
Trends in Career Decision-Making at the Higher Secondary School Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Mubarak Shah

PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology, Peshawar

Mubarak.shah275@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Iffat Ara Hussain

Professor at Department of Teacher Education, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology, Peshawar

iffathussain91@yahoo.com

Khurshid Khan

PhD Scholar, Qurtuba University of Information Science & Technology, Peshawar

ORCID ID 0009-0003-7371-387X

Khurshid.qup000@gmail.com

Stana Din

PhD Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar. ORCID ID 0009-0003-4879-2545

stanadin.afridi2023@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is aimed at finding the trends in career decision-making among students at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study is conducted in District Dir Lower through narrative research design. The population of this study included all the subject specialists at higher secondary school in District Dir Lower. Total of 20-teachers were purposively selected as sample of this study. Data was collected through the conduction of semi-structured interviews and was analyzed thematically by using Clark and Brown six-step approach. From the findings of this, it is concluded that the trends in career decision-making among higher secondary school students in District Lower Dir is greatly tended towards traditional fields such as medical sciences, engineering and competitive civil services due to sustained parental, social and financial pressure. Furthermore, this study also concluded that emerging and innovative career fields have received marginal attention as a result of limited exposure, guidance and counseling at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These findings highlight the need for policy reforms in school-based career guidance and counseling services, along with greater investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and awareness programs that can broaden students' understanding of diverse career opportunities.

Key Words: Career, Career Decisions, Career Choices, Higher Secondary Schools

Introduction

Career Decision-making is one of the most important decisions for adolescent students (Asghar & Ajmal, 2022). Career decisions of students at this stage of life have long term implications on their academic discourse, employment opportunities and overall satisfaction of life (Subhrajyoti, 2023). In Pakistan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular, the higher secondary level of education is a critical juncture in which a student is tasked with the selection of a particular field that will shape future academic and professional discourse.

In the developed countries of the world, students are given greater freedom of choice in respect of field's selection due to the availability of variety of fields as well as the availability of options of mid-course transition for students (Sahlberg, 2007). But in developing countries like Pakistan, the variety and availability of fields is limited that restrict the choice of students at higher secondary school level. This structural rigidity puts huge pressure on adolescent students in making decisions having limited exposure to full spectrum of career options, career counseling and accessibility to professional grooming (Keshf & Khanum, 2022).

The making of career-decisions is psychological in one hand and social in another. It is shaped by variety of factors that include personal interest, students' aptitude, self-efficacy, parental expectation, socioeconomic status, peer-influence, community norms, instructional quality and infrastructure facilities (Duong, 2022; Syeda & Shah, 2025).

In the educational context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the decision of choice of career is further subjected to the conservative nature of culture, gender-biasedness, access to education and lack of economic diversification (Zeb et al., 2025). There are multiple factors that contributed in the promotion of students towards college education (Din et al., 2026) and in which the presence of instructional challenges are included (Khan, 2026). As a result, students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa choose career based on default choices, social and family pressure along with social prestige for some professions without having awareness and knowledge of the emerging fields. The choices of career at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are regarded as definitive that fulfill the eligibility criteria for tertiary level of education. The decisions of career choice is mostly based on inadequate guidance and informal counseling mostly form parents and teachers bearing motives and desires rather than targeted professions based on market capacities (Usman et al., 2024).

In the modern era of dynamism, change and technological revolution (Kumar & Gautam, 2023), there is a noticeable change in the career preferences of students (Rachoin et al., 2023). Students are moving towards emerging fields such as information science and communication technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, forensic sciences and gig economy due to the knowledge of global career trends through access to technology, social media and freelancing services (Onyema et al., 2024). On the other hand, the preferences for medical and engineering fields still hold proper grounds due to social and financial stability of these fields (Azam et al., 2026).

This conflict between traditional and emerging fields along with gaps in available literature within higher secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa forms the base for the conduction of

this study. Therefore, this study is aimed at the examination of trends and patterns underlying career decision-making among higher secondary school students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through the presentation of insights and actionable recommendations for educators, parents, and policymakers.

Objectives

To analyze trends in Career Decision-Making at the Higher Secondary School Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Question

What are trends in Career Decision-Making at the Higher Secondary School Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Methodology

A narrative research method was used to the investigation of trends in career decisions-making at higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study is delimited to the higher secondary schools of District Dir Lower under elementary and secondary education department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The population for this study was all the subject specialists at the higher secondary school level in district Dir Lower. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from 20-subject specialists for the collection of data. The selection of teachers was made through purposive sampling technique and data was analyzed thematically by using Clark and Brown six-step approach. All ethical and codal formalities were fulfilled before, during and after the conduction of interviews.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is presented regarding the prevailing trends in making career-decisions at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The collected data revealed that the career choice and decisions are dominated by careers that reflect prestige and financial status of individuals. After applying Clark and Brown six-step approach of thematic analysis the following themes were emerged:

