

Theme: Career Guidance, Entrepreneur, and Development Readiness.

How do current practices and policies in career guidance affect students' career choices in Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

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Policy Statement

To address the lack of career guidance in the Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the study recommends the government integrate culturally sensitive career counseling into the national curriculum, implement and foster government-NGO collaborations for teacher training, and leverage digital tools to bridge access gaps. These measures aim to equip students, especially in remote areas, with diversified career options aligned with market demands while ensuring inclusivity for girls.

Abstract

The study explores career guidance and practices students' occupational decisions regarding NMTDs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with specific reference to socio-economic cultural and infrastructure challenges. Employing both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study compares District Khyber where students have relatively greater educational attendance opportunities than in South Waziristan, isolated (remote) and largely underdeveloped areas the study surveyed 60 students and conducted FGDs with parents, teachers, and government representatives, a combination of a survey, focus groups discussions and analysis of secondary data shows a lack of awareness and poor access to career guidance among the target population, especially in the rural female population. Key findings highlight the dominance of traditional career paths like medicine and engineering, limited exposure to non-conventional opportunities, and systemic inequities driven by cultural norms and geographic isolation. The study concludes with actionable recommendations, including implementing existing policies, integrating career counseling into school curricula, teacher training, localized initiatives, and leveraging technology to enhance accessibility. These strategies aim to create an inclusive framework for empowering students and aligning educational aspirations with labor market needs in marginalized regions.

1. Introduction

The newly merged tribal districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, lack structured and accessible career guidance, leading students to take a restricted view of careers (medicine, engineering) with limited opportunities. According to Khyber Medical University (2024), only 13 percent of students qualify to study in medical schools, while the number of engineers attending engineering colleges has dramatically dropped by 76 percent since 2017. Although we have some policies which are the National Education Policy (2017), National Youth Policy (2018), Prime Minister Kamyaba Jawan Program (2019), and National Skills Strategy (2009) most remote areas of Pakistan neglect inclusive education. These statistics draw an urgent need for diversifying students' career options in the region in which educational aspirations are mainly dictated by socio-economic conditions and cultural norms as well as the services of career counseling.

The lack of infrastructure and absence of connectivity represent large geographical challenges for the NMTDs. Keshf and Khanum (2021) note that career guidance is unavailable and ineffective in Pakistan due to its geographic inaccessibility which creates urban-rural disparity. Likewise, Zahid et al. (2020), explain that remote and underserved areas in Pakistan that encounter hurdles in developing access to formal career counseling services because of logistical and infrastructural issues. But these factors not only isolate communities; they also make it prohibitively challenging to gather reliable data on students' educational aspirations and career outcomes. Therefore, career guidance efforts in these regions continue to be poorly informed, using fragmented or outdated information. However, because these areas have been difficult to access, they have remained out of sight in national education and development policies, resulting in a critical lack of understanding of local peculiarities to their needs.

These issues have been compounded by decades of political instability and conflict. Long wars and military operations have devastated education systems, uprooted communities, and destroyed the foundational basis for socio-economic development. As a result, the NMTDs have had no more than a minimal integration into national career guidance initiatives. Zahid et al. (2020) study also highlights that Pakistan's efforts in career counseling remain just in their infancy, especially in the rural and disproportioned areas of Pakistan where geographical limitations, as well as institutional frameworks, hamper the urge. The NMTDs have a limited opportunity to generate income. In particular, many of the families live below the poverty line, through subsistence farming or informal labor market. There are few opportunities for vocational training or employment beyond these low-paying and unstable jobs for youth in these areas. According to the World Bank (2021), the educational curricula of Pakistan need to be aligned with labor market demands to enhance the employability of Pakistanis in the labor market. However, the NMTDs do not possess the institutional capacity to carry out such reforms.

In addition, cultural norms and traditional gender roles continue to limit career choices for young women (Butt, et al 2024). These socio-economic cultural barriers complicated the student's situation and forced them to abandon their aspiration in exchange for survival practices.

Systemic inequalities in terms of access and representation are something that calls for culturally sensitive, and inclusive career counseling models, as articulated by the British Council (2020) and UNESCO (2020). As such, this addresses the intersection of these systems, geographic, and socioeconomic challenges. These global examples range from the Bridge to Employment program (Detgen et al., 2021), to career readiness frameworks (Dodd et al., 2022) but require adaptation to the context of the NMTDs. The neglect of robust career counseling in these regions and the failure to utilize the potential of thousands of students is not an oversight.

This study compares two different regions, the two focus regions with contrasting levels of educational accessibility and infrastructure. District Khyber, close to the provincial capital Peshawar, enjoys relatively better access to urban centers and resources, compared to remote South Waziristan, considered one of the most remote and underdeveloped areas across the country. The research can analyze how socioeconomic factors and geographic proximity impact career aspirations and educational attainment. This research aims to offer a voice to students' parents' and educators' lived experiences in the NMTDs. To uncover obstacles they face, while at the same time highlighting their potential and aspirations. Based on localized insights, and using global practices, this study proposes actionable recommendations for enhancing career guidance services in these geographies.

