

# CONSEQUENCES OF THE LACK OF INTEREST-BASED EDUCATIONAL CHOICE AMONG PAKISTANI STUDENTS: HOW TECHNOLOGY COULD IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PROCESS

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**ABSTRACT**— It has almost become a social norm in Pakistan that the students who are about to enter their undergrad life and make one of the most crucial decisions that will have an impact on the entirety of their future; i.e. deciding a career path for themselves, are left with a handful of options to choose from, that may or may not be in alignment with their personal interests. These options may include career paths such as some engineering disciplines (civil, mechanical, electrical et cetera), medical science, and business administration. In many cases, students do not even have the liberty to make their own choice. Their decision is influenced by the opinion of their parents, guardians, or other family members, or they just have to follow the family trend. Such practices are only causing harm as students are not encouraged to choose a career path solely in accordance with their interests and work activities that they prefer. The consequences include increasingly high dropout rates, especially among the undergrads; unsatisfied jobs; switching between study majors; and what not. A survey was conducted to identify the hindrances to interest-based educational choice. The results from not only point out the hindrances, but also depict a need for an accessible educational guidance system.

**Keywords**—Career, dropouts, education, Pakistani students, vocational choice.

## INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career path is identifiably one of the most troubling and crucial decision that one could encounter [1]. It may seem like a one-time decision, but it could potentially shape the entire future of one's life as a student and as a practitioner. Choosing an appropriate career path is vital for a successful and satisfying future. What the majority of Pakistanis fail to understand is that an appropriate career-path varies from individual to individual. To state it in rather simpler terms, "one size does not fit all". Educational and career choice varies from person to person based on the activities that they enjoy and the kind of environment they prefer.

There are many factors that are considered while making these decisions; including but not limited to financial conditions, competencies, family trend, market trends et cetera. Though the one factor that is most important and should have the highest of all priorities is personal interest and preferred work activities and environment. Yet, this factor seems to be largely compromised on to the extent that most individuals do not even take it into account.

## BACKGROUND

Vocational Psychology could be defined as the study of the psychological facets of work-related conduct and experience [2-4]. It is a branch of psychology that deals with the study of how people take vocational (job or work related) decisions and decide their career path [5]. The origin of vocational psychology is widely attributed to Frank Parsons' 1909 publication titled *Choosing a Vocation* [6]. Until the 1950s, vocational psychology was paid very little attention to and there was absence of proper research that could address this subject. From 1951 onwards, though, vocational psychology captured a great deal of attention. The first major recorded contribution to vocational psychology was made by Donald E. Super, who studied the patterns of vocational development in human beings for 20 years, which is referred as the Career Pattern Study (CPS). He presented the results in his paper, which became the basis for the development of numerous theories stemming from vocational psychology [7].

According to vocational psychology, if a person selects a career-path in accordance with their interests and preferred work activities, they are most likely to excel at work and experience a high level of satisfaction [8-11]. Work environment also influences one's career satisfaction – individuals who function in their preferred work environment feel happier and more comfortable with their work [12]. Hence, over the years, vocational psychology has offered numerous frameworks and tools for vocational counseling in order to assess one's work-related preferences beforehand. These tools play a vital role in career development today.

## THE PROBLEM

Vocational counseling has been recognized worldwide as an essential part of fruitful education and a satisfying and productive future of young minds. Along with on-campus career counseling offices, many universities around the globe have developed automated educational guidance systems for their students to help them decide what program(s) they should study. It is rather unfortunate that such is not the case in Pakistan. Where other problems in the education sector have managed to draw attention from the government and the public, one core problem still exists almost unnoticed – the dire lack of educational and career counseling.

