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RESEARCH PAPER

The Effect of Socio-cultural Factors on the Career Aspirations of Secondary Schools' Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Socio-cultural factors determine students' future careers in secondary schools. This study investigated the effect of socio-cultural factors on career aspirations of secondary schools' students. Study's objectives were to; find out the effect of socio-cultural factors on career aspirations of students and develop strategies for the career guidance of students. Study's design was quantitative. Its population was 30439 students. The sample 380 was selected with simple random sampling. A questionnaire was developed, validated and piloted for collecting data. Data were gathered with self-administered questionnaires and analyzed with mean scores, standard deviations and the chi-square test. The study found that socio-cultural factors significantly affect students' career aspirations. Moreover, societal demands, culture, gender stereotypes, role models and social media shaped career aspirations. Study recommended the facilities of career guidance in schools and career orientation sessions for students to have appropriate career aspirations at secondary level.

| **Keywords:** | Effect, Socio-Cultural Factors, Career Aspirations, Secondary Schools' Students, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan |

Introduction

Socio-cultural factors such as society, environment, the context in which students live, peers and friends are important influences on the career aspirations of secondary school students (Kniveton, 2004). Peers and friends influence the career tendencies of one another and play a significant role in the career determination of their fellow students. There are career aspirations' differences in male and female students due to gender, social values, culture and traditions (Ogunkola & Olatoye, 2005). Denga (2004) found that socio-cultural factors determine obligations for the individuals in society which paves the way for his or her future career paths; therefore, culture and religious beliefs influence the career aspirations of female students.

Several studies have established the significant influence of socio-cultural factors on the career aspirations of students. Domenico and Jones (2007) reported the influence of socio-cultural factors, i.e. gender, socio-economic status and cultural patterns affecting the career choices and aspirations of secondary schools' students. Singaravelu et al. (2005) identified the influence of culture and society on the career aspirations of students, as societal needs and demands shape the career patterns of the individuals. The gender of students and their ethnicity also affect the career patterns of students. Borchert (2002) found that students are affected by the people with whom they interact and therefore, their attitudes and beliefs are shaped by the ideas and suggestions of the group or society in which they live. Chovwen (2003) identified that in majority cases females are rarely employed in science and technology related careers but they are commonly employed in low profile careers with low salaries such as social work, nursing, teaching, care taking and marketing. The causes for this, is females under representation in education because of socio-cultural factors, norms, values and traditions, influence of peers and lack of female role models in

such careers (Ogukola & Olatoye, 2005). Ituma and Simpson (2006) found that socio-cultural context affects the career aspirations of youth. Among these the most powerful is the extended family members who influence each other and set obligations and expectations for the youth. Socio-cultural practices influence the career choice decisions of youth and they select careers for meeting the needs and demands of the society. Therefore, youth is not free to make their career choice decisions on their own free will but their careers are determined by socio-cultural factors.

Benet and Aygun (2003) found culture to be a significant influence in the career aspirations of students. In Individualist cultures students are free to make their career choice aspirations while in collectivist cultures students are bound to act upon the advice and suggestions of their elders. Elizabeth (2012) found that culture plays a significant role in the career aspirations of students. Socio-cultural factors like traditions, customs, beliefs, norms and values play a significant role in the career determination of the students. Gender stereotype beliefs play a significant role in the career determination of female students. Ethnicity also plays a key role in the career determination of female students. She also found the role of social class or ethnicity, peers and friends, interaction with people of the community and social role models as important factors that play their significant role in the formulation of career aspirations of students.

Literature Review

About the career aspirations of secondary schools' students, Salami (2001) reported that cultural and societal beliefs, traditions and expectations affect the career aspirations of females and shape their minds that they need not to be too much serious about their future career choice decisions. They are discouraged from making the career choice decisions and are usually employed in traditional female stereotyped, lower status occupations with low salaries. They are influenced to aspire for helping their husbands and rear their children while making career choice decisions of males are considered as serious as they would become the future bread winners of the family. According to Salami (2007) young students who grow up in collectivist cultures, make career choice decisions on the advice of parents and if they make such decisions on the basis of their own free will then it may result in unrealistic career development and emotional disturbances of students due to lack of approval and financial support which is the source of success for the career development of adolescents.

