

Career Counseling in Pakistan

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study that aims to identify and understand the importance, availability and practical implementation of career counseling at different educational levels of Pakistan. The importance of a career counselor and the influence on career choice has also been highlighted in the study. The in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from 25 participants, belonging to different universities of Pakistan, having different academic and professional background. The collected information was processed after coding the interviews by thematic analysis using the software (N-vivo, ed. 10). The results from thematic analysis showed that a proper career counseling system is not available at any level of education. In fact career counseling does not exist in Pakistan in a true sense. Most students do not get any counseling at any level of their academic life about their career path. It was seen that people choose their career under the influence of their family members or due to the availability of the subjects/profession. It was also found that a career counselor must be a professional counselor, equipped with psychological, academic and professional skills and knowledge. As Career counseling plays an important role for the right selection of a person's career path, the study aims to highlight the information of career counseling to help the educational policy makers in Pakistan. It may enable the regulatory bodies to understand the current level and importance of career counseling to shape up their future policies and practices keeping in view the findings of the study.

Keywords: Career Counseling, career counselor, career choice, pre-school, post college, university level, family level, Career Choice Influence.

Background

Education prepares people for different career paths. If provided appropriate guidance and direction people can make right choices for their future and can contribute effectively as a member of their society. Having proper career counseling the students can avail better career opportunities of their likings and can have better choices for their careers in future.

With multiple choices of subjects and professions, it has become very important to make a choice that best suit a person (Brown, 2000). Career counseling is a nonstop process throughout the life span and making the right career choice is to choose what you want to do in life (Avery, Fairbanks & Zeckhauser, 2008). Career counseling has always played the most important part in the making of right career choices for adults (Basinger & Smallwood, 2004).

The present practices of career counseling are addressing the need of both professionals and students in the developed countries i.e. United States, Canada, Australia and United Kingdom (Kumar, 2007).

The focus of this study is to investigate the current practices and their role at different educational levels and institutes of Pakistan. In Pakistan a student before joining any profession has to go through three levels of educational institutes i.e. a school level (grade 1-10), college level (grade 11-12) and a university level (grade 13 onwards). At each level it is important to choose subjects and area which will lead to the next level.

Career Counseling according to (Oxford Dictionary) can be defined as "A process by which a counselor, a qualified professional or an experienced person, helps students to learn about and select a program of studies, and prepare for a career."

Rogers, (1999) defined the term "career counseling" as a process of verbal relationship between the counselor (a senior person) and a counselee (a student or a professional) in which the senior person after assessing and measuring the skills, interest and abilities of a counselee provides direction in the form of information about the opportunities and career options that can be optimal for the counselee.

Nevo, (2007) states that a key role of a career counselor is to help a person, a student or a professional with the information about the relevance of education/experience to the practices of the world.

Schmidt, (2003) argued that it is very critical for a student to know how his personal goals and the career choices in the world of work are aligned. Students that work in the areas they are passionate about are more productive, have more retention rate and are highly motivated to their professions (Whiston & Sexton, 2008). Most of the students are studying for the pursuit of a right career after the completion of education. The theory of Super claims, that a young student is in the exploration stage for the first time in life while the mature student in the recycling of career exploration. These mature students need to make crucial decisions in their

choice of career. The choice is needed in both the advance subject selection and in the career path. At this stage it is very important that students must understand their interests, the opportunities in the work market and relevance of academic life with the professional life (Pelgrum & Anderson, 2009).

Career counseling is a life time process. Mainly it can be divided into the stages like, a pre-school stage, secondary school stage, post secondary stage, professional study stage and professional stage (Whiston, Brecheisen, and Stephens, 2003). The first stage starts when the child has not yet started any formal education. At this stage parents can be the best counselor after analyzing the trend of interests and activities of a child. The second stage is when a child enters the formal education in school. At this stage a student has more interaction with the teachers, who are responsible for the right assessment of child's right career selection. The third stage is a mature stage for a student. At this stage the students himself start understanding his own interest couple with the opportunities available in the world outside. The fourth stage is a stage where one has to select a subject in an area that will have a strong connection with what profession one will follow in future. The last stage that lasts for the rest of a person's life is the professional stage. At this stage it is a duty of organization to take different test, evaluate performance and look for the interest, skills and intentions of the employees and allocate him in the right career choices (Allen, 2009). The focus of the study will remain to the educational level in the context of Pakistan.

A counselor in career counseling process plays an important role. The development of career has a strong relation with psychology and sociology (Roberts, 2004). A career choice is highly influenced by the psychology of a person. So the theory and practice has a deep relation to psychology (Saka & Gati, 2007). To be a good counselor, one must be well familiar with the principles of psychology and sociology (Avery, 2008).

Though the theory of Career Counseling has been matured over the period of time, yet it has not progressed to a single point which suits all people in all contexts (Carnevale, 2002). The previous literature contributed towards the shaping of theoretical framework of career counseling. Frank Parsons was the first to give the conceptual framework of the concept, and known to be the father of career counseling. According to him there are three things important to choose a right career i.e. (1) clearly knowing yourself (2) knowledge and awareness about the opportunities available and (3) clear understanding of the relation between the first two facts, cited by (Dahir, 2004).