A student who has passed intermediate education has to make a crucial decision that would influence their future to a great extent – choosing a career path, a university major. This is a decision that one needs to make in accordance with their personal interests and preferred work activities and work environment. Yet, an alarmingly small percentage does so. Most of the students are only interesting in following the family trend, while many are coerced into choosing a career-path by their parents or other relatives. Many students follow their friends to higher studies, and many are just desperate to get admitted into a university, regardless of what they study. Additionally, intermediate level students are only aware of a quite confined set of career options and study majors, which may or may not align with their preferences. All these problems stem from one core issue – the lack of counseling in Pakistan [13-14]. Students are not given proper awareness

about their options and are not guided with their decisions regarding higher education [15]. As a result, students choose, or are made to choose, a career path that does not align with their preferred work environment and activities. They realize the damage after they have wasted valuable time with. This results in a number of current and long-term problems.

### Shifting majors

One quite observable and damaging result of the dire lack of counseling is that the students who enter a university without getting proper counseling regarding what major they should study are eventually compelled to shift from one major to another until they find a perfect match for themselves [16]. This not only causes frustration for the student, but also wastes their and their supporters' precious time and money.

### Dropouts

Students who are undecided regarding their career-path are quite prone to dropping out of the educational institute, leaving studies altogether [17]. Many students choose to drop out rather than juggling study majors due to the fact that they are being financially supported by their parents and shifting between majors would be an investment gone in vain. Statistics reveal that more than half of all students who choose to drop out of studies do so during the first year of studying their chosen study major [18-19].

### Academic and career frustration

When individuals enroll in a study major or perform a job that does not align with their personal interests, they experience emotional imbalance [20-21].

## THE SURVEY

In order to put the problem into numbers and discover different opinions regarding this matter, we developed survey comprising of a total of 14 questions; out of which, 4 were open-ended questions to receive feedback from the audience. 7 questions were focused specifically on the problem, the data gathered from which is included in this paper. We used Google Forms to make the survey in order to gather diverse data and to make it available to as much population as possible. Although the problem begins to bloom from the intermediate level, we made the survey available to the audience ranging from matriculation level to qualified practitioners and PhDs. The total number of participants in the survey was 221. In order to ensure uniqueness in data, all the participants were required to sign-in with their IDs in order to answer the survey questions.

The highest percentage of participants, 40.2%, came out to be bachelor's degree holders; followed by 33.3% intermediate pass students (FSc and A-level included); followed by 18.7% of master's degree holders; 1.8% of matriculation, O-level, and A-level students each; and 0.9% of PhD students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary goal of the questions asked was to find out the ratio of interest-based educational or vocational choices to choices influenced by other factors; such as parental pressure, peer pressure, lack of options et cetera.

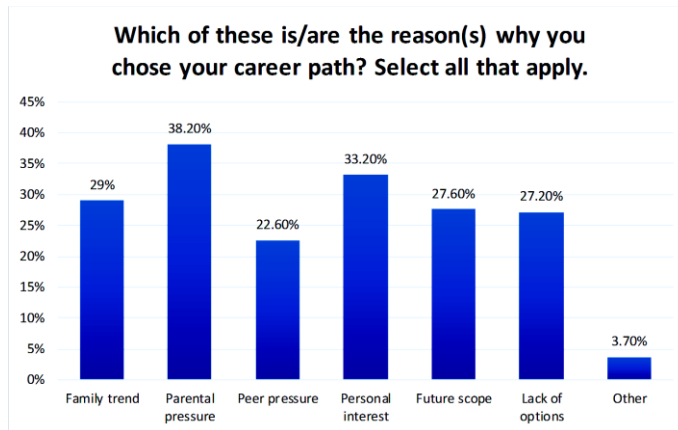


Figure 1: Reason(s) for choosing a career-path

Figure 1 shows the data gathered against the question in which we asked the participants to choose all the factors that influenced the choice of their study major if they are students, and their job if they are practitioners. As can be seen, parental pressure got the highest percentage (38.20%). While personal interest got the second highest percentage (33.20%), there is not a large margin to it when compared to family trend (29%), followed by future scope (27.60%) and lack of awareness about the options available (27.20%). Also, there exists an ambiguity as to how the participants understand the term "personal interest". To many, personal interest simply means one's wishful thinking rather than actual awareness about the work activities that they enjoy and the work environment that they prefer.