Yowell (2000) found that the career aspirations of female is more influenced by the ethnicity and that of males are more influenced by the future career concerns. Watson et al. (2010) identified that male students aspired more for the investigative careers while female students were more aspired for social careers. Sax (1994) found that male students are more influenced by the financial or monetary benefits of careers while females are more influenced by the socio-cultural aspects of careers. Young et al. (1997) found differences in the career aspiration of urban and rural secondary school students. Rural students base their career choice decisions and planning on their own learning and experiences, family guidance, gender roles and societal norms and values. Urban students were found more independent and parents and family were not very much influential in their career choice decisions. Urban students were found equipped with rich career planning information as compared to rural students who did not posses enough information regarding their future career planning. Naidoo (1998) identified the influence of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, work values and gender in the career selection of students. The religion of children is a significant factor in the career determination of children (Hickman, 2000). Similarly Salami (2007) identified that religion shapes the morality of students and gives direction to the career choice decisions of students, therefore, they aspire for careers in accordance with their religion.

Salami, (2000) found that gender stereotypes affect the career roles of both male and females, therefore, there is stereotyping in female dominated careers, like, nursing and male dominated careers like engineering because career choices are made under the umbrella of socio-cultural influences. Migunde, Agak and Odiwuor (2011) identified that both males and females preferred investigative careers which deals with abstract concepts and intellectual problems like Medical and Engineering and enterprising careers dealing with leading and managing, while realistic careers which needed masculinity were preferred by males and social careers like art and literature were preferred by females. This was due to their socio-cultural factors and expected future gender roles. Adolescents' future career goals are influenced by the norms and values of society (Nurmi, 2004). Mutekwe, Modiba & Maphosa (2011) identified the role of gender as a significant influence on the career aspirations of female students because students at the level of secondary school perceive and identify their future roles on the basis of their genders, therefore, they try to adjust themselves in their expected futures, through their gender appropriate career choice decisions. Micallef and Gatt (2004) identified that female students were not encouraged to select male dominated careers, such as, Engineering and medicine. Oyebade (2003) highlighted that females were little prepared for career planning and development at the level of secondary schools because of their limited future career scope in the society.

Aguele and Agwa (2007) identified that the interest of females diminish in science and technology related careers because of religious and socio-cultural beliefs about their gender roles in the society. They also noted the inequality of opportunity at the secondary level, weak physique, order of birth, marriages and teachers' attitude towards females which adversely affect their aspirations for science and technology related careers, therefore, they stressed on the creation of more employment opportunities for females in order to create more role models for them in science related careers and may encourage more females to adopt science and technology as their careers. Gotfredson (2005) found that during adolescence, students shape their career planning based on the type of their gender and prestige level associated with the occupation. Therefore, females tend to aspire for a narrow range of career choices as compared with males, who aspire for a broader range of careers. In adolescence career choices are influenced by the socio-cultural factors to which one is exposed.

Swift (2009) reported peers and friends as good sources of information on courses, careers and college options of their fellow students. They are very close to one another and influence the career patterns of each others. Students also rely on the advice, information and guidance of their friends and peers. Olamide and Salami (2013) reported friends and peers as important agents in the career development of students at secondary level. Payne (2003) pointed out that friends and peers were often found to be influencing the career choices of students. They also serve as a source of competition in the aspired careers. Kloosterman (1994) found that young students are influenced by their peers and friends as they verify the career choices of students for various careers.