Another modified theory was presented by John Holland, (1987) in which he argued that there is a strong relationship between the personality and the profession. The theory holds that as there is a relation between the work and personality, a career choice can be an expression of personality of a person. We can conclude here that a career choice is a clear expression of how well a person knows him/herself and his/her profession.

The quality of career counseling is dependent on the context and the expertise of a career counselor (Sink, 2005). One of the important parts of career counseling process is the career counselor. Sink, (2005) also argued that the career counselor must be a person who is capable of understanding and psychologically assessing the hidden and apparent skills and interest of his client (a student).

Career counseling historically has been seen as counseling from within the person as each individual have a set of preferred choices for his/her career path. The best method considered for career counseling in the past was to know oneself and take a decision for a career path (Whiston & Sexton, 2008). With the passage of time as more professionalism has been introduced in the concept, it has become more systematic.

Career counseling must be provided keeping in mind the advantages and the disadvantages. The parties involved in career counseling i.e. students, professions and the institutes must equally participate in the process to make career counseling a success (Pelgrum, & Anderson, 1999).

Objectives of the study

The key objectives of the study are as follows:

To identify the current level of career counseling in the educational institutes of Pakistan.

To identify the operations and usefulness of the career counseling offices/ teams in the educational system of Pakistan.

To find out at which level i.e. school level, college level and university level the students are being counseled about the career choices and opportunities.

To find out if there is any support from the family (parents) in the career counseling to the students.

To identify the role and importance of a professional career counselor in the career counseling process.

To find out the factors those influence the most in the career selection of students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design selected for the present study is purely qualitative that aims to guide sample and information collection and analysis. The interview method is used for the collection of relevant information.

This type of qualitative approach is used to provide a comprehensive summary of facts and events, and

is commonly used by researchers who require answers to questions about specific events or phenomena (Shipman, 1997).

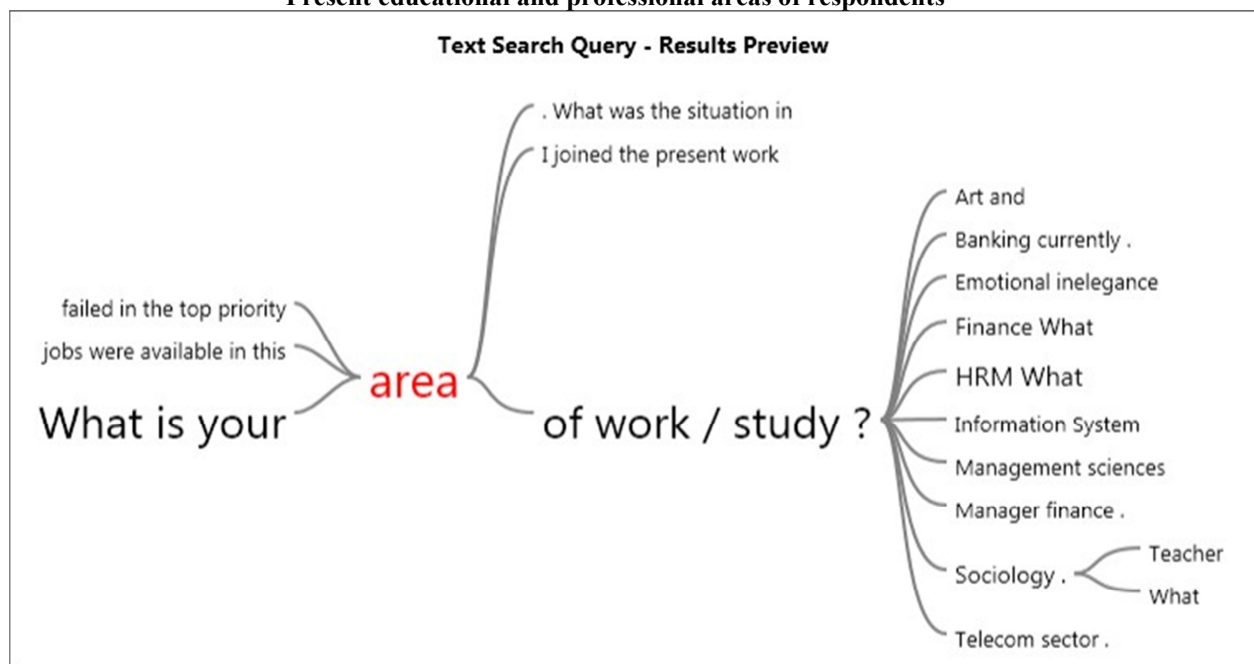
Sample

Twenty five respondents were invited to participate in the study. A convenience sampling method was used to collect information from students (currently studying or working in Islamabad). It was made sure that all interviewees were the individuals belonging to different educational backgrounds and educational institutions covering the big cities of Pakistan i.e. Lahore, Islamabad, Multan and Karachi. These cities are considered to be the educational hubs of Pakistan. Free consent of the participants was made sure through a written consent form signed by each respondent.