In addition, this study utilizes the discourse of education and employment opportunities in marginalized communities. Career counseling can be effective in breaking students free from the poverty cycle, reducing youth unemployment, and creating economic resilience. The International Labor Organization (2020) and PIDE (2021) also argue that Pakistan youth's economic future would substantially improve by integrating career guidance with entrepreneurial training and skills development.

This study focuses on the development of a roadmap to create a mechanism to empower students of the NMTDs by addressing the geographic, economic, and systemic gaps in career guidance services. It addresses challenges into opportunities, using evidence-based solutions and culturally relevant models so that no student, irrespective of their geography and circumstances, is denied the power to realize their potential. The existing literature reveals critical gaps, and the absence of context-specific, and culturally adaptive career guidance models that address these intersections.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Career Guidance in Pakistan: A Persistent Gap

The issue of limited career counseling left unaddressed in Pakistan, especially among the Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the lack of structured career guidance. Research has indicated that career counseling services are very limited reflected in the failure to take up other career paths other than the noble ones (medicine and engineering). However, the trend continues even when there are fewer prospects in these fields, as only 13 percent of students can qualify for medical school and there has been a massive drop of 76 percent in the number of engineering applicants since 2017 (Khyber Medical University, 2024).

The recognition of the problem is in the existence of national policies such as the National Education Policy (2017), National Youth Policy (2018), Prime Minister Kamyaba Jawan program (2019), and the National Skills Strategy (2009). Still, they don't work; implementation gaps prevent it. The lack of institutional capacity to address these gaps is also acknowledged by the World Bank (2021), which has raised alarm at the real challenges of providing these types of guidance. (2020) argues that career guidance remains underprioritized within educational reforms. Butt & Park (2024) suggests that cultural norms, especially restrictive gender roles prevent women from getting a career.

2.2 Challenges in Remote Areas

In remote areas, geographical, socio-economic, and, cultural barriers further aggravate the problem of effective career guidance. A study on career guidance and counseling in developing countries suggests due to rugged terrain and inadequate infrastructure, physical isolation bars access of people to counseling services (Keshf & Khanum, 2021). Apart from these logistical difficulties, poverty also hugely limits career opportunities further reducing many to subsistence activities or informal labor markets (World Bank, 2021).

The cultural factors too could be blamed. The main barriers to women's educational and professional choices enforced by the traditional norms of gender lead them to access lesser diverse career paths (Butt & Park, 2024). Moreover, political instability and protracted conflict have disrupted education systems and done so without career guidance initiatives to fill in the gaps (Zahid et al. 2020). These barriers underscore the importance of the systemic reforms that would provide redress to the particular problems of these communities.

2.3 Interventions and Practices in Pakistan.

However, there are some initiatives that the formal career guidance service in Pakistan might improve under these challenges. Mentorship programs in Azad Jammu and Kashmir have substantially influenced youth career aspirations for example. According to Summera (2022), such programs improve educational and leadership aspirations and make them closer associated with the local labor market needs.

Entrepreneurial training provides a route to include economic resilience. Targeting entrepreneurial education may reduce unemployment, and promote self-employment – The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021) Furthermore, career guidance has to be recorded in education. According to the British Council (2020), for instance, it is important that symptoms of career confusion are directed toward referred counseling services and incorporated into curricula to offer a standard career development framework based on best practices.

2.4 Global Practices.

Pakistan's labor market challenges in career guidance could benefit from more insights with reference to global best practices. Disadvantaged students have been helpfully supported by programs such as the Bridget to Employment Initiative (BTE) (Detgen et al., 2021) by raising awareness of career opportunities and preparing them for higher education and professional environments. Stipanovic (2017) further shows that career pathways models, with counselors on call, encourage students' self-efficacy and academic motivation as well.

Another important area of development is entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurship plays a part in decreasing initial unemployment among youth and promoting innovation as mentioned by the International Labor Organization (2020) as well as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2021). According to Okolie et al. (2020), career counseling should be integrated into vocational education to the bridge competence and demands of the labor market.

We need culturally adaptive approaches for implementation to be successful. In China and Hong Kong, studies emphasize the need for culturally sensitive, long-term career interventions. According to Gu et al. (2020) and Cheung (2014), to help students improve their career decision paths, those programs must factor in societal values and influences.

Adapting these models of global practices to the socio-cultural context of Pakistan would create a complete career guide for the students of Pakistan and help them to circumvent systemic barriers and be able to choose the desired career pathways that they want to tread upon.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection to provide a holistic picture of career guidance practices and problems in the Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This approach is justified due to its capacity to reflect quantitative trends, as well as the intricate experiences lived through by students, parents, and educators. To demonstrate the discrepancy and contextual factors that will influence career guidance, the study contrasts District Khyber, where access to resources is relatively better, and South Waziristan, a distant and underdeveloped area.

