

FACTORS AFFECTING THE CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Multiple factors influence the career aspirations of students in secondary schools. The study aimed to explore the career aspirations of secondary school students, factors affecting the career aspirations of students, gender wise comparison of factors affecting the career aspirations of male and female students and the development of effective strategies for career guidance of students in secondary schools. All the students of government higher secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan were the population of the study, however; study sample of (1000) students was selected through cluster sampling while for gathering qualitative data a sample of 20 students was purposively selected. The study utilized mixed methods explanatory sequential for which quantitative data was gathered through questionnaire and qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. Further, quantitative data was analyzed using Chi-square statistics while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The study explored that Medical, Teaching, Engineering, Armed forces and Civil services as major career aspirations of secondary schools' students. It was also highlighted that effect of students' parents, personalities, socio-economic status, families, society and its traditions, as major factors affecting the career aspirations of students, while a significant gender wise differences was found as male career aspirations were based on their personalities, parents and socio-economic status while parents, personality and family as major factors affecting the career choices of female students and recommended the provision of career guidance facilities for effective career planning of students in secondary schools.

Keywords: Factors, Affecting, Career aspirations, Secondary school students, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Secondary education is a vital stage of education aiming at the provision of students for future careers and higher education (Education Policy, 2009). During this stage students move from schooling to the practical world of work; therefore, they formulate their future career aspirations through selection of subjects and courses of study that eventually shape their future careers (Wright, 2005). By considering the importance of this stage in terms of future expected careers for students of this level, the National educational policy (2009) recommends the facilities of career guidance for the students of secondary schools that may enable them to select courses of study on the basis of their interests and aptitudes. According to Swift (2009) and Kerka (2000) students' career aspirations in secondary schools are influenced by their personalities, aptitudes, interests, self-image, socio-cultural and socio-economic phenomena, family support, occupational opportunities and role models.

Similarly, Bandura (1977) highlighted that students' personal potentials, socio-cultural interactions and schooling are significant influencers on their career aspirations. According to Salami (2008) students' career aspirations are the product of their parental likes and dislikes, self-interests, academic achievement and material gains. Edwards and Quinter (2011) and Osakinle and Adegroye (2008) found, socio-cultural background, geography, subjects in school, and fellows at school and family context as the highly significant factors affecting the career aspirations of students. Kiani (2010) reported that in secondary schools of Pakistan, multi-dimensional factors like students' personalities, parents and family, socio-economic and socio-cultural background and career outcomes affect their career aspirations.

Likewise, Barret (2009) highlighted the significant effect of personality in the career aspirations of students at the level of the secondary schools. Obinu and Ebinu (2010) reported students' personalities, self-image and interests as major influencers on the career aspirations of students in secondary schools. Gasser et al., (2004) demonstrated that students who aspired for prestigious careers like medical and engineering were significantly different in personality traits, aptitudes and interests from the rest of the students at the level of secondary schools. Parents and family play a significant role in the career aspirations of students in secondary schools (Kniveton, 2004). Parents and families are the sources for material, financial, emotional and moral support in formulating the future career aspirations of children and through it they approve or disapprove the future career trajectories of their children (Salami, 2007). Kiani (2010) and Rauf (2013) identified the significant influence of parents and family and particularly of fathers in the career aspirations of students in secondary schools of Pakistan. Kisilu, Kimani and Kombo (2012) found the role of parents, family and particularly siblings' influences in the career aspirations of students in secondary schools. The study also found the influence of

mothers and older sisters on the career aspirations of female students. Fergusson and Woodward (2000) reported that students belonging to educated parents had aspirations for prestigious careers as compared to students from un-educated parents.

Elizabeth (2012) found a significant effect of school's environment, teachers, career guidance personnel and fellow students on the career determination of students. Kisilu, Kimani and Kombo (2012) identified schools' subjects, class fellows and teachers as influencing agents in the career aspirations of students. Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006) reported that like parents, teachers are the central figures in the career development of students. Kniveton (2004) and Khan, Murtaza and Shifa (2012) highlighted that teachers are resource persons who help students in the selection of school's subjects based on their interests, aptitudes and desired career outcomes. Mutekwe, Modiba & Maphosa (2011) found the effect class fellows and school friends on the career aspirations of students. Singaravelu et al. (2005) reported students' interaction in school with class fellows and fellow students of the school positively influence their career aspirations.