The number of participants was considered good enough for the present study as a sample size of 6-30 respondents is considered to be adequate for a detailed qualitative study (Johnson, 1991); (Shipman, 1997).

DEMOGRAPHICS	
GENDER	
Female	8 (32%)
Male	17 (68%)
EDUCATION	
Master	10 (40%)
Above Master	15 (60%)
STATUS	
Professional/students	16 (64%)
Students	9 (36%)
AGE	
25-30 YEARS	10 (40%)
30-35 YEARS	10 (40%)
35-40 YEARS	5 (20%)
Total Respondents	25

Present educational and professional areas of respondents



Information collection

Semi-structured in-depth interview method was used to collect information about the observation and experience of the respondents about career counseling in their academic life. Interview method has been validated for information collection of qualitative studies by many previous scholars (Weller and Romney, 1988; McCracken, 1988; Thomas, 1993; Coulon, 1995; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Stewart, 1998; Stouthamer Loeber and van Kammen, 1995; Gillham, 2000; Fowler, 2001; Yin, 2001).

Settings

The study took place in Islamabad, which is considered to be having more number of universities than any other city in Pakistan. Measures were taken to provide a comfortable environment without any disturbance. With the permission of the respondents, interviews were recorded. After the interviews were completed the

recorded answers were transcribed into a text form in MS-word files.

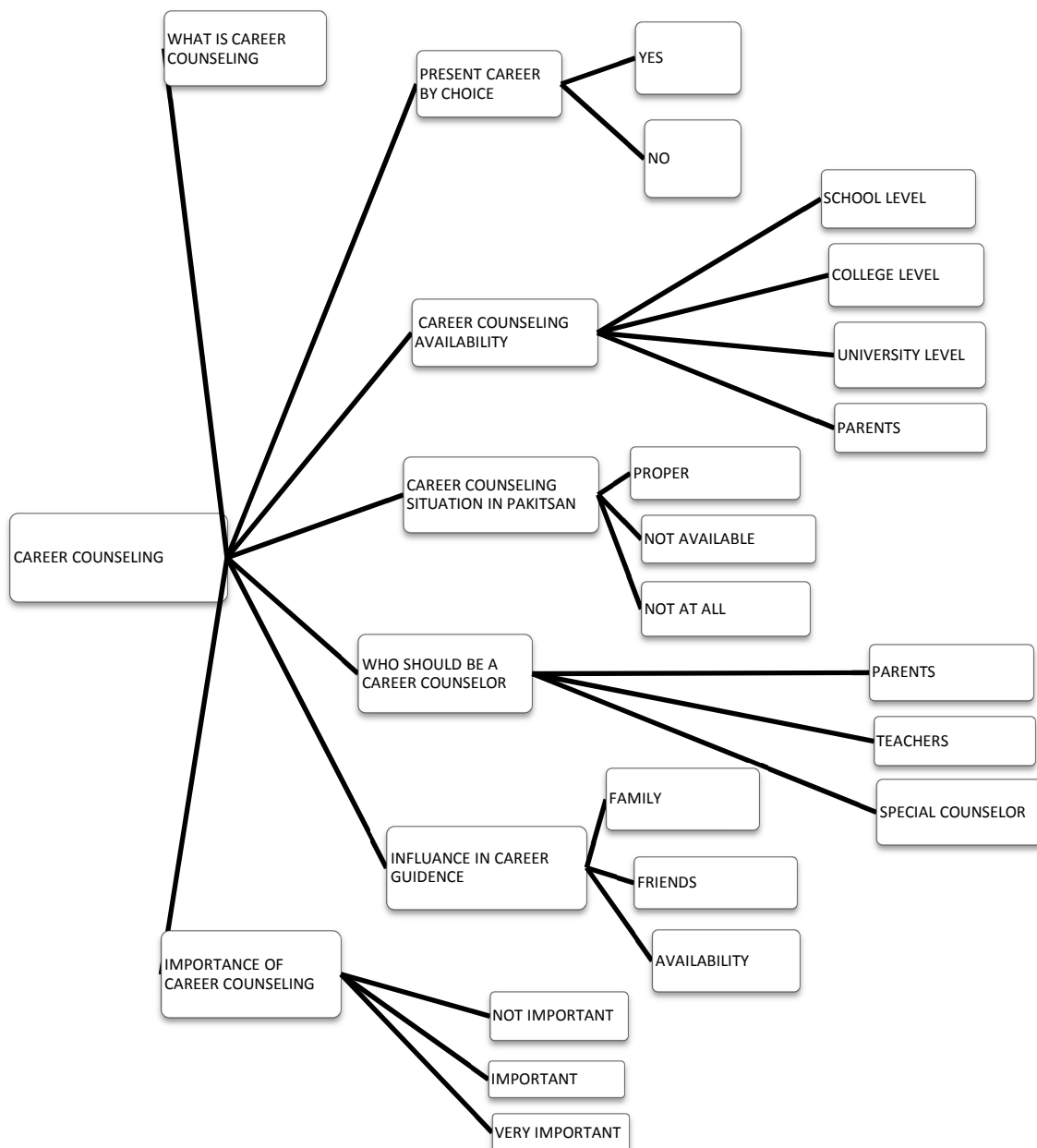
Interviews

Each respondent was interviewed for 20-30 minutes. The demographic data was collected from the participants about their age, education, gender and career status in the first 3-5 minutes. The information about career counseling was explored through in-depth interviews from the participant in the next 20-25 minutes. The focus of the interview was to gain information about the personal experience about career counseling at different levels of their education, and other related factors regarding career counseling in Pakistan.