Small and Mclean (2002) reported the influence of role models in the career aspirations of young students. Students usually show preferences for such careers in which they have identified role models. Role models are not only a source for the selection but also for the rejection of some careers. Winston (1998) found social role models as important agents in the career choice determination of the students. De Almedia (1998) found the influence of guest speakers in career guidance workshops, as role models in the career selection of students. According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, students learn through observation of others behavior in the society. Krumboltz, Mitchells and Jones (1976) highlighted that people of the society and their activities influence the career planning and development of young students.

Willcockson and Phelps (2004) reported the influence of social media, i.e. films, T.V and internet as a major influence on the career choice decisions of students. Maharaj (2007)

found the influence of television, movies and internet on the career determination of students. Swift (2009) found the role of favorite television plays in the career aspirations of students. Watson and McMahon (2005) highlighted that students usually observe role models through social media like television and internet that shape the behaviors and attitudes of students and is therefore, the source of information as well as career awareness of students. Kloosterman (1994) concluded the influence of media with television, advertisement and music and role models from media as affecting the career choices of students. Kiani (2010) found the influence of social media and successful professional relatives as role models in the career choices of secondary schools' students.

It is concluded that socio-cultural factors are significant influencers in career determination of secondary schools' students and socio-cultural factors like gender, ethnicity, culture, peers and friends affect the career aspirations of secondary schools' students, therefore; the study investigated the effect of socio-cultural factors on the career aspirations of secondary schools' students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Material and Methods

The design for the conduction and reporting of the study was quantitative survey for developing the effective career guidance interventions for secondary school students. The population of the study was 30439 secondary school students from district Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The sample of the study was 380 which was determined with Raosoft online calculator for the determination of the sample for research studies. The sample was selected with using simple random sampling procedure. A questionnaire containing the effect of socio-cultural factors on the career aspirations of secondary schools' students, validated with expert opinion of experts in the field of career guidance and pilot tested for the reliability. The reliability of the tool was 0.825. According to Law (2004) if the coefficient of reliability is 0.80 then it is excellent and if it is from 0.60 to 0.79 then it is adequate. The data were collected with using self-administered questionnaires and analyzed with mean scores standard deviation and the chi-square test of significance. Ethical principles for conduction of the study, participants and reporting the findings of research were followed.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Effect of Socio-cultural Factors on the Career Aspirations of Students

Statements	Number	Mean	S. D	χ^2	P
Societal needs and demands affected your career aspirations	380	3.87	.67	59.45	.000
Culture affected your career your career aspiration	380	3.92	.56	87.34	.000
Religion affected your career aspiration	380	3.67	.87	62.21	.000
Ethnicity affected your career aspiration	380	3.61	.42	43.47	.000
Social gender stereotype affected your career aspiration	380	3.84	.23	44.56	.000
Friends affected your career aspiration	380	3.69	.18	39.34	.000
Peers affected your career aspiration	380	3.56	.54	78.42	.000
Social role models affected your career aspiration	380	3.89	.31	55.34	.000
Social media affected your career aspiration	380	3.62	.66	43.67	.000
Social status and prestige affected your career aspiration	380	3.59	.34	26.34	.000

Table 1 demonstrates the socio-cultural factors affecting the career aspirations of secondary schools' students. The mean scores of 3.87, 3.92, 3.67, 3.61, 3. 84, 3.69, 3.56, 3.89, 3.62 and 3.59 highlighted that students agreed that socio-cultural factors of societal needs and demands, culture, religion, ethnicity, social gender stereotypes, friends, peers, social role models, social media, social status and prestige affected the career aspirations of

secondary schools' students. On application of the Chi-square test, the findings were found statistically significant.

The findings identified that socio-cultural factors of societal needs and demands, culture, religion, ethnicity, social gender stereotypes, friends, peers, social role models, social media, social status and prestige affected the career aspirations of secondary schools' students.

