



Original Article

Career Awareness and Preparedness among Secondary School Students in Quetta: A Descriptive Survey Study

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ABSTRACT

The concept of career awareness is very important for the development of students' academic and career choices. Especially at the secondary school level, where students start making important life decisions regarding subject and career choices. The present study aims to determine the career awareness among high school students in Quetta, Pakistan. The research design is quantitative, with a descriptive survey method. Students studying in government secondary schools of Quetta were the population of the study. According to which, data were collected from schools by adopting a multigrade sampling method and from students by adopting a convenience sampling method. A structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument for this purpose. The result shows that the students had moderate to low career awareness. The majority of the students had very little information about career choices, career paths and labour market requirements. The most common sources of career information were family members and teachers, and formal career guidance services were mostly not available in schools. From these findings, the researcher realised that a lack of career awareness adversely affects the career choices of students. Therefore, systematic career guidance programs must be started at the secondary school level to promote career awareness and preparation of students. For this, from the school teacher and principal to the provincial government, their role should be played, and for this purpose, training of school teachers and career guidance programs should be started in schools.

Keywords: Career Awareness, Secondary School Students, Career Guidance, Students' Preparedness

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INTRODUCTION

Career awareness is an essential part of career development and a strong factor determining academic motivation, choice of subjects, and final job prospects in the future among students (Brown & Lent, 2012; Savickas, 2013). At the teenage level, students start having career goals as they acquire self-concepts that focus on their interests, capacities, and values (Super, 1980). Studies have found out that early exposure to organized information on careers improves the career maturity, self-efficacy, and readiness of students to make career decisions (Hirschi, 2011). Social Cognitive Theory of career (SCCT) points out that self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and contextual supports or barriers influence career development (Lent et al., 1994; 2000). In a case where the students do not have a source of sound career information, as well as institutional guidance, their potential to make realistic goals and follow the relevant education pathways will be limited. Career exploration is even more limited in developing nations by contextual factors including socio-economic issues, inadequate school resources, and cultural demands (Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Career decision-making in Pakistan is usually determined by the family expectations and prestige accredited to a specific profession (Asghar & Ajmal, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2024). Career counselling services in schools are not provided; thus, empirical studies have indicated that students often use parents and teachers as the main sources of career information. This dependency can restrict the availability to a wide range of and upcoming career prospects. This is more urgent in the undeveloped provinces like Balochistan where the educational disparities, scarcity of institutional resources and gender-related limitations influence the educational path of students (Coşkun, 2023). The problem of socio-economic pressure that affects students in Quetta tends to emphasize immediate employment at the expense of career planning (Zeb et al., 2020). There are also other cultural barriers that female students might face that limit career exploration.

Although the role of career awareness has been acknowledged, regulated systems of career guidance are still mostly lacking in most government secondary schools in Quetta. Absence of trained counsellors, career development and policy implementation have generated a huge disparity in the readiness of students to make career-related decisions (Keshf & Khanum, 2021). Hence, the required empirical study will be to determine the present status of career awareness

among the secondary school students in Quetta. This study aims at analysing the degree of career awareness of secondary school students in Quetta, Pakistan. The research aims at getting to know what students in their academic decision-making stage know about occupational opportunities and career choices available and the education paths. Since secondary education is one of the major transition stages in which students embark on making subject and career-related decisions, measuring career awareness in secondary level is critical to the process of promoting informed and realistic planning.

The purpose of the present study is to determine how well the students consider them aware of career possibilities and the career-related information that is available to them in their school setting. Through the perspectives of the students, the study will strive to bring out gaps that exist in terms of career awareness and institutional support in the government secondary schools. The results will be used to give support to the research based on empirical evidence to help guide career guidance programs that will be structured and delivered in schools to help the students be better equipped in their decision-making concerning education and career in the future.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Assess the level of career awareness among secondary school students in Quetta.
- Identify major sources of career information for secondary school students.
- Examine the need for career guidance services at the secondary school level.