INFORMATION PROCESS

The data was transcribed into software (N-Vivo, Ed. 10) for thematic analysis. Different queries were run to analyze the pattern of data and results of the interviews. Word frequency, tree maps and graphs were extracted from the N-Vivo for the interpretation of results.

Thematic Model from N-Vivo



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Career Counseling

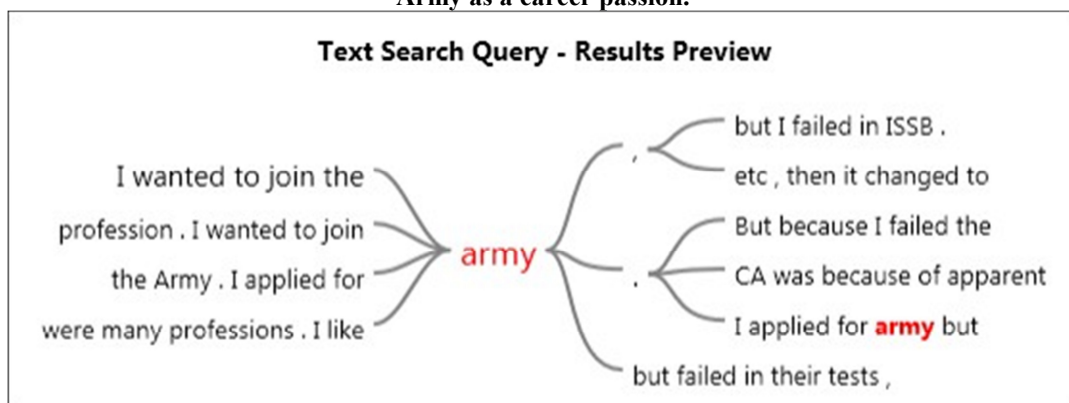
The information from interviews indicated that people hold two major perceptions and views about the term career counseling. Twenty respondents (80%) stated that career counseling is giving a proper and right guideline to a person (a student or a child), by a senior, about choosing a career. They reflected that the direction about the career should be given keeping in mind a few facts. These facts included the assessment of the skills, abilities, interest, likes and dislikes of a person. The other factor that was considered important before giving career counseling was the availability of subjects and fields of work to the respondents was in the work market. There must be a close fit between the personality and the career choice. Career counseling is also perceived by respondents as planning of career keeping in mind the strengths and weaknesses of a person. Five (20%) respondents defined career counseling as a step by step process of helping someone to make right decisions throughout the life.

The previous literature has seen the term career counseling in the same way as Baker, (2001) defines that career counseling is providing guidance to a person regarding issues and opportunities related to one's career, similarly Beale, (2004) stated the term career counseling as with more and more diverse career options and professional opportunities emerging guiding a person to choose appropriately from among the available choices of career. Dahir, (2004) says that, career counseling helps individuals make the right choice about their career paths, career development and career change. According to (Dahir & Stone, 2003) career counseling is to help individuals make informed career choices and help them define their career paths to maximize the success in their chosen careers.

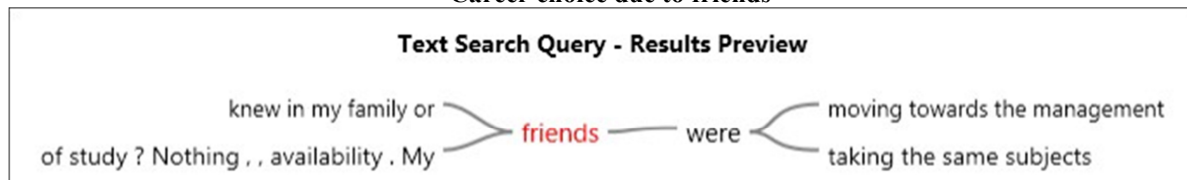
Present Career Choice

Respondents when asked if the careers they were currently in were chosen by themselves or someone guided them. Fifteen (60%) participants replied with "no" which means that no one guided them to choose any career in their entire life. Eight (30%) participants stated that they were guided by their parents for the career they were currently in. Two participants (10%) stated that their teachers guided them (moving from matric to intermediate level) for the selection of subjects for further studies.

Army as a career passion.