Discussions

The study found that socio-cultural factors of societal needs and demands, culture, religion, ethnicity, social gender stereotypes, friends, peers, social role models, social media, social status and prestige affected the career aspirations of secondary schools' students. The findings of the study are in agreement with the findings of previous research studies, as Singaravelu et al (2005) identified the influence of society in the career aspirations of the students as societal needs and demands shape the career patterns of the individuals. Domenico and Jones (2007) reported the influence of socio-cultural factors, i.e. gender, socio-economic status and cultural patterns affecting the career aspirations of secondary school students. Brown (2001) demonstrates the influence of the context, i.e. socio-cultural factors and choice influencers, i.e. media, friends and peers that significantly influence the career aspirations of the students. Similarly, Aygu (2003); Elizabeth (2012) and Salami (2001) reported that cultural and societal beliefs, traditions and expectations affect the career aspirations of students and that female are more influenced by culture and gender stereotypes beliefs. Likewise, Elegbede (1977) and Salami (2007) identified that religion shapes the careers of students. Staurt (2000) and Payne (2003) found the influence of peers and friends as a significant influence on the career choice decisions of the students. They are very close to one another and influence the career patterns of each others. Students also rely on the advice, information and guidance of their friends and peers. Olamide and Salami (2013) reported friends and peers as important agents in the career development of the students at the secondary level. The effect of social role models has also been reported by other studies, like Winston (1998) found social role models as important agents in the career choice determination of the students. De Almedia (1998) and Small and Mclean (2002) found the influence of the guest speakers in career guidance workshops as role models in the career aspirations of the students. According Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory students learn through observation of others behavior in the society. Maharaj (2007) found the influence of the television, movies and internet on the career determination of the students. . Willcockson and Phelps (2004) and Kiani (2010) reported the influence of social media, i.e. films, T. V and internet as a major influence on the career choice decisions of the students. John (2009) found the role of favorite television plays in the career choice of students. The Social Cognitive Career Choice Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) is based on the inter-relationship of personal, environmental and behavioral factors for the career selection and development of the individual. This theory assumes that contextual or socio-cultural influences determine the learning experiences, social cognition and cultural socialization of the individuals which formulates their self-efficacies and outcome expectations and ultimately lead them to the realization of their career choices decisions.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that socio-cultural factors, i.e. societal needs and demands, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender stereotypes, friends and peers, social role models, social media, status and prestige are significant socio-cultural factors affecting the career choices of secondary schools' students. The socio-cultural factors set the standards for the careers in the society and inspire the students for careers with good socio-cultural status and prestige in the society. Furthermore, on the basis of gender wise comparison, females are more influenced by the socio-cultural factors as compared to males because females are

more under the influence of culture, religion and social gender stereotypes for the choice of their careers. The reason is that females are more careful in observing the socio-cultural norms of the society and they like careers which do not violate these norms of society.

Recommendations

- The study recommends the provision of career guidance facilities for the effective career planning of the students in secondary schools. As the career guidance facilities are not available in secondary schools, therefore, it is very difficult for the students of secondary schools to select appropriate subjects of their study at this level, which are based on their interests, aptitudes and knowledge of the career opportunities.
- There must be collaboration between parents, teachers and schools' authorities for the support of students in career choice decisions. As a friendly relation between home and school is compulsory for making conducive environment regarding career choice decisions of students, therefore, it will help the teachers and parents to know the interests and abilities of the students for making proper subjects selection that may lead them to their desired future destinations.
- In order to prepare the students of secondary schools for the future careers in an effective manner, there is the need for provision of information about the future requirements and terms and conditions for entry into the desired professional colleges. The study recommends the incorporation of career guidance subjects in the schools' curricula for the provision of career information and knowing the requirements for the entry into the professional colleges. Folsom and Reardom (2003) also identified career guidance curriculum as an effective tool for the career information, exploration and career planning of the secondary schools' students.
- Career guidance in secondary schools needs the provision of books, brochures and social media. Therefore, the schools must be provided with books, brochures and Internet facility for the facilitation of students, in career guidance.
- The study also recommends the active role and involvement of the policy makers, governmental authorities and community for the provision of material and financial resources to help establish the facilities of career guidance in secondary schools.

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