Research Questions

- What is the level of career awareness among secondary school students in Quetta?
- What are the main sources of career information for these students?
- Is there any difference in career awareness between male and female students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Career Awareness

Career awareness is an essential part of career development, which implies knowledge about the occupational opportunities, awareness of personal interests and talents, and awareness of educational routes to various professions (Gysbers et al., 2014). It is not an isolated event but a development process

that changes throughout the life span (Super, 1980). The Life-Span, Life-Space Theory (Super, 1980) states that, in adolescence, especially in the exploration stage, people start to be actively exploring career choices and relating them to their emerging self-concept (Super, 1980). Career awareness is inextricably related to career maturity and decision-making readiness. Increased awareness levels enable students to be clearer, goal-setting capacity and confident in career planning (Hirschi, 2011). According to the Career Construction Theory, personal meaning-making and adaptability influence the career development and must be exposed to a variety of career information (Savickas, 2013). Another theory applicable here is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) which describes that the contextual supports, outcome expectations and self-efficacy beliefs determine career awareness (Lent et al., 1994). In case students are deprived of the accessibility to the correct information, as well as to the guidance provided by the institutions, their career decisions are limited by the environmental constraints (Lent et al., 2000). As such, career awareness is a cognitive basis of successful educational and occupational planning.

Career Awareness at the Secondary School Level

The secondary school level is a very sensitive phase of transition when the students start to make subject and career decisions that precondition their further paths (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Studies have shown that exposure in the early career life increases the engagement of students in the academic activities and future planning. The career decision-making competence and indecisiveness levels are shown to be lower in students who have systematic access to career information (Gati & Asher, 2005). School-based career guidance programs positively impact students on the levels of self-efficacy, motivation, and realism in goal-setting, having proven to have a positive effect on these aspects in international studies (Brown & Lent, 2012). On the other hand, the lack of systematic career interventions leads to a mix-up, illusions and lack of interest in school (Hirschi, 2011). The developing countries have inadequate institutional infrastructure that undermines the process of implementing career guidance systems (Watts & Sultana, 2004). In many schools, there are no trained counsellors, career development programs, and policy support which minimizes exposure of students to various career opportunities. Consequently, students can make career decisions using unofficial or partial sources of information.

Career Awareness in the Pakistani Context

Career guidance of the Pakistani public education system is still underdeveloped (Kanwal, 2023). According to the studies, secondary school students tend to lack the information on career opportunities outside of such fields as medicine, engineering, and civil services. Parental expectations and social prestige often impact career decision-making but not aptitude (Asghar & Ajmal, 2022). The study done in other provinces of Pakistan shows that lack of the professional counselling services in educational institutions limits the career exploration of the students. There are lots of schools with no special career counsellors, and teachers do not train career guidance practices (Zahid et al., 2020). As a result, informal networks play a very critical role in informing students about career. This is more devastating in the under-developed areas like Balochistan where inequality of education and lack of institutional provision determine the academic lives of students. Socio-economic limitations tend to drive the students into focusing more on the immediate jobs rather than the long-term career planning. In spite of these contextual issues, there is still not much empirical research on career awareness in Quetta, which creates a notable gap in research concerning the region.

Factors Influencing Career Awareness

The factors affecting career awareness are varied and interact with each other, some of them are family background, socio-economic status, school environment and media exposure (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Family is overbearing in collectivist society to influence the aspirations and career expectations of students. Although the intervention of parents can be a motivating factor, it might also limit exposure to alternative careers. Teachers are also useful in career socialization as they help students to choose subjects and plan their academics. Nevertheless, they do not have sufficient training in career counselling that restricts their ability to offer systematic guidance (Zahid et al., 2020). Career information and opportunities are greatly influenced by socio-economic status. Low-income students do not usually get a wide range of professional exposure and might focus on financial security in the short-term. Media exposure is now a contemporary means of career awareness, exposing students to new jobs; although media images do not necessarily represent a reality of the labour market (Brown & Lent, 2012). SCCT focuses on the idea that the contextual barriers such as the financial constraints and institutional insufficiency have a direct impact on career self-efficacy and choice (Lent et al., 2000).

Thus, the need to boost institutional provisions in the schools is critical to improving career awareness in adolescents.