Peers and friends significantly influence the career aspirations of students in secondary schools (Kniveton, 2004). Swift (2009) and Olamide and Salami (2013) found that peers and friends are a rich source of guidance regarding courses of study, career opportunities and entrance procedures for professional colleges. They have close relationship and trust upon the advice and information of each others; therefore, easily influence the career aspirations of each others. Payne (2003) brought out that peers and friends are a source of competition for students at secondary level and this affect their career aspirations. Kloosterman (1994) reported students are a source of verification for the career aspirations of secondary level students.

Denga (2004) identified that socio-economic status determine obligations for students in society and this influences the future career aspirations of secondary school students. Sax (1994) reported that male students are more under the influence of socio-economic matters as compared to the female students. Obinu and Ebunu (2010) found that socio-economic factors or financial demands affect the career choice decisions of students. Mutekwe, Modiba & Maphosa (2011) and Thachenkery (2010) found the influence of better financial status and high income on the career aspirations of students.

Ali, Zeb and Maqbool (2013) reported the effect career outcomes i. e. of good salaries, social status and future protection in the career aspirations of students. Sutherland (2008) highlighted that career aspirations are based on job market and career opportunities. These days the job market has become much more competitive for accommodating the growing number of graduates (Salami, 2004).

Salami (2007) identified the job related characteristics like financial benefits, status and leisure opportunities significantly affect the career aspirations of students. Moy and Lee (2002) found that job market attributes are significant influencers in shaping the career aspirations of students. Agarwala (2008) found career opportunities, economic gains, status, promotion and leisure as significant factors affecting the career aspirations of students. The most significant developmental task for the students of secondary school is to develop proper career aspiration based on their interests, aptitudes and knowledge of career opportunities (Super, 1990). Career choice decisions are a nightmare for adolescents, when they are unaware about the competitive world of work and the skills required for it (Olamide & Salami, 2013). Tabassum (2012) identified that in majority of Pakistani secondary schools the facilities of career guidance are not available and therefore, students blindly aspire for the careers of medical and engineering which results in the wastage of their potentials in the long run.

We conclude that there are personal, socio-cultural; school related and job market factors that affect the career choice aspirations of students in secondary schools. There have been studies internationally and few studies in the Pakistani context, like the studies of Kiani (2010) about personality and career aspirations of students in secondary schools, Khan (2011) about teachers' role in career guidance at secondary level, Rauf (2013) about parental guidance for career aspirations of secondary level students, Kiani, Hassan and Irfan (2013) about career aspirations of secondary level students and Khan, Murtaza and Shifa (2012) about the role of teachers in provision of career guidance at secondary schools. These studies have explored some of the factors affecting the career aspirations of secondary school students but there are no comprehensive studies on factors affecting the career aspirations of secondary school students in Pakistan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular. Therefore, the researchers have decided to conduct a study on factors affecting the career aspirations of secondary school students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The study used Mixed Methods Explanatory Sequential Design. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) Explanatory Sequential Design is characterized with the advantage of clearly defined quantitative and qualitative sections and is, therefore, easy for the readers and the researchers who design and conduct the study. The population of the study was all the students of Higher Secondary Schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In The sample for the quantitative data of phase one of the study was randomly selected through cluster sampling technique and its size was 1000 (500 males and 500 female students). In view of Best and Kahn (2008) cluster sampling is appropriate when the population is geographically scattered. The sample for the qualitative data of phase two was selected through purposive

sampling and its size was 20 research participants i.e. (10 male and 10 female students). Creswell (2011) highlighted that purposive sampling provides participants with rich information.

The researchers used self constructed Questionnaires for the collection of quantitative data. The questionnaires were developed through expert opinion for the adjustment of its difficulty level and suitability. The researcher's pilot tested the questionnaires for the determination of their reliability through Cronbach's alpha. The values of reliability were found 0.824. According to Law (2004) if the coefficient of reliability is 0.80 then it is excellent and if it is from 0.60 to 0.79 then it is adequate. The researchers prepared Semi-structured Interview guides for the collection of qualitative data. The researchers themselves administered the questionnaires to respondents and received 961 questionnaires. Iarossi (2006) identified that in self administration; more than 80% return rate is appropriate. The return rate was well above this criterion. For the collection of the qualitative data of the second phase, the researchers conducted interviews from 17 students (09 males and 08 females). The interviews were recorded on the data sheets. In Mixed Method Explanatory Sequential Design, first quantitative data was analyzed, followed by qualitative data analysis and then both the data are interpreted together (Creswell, 2011). The quantitative data were presented in tables and interpreted through the use of percentages and Chi-square test of significance. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1. Career Aspirations of Secondary School Students

