

## **Career-related Learning in Educational Institutions of Pakistan: A Comparative Case Study**

**Zehra Keshf\***

Department of Behavioral Sciences, National University of Sciences & Technology, Islamabad,  
Pakistan

Career-related learning is a life-long process as career is a major part of the modern day life style. To ensure best career related learning, the role of educational institutions cannot be ignored. Internationally, schools, colleges and universities attend to it in great detail whereas the situation in Pakistan is quite different. Though the situation has evolved in the recent years, however, it still needs a lot of work. Hence, the present research was designed to explore the career-related learning in two educational institutions in Pakistan. The research question of the study was regarding career-related learning opportunities that are available to school and college level students in an average educational institution of Pakistan. For this purpose, two institutes (one from Islamabad and one from Faisalabad) were selected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, psychologist, and school principal at both schools. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Results showed that despite some efforts to induce career-related learning in the students, specific aim in this regard is lacking on the part of administration. Recommendations are charted at the end on the basis of comparison of current practices in Pakistan and the international standards.

*Keywords:* career-related learning, career, educational institution, school, college, higher secondary

Career-related learning revolves around introducing children to various careers and what they entail. In school years, many activities are designed to give children extensive exposure and experience of careers like the tasks included in those careers and the type of work included in different careers. Career related learning could be a part of primary as well as secondary school. The depth of career related learning would certainly depend on the developmental and cognitive level of children (Kashefpakdel et al., 2018). Career related learning is a part and parcel of our lives. Careers are a huge component of our lives and hence pondering, choosing, trying and pursuing a career consumes a lot of our time and effort. Whether we realize it or not, career related information, activities, sessions, seminars, lectures and discussions have become a necessity of the present time. In order to develop clarity about their respective careers, students start thinking and planning from a very young age. Career related learning should be started early as it helps in introducing children to the wide array of subjects and the related career opportunities present around them. It also helps in strengthening their sense of self and broadening their understanding of available career options from early years. Limited career related learning opportunities are likely to cause confusion, indecision and ill-information about the career prospects (Basham, 2011; Kashefpakdel et al, 2018). Career-related learning goes on in college and universities as well.

\*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ms. Zehra Keshf, Department of Behavioral Sciences, National University of Science & Technology, Islamabad.  
Email: zehrakeshf@gmail.com

It continues in professional lives where organizations and employers arrange career development programs for their work force. Global trends have tilted in favour of career education as it reaps immense positive results for the individuals involved in it. Students have high motivation when they are able to pursue their desired career (Mohebbi et al., 2021). Other possible benefits of career-related learning include clear direction, goal orientation and connecting learning to real life. High motivation, better financial awareness, and acquiring social skills have also been linked to career-related learning (Hutchinson, 2012; Kashefpakdel et. al, 2018)

Career-related learning is an essential component of different institutions. In England, governmental laws of 2016 support it for schools, colleges and universities. Schools are under the obligation to provide career guidance to the pupils aged 12 to 18 years. To assist young students in finding work after education, new role of an employment advisor has been introduced (Long & Hubble, 2017). A campaign was launched to encourage business people to mentor and volunteer for guiding teenager students. Efforts are also being made by the government to manage link between students and those who can provide apprenticeships and technical education. On its basis, career guidance aims of the government for the next couple of years will be established (Long & Lewis, 2023). Since 2012, National Career Service has been operative in England which aims to provide information, guidance and advice to students older than 13 years of age regarding opportunities in education, training and work. Qualified career advisers are hired for providing this service. Also attempts are being made to make partnerships between educational institutions, volunteer services and professionals, so that students can be provided better information regarding world of work (Long & Lewis, 2023).

Career development institute reports that career information, career guidance, career education and effective engagement with employers are the best practices to follow in this regard (Career Development Institute, 2018). The research studies conducted at school and college level in various countries support the career guidance services and vocational information for career development. Studies conducted in Romania, Vietnam and New Zealand show that career services offered by educational institutions should be improved. The support, guidance and information wanted by students is markedly different from what is available to them. The importance of considering the student as an individual along with their unique context and developing individualized guidance activities is also indicated. Moreover, the need to have enough number of trained professionals for career learning of students cannot be denied (Basham, 2011; Loan & Van, 2015; Mihaela & Cristina, 2015).

Looking at some international schools and colleges, different career learning practices are identified. In Seton High School, Cincinnati, students can visit academic advisors to get help in choosing the right college for their career choice. The admission timelines, entry tests preparation, personal statements and essays, application forms, financial aid forms etc. are discussed with the students. Guidance sessions on various topic like adopting proactive behaviors, identifying career interests and goals, anxiety and stress management etc. are also offered to the students. The Seton High School recognizes that students can change their career preferences. Therefore, different activities are planned for students. They can attend group advising sessions, prepare essays by exploring their career options, attempt work-shadowing, participate in internships, volunteer in their field of interest etc. This expands the

horizons for students as they gain more information about their future career (Seton High School, 2017).