Gender and Career Awareness

Gender is still a major factor of career awareness and opportunity. It has been found that female students usually encounter structural and cultural conditions that restrict career exploration. Girls can be motivated to follow socially constructive careers, which limits their exposure to different career opportunities especially in conservative societies (Sattar et al., 2025). The education and labour inequality between the genders in Pakistan further influence the career expectations and confidence of the female students. Lack of female role models and restricted mobility in some parts of the country such as Balochistan are also sources of weak awareness and efficacy of careers and self-determination in girls (Sattar et al., 2025). The solution to gender differences in career awareness should be systemized individual schools-based guidance programs which encourage equal access to information and opportunities.

Research Gap

Global literature has written extensively on career awareness and career guidance based in schools (Brown & Lent, 2012; Savickas, 2013; Lent et al., 1994), but so far scarce empirical studies have targeted secondary school students in Quetta, Balochistan. Currently, Pakistani research focuses mostly on bigger cities and ignores inequalities at the regional level. Due to the specifics of socio-economic, cultural, and educational issues in Balochistan, the targeted study is needed to identify the true career awareness rate among students. Lack of Quetta specific empirical data makes it difficult to formulate contextually relevant career guidance policies. Consequently, this research fills an important gap in research by investigating the career awareness of secondary school learners in the city of Quetta.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research design using a descriptive survey method to assess students' career awareness. All secondary school students in government secondary schools in Quetta in Balochistan formed the population of this study. The target population has been chosen as secondary school students (Grades 9 and 10) since this is a crucial time of academic and career choice. At this stage, students start to make subject choices and build the early career goals and become an apt time to gauge career

awareness. The sample of government secondary schools was selected because of the ease of access, the representation of the different socio-economic groups, and the big percentage in the public education system of Quetta. Students taken in urban government secondary schools were considered the population and they were both male and female.

An appropriate probability sampling technique, (e.g. stratified random sampling), was used in selecting a representative sample of secondary school students in government secondary schools in Quetta. The stratification was used to have proportional representation of students in terms of gender and school distribution. A total of 258 students (102 male students and 156 female students) of 43 secondary schools of Quetta city were selected as the sample out of the total population. The sample was chosen with consideration of Grade 9 and Grade 10 students to obtain the views on the transitional phase of secondary education. Both sexes were represented to have both male and female students so that the results could be generalized in the entire scenario of government secondary schools in Quetta. The chosen sample size was found to be sufficient in order to gather good statistical analysis, as well as the description of the general student population.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: demographic information and items related to career awareness. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure students' responses. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to assess the level of career awareness among students.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

While 42% of students feel knowledgeable about career paths, a comparable 38% remain unfamiliar. With a mean of 3.00 (neutral), results indicate that many students lack a comprehensive awareness of career options and their requirements, showing a partial knowledge gap. A striking 88% of students feel unprepared to make career decisions, with no respondents reporting agreement. The very low mean (1.89) highlights serious concerns about students' career readiness, pointing to insufficient guidance and preparation at the secondary level. Nearly three-fourths (71%) of students report not attending any career-related seminars or workshops. The low mean

(2.27) confirms that structured exposure to career development programs is rare in schools, leaving students underprepared for informed decision-making. The strongest consensus appears here: 82% of students agree that more career awareness initiatives would improve their decision-making. The high mean (4.12) highlights demand for structured interventions, reflecting students' recognition of the value of career guidance programs. Confidence levels are alarmingly low, over 70% of students lack confidence in planning their careers beyond secondary school. The mean (2.30) reflects that most students feel underprepared and uncertain about their ability to pursue career goals independently.

Overall Insights

- Awareness levels are mixed: while 42% claim some knowledge of career paths, 38% admit unfamiliarity.
- A very large majority (88%) do not feel ready to make career decisions, suggesting limited guidance and support.
- Most students (71%) have not participated in any workshops/seminars, confirming a gap in institutional support.
- Demand for more structured programs is overwhelming (82%), indicating students are eager for opportunities to learn.
- Confidence to pursue careers after secondary school is low (mean 2.30), further highlighting the lack of preparedness.

Quetta secondary school students indicate high levels of disparities in terms of career awareness and preparedness. Although they are aware of the relevance of career guidance programs, most students are not well exposed through structured exposure, workshops, and counselling, and as such, they are not able to make an informed career choice or pursue long-term objectives. Interventions, or rather remedies to this critical gap, are urgently needed, especially in the form of career workshops, guidance sessions, as well as resources allocation.