Career choice due to friends



Another pattern was also emerged during the information processing that seven participants (30%), wanted to join the armed forces, but could not because of certain reasons. Most of the participants also added that they selected the career path due to the outer look and charm of the profession, like, banking because the managers looked well dressed and educated people, availability of the job in the field, availability of the subjects in the schools, colleges and universities. Some cultural (girls cannot join certain professions), and family (because parents only wanted their children to become a doctor or an engineering) factors were also involved in the selection of a career for the participants.

A few participants also stated that they did not go for a career of their choice because there were no financial gains and low monetary rewards in that career (like writers cannot earn good in the country). A few

participants also stated that they went for the career because their friends were going for the same subjects and the same institutions.

Previous studies also used interview method to collect data for career choice (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008). Many studies have seen relationship of career choice related to educational level (House & Hayes, 2002); social history (Ivey, 2003); professional history (Okun, 2002); family values as Cited by Zunker, (2010). Even in the past career choice like the present study has been influenced by many factors that include the availability of employment (Martin, 2002); (Heppner & Heppner, 2003); (House & Hayes, 2002). Family values and influence of father has been seen as one of the strongest reason of a career choice (Martin, 2002)

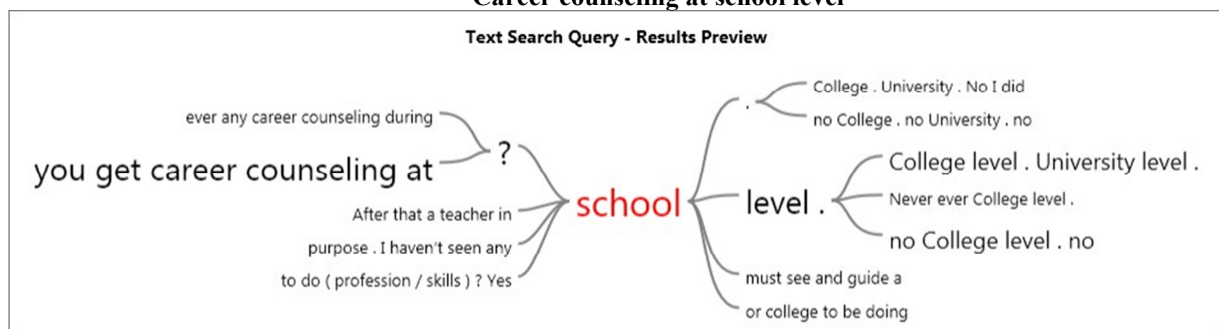
Career Counseling Availability

AVAILABILITY OF CAREER COUNSELING		
	Yes	No
Pre-School (Mother, Father)	12 (48%)	13 (52%)
School Level	5 (20%)	20 (80%)
College Level	7 (28%)	18 (72%)
University Level	8 (32%)	17 (68%)

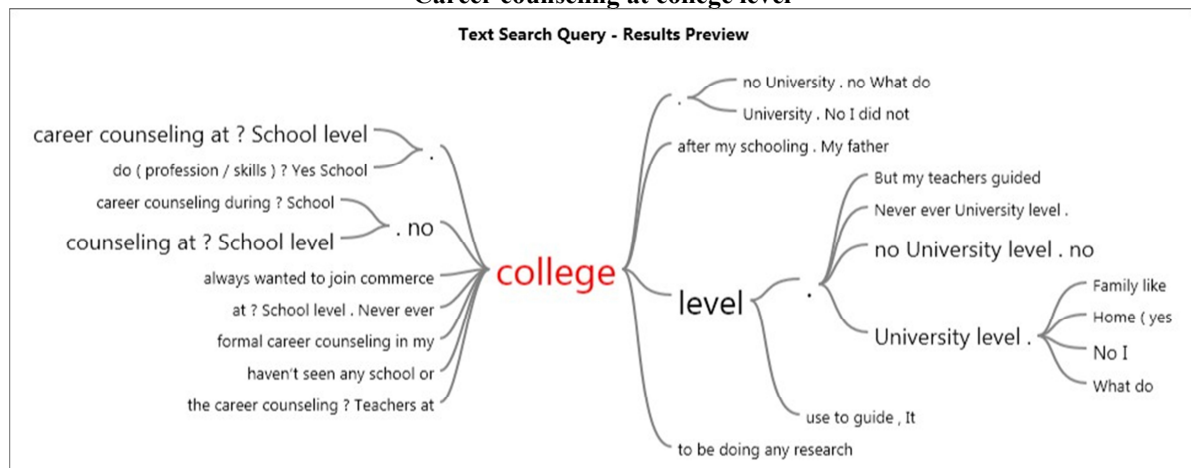
This is one of the most important objectives of the study. The participants were asked according to their observation and experience if there is an availability of career counseling at any level of education for them. According to the theory the levels of career counseling were divided into four stages, (1) pre-school that is parents (2) school level (3) college level (4) university level.