In Portland Community College, a course is offered to the student which helps them in choosing career major, evaluating personal skills and strengths and exploring careers. The course is titled college success and career guidance. In this way, students are equipped with ways to make career decisions, to look for scholarships, to identify their strengths and consequently they gain the strategies to succeed in their future (Portland Community College, 2017). In Pakistan, some private educational institutions are making their efforts for imparting career-related learning to their students. In various schools and colleges, career guidance cells are being set up. But this is not a very old concept. Hence, the services and functions of these career guidance cells are continuously evolving. Following are some examples of career-related activities in different schools and colleges of Pakistan.

The City School has a special focus on career and academic development of students. Guidance counselors are recruited at their senior school branches for the provision of updated information. Career options, further study options, national and international opportunities are discussed by these counselors with the city school students. Mainly, the focus of their counselors lies on higher education opportunities for the said students, while keeping in view their aptitude and career goal. To make the career decisions and development easier for their students, city school website provides a student resource kit. It lists several links about study options in international countries like USA, UK, Canada, Malaysia etc. College and university guides, testing procedures, application and essay guides, visa procedures, accommodation opportunities, scholarship information is also available in these links. Some helpful links of local universities are also available e.g. institutional ranking by higher education commission HEC, lists of universities which offer degrees in various fields, lists of medical and engineering colleges, scholarship links (The City School, n.d.). Students of The City School can benefit from it by choosing the best educational opportunity for their desired career or field.

Learning Alliance, a school in Punjab, aims to make the career choices smooth for their students. By recognizing the worth of future planning and career planning for the students, guidance and counseling services are offered to the students. The Learning Alliance states that they are aware of the concerns students have due to the ambiguities regarding future career selection. Therefore, support and guidance in subject and course selection, filling university applications and writing personal statements is offered. Another practice which is unique to this institute is the arrangement of career events. Professionals and experts of different fields share their experience with students in such events (Learning Alliance, n.d.). Talks with field experts and career guidance services are the facilities available at the said institute.

TNS, an educational institution of the Beaconhouse Group, has a career department to foster career-related learning in their students. As per the information on their website, this department extends its work and instead of providing just the information about university applications, it attempts to help students in making informed choices. Therefore, to enhance their academic motivation, information is provided to the students about different workplaces. Individualized career advice and career development opportunities are also discussed with the students by their career counselor. Moreover, TNS also claims to provide

vocational pathways and internship opportunities, in addition to the educational opportunities. Experiential learning is also being practiced by the TNS staff with their students. Instead of treating the students as passive learners, creativity, intelligence, free thought and individuality of students is encouraged. By doing this, TNS wants to contextualize the academic information with the real world experiences (TNS Beaconhouse, 2017). This aspect of experiential learning is unique as it is not commonly attempted in schools or colleges of Pakistan.

Headstart School, Islamabad, has its own guidance and counseling team. In order to help their A-level students in the best way about their future careers, a series of sessions is started with each student as soon as they enter grade 9. To increase the exposure of students, international university representatives are also invited so that students can interact with them. For opening internship avenues, Headstart School has developed liaisons with some companies and organizations. This helped their students to get internships in their field of interest (Headstart, 2016). Other than the above mentioned institutes, several other schools and colleges are also offering career-related learning to their students. Roots Millennium School, Roots International, Beaconhouse School System and Supernova school have people available for providing guidance and arranging career-related activities. Despite these services, a number of schools, colleges and universities lack these facilities for their students. In some institutes, these services are mentioned on paper but are not practiced in the true sense. Therefore, this research aims to look at the global scenario and compare two Pakistani educational institutions in that context. This choice will allow for comparing and contrasting the career-related activities and practices of the average educational institutions from Pakistan with that of the world. Recommendations for improving them and making them up to the global mark are also presented at the end.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary research objective is to find out career-related learning available to the average Pakistani student at school and college level. A comparison between two institutions will also be drawn by exploring activities and practices followed by those institutions.

### **Research Questions**

- What facilities regarding career-related learning are available to school and college level students in an average educational institution of Pakistan?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This case study research was conducted by using qualitative method to explore the career-related practices of two institutes.

#### **Sample**

Sample consisted of students and any individual involved with career-related learning of students i.e. teachers, psychologist, school principal. 6 students, 3 teachers, 1 psychologist

and 1 school principal were interviewed from institution X. 5 students, 3 teachers and 1 principal were interviewed from institution Y.