The research therefore incorporates ‘both objective and subjective data gathering instruments’ to achieve its objectives. This design helps get an all-around understanding of the pros and cons of career literacies and counseling in the newly merged tribal districts (NMTDs).

3.1 Geographical Focus

The study focuses on two districts within the NMTDs to capture a balance between accessibility and remoteness:

District Khyber (Near): Neighbouring Peshawar, this district might be an easier area to reach for career guidance programs because of closer connections and reachability.

South Waziristan (Remote): As a less developed region with limited endowments, this district is valuable in showing the learning conditions evident among students in remote areas.

3.2 Participants:

There will be students, parents, principals/ headmasters, and government and non-government organizations.

Students:

Target group: High school students -both public and private school students in grades 9,10, 11, and 12.

Sample Size: The total student population is 60 students with 30 students from each district.

Sampling technique: To obtain a gender and school type (public/private) distribution sample, stratified random sampling was employed.

Selection criteria: In the selection process, factors such as size, location, and easily accessible schools were selected. Selected schools were in Urban & Rural schools in District Khyber and South Waziristan.

Parents:

Sample size: 10 parents (5 from each district); one family from each sub-district of the selected areas.

Sampling technique: Specifically, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to sample families selected for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Every attempt was made to select the parents with a cross-section of education as socio-economic status.

Headmasters:

Sample size: 10 headmasters of which 5 were from the South Waziristan district and 5 from the Khyber district.

Selection criteria: School headmasters were selected randomly from each sub-district.

Government Representatives:

Target group: Representative of the Education Department (RED) that has connections with creating curricula or counseling services for student career education.

Sample size: Two members of the RED (One from Khyber and One from South Waziristan).

Selection criteria: From their role and the presence of availability from the local district education offices.

NGO Representatives:

Target group: It includes NGOs that are focused on education and youth in the region.

Sample size: 2 (1 from each district) representatives.

NGOs: Some of such organizations include, WAWA and CARAVAN.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Surveys:

Target groups: The targeted audiences were Students.

Instrument: Self-administered, semi-structured questionnaires designed to establish respondents' knowledge of the available careers, their impression of the present career guidance services, and the obstacles to efficient career counseling.

Mode: Both direct (for South Waziristan) and virtual (where possible like District Khyber).

3.4 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs).

Target group: Parents, NGO Representatives, and Government Representatives (RED)

Structure: Semi-structured discussion guides that were centered on parental impressions on career guidance, relevance, and its impact on the student's career paths.

Logistics: Focus group discussions take place in community venues at each sub-district level.

3.5 Secondary Data Review:

Review of the current literature on career counseling policies, programs, and reports in the region. This includes both government and other forms of official documents as well as records from non-governmental organizations.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Analysis: Surveys' responses: mean, frequency, percentage distribution of results. Career awareness is examined in terms of educational effectiveness using other more complex analytical techniques such as multiple regression analysis.

Tools: Computer software like SPSS, Spreadsheet, and Google Surveys.

Qualitative Data:

Analysis: Thematic analysis, Enduring issues, ideas, concerns, and practices commonplace to career guidance from FGDs and open-source survey questions for theming down.

Tools: Manual coding is used for generating themes and sub-themes for thematic analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations:

Informed Consent: Participants receive a description of the forthcoming research and offer written or spoken permission.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: To ensure the participants' anonymity as per their instructions, the responses collected were kept anonymous.

Cultural Sensitivity: The cultural beliefs of parents followed especially when conducting FGDs.

