is not an expensive field of study, I thought of doing it. Plus, once anyone qualifies as a chartered accountant, a guaranteed job is available”. One of the participants commented, “I do not think career counselling is useful. In Pakistan, there are limited options; you can only become a doctor, engineer, chartered accountant or MBA. So why should we waste time and money on it.”

Perceptions of Career Counsellors

The themes generated from interviews conducted with career counsellors are:

Incompetent educational system

According to all the five counsellors interviewed, the educational system in Pakistan is incompetent. It is below international standards, and with so many educational boards prevailing simultaneously, the credibility is even worse. They believed that the curriculum is not regularly revised and new scope of teaching and learning and new career opportunities are almost extinct. According to all counsellors, career counselling is still not an innate part of the curriculum because the educational system in Pakistan is not only incompetent but is also subject to corruption. An excerpt from one of the counsellor’s interviews highlights that career counselling is in the teething phase in Pakistan. In his words, “Career counselling in Pakistan is still an emerging field with lack of funds designated by the government being a primary reason. Besides limited budget, the students of Pakistan suffer from multiple economic problems, law and order problems, incompetent education system and lack of knowledge are other reasons that affect the individuals’ choice of career.”

Another counsellor commented, “Individuals from developed countries like the USA and UK, undergo well-planned career assessment measures and then get corresponding counselling services. This is credited to governmental assistance for the development of promising careers. In the West, it assists citizens in finding suitable jobs based on job requirements and in-depth company information. Similarly, in Singapore, international students apply for a Ministry of Employment subsidy for fee allowance against their job services for three years. In Pakistan, we can only provide better career choices if proper career counselling is included in the curriculum.” Yet another counsellor added, “In Pakistan, career counselling is only available in some of the top private educational institutions. Not everyone can afford this facility, and it is only available to those who are part of elite institutions. If a counsellor has the right tools, qualification or has gone through the right course/training, it can make a world of a difference for students. It would be a step in the right direction if career counselling is made mandatory for all high school students.

Career counselling provides clarity

Every counsellor interviewed was of the opinion that career counselling must be a mandatory part of the curriculum. One of the counsellors commented, “I strongly advocate making career counselling mandatory in educational institutions as it helps clarify parents and students about the numerous choices available for both higher education and job career prospects. Moreover, by getting the right direction and identifying the real strengths and weaknesses, students along with their parents can channel their efforts and invest their money in the right direction”

School Counsellors VS outsourced counsellors

Since the counsellors hired by the school know students better, they can guide them more effectively compared to outsourced consultants. Three of the five counsellors believed counselling would be more effective if it were an innate part of the curriculum. At the same time, the other two believed that as long as a counselling facility is available, it does not matter who does it. One of the counsellors commented, "Rather than hiring a consultant externally, it makes more sense that in-school counsellors who have known students for a few years analyse student interests and advise them accordingly. Hence enabling students to strengthen their aptitude for their selected degree or career option and achieve desired results effectively."

Having a career counselling set up in school or college also benefits the institution by giving it a systematic and comprehensive foundation to manage its curriculum and extracurricular activities that support the goals of its student body. As one of the counsellors commented, "When career counselling is a compulsory part of the curriculum, all activities are aligned with student's career growth and future career options. Students participate in those activities, and hence it helps us know students better, and thus we can guide them better over successive career guidance meetings."

Counselling as a source of direction aligned with innate abilities

All five counsellors believed that with the help of career counselling, the counsellors could identify the student's innate abilities and help them give direction. Moreover, they can analyse their strengths, weaknesses, inclinations and aptitudes, giving them a sense of ownership regarding who they are. They also encourage them to go onto the journey of self-discovery and then align their career pathway with what they like doing. Counsellors use many different tools to analyse the personality types of the students, such as Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Holland code (popularly known as RIASEC technique) and other forms of psychometric assessments to identify which career pathway suits a student's personality. As one of the counsellors commented, "Teenagers are usually indecisive about their future, and therefore counselling becomes a source of direction for them. Counselling helps students identify their strengths, weaknesses, and real potential. Moreover, with limited exposure to offerings of local universities and colleges, students and parents often opt for traditional career choices. Counselling talks about open horizons of limitless possibilities based on students' profiles and therefore enable him/her to pursue a degree that aligns with their interests and plans in the dynamic world."

5. DISCUSSION

It is evident from the literature, and the findings of this research that career counselling is extremely important, and those who acquired it were more satisfied with their careers than those who did not. Career Counseling is about making life-changing decisions. Findings showed that all the participants agreed unanimously that career guidance is very important and must be made mandatory in schools. Keshf & Khanum (2021) emphasise that it is very important for students to undergo counselling before experimenting with various careers. Most participants believed that without counselling, family or peer pressure drove most people to decide on their career path. Keshf & Khanum (2021), and Yaqoob et al. (2017) share the same standpoint. Findings also reflected that parents guide their children's personalities and career development from childhood. They want their children to fulfil their incomplete dreams on their behalf. It is commonly observed that Pakistani society has a collectivist culture where children remain dependent on their families until adulthood. Parents and guardians support their children, including emotional and financial stability. Children also show great respect towards those who are older than them, obeying orders without question or hesitation. (Hofstede, 2001). These factors and authoritarian parenting styles might be amalgamating to hijack decision-making authority from the children. Hence, those not exposed to career counselling did not feel something important was missing until they entered the professional world.

Findings also reflected that Pakistani professionals need better self-awareness. Those who were exposed to career counselling had the decision-making ability about their career choices, as also supported by the literature that self-knowledge is necessary for those who want to make wise decisions about their career (Guber, 2015; Hooley, 2014; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006; Raouna, 2017; Watkin, 2016). As per findings, a professional career counsellor assesses an individual's interests, strengths, and weaknesses to advise them on what career they would be best suited for. Many factors go into choosing a profession - such as intelligence, skillset, personality type, or general aptitude. This is why it is important to speak with

someone qualified before making an informed decision about the future profession (Hanimoglu, 2018). Career counsellors also believe that career guidance ought to reach every individual during their lifetime, and it must be made a mandatory part of the curriculum so that children can make informed decisions regarding their career pathway and choose what they love doing so that they excel in it and enjoy doing it. They believe that the career path that a child chooses must be aligned with their innate abilities (Akhter et al., 2021). Children must make informed decisions regarding their career pathway rather than just following their intuition, peers or even family pressures. Each individual has a right to know what they are doing and why they are doing it. And this can be done best if career counselling is an innate part of the curriculum.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings disclose that career guidance and counselling should be implemented in schools with clear policies monitored and accompanied by detailed career advice. Good career decisions should be encouraged from an early age so they can take advantage of opportunities at higher levels. This would also give them more opportunities that could lead to better incomes and, more importantly, job or career satisfaction. The study results show that parents and teachers should also play a role along with counsellors, but they should not force students to choose a career. Also, suppose career counselling becomes a mandatory part of the curriculum. In that case, each student will be exposed to it and can take a better career option that suits his/her personality type, thus creating better job satisfaction, informed career decisions and eventually better opportunities to become successful.

Overall, there is an awareness of the importance of career counselling, but unfortunately, ample opportunities are not available. The majority of schools and colleges do not offer career counselling opportunities. Only elite schools and colleges have such opportunities. Secondly, the government is not supporting the cause by making it a mandatory part of the school curriculum. Lastly, society, the parents and the peers, with their incomplete knowledge of the career pathways available, are the biggest hurdle in a student's career discovery journey.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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