Two comparable educational institutions were chosen by purposive sampling from two cities as cases. The institution from Islamabad was renamed as X and that of Faisalabad was renamed as Y. Both of these institutions offer education from nursery till Year 12. These higher secondary institutions attract students from all social classes and are therefore accessible to the average Pakistani student. They are comparable as both of them have large number of students and staff, equal focus on curricular as well as co-curricular activities, well managed purposely built huge campuses, and an established repute in their respective cities. Separate sections for junior, senior boys and senior girls are present. Facilities like dispensary, cafeteria, library and sports grounds are also offered to the students. Exposure to debates, dramatics and arts are some common features. An average educational institution is defined as a government owned educational institute where students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are present.

## **Assessment Measure**

### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

To conduct semi-structured interviews, several questions were intended in the interview guideline two of which are given as an example; 1) What efforts are made by the institution to prepare students for future careers, 2) What is the impact of current co-curricular activities on career-related learning of students?

## **Procedure**

After selection of institutions X and Y, permission was taken to visit the institutions and interact with the teachers and students. As an incentive, career-related guidance and help was offered to the institutions. Multiple visits to the institutions were carried out for semi structured interviews with staff and students. Additionally, observation of class lectures and school facilities was also carried out during interviews. Vigorous notes were taken down during the visits. The gathered data was then arranged and analyzed keeping in view the research objectives. All practices related directly or indirectly to career-related learning are presented. All ethical guidelines recommended by APA were followed. All participants had the right to withdraw and were clearly told about the research purpose.

## **Results**

After transcribing all interviews, thematic analysis was conducted to find out the recurrent themes in data. Major themes and supporting verbatim about career-related learning practices at institutions X and Y are presented in the following section.

### ***Career-related Learning***

In both institutions, the term career-related learning was not familiar to the interviewees. However, an introduction to the term and its meaning resulted in a highly positive response. They were given a comprehensive yet brief account of the term i.e. the term includes career education (self-development, career exploration, career management), work related learning and information, advice, and guidance about careers (Hutchinson,

2012). Once they understood the meaning of the term, initial confusion vanished and expressiveness took its place. A respondent stated, *'our teachers often try to tell us about different careers especially when they are teaching a relevant topic'*. A teacher said, *'I teach physics and I always tell students about astronauts, atomic engineering, nanoparticle research and many other such careers'*.

### ***Institutional Focus***

In institution X, several curricular and co-curricular activities include elements of career learning practices. Services and facilities available to students also, sometimes, overlap with career learning practices. But interestingly, these activities and services are carried out without a targeted career-related focus of the administration. A student of institution X mentioned, *'They do not tell us to be prepared for our careers but they arrange debates and poster exhibitions and quiz and dramas. They are all different ways to make us more confident and ready for the time to come'*.

In institution Y, career-related learning is found to be purely accidental rather than intentional. A specific focus on imparting career-related learning to the students is lacking. The principal shared, *'We do not think that students are going to follow this career so we are going to prepare for this specific career as there is large variety in careers and we cannot encompass everything. But I believe that what we are focusing on regarding curricular and co-curricular activities is going to help them in one way or another'*.

### ***Role of Teachers***

In institution X, teachers also attempt to link education with the world of work. This helps career-related learning as students get a chance to link theory with practice. While this is not a common practice right now however it can be properly established for the benefit of their students. A student said, *'Some teachers focus on only the syllabus but some teachers always share examples from around us. And my class fellows enjoy and learn better when we are given true examples'*.

In institution Y, teachers appeared to be highly ambitious and concerned about their students. They attempt to generate career-related discussions during class lectures. Sometimes, teachers share their personal experiences revolving around their career choice. However, the major emphasis and encouragement of teachers still lies with careers in medicine and engineering. A teacher said, *'I try to discuss the good careers available to students and I push my students to focus on being a doctor or engineer. They are strong career paths'*. A student said, *'Last year our mathematics teacher shared how she ended up in teaching and how she ended up with a degree in math. I think many students were motivated by her story'*.

### ***Role of Alumni***

To motivate students about future endeavors, students are sometimes given a chance to listen to their seniors in institution X. At annual functions and other such events, alumni participate by sharing their career journey with the students, teachers and parents. These alumni talks are not regular or interactive in their nature, but it is better than nothing.

Moreover, students are likely to relate to them as they belonged to the same institute. The principal of the institution shared, *'We invite our successful students of past years to come to the school and share their journey at the annual function. Seeing them pushes the students to try for those paths'*.

In institution Y, success stories of old students and the career paths chosen by the students of recent batches are shared with the current students to motivate and enlighten them. Achievements of alumni are sometimes shared in morning assembly. If some old student visits the school, teachers invite them to class to share their career choices and interact with students. Students also ask questions and develop a better understanding of various careers in this way. A student said, *'Last month there was an old student who is now a manager at a tech company. He mentioned various careers in IT which I had no idea about'*.