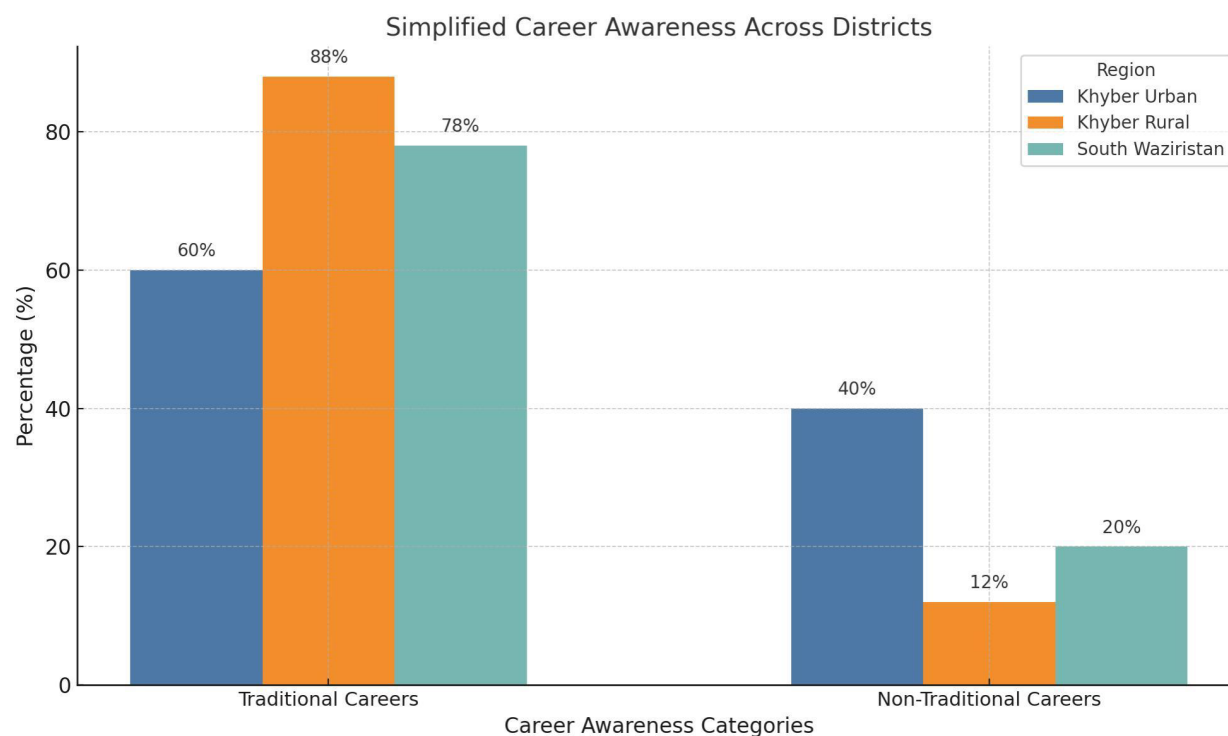
Language Barriers: Self-administered questionnaires, discussion forums, and FGDs were conducted in the Pashto language with appropriate cultural and contextual translation in mind.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that career counseling practices and awareness differ significantly in District Khyber and South Waziristan. Specifically, by analyzing quantitative survey data and combining them with the outputs of FGDs, the study reveals a system-level problem with access to, awareness of, and the availability of resources for students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

4.1 Present Status of Career Guidance

Within Khyber, 52% of the survey respondents reported being exposed to career guidance albeit largely in the urban and semi-urban catchment of Peshawar. Sometimes, NGOs offer workshops, but as the practice shows, they are not regular and fail to become long-run effective. They demonstrate a relatively low level of awareness about careers apart from medicine and engineering. However, 40% of the students in urban areas of Khyber knew fields such as IT and commerce as different areas of study from 12% of students in rural schools (Table 1).

Table-1

The graph (Table 1) compels attention to dramatic differences in career awareness between districts and an emphasis placed on traditional occupations like medicine or engineering. In the urban part of Khyber, 60% of the students claimed to know about conventional careers, While in the rural part of Khyber, 88% claimed to know about conventional careers This clearly shows that society favors conventional career paths. On the other hand, awareness of other career opportunities like information technology, commerce, etc., is comparatively low; Only 40 percent of urban students and 12 percent of rural students could nail it. The situation in South Waziristan still corroborates this trend where 78% of students know about traditional careers while 20% of students are aware of non-traditional careers. Such research confirms that these audiences never get exposed to any careers, most especially in rural or underdeveloped areas.

In South Waziristan, the students mentioned that they are not aware of any non-conventional occupations which again confirms the culture of the society revolved much around those specific occupations only. *“We make our children opt for medical because it is safe and noble a profession,”* said a student’s parent (Waziristan).

A parent remarked (Khybar): *“While my son has attended a session in Peshawar through a private initiative, schools in our area don’t have proper counseling services.”*

Teachers (Waziristan), too, admitted gaps in their knowledge: *“We don’t have the training or materials to explain broader career opportunities; we rely on our limited understanding.”*

South Waziristan demonstrates almost no career counseling structures. Only 18% of students surveyed reported any exposure to career counseling services, primarily through NGO interventions or family advice.

A headmaster stated (Waziristan): *“We don’t even have enough teachers to teach basic subjects properly, let alone counselors for guiding careers.”* Families heavily influence career choices, with students directed toward traditional professions such as medicine or engineering.