Did you receive any formal counseling/guidance regarding what career path you should choose?

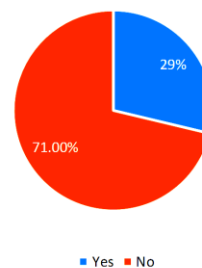
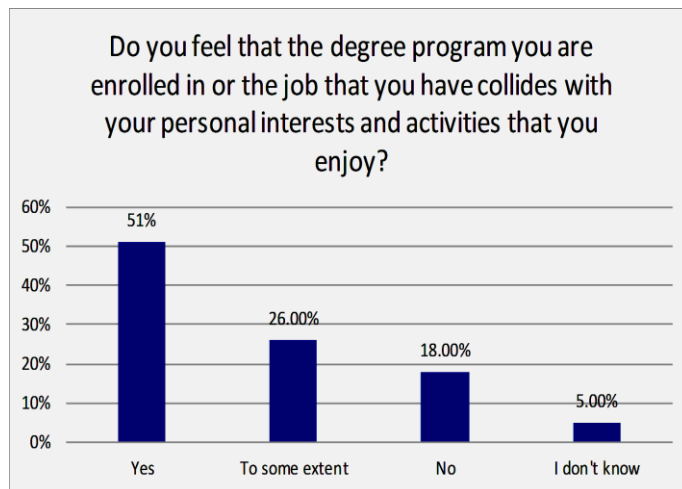


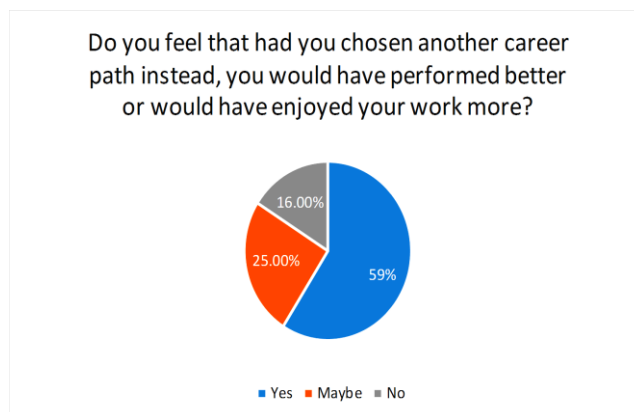
Figure 2: Pre-decision counseling ratio

Figure 2 shows the input to our question regarding whether or not the participants received any proper guidance or counseling regarding their vocational or educational choice. A dominating 71% of participants said that they did not receive any guidance with their choice.



**Figure 3: Collision of interests and chosen career-path**

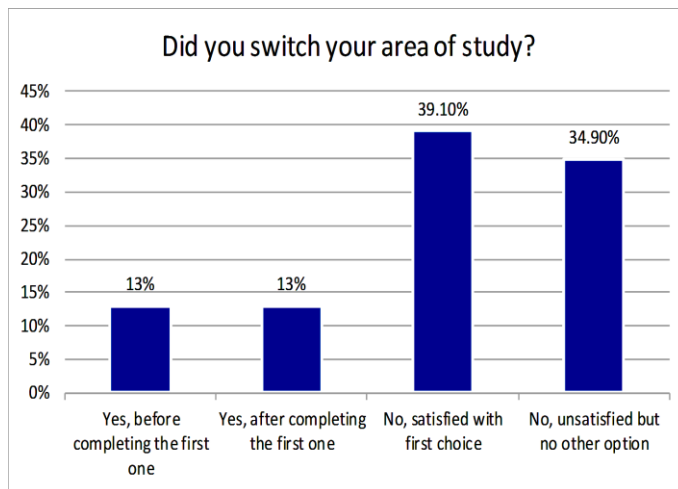
Figure 3 shows the data gathered against our question regarding whether or not the participants thought that their preferred activities and interests collided with their current job or degree program. To which, only 18% of participants confirmed that their current job or study major aligned well with their interests, while 51% said otherwise. 26% said that their personal interests collided with their job or study major to some extent, while 5% were unsure about it.