Career Choices	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-square Value	P-value
Agriculture	19	2.0	1178.51	.000
Armed Forces	70	7.3		
Business	42	4.4		
Civil Service	62	6.5		
Computer and IT	28	2.9		
Engineering	88	9.2		
Law	31	3.2		
Medical	341	35.5		
Teaching	262	27.3		
Any Other	18	1.9		
Total	961	100		

df=9

Chi-square Table Value= 16.919

The above table demonstrates the career aspirations of secondary school students and identifies that as for the major career aspirations; 35.5% students aspire for the

career of Medical, 27.3% Teaching, 9.2% Engineering, 7.3% Armed forces and 6.5% for Civil service. On the other hand as for the minor career aspirations of secondary schools' students, 2% aspire for the career of Agriculture, 2.9% Computer and information technology, 3.2% Law and 4.4% Business.

It identified Medical, Teaching, Engineering, Armed forces and Civil service as prominent career aspirations of secondary schools' students. On application of the Chi-square test, the findings were found statistically significant.

Table No. 2
Factors Affecting the Career Aspirations of Secondary School Students

Career Choice Factors	Responses Total= 961(100%)		Chi-square value	P-value
	Yes (%)	No (%)		
Personality	66	34	18.19	.033
Parents	57	43	63.38	.000
Family	29.4	70.6	42.81	.000
Teachers	23.5	76.5	16.18	.063
School Counselor	2.7	97.3	46.65	.000
School Fellows	19.6	80.4	34.75	.000
Peers and Friends	18.9	81.1	27.14	.001
Socio-economic status	36	64	37.95	.000
Job market	18.4	81.6	26.04	.002
Any other	10.6	89.4	26.67	.002
df= 9		Chi-square Table value= 16.919		

Table 2 identifies that 66% students were under the influence of personalities in their career aspirations, 57% under the influence of parents, 36% under the influence of their socio-economic status 29.4% under the influence of families, 23.5% under the influence of teachers, 19.6% under the influence of school fellows, 18.4% under the influence of job market and 18.9% under the influence of peers and friends,.

It highlighted students' personalities, parents, Socio-economic status, families and school fellows as major factors affecting the career aspirations of students in secondary schools. On application of the Chi-square test, the findings were found statistically significant, except for the influence of teachers.

support mechanism for the career determination of the students. Society set the trends for the career choices and is a source of inspiration.

As for the influence of parents, they are a source of guidance, inspiration, financial support, emotional warmth and motivation. About this, one of the male students (MS4) told the researcher in these words:

“...My parents guide me and tell me what to do and they told me to become a doctor because if I become a doctor, I will have good life and people will respect me and my parents are very kind who takes great care of mine and spend money on my books and clothes and they love me too much and I love to make them happy and how can I make them happy only if I complete their dream by becoming a doctor....”

Parents affect the career expectations of children and make their minds for the future careers. In this respect one of the female students (FS3) told the researcher about her career choice in this manner:

“...I want to become a teacher and my parents told me to become a teacher because it is good for me as the service of the teacher is easy, there is no contact with males and it is according to the teachings of Islam and the traditions of the Pathans...”

Similarly, one of the male parents (MS5) told the researcher that:

“...My parents told me to become a doctor because they consider me intelligent and can become and they know medical is good for getting income and if I am unable to get a government job then I can also establish my own clinic and I will also have respect in the society...”

The wishes of parents affect the career choices of students because they are the first role models and their career choices are the products of the wills of their parents and for this they often force their children. In this regard two of the male teachers (MS7, FS2) about the influence of parents on the career choices of the students replied:

“...The desires of parents influence the career choice of students, parents love to select careers for the children which have high income and have less effort, parents are the real role models for their children, they spend money upon children and tell them what to do and therefore, the career choice of children is usually the extension of the expectations of their parents. Parents also impose their will upon their children and normally compel them to adopt the career choices whether they like or not or fit for them or not and they have to obey....”