The outcome of the student responses shows that the degree of career awareness of the students at the secondary school level in the government schools in Quetta is low. A significant percentage of students (81% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they possess sufficient information about the various career options and the mean was low ($M = 2.07$). This implies that the majority of the students have little knowledge of the variety of careers that can be chosen upon secondary

education. Moreover, three-quarters of students said their schools lack enough resources to assist them in making wise career choices ($M = 2.19$). This little informational and institutional support depicts poor exposure to career-related information during a critical decision-making period. On the whole, the findings prove that career awareness in students is divided and not developed to the full extent.

The responses made by students also indirectly indicate that schools are not playing a good role as sources of career information to students. The degree of disagreement on access of career information and guidance material is very high, meaning that students are not getting structured, reliable career-related contributions via formal school channels. With a lack of systematic career guidance activities and material, the students will tend to use informal sources of information about career like members of their families, peers and community stories. The fact that schools are a formal source of information limits the risk of partial, biased, or stereotyped career perceptions among the students.

The findings reveal that there is a significant and unmistakable need for career guidance services among the students. A big majority (83%) concurred or strongly concurred that more career guidance sessions and workshops in schools should be done, as indicated in the high mean score ($M = 4.10$). This shows that students understand the value of career guidance and that, in its absence, they perceive themselves as deficiently mentored. The available information on careers is low and the demand for guidance services is high, which demonstrates a great need. Students know that career planning is important and do not have a chance to build informed career choices with opportunities and support of the institution.

Based on students' responses, the following key findings emerged:

- **Low Career Awareness:** Most secondary school students lack sufficient information about different career options and future pathways.
- **Inadequate School-Based Career Resources:** Students perceive their schools as lacking adequate resources and structured support for career decision-making.
- **Reliance on Informal Information Sources:** Due to weak formal guidance provision, students are likely dependent on informal sources for career information.
- **High Demand for Career Guidance Services:** Students strongly express the need for more career guidance sessions, workshops, and structured

activities.

- Awareness–Support Gap: While students understand the importance of career planning, they do not receive the necessary institutional support to translate awareness into informed choices.

Discussion

The findings obtained through the student-based research demonstrate that there is a definite imbalance between career selection needs imposed upon secondary school students and supports they obtain. Despite the fact that students are supposed to make decisions regarding subjects and career-related choices at the secondary level, the findings show that students make the decisions with little information and guidance, supported by the reviewed literature (Watts & Sultana, 2004; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Zahid et al., 2020). Adolescence is a very critical period in career exploration as far as developmental career is concerned and this needs to be structured and guided. The fact that the career awareness of the students is low indicates that the students have no ability to fully explore career choices and gain insight into future demands. Social cognitive career theory explains that inaccessibility to career information is a contextual crippler that inhibits the ability to build realistic goals and outcome expectations.

The high demand for career guidance sessions proves the fact that students are not indifferent or unmotivated. Instead, they are aware of their inability to be ready and actively seek institutional aid. This need is an indicator of how students have appreciated career guidance in planning their future and academic life. The results also indicate that the existing school practices might not allow students to have a methodical exploration, contemplation, or planning. Lack of organized career guidance gives the students an opportunity of making career choices out of incomplete knowledge, peer pressure, or trial and error instead of making a good career choice.

CONCLUSION

In the minds of students, secondary schools in Quetta lack awareness of careers at the school level and there are inadequate career information and guidance for the students. The value of schools as primary sources of career information is not being fulfilled, with consequent students having to resort to informal and possibly limited means. Nevertheless, these difficulties do not affect the desire and necessity of students to participate in the career guidance activities

as the number of requests to have a guidance session and workshops is high. This implies that there is a dire need to intervene. The research concludes that school-based career guidance services should be enhanced to improve the level of career awareness, career preparedness and decision-making ability of students. The facilitation of school-based structured guidance, availability of career information and frequent career-oriented functioning can prove very useful in assisting the students of secondary school to make informed and realistic career choices.

Recommendations

- Career guidance and counselling programs should be introduced at the secondary school level.
- Teachers should be provided with training to support students' career awareness.
- Career awareness seminars and workshops should be organized in schools.
- Educational authorities should develop career guidance policies tailored to the local context of Quetta.

Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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