**Figure 4: Satisfaction with the chosen career-path**

Figure 4 depicts that 59% of participants were of the opinion that they would have been more satisfied had they chosen a study major or job other than the one that they currently have. 25% passively followed, while only 16% thought their current job or study major was fit for them.

We are also interested in collecting data about how students shift between study majors. Hence we asked them whether or not they made a shift; if not, whether or not they were satisfied with their first choice; and if they did, at what point they did it.

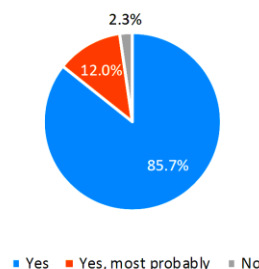


**Figure 5: Switching or shifting study majors**

The data represented in Figure 5 shows that 39.10% of participants reported that they were satisfied with the career path that they first chose, while 34.90% said that they were unsatisfied, but could not change it at any level due to absence of options or other problems. 26% of participants reported that they shifted from one study major to another; 13% made a shift before they completed their first choice, while 13% completed their first chosen study major and then made a shift.

Finally, we asked the participants what they thought of a system that could potentially guide them and the future generations to make better educational and vocational choices and whether or not they would have utilized such a service if it were available when they had to make an education or vocation related decision.

If there were a platform where you could assess your interests and get career and study related guidance for yourself, would you avail it?



**Figure 6: Felt need for counseling**

As Figure 6 shows, 85.7% of participants said that they would definitely have benefited from an educational and vocational guidance service if it were available to them when they had to make a decision. 12.0% said that they would most probably have utilized such a service, while 2.3% answered in negation.

Do you think that there is a need for a platform where students seeking to decide their career path could be guided about their choice based on their interests?



**Figure 7: Felt need for a vocational and educational guidance system**

We finally asked the participants if they thought that an educational and vocational guidance service was needed. With an exception of 1.40% of participants, all the rest of said yes.

## CONCLUSION

The survey indicates that most individuals choose their career-path due to parental pressure, family trend, or lack of available options or the lack of awareness regarding available options. Although personal interest also received a high percentage, it is ambiguous how each individual interprets "personal interest". The results also depict the lack of educational counseling and guidance in the country, along with the need being felt for it today. Majority of participants convey complete or partial dissatisfaction with their chosen career-path and that they are of the opinion that they would have felt more satisfied had they chosen another one.

Vocational psychology has come a long way from being an almost non-existent thought to one of the most widely studied disciplines today. The need for vocational and educational counseling is being recognized gradually in education sectors all over the world – it has become a requirement rather than an opportunity as an increasingly high number of students find it challenging to make education and vocation related decisions [22-25]. A number of studies indicate that career counseling plays a vital role in alleviating stress and frustration among students and practitioners [26-27]. Career counseling services have also shown to have contributed a great deal to maximizing the use of human-resources, reducing dropout rate, mitigating market failure and mismatched or discouraged personnel, and a number of other virtues [28].

While most of the world has already started working towards effective methods for vocational counseling, Pakistan drastically lags behind as this element still remains a dark area in the education sectors [29]. In order to keep up with the rest of the world and to eliminate the adverse effects of the lack of vocational counseling in Pakistan, there is a need for a robust system that could perform educational and vocational counseling. Career development is in fact a lifelong process – hence, one could seek career counseling at any point in life, which means that every age group should be taken into account to derive a complete vocational and educational guidance framework. But for the start, steps could be taken to initially target students specifically – intermediate students in

particular, to help them with choosing their study major at university level in an attempt to minimize of them to shift from one major to another and to ensure that their interests and preferred work activities do not collide with what they study. The scope could be broadened further as new insights regarding the effectiveness of the initial approach comes to light. Such a framework could potentially be utilized as a localized system by different independent educational institutes to assess new candidates for admissions. Professional organizations could also benefit from it by assessing their new employees through such a system in order to place them at appropriate positions.

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