4.2 Barriers to Career Counseling

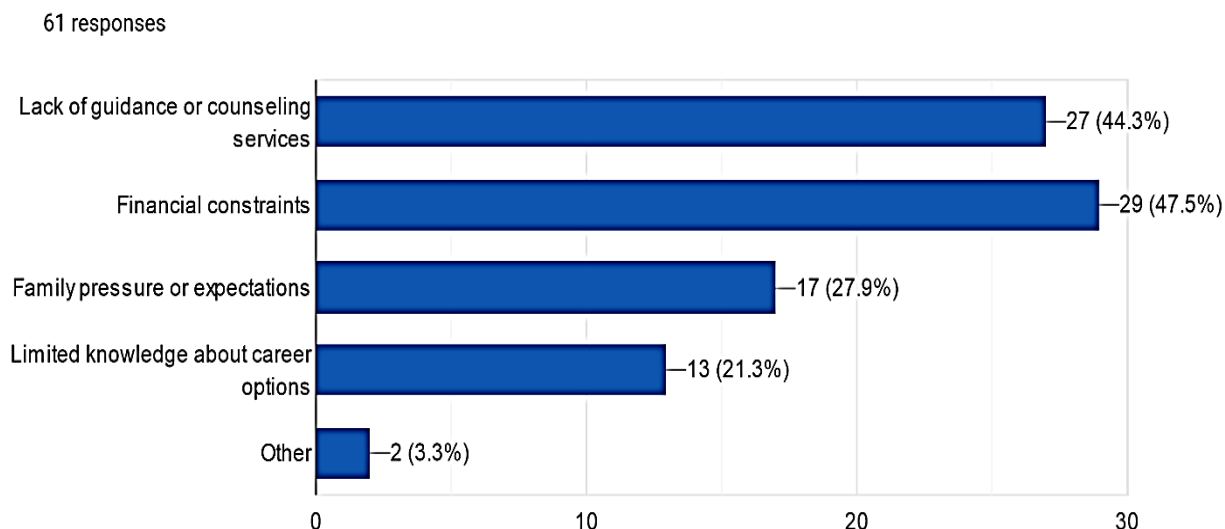
Lesser preventions cited were the absence of professional Counselors in schools (44.3%), finance (47.5%), families’ pressure and expectations (27.8%), and few other careers (21). One NGO worker highlighted (Khybar): *“!Khyber is near Peshawar but the rural areas still stay disconnected with alternate career discourses.”*

Lack of infrastructure/facilities was also common; 89% of the students also reported security issues; geographical isolation was also seen as a key factor. 73% of the students stated that family was unable to pay fees as a big problem.

A parent lamented (Waziristan): *“While the majority of government schools continue to stay shut for years; educational rights don’t even begin with career counseling.”*

Some of the changes were observed about gender – girls, for example, were almost not included in such discussions.

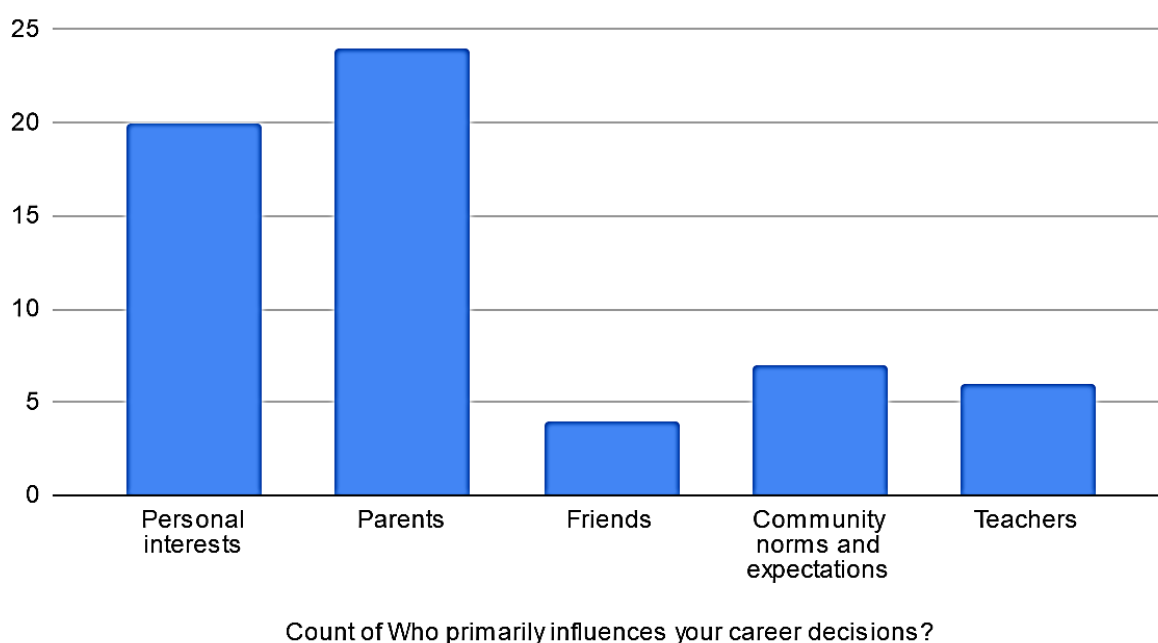
Table-2



4.3 Role of Stakeholders

In both districts it is shown that parents play a significant part in influencing career choices directly and in total, parents influenced 24 students out of 60 to take traditional professions without a broader perception of available opportunities. At that point, 20 students express personal interest in their careers all in the medical field. Since faculties receive little training, they emphasize academic quotas rather than career guidance.