The table and pie charts from the data analysis showed that at the first stage 48% of the participants got the career counseling from their parents (from father and mother), 52 % did not get the counseling at this stage. At the second level a school level only 20% participants were guided for the subject selection while 80% did not get any career counseling at this level. At the college level 28% participants were guided while 72% were not guided for the selection of a career path. At the third stage i.e. university level 32% participants were guided while 68% were not guided for the selection of their career path. The most frequent answer contained the word “not properly”, which indicated that the proper career counseling system does not exist at any level of the education. The pattern of the data analysis showed that mostly parents guide their children in their career selection. So the career choice is influenced by the family members like mother and father. The rest of the three stages lack career counseling system greatly as none of the participants got any proper career guidance at any educational level. A small percentage which got the guidance was not also properly guided according to the principles of career counseling. The small amount of counseling which was available to the students was influenced by the knowledge and interests of the teachers (a participant stated that my teacher guided me to select sciences, because she use to teach science subjects).

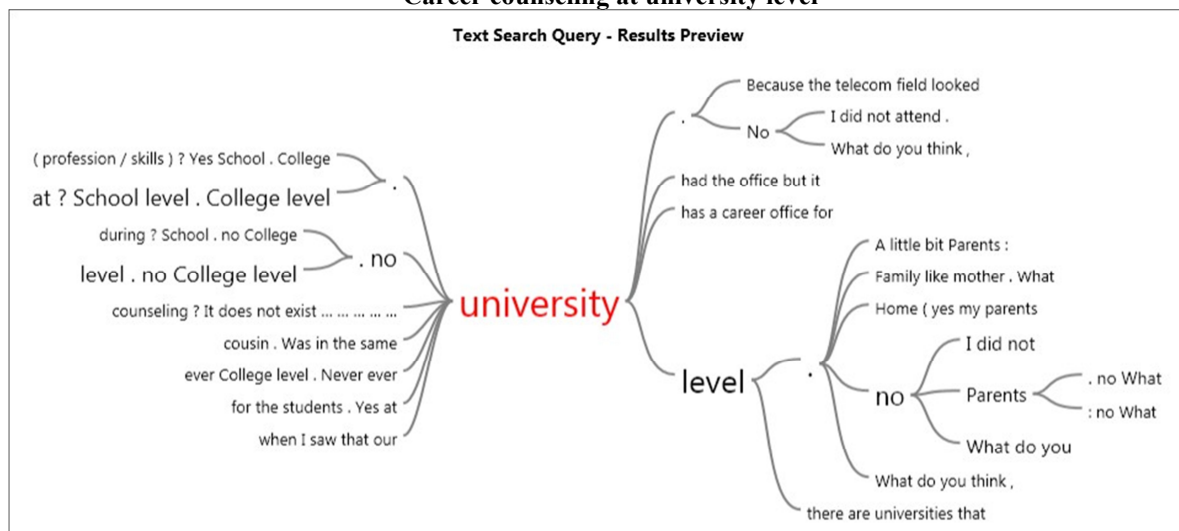
Career counseling at school level



Career counseling at college level



Career counseling at university level



Sink and Stroh (2003) stated that school going children who attended those schools having proper career counseling were found to be more career oriented and performed well in the studies as well. In Canada a cross cultural study also confirmed that students who studies in well established career counseling environment scored higher in tests than the ones who studies in schools with improper career counseling environment (McGannon, Carey & Dimmitt, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2003).

Career counseling is an ongoing process and its importance can be seen throughout the academic and professional stages (Saka and Gati, 2007). Career counseling as a discipline both theoretically and practically has matured from pre-school stage (starting from family) to the university or a professional level (James and Gilliland, 2003). No single method is applicable for proper career counseling at all levels, but according to the stage and requirement different models with different assessment and guidance methods are required (James and Gilliland, 2003).

Career Counseling in Pakistan

PROPER CAREER COUNSELING IN PAKISTAN

	Yes	No
Does it Exist?	0 (0%)	25 (100%)

The results from the interviews showed some shocking indication about the proper system of career counseling in Pakistan. The main idea was to collect information about the experience and observation of individuals about the career counseling in Pakistan. There was not a single person who said that there is proper career counseling available to students in Pakistan. The ration of the answer to a question “whether there is a proper career counseling system in Pakistan was 25 “no” to 0 “yes.”

Some of the participants agreed that there are career counseling offices at the university level. The same