Dominance of prestigious and Financially Secured Fields

The collected data has revealed that students at higher secondary school level have limited personal insights for choosing a career. The surveyed teachers revealed that the traditionally followed fields are medical sciences and government management services. As one of the surveyed teacher shared his views in similar manner:

“In district lower Dir, the career aspiration of students are dominated by medical, CSS and PMS” (T-2)

Another teacher has replied that students are dragged into medical field due to financial stability. As he remarked:

“Students are locked into medical field. Parents are insisting on this field as a result of financial strength and social prestige” (T-3)

Two respondents have shared that the domination of medical and competitive management services have made social sciences obsolete at higher level of education. (T-1, 13)

Another surveyed teacher has shared his opinion that the tendency of students are pre-dominantly towards medical sciences, information and technology and CSS. As he remarked: "Students at higher secondary school level are frequently taking guidance regarding taking admission in medical and doing CSS, PMS and PCS examinations as their career." (T-20)

Another surveyed teachers shared similar remarks in this manner:

"The career decisions of students are greatly influenced by the financially sound fields" (T-18)
Four respondents have shared that the prestigious careers are respected in society as compared with teaching and business that is why parents and students have no choice but some specific fields such as medical and IT. (T-5, T-8, T-15, T-19)

Similar views are shared by another respondent in this manner:

"Students believe that if they become doctors or CSP officers, they will not only gain financial freedom but will also gain social recognition that is why they are ignoring other potential careers that might suit their skills better."()

Three respondents have shared that the pressure of parents on their children for pursuing medical and engineering fields due to social observance of these professions irrespective of considering the passion and aptitude of their children. (T-, T-, T-)

Another respondent has shared that financial aspect of a field is the main indicator for career choice of students. As he remarked:

"The financial strength and bright future related with any field is the main indicator for choosing and selecting a field by students." (T-)

Similarly another respondent has articulate higher salaries and job security as the key indicator for career choice. As he remarked:

"Students and parents give preference to higher salaries and job-security of selecting a career" (T-)

A set of two respondents have shared that family expectation play key role in deciding careers for children. (T-, T-)

Personal interest of children plays no role in career decisions. As one of the respondent has remarked:

"Students' personal interests are not playing any role in their career choice as they are not given any role in their career decisions by their parents" (T-)

Two respondents have shared that the dominance of prestigious fields is rooted in the belief that only these professions uplift social status. Students feel they must choose them to meet societal approval, not because they are passionate about them (T-, T-)

The data reveals that higher secondary students in District Lower Dir largely choose careers based on financial security and social prestige rather than personal interest. Medical sciences and competitive civil services dominate their aspirations, driven by parental pressure, societal expectations, and perceived job stability. Consequently, students show limited self-insight in career decision-making and diverse fields especially the social sciences remain overlooked.

Marginal interest in Emerging Fields

The collected data has also revealed that the interest of people in selecting emerging fields is marginal. One of the respondents has shared that the selection of traditional career over shadows the emerging fields. As he remarked:

“Most of the students are subject to join traditional careers such as medical sciences that is why the interest of students in emerging fields of data analytics, criminology and AI is very weak.” (T-6)

A set of two respondents shared that when they introduce innovative fields such as robotics, climate change or renewable energy in their classes for the purpose of career guidance. Students show very little interest in these emerging fields. (T-1, T-15)

Similarly another respondent have shared his views in this manner:

“Career choice of students is biased towards some specific fields while innovative and emerging fields receive very little interest” (T-11)

Four respondents have shared that students show lack of confidence when they are encouraged to opt emerging fields because they believe the emerging fields require excellent grip of English and IT and students are not good in these areas. (T-2, T-5, T-9, T-14)

Another respondent has articulated similar remarks as follows:

“Our education system is not based on practicality and students are not exposed to various fields. That is why they are not intended towards emerging fields such as AI and ICT.” (T-18)

Another respondent has expressed similar remarks that:

“Parents do not possess knowledge about emerging fields and they discourage their children to go beyond traditional fields.” (T-3)

Another respondent regards parental pressure as vital indicator for reducing the motivation of students towards emerging fields. As he remarked:

“It is the parental pressure that reduces the motivation of students towards emerging fields. And as results students show less interest for information and technology, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.” (T-4)

Six respondents were of the view that lack of basic facilities, lack of science and IT equipment’s, lack of play grounds and sports equipment and unavailability of trained teachers, guides and counselors are the forces behind less interest of students for emerging fields such as sports, IT, renewable energy etc. (T-7, T-8, T-10, T-19, T-20)

Two respondents have shared that students are tended for CSS, medical and engineering while emerging fields receive less or no interest due to lack of knowledge on the part of students and their parents. (T-12, T-17)

Another respondent has shared similar views in the following manner:

“Some students show initial excitement when we talk about space science or AI, but it fades because there are no role models from our district who have succeeded in these emerging sectors.” (T-13)

Two respondents have shared that local job opportunities still revolve around conventional professions. Students believe learning about new fields won't secure employment, so they don't invest time in them." (T-14, T-16)