Parents influence students' love for careers and they try to achieve success in those careers to satisfy the expectations of their parents. In this context one of the male teachers (FS6, MS1) told:

"...You know that parents usually express their preferences and love for the careers and usually the same becomes the life goal of their children to get, therefore, parents determine the interests of students for various careers and normally students make their career choices in the light of the expectations of their parents because it is the dream of every student to make his parents happy, therefore, parents are significant influence on the career choices of our students...."

The socio-economic status of students and their families significantly influences the career choices of students. It enables the students to pursue their choice careers and if they are poor then they are not in a position to pursue their choice careers and instead remain at the mercy of the situations. In this connection one of the teachers (MS2) expressed in this manner:

"....There are many students in our school who are intelligent and are able to get good marks but as they belong to poor families who cannot afford their high fee for their education, so, in future they may not be able to go to their choice careers though they are fit for them and the previous year such a problem came with one of our students, who though got admission in the medical college but his parents were unable to give him education at the medical college, so, he could not join and remained..."

DISCUSSION

The quantitative findings of the study demonstrated that Medical, Teaching, Engineering, Armed forces and Civil service as prominent career aspirations of secondary schools' students, students' personalities, parents, socio-economic status and their families as major factors affecting the career aspirations of students at secondary level. Moreover, on the basis of gender wise comparison, the findings displayed personality, parents and socio-economic status as major factors influencing the career aspirations of male students while parents, personality and family as major factors affecting the career aspirations of female students in secondary schools. The qualitative findings highlighted that the most influential factors affecting the career choices of the secondary schools' students are their parents, their own personalities, socio-economic status of students, family members, society and its traditions. As for the influence of parents, they are the source of guidance for the career choices of students and their attitude, expectations and socio-economic status influence the career choice decisions of students. The personalities, interests, abilities, aptitudes and aspirations of students serve as foundations for their future careers. Students with good socio-economic status can pursue their career aspirations and those with low socio-economic status are unable

to fulfill their desired career aspirations. The family and siblings also influence the career choices of students because they are a source of guidance, financial support and are role models for the young ones of the family and they follow them in the choice of their careers. The attitude, trends, culture, traditions, religion, norms and values of the society significantly affect the career choices of the students.

Male students are more influenced by their personalities and socio-economic status in the choice of their careers because they are comparatively more independent as compared to females in making their career choice decisions and they are also the supposed future bread winners for their families. Females are more influenced by their parents and family because they are more dependent on their parents and families as compared to males and moreover, they have to keep the values of the family in the selection of their future careers.

Similar findings have also been reported by the studies of other researchers like Kiani (2010) who highlighted students' personalities, parents, socio-economic status and social prestige as significant factors in the career determination of secondary level students. Similarly, Salami (2008) found the factors of personality, socio-economic status and extended family significantly influencing the career aspirations of youth in secondary schools. Such findings have also been reported by Kerka (2000); Edwards and Quinter (2011), Swift (2009) and Salami (2008) who identified personality, family, parents, siblings, type of family, society, culture and economy which play their influential role in the career development of the individuals. The Social Cognitive Career Choice Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) is also based on the inter-relationship of personal, environmental and behavioural factors for the career selection and development of the individual. Similarly, Bandura (1977) identified the context of the individuals, personal abilities and societal interactions as significant influences on the career choice decisions of the students.

CONCLUSION

The study explored Medical, Teaching, Engineering, Armed forces and Civil service as prominent career aspirations of secondary schools' students highlighted the significant effect of students' parents, personalities, Socio-economic status, their families, society and its traditions, as major factors affecting the career choices of students at secondary level. Furthermore, on the basis of gender wise comparison, the findings displayed personality, parents and socio-economic status as the major factors influencing the career choices of male students while parents, personality and family as major factors affecting the career choices of female students in secondary schools. It showed the effect of socioeconomic factors on male students and the effect of socio cultural factors on the career aspirations of female students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Keeping in mind the objective of developing effective strategies for the career guidance of secondary schools' students, the researchers recommend the strategies of the provision of career guidance facilities in schools for the students of secondary level which will enable them to select courses of study on the basis of their interests, aptitudes and career information. Trained career guides may be appointed for facilitation of students to identify their potentials and career opportunities fit for their potentials. Parents, teachers and schools' heads may collaborate for the proper career guidance of students. Career guidance resource centers may be established in schools with the availability of books, brochures and social media related with career guidance.

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