Table-3



A teacher remarked (Khyber): *“Yet, when we would like to make a difference for students, a lack of educational staff training, and resources restricts us”*.

In South Waziristan, stakeholders rarely focus on career-related issues. *“Here community leaders look at education as something secondary, not to mention career guidance,”* said a headmaster (Waziristan).

4.4 Government and NGOs

NGOs play a more active role in Khyber but lack sufficient localized approaches in South Waziristan.

Participants on the government side acknowledged (Waziristan): *“Some challenges of logistics and lack of continuous, consistent career guidance interventions in hard-to-reach regions.”*

An NGO worker stressed (Waziristan): *“Projects do not work if they are developed for the urban settings; we need something specific to South Waziristan.”*

4.5 Issues Affecting Girls

Moreover, there were no girl (student) participants from South Waziristan due to cultural constraints while in Khyber only 28% (6 out of 61) of the girls interviewed reported culture and infrastructure as constraints and the scenario was much worse in SWW. Among them, 82% (54 out of 61) have only got education from madrasas where they do not get appropriate ideas about careers, which provide limited career-related insights.

Table-4

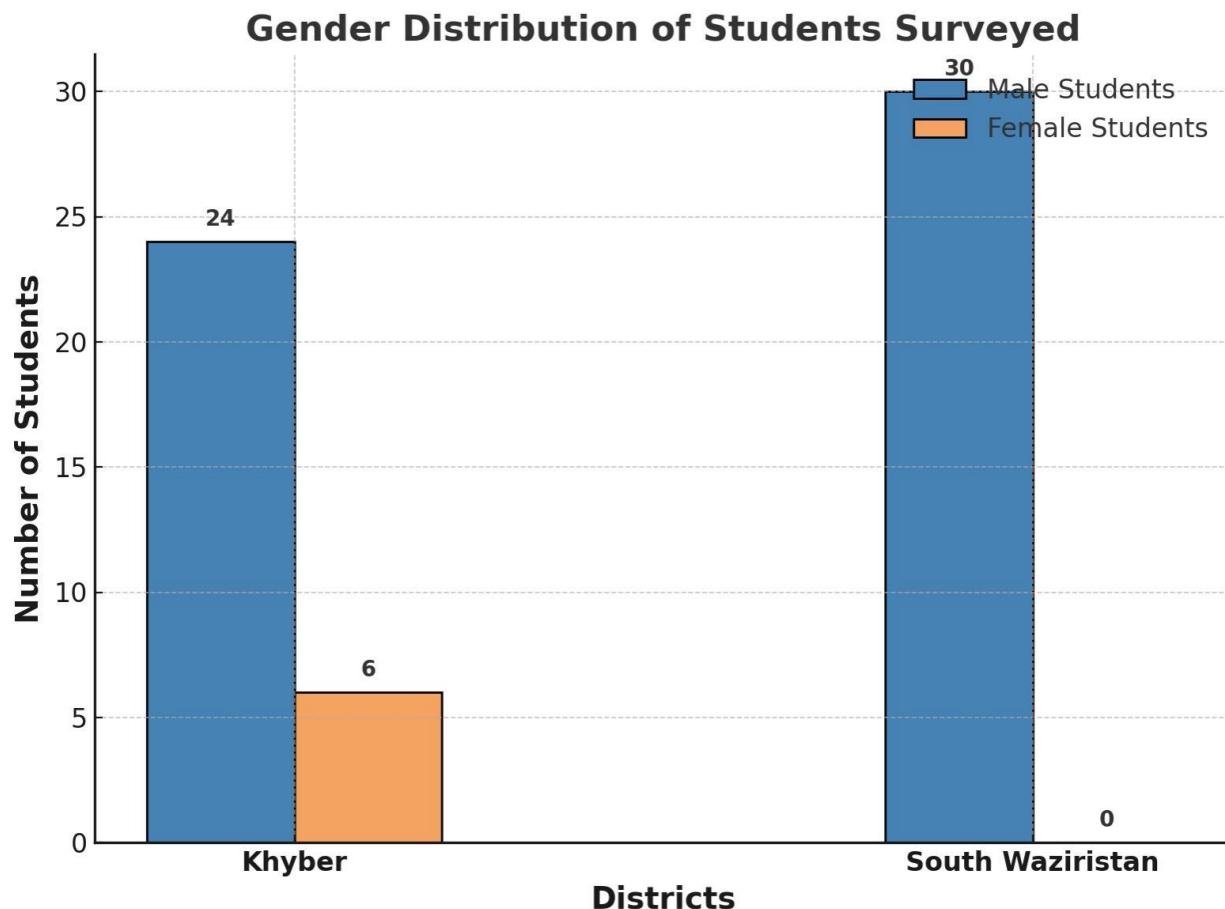


Table 4 highlights potential cultural or systemic barriers limiting female participation, particularly in South Waziristan. A parent explained (Waziristan): *“Education especially religious education remains the only education most girls can receive because schools remain out of reach for them.”* The people living in remote areas therefore suffer higher degrees of marginalization since they are usually characterized by poor infrastructure, economic challenges, and geographical location. This denies them basic entry to other educational and career counseling reforms that form the foundation of most improvements.