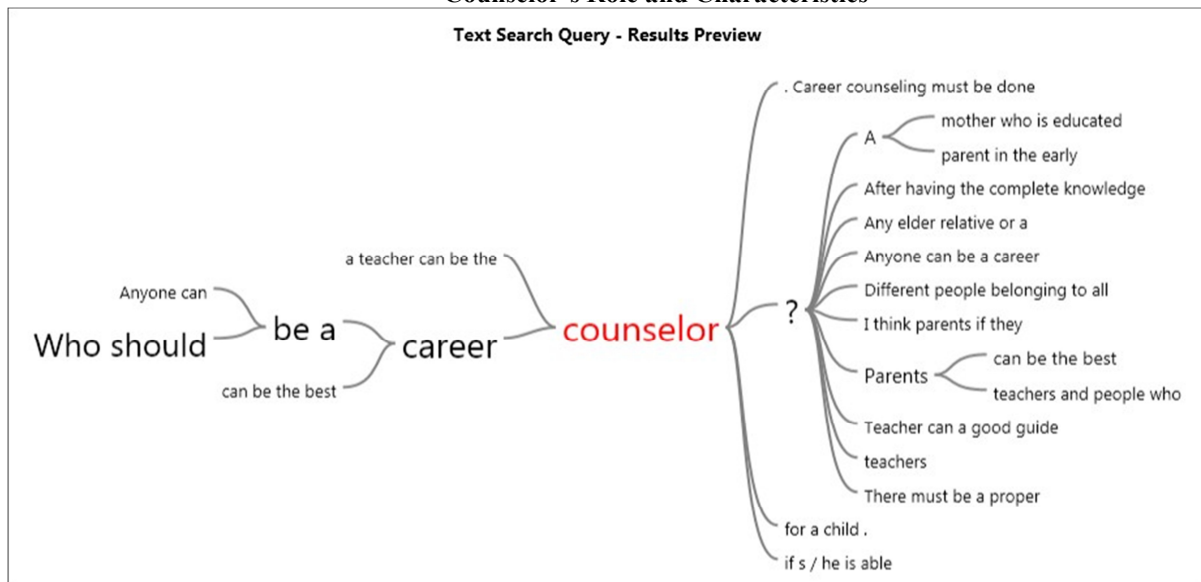
participants added that the career offices operating in the universities are more of placement offices. These offices do not have a direct contact with students. The emails regarding the available jobs are sent to the students and are encouraged to apply for these jobs through universities' offices.

The study also indicated some reasons why there is not an established system of career counseling in Pakistan. Participants reflected that the academia at the education level is not knowledgeable enough to think about establishing a proper career system for the students. The government policies about education do not contain any plans for the career counseling importance in educational sector of the country.

Career Counselor

The most Integral part of career counseling is a career counselor. The concept career counseling will be incomplete without mentioning the role and characteristics of a career counselor. The participants were asked to give their views about "who should be a Career Counselor", and in reply they answered in three categories. Eleven (44%) participants stated that a career counselor must be a specialized person who is skilled and capable of understanding the psychology of a student along with the opportunities available in the work market. Eight participants (32%) said that teacher at all educational levels should be career counselors for a student, because the teachers are the closest people to a student. The close teacher-student relationship enables the teacher to see the interests of students and guide them towards the right career path. Six (24%) participants added that parents specially an educated mother or a father can be a best career guide to a child. There was also a combine view that the choice of a counselor is stage dependent. It was found that at the early stage (pre-school) parents should assess the interests of children and guide them towards the activities that suit their interests. At all educational levels a teacher couple with the help of a professional counselor should conduct tests to identify the skills of a student and counsel the student accordingly.

Counselor's Role and Characteristics



Previous research considered career counselor as an integral part of a career counseling process (House, 2002). Some of the most important characteristics of a counselor that previous studies have indicated are as follows:

Psychology and career counseling are interconnected fields, and it is important that a counselor must be a psychologist (James and Gilliland, 2003). Career counselors also help students or professionals with the self-assessment and self-analysis. After that the counselors help them to match the self interests and the various work opportunities available in the environment. This indicated that a counselor must be a well experienced person having knowledge with the industry or work environment (Whiston & Sexton, 2008)

A counselor a person who closely interact with a person to judge the interests and abilities to forecast a proper line of action (Dimmitt, 2005).

Many models of career counseling support that a career counselor must be a knowledgeable body that has all the required skills and abilities for the guidance and counseling of his client (a student of a professional) (Roberts, 2004).