### ***Role of Psychologist***

A psychologist available at the institution X carries out one-to-one sessions with students regarding the concerns they are facing. In addition to behavioral and emotional troubles, career-related and educational concerns are also expressed by some students. In these cases, the psychologist understands the concern at hand and then guides the student accordingly. Though it is not very common, but in rare cases students of intermediate consulted the psychologist for information and guidance to pursue a career in air force. The psychologist gathered the relevant information and charted out possible career pathway for them. This guidance and information helped the concerned students as they were successful in joining the air force. The psychologist shared, *'Two cousins came to me two years ago. They were in final year and they were crazy about joining air force. I helped them in learning about the whole process and they are now under training'*.

Some informative lectures are also arranged and delivered by the psychologists to the students. Sometimes, the topics of these lectures are related to careers indirectly. Time management, confidence building, power of positivity etc. are not only relevant to the students during their education; but it will surely help them during their careers. These lectures, unlike the one-to-one sessions, are more informative in their nature. These are directed at large groups of students. Sometimes, all the sections of intermediate and matriculation are attending the lecture at once. Hence, these are information sharing and not very interactive.

Similar lectures are also conducted with the teachers. These are planned on alternative Saturdays. Sometimes, the topics of these lectures coincide with career-related topics. Power of positive mindsets, inculcating responsibility, being a team leader, satisfaction from work etc. are some of the topics covered with the teaching staff. Although proper career planning and management is not being done through this; but careers and related aspects are being discussed from various angles through these lectures.

Additionally, lectures with parents are also being planned. One such lecture has been carried out with parents of some students. Though the attendance was not large, but parents were guided about the way they can get involved with their children regarding their future development. It is only a start but involvement of parents will potentially lead to positive results.

Institution X recently allowed a trainee career counselor to work in their institute for a short placement. The principal was glad to have the trainee career counselor in the institute. The obvious need for career counseling activities was expressed by the principal. He also appreciated the efforts made by the trainee career counselor and voiced his support for such activities in future as well.

The institution Y does not employ a psychologist or a career counselor. Therefore, students are unable to get help and guidance from a trained professional. Any concerns or confusions of students are usually put in front of teachers who guide and advise them in their limited capacity. The cultural tilt towards medicine and engineering fields over-shadows the students' aims and ambitions for different career paths. The principal of the institution said, *'I personally want to hire a psychologist and a career counselor but it is going to take some time before it finally gets done'*.

### **Career-related Lessons**

Institution X has no regular class lessons on career-related topics. However, their administration allowed a trainee career counselor to plan and conduct a number of lesson plans in April, 2017. These were designed and delivered for the male and female students of matriculation. Lessons on different topics like career fields, time management, communication skills, decision making, goal setting etc. were carried out. The interest and feedback of students showed that they were in dire need of such lessons. Teachers and administration appreciated the topics and styles of these career-related lessons. Additionally, career-related one-to-one sessions were also pursued by some students after they attended the career-related lessons. The principal shared, *'A career counselor worked with us for a short while and I got positive feedback from students about the content delivered to the students'*.

Institution Y also lacks specific lessons on career-related topics. Though the students expressed a need for such lessons but the administration has not made arrangements for it. However, teachers and administration welcomed the idea. They also stated that they had not realized the need for it before the interview. However, they were open to arranging such lessons given the feasibility of time. A student said, *'We are not given any specific lectures about careers but I think it would benefit us if it could be done'*. A teacher mentioned, *'Students could be much more focused and informed by lectures on such topics. Currently they are very confused on such matters'*.

### **Conclusion**

The detailed interaction with both institutions reveals that the average Pakistani student is not getting a lot of career-related information, education and learning. In this regard, the efforts by teachers are self-initiated and targets by administration are loosely aimed. Proper focus and planning on these aspects is lacking. The students are energized and curious. They often have career-related queries and confusions. But appropriate services need to be offered. Comparing the practices at these two institutions, it is obvious that the lack of a professional psychologist at institution Y puts its students and staff at a greater disadvantage as a number of career-related practices carried out in institution X are due to their psychologist. Hence, clear aims to inculcate career-related learning are required.



Additionally, the administration, teachers and students should be on the same page to realize its importance and get maximum benefit from it.

### Recommendations

To enhance career-related learning, a number of actions can be taken. Students are mostly opting for famous career fields (e.g. doctors, engineers, pilots etc.) based on hearsay. Reality based information about these famous careers should be shared like the grades, skills, pathways, job description and work environment. Similar information about less famous but equally good careers e.g. nutrition, space studies, data sciences etc. should be shared as well. Students should be encouraged to make career choices based on their interests and aptitudes. Informative sessions by experts in various fields can also be motivating for them. Lastly, sessions on life-long skills like time management, procrastination handling, positive attitude, persistence etc. should be regularly conducted. The inclusion of such information can motivate and guide the students.

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