4.6 Policy recommendations developed from the input of the participants.

The findings from the FGDs acknowledge the need to expand the service delivery of career guidance to unserved areas. Recommendations included:

Policy Integration: Adoption and integration of career counseling into the national curriculum. Proposed by 65 % of the respondents and affirmed by the teachers during Focus Group Discussions.

Localized Initiatives: Developing communication materials that reflect culturally appropriate messages in local languages, that as Pashto. *“While workshops in Pashto will be more effective to reach out to the rural population, it will also be easier to convince the stakeholders”* stated an NGO representative (Khybar).

Government-NGO Partnerships: Indications of conducting frequent training programs for teachers in career counseling.

Access Incentives: For students in needy categories, special consideration for scholarship and financial assistance in their various fields of endeavor.

Innovative Models

Participants suggested several innovative approaches: Mobile Counseling Units: Van used for offering guidance sessions to people in remote setting. Discussed during FGDs and considered highly feasible by most participants in the split feasibility assessment.

Digital Platforms: Government support for the development of inexpensive applications and websites available only in the Pashto language containing career information.

Media Campaigns: Through radio appearing and increasing social media coverage to make the population aware.

An NGO representative emphasized (Waziristan): *“Specifically, it can be useful in launching radio campaigns in the Pashto language to encourage people in rural districts to seek careers other than security forces.”*

5. Conclusion

The data reflect major disparities in career counseling between the regions, with better access in Khyber in most of the urban areas and nearly nonexistent in South Waziristan. There are still gaps that must be closed for stakeholders, government, and other similar bodies to address the issues through collaboration and the use of cultural sensitivity and innovativeness. The strategies for fundamental educational changes need to be given much higher attention to make career counseling comprehensible and viable in the identified districts.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the gaps in career guidance services in the Newly Merged Tribal Districts (NMTDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, overseen by the government involving local leaders and educators. This proposes a roadmap of short-term (1-2 years) and long-term (3-5 years) strategies to implement career guidance reforms in the NMTDs, focusing on institutional frameworks, infrastructure, gender inclusion, and partnerships to empower youth and foster equitable development:

1. A Review of the Efforts to Incorporate Career Counseling in School Systems and Policy implementation

Integrate career information and development sessions as components of curricula for secondary schools so that students will have permanent reminders of the available streams. Non-traditional business careers which include information technology and business should be encouraged by schools since they discovered that students in the urban area of District Khyber have an interest in the two fields. Create culturally appropriate media for the functioning zones because there might be appearances of cultural bias that would lead to social pressure as suggested by Zahid et al. (2020).

2. Teacher and Counselor Training

Most importantly, enhance trainer and counselor training to show the trainer's ability to tutor the group effectively. Prospects at the moment many teachers rely on advising students to consider stable jobs like medicine and engineering since they do know of other possibilities. The areas that need to be included are training modules covering socio-economic and cultural issues that affect students especially those from remote areas such as South Waziristan.

3. Community Engagement

It becomes easier for parents and local leaders to accept the programs that will be taken to enhance career counseling. Closely, it was revealed that parents bear the responsibility for shaping career destinations for 42% of students studied while still having little idea of the range of modern careers available. Organize some workshops to fight bullying that restrict girls to limited careers since it is customary for girls in South Waziristan to be limited in their careers due to societal restrictions.

4. Leveraging Technology

Those with the possibility include mobile applications for career guidance, virtual career fairs, and social media advocacy, particularly in areas where physical access to services is a challenge. Local language radio and television channels should be used to broadcast career-related content to inform marginalized groups, as suggested by Keshf and Khanum (2021).

5. Initiation to School-Based Career Guidance Teams

Schools should have special coordinating groups that will arrange the workshops, invite experts, and offer mentorship. The absence of such structured programs in South Waziristan is a clear indication that the need for such programs cannot be overemphasized. Discuss and organize professional forums and practice fields for establishing relationships between students and various types of occupations.

6. Special Emphasis on Girls Education

Create programs for female mentees and scholarships that will give girls a chance to consider fields they have rarely seen before. FGDs showed how cultural beliefs will always exclude girls from career-related talks. Include NGOs to set up gender-sensitive career counseling services, as the NGOs have attempted this in Khyber, but only a few of them have tried it and they are not very effective.