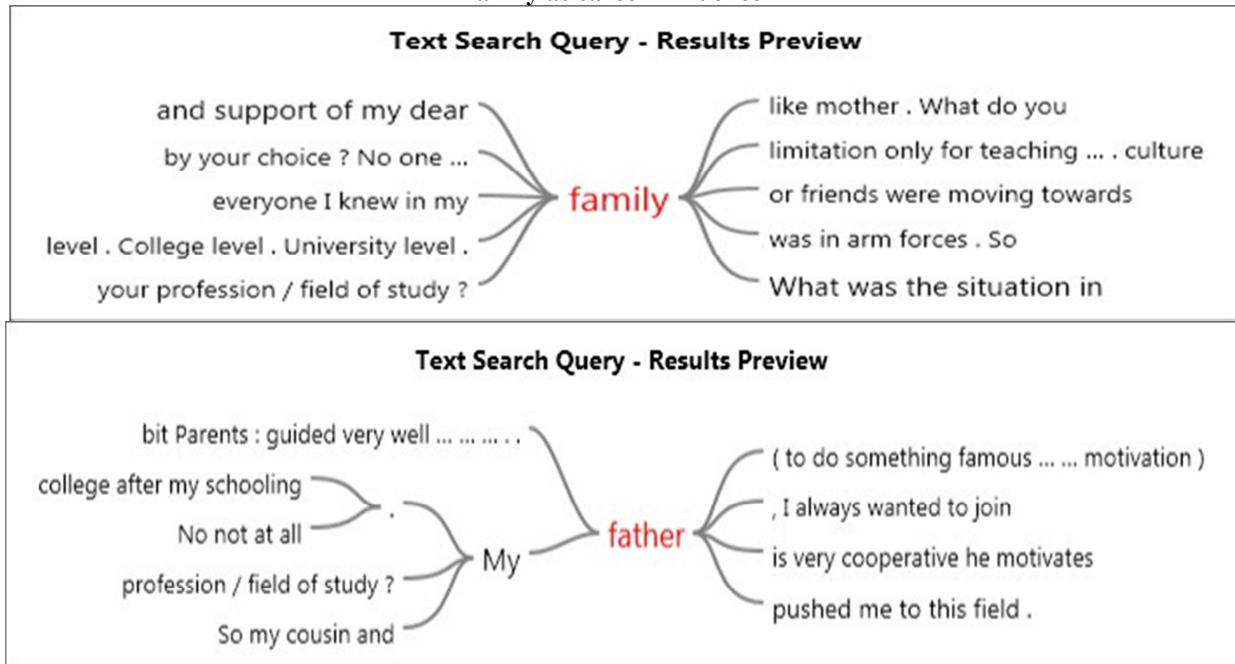
These studies strictly state that a counselor must be a professional. A teacher or parents can be a help to the counselor but they cannot be the sole counselors, unless they are professionals in the field as well.

Career Choice Influence

Another dimension of the study was to see what really influenced the careers of the participants.

Different statements were given by the participants. Twelve (48%) participants went for the present career because of the limited availability of the education/career choices. Nine participants (36%) stated that they joined the present career because their family wanted them to. Four (16%) participants stated that because their friends or class mates were going for the subjects and institutes, that is why they joined the current career. So it is clear that most students choose their careers because of the availability of the subjects in the educational institutes. The second dominated reason is that their families tell them to choose it. The third reason was found to be following the band vegan after friends.

Family as career Influence



Importance of Career Counseling

In this part the stated importance of the career counseling is discussed. Twenty two (88%) participants responded in the absolute favor of importance of career counseling. They stated that career counseling plays an important role in the right selection of the ones career. They added that there must be a special body in the educational institutes that should deal with career counseling of students. The participants emphasized on the importance of career counseling and its implementation in educational sectors. Three participants (12%) also stated that it is important, but they did not emphasize on its proper and specialized implementation.

The importance of career counseling has been emphasized by many studies. Schmidt, (2003) stated that it is extremely important that students must be counseled and guided about what career path they must choose before they enter the professional world. Sink, (2005) suggests the career counseling must be incorporated in the curricula. Career counseling gives a right direction to the self-esteem of a person. Career counseling help individuals to take care of many aspects of their personalities that include, personal understanding, support to their insight and a clear thinking process (Green & Keys, 2001).

Career counseling helps in motivating students to realize their professional needs and how they can align them with the professional life (Baker, 2001). Career counseling has always played an important part in the goal settings of students or professional that guides them to their future professional life (Zunker, 2010). Career counseling has been linked to sense of achievement by many researchers.

Career counseling help individuals to choose the career of their own choice to totally exercise their personal powers and passions (Beesley, 2004). The importance of career counseling has not only been related to professional success as it has been argued by Gysbers, (2005) that it helps in maintaining a work life balance, enhancing your skills and abilities, maintaining a personal value system and keeping personal vision ahead than any other thing.

Conclusions

The crux of the study is that there is a serious attention required in the area of career counseling in educational institutes of Pakistan. Students are not receiving any career counseling at any level in the academic life. Most people choose their careers without understanding their personal goals and interests in life.

People take career counseling as guiding a student or a person about the right career path, after analyzing thier skills and interest. This guidance must be given by someone who is specialized in psychology and science of career counseling. It was found that most of the people are not guided or counseled about their career selection. A few that are guided are mostly guided by their parents/immediate family members or in a few

cases their teachers. All of this guidance is done informally and in unsystematic way. There is no formal system of career counseling available at any level of the education i.e. school level, college level and the university level. Mostly career counseling is available at homes by a mother or a father. There are offices established at university level for career counseling, but in reality they are not fulfilling the purpose. These offices are working for the placement of their students which is completely different from career counseling. The experience of the participants also reflected that a proper career counseling system does not exist in Pakistan at any level, where a counselor is there to guide the students professionally. A career counselor must be a person having knowledge of psychology and who is able to identify the personality of a student to match his passion and profession. The present career of student is chosen by them due to the availability of the limited subjects or profession. The lack of career counseling made students choose the profession that looked attractive and charming without understanding their personality and interests. A number of people blindly follow their friends or siblings for the academic and career selection. It was found that career counseling can play an important role in the right selection a person's career path. It is very essential that career counseling is established at all educational levels in a true sense to make people choose what they love to do in life. If the right career selection is done through proper career counseling, a lot can be contributed towards the society by each individual.

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