Overall, students show minimal interest in emerging fields due to strong preferences for traditional careers, limited exposure and facilities, low confidence in required ICT and English skills, and parental pressure. The absence of role models and local job prospects in modern sectors further discourages students, keeping emerging fields largely overlooked.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that career decision making among higher secondary school students in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is greatly influenced by external pressure rather than student's choice. Data revealed that the traditional trends of career decision-making is towards medical sciences, engineering and competitive civil services due to deep cultural, social and financial priorities rather than personal choices. This finding is aligned with the finding of Syeda and Shah, (2025) that showed that career decision-making is a collective decision in conservative societies where the expectation of family has greater influence over adolescents' choices. The findings are also evident that students do not possess proper awareness, knowledge and exposure regarding different fields due to lack of proper guidance and counseling from teachers and parents. This finding is similar to the findings of (Usman et al., 2024) that showed that limited resources in terms of materials, seminars, workshops, and lack of teachers' training in the field of career guidance were the problems in schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to which students are not given proper awareness, guidance and exposure regarding different professions. The findings of this study has also revealed that there is marginal tendency of career choices towards emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, data analytics, and renewable energy due to inadequate exposure to practical and modernized professions. This finding is aligned with the findings Azam et al., (2026) students' at higher secondary school level prefer medical and engineering fields as per tradition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The finding that the lack of students' enthusiasm for emerging fields highlighted the importance of localized success stories, mentorship and representation in shaping aspirations. These outcomes further highlighted the need for expanding students' career horizons more than exposure alone.

Conclusion

This study is aimed at finding the trends career decision-making among students at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Narrative research design is applied for the conduction of this research and data was collected from 20-teachers of District Dir Lower and was thematically analyzed. From the findings and above discussion, it is concluded that the trends in career decision-making among higher secondary school students in District Lower Dir is greatly tended towards traditional fields such as medical sciences, engineering and competitive civil services due to sustained parental, social and financial pressure.

Furthermore, this study concluded that emerging and innovative career fields in which artificial intelligence, robotics, and renewable energy include, has received marginal attention as a result

of limited exposure, guidance and counseling at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These findings highlight the need for policy reforms in school-based career guidance and counseling services, along with greater investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and awareness programs that can broaden students' understanding of diverse career opportunities.

Recommendations

- It may be recommended that the structured career guidance and counseling programs may be launched at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- It may also be recommended that students may be given career awareness and practical exposure before the induction at higher secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

References

1. Asghar, S., & Ajmal, M. A. (2022). Adolescents' career decision making: A qualitative study. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(3), 952–967.
2. Azam, W., Mustafa, J., Khan, K., & Ahmad, D. (2026). Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Interest in Inter-Science Subjects in the Working Folks Grammar School System in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *Social Science Review Archives*, 4(1), 3538–3542.
3. Din, S., Khan, K., Hussain, I. A., & Muhammad, M. (2026). Factors Affecting the Promotion of College Education in District Khyber, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *Social Science Review Archives*, 4(1), 2653–2657.
4. Duong, N. (2022). An assessment of factors influencing career choices among fresh graduates: a survey of students majoring in business and economics. *Journal of International Economics and Management*.
5. Keshf, Z., & Khanum, S. (2022). "It is a very difficult process": career service providers' perspective on career counseling in Pakistani universities. *Heliyon*, 8(1).
6. Khan, K. (2026). Instructional Challenges: English as Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools of District Lower Dir. *Social Science Review Archives*, 4(1), 785–792.
7. Kumar, P., & Gautam, D. (2023). Transformative Role of ICT in 21st Century Learning: Enhancing Educational Effectiveness and Equitability. *International Journal of Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology*, 11(December).
8. Onyema, E. M., Esther, U. N., Okpala, C. C., Umoke, C. C., Obioma, N. J., Okoronkwo, M. C., & Edmond, V. U. (2024). The role of emerging technologies in academic career development. *Babcock University Journal of Education*, 10(1), 36–49.
9. Rachoin, J.-S., Vilceanu, M. O., Franzblau, N., Gordon, S., & Cerceo, E. (2023). How often do medical students change career preferences over the course of medical school? *BMC Medical Education*, 23(1), 596.
10. Sahlberg, P. (2007). SECONDARY EDUCATION IN OECD COUNTRIES COMMON CHALLENGES , DIFFERING. *Sharing Expertise in Training*.

-
11. Subhrajyoti, T. (2023). Career Decision Making of Secondary School Students-A Critical Review. *Zenodo*, 8(2).
 12. Syeda, K., & Shah, S. M. A. (2025). Factors Affecting Career Choice of Graduates in Pakistan. *Pakistan Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2).
 13. Usman, M., Khan, R., Khan, W., & Khan, M. I. (2024). An Assessment of Career Guidance Services at Secondary School Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *THE SPARK" A HEC Recognized Journal"*, 9(1), 156–168.
 14. Zeb, A., Ali, A., & Hussain, M. S. (2025). The Effect of Socio-cultural Factors on the Career Aspirations of Secondary Schools' Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 672–680.