7. Existing Policies Implementation and Allocating Resources

Demand the provincial Departments of Education and other relevant authorities and agencies to ensure that provisions of education for career purposes are included in provincial legislation and education policies for adequate funding for rural schools. According to Zahid et al. (2020), institutional support is relevant for career guidance to support the career development of the labor market. Engage both internationally and locally based NGOs and the private sector, to work with the identified NMTDs to design interventions that fit their specific context.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Conduct annual and periodic checks of the effectiveness of career guidance programs and improve the approaches used. It is possible to employ the instruments mentioned by Dodd et al. (2022) to assess the increase in career readiness. It should be possible to solicit feedback from students, parents, and educators to ensure that those programs posed in the district are still relevant and adequately species to tackle various difficulties in that region.

9. Entrepreneurship and Vocational Training.

Invest in new programs of entrepreneurship and vocational training to offer enrollments in non-traditional career choices. According to the survey, only 12% of students were ready to think about nontraditional occupations implying the necessity of changing the situation. Vocational training should be developed in cooperation with organizations like the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) thus ensuring that the vocational trades meet the demands of the market.

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Appendix A: Survey

This survey aims to explore students' awareness, experiences, and challenges regarding career counseling.
Section 1: Demographics
Gender
Male, Female, Prefer not to say, Other:
Which district do you currently live in?
South Waziristan, Khyber
What is your current grade?
Grade 9, Grade 10, Grade 11, Grade 12
Section 2: Career Awareness
Are you aware of career options beyond traditional fields such as medicine and engineering?
Yes, No, Maybe

How do you learn about career options?
Teachers, Family and relatives, Friends, Internet/Social Media, Career counselors, Other
On a scale of 1 to 5, how well-informed do you feel about available career opportunities?
(Not informed at all)
1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Section 3: Career Counseling Experiences
Has your school provided any career counseling or guidance sessions?
Yes, No, Maybe
If yes, how effective were these sessions in helping you understand your career options?
Very effective, Somewhat effective, Not effective, NA
Would you be interested in regular career counseling services at your school?
Yes, No, Maybe
Which type of career guidance do you consider most valuable? (Select up to two.)
Information about labor market trends, Skill and personality assessments, Mentorship from professionals in different fields, Guidance on educational pathways, and Other
Section 4: Factors Influencing Career Decisions
Who primarily influences your career decisions?
Parents, Teachers, Friends, Community norms and expectations, Personal interests, and others:
Do cultural or societal norms impact your * choice of career?
Yes, No, Maybe
Have you considered non-traditional career paths, such as vocational training or entrepreneurship?
Yes, No, Maybe
Have you considered non-traditional career paths, such as vocational training or entrepreneurship?
Yes, No, Maybe
Section 5: Future Aspirations

What career path are you most interested in pursuing?
Medicine, Engineering, Business/Commerce, Arts and Humanities, Information Technology, Vocational Training/Entrepreneurship, Other
Do you feel confident about achieving your career goals?
Yes, No, Maybe
Section 6: Challenges and Suggestions
What challenges do you face when exploring or deciding on a career? (Select all that apply.)
Lack of guidance or counseling services, Financial constraints, Family pressure or expectations, Limited knowledge about career options, Other
Please provide any suggestions for improving career guidance services in your school or community

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide: Career Counseling and a Policy Recommendation
Introduction
To gather insights from parents, teachers, government stakeholders, and NGO representatives about challenges with current practices and potential improvements in career counseling services available to students in grades 9 through 12. Policy recommendations will be made to increase career guidance in underserved areas based on the discussion.
Briefly explain the purpose of the discussion: aims to explore perceptions and recommend resources that will improve career counseling services.
In particular, assure participants there will be confidentiality and their inputs will be used only for academic purposes.
Section 1: Current Landscape of Career Counseling
1. What are the career counseling in your region?
2. What are the career options for students who do not know beyond the traditional frontiers of

medicine and engineering?
Section 2: Role of Stakeholders
3. How have parents, teachers, and communities influenced students' careers?
4. What is the role of government and NGO's in career guidance?
Section 3: Challenges and Barriers
5. What are some of the biggest obstacles facing students from getting quality career guidance (ie, absence of counselors, traits of the culture, lack of proximity)?
6. Do girls have specific challenges pursuing diverse career paths?
Section 4: Improvement Recommendations
7. If we could make more successful policy changes that would improve access to career guidance in underserved areas, what would we do differently?
8. What would a sustainable, culturally relevant partnership among schools, governments, and NGOs look like to co-produce career counseling programs?
Section 5: Future Strategies
9. What sorts of innovative models or approaches would make helping careers better? (for example, mentorship programs, digital platforms, etc.)
10. What can be done with such models to make them tailored to the needs of rural or underserved communities?
Conclusion
Summarize the main points and go with the participants for the final input.