

**Perceptions of Career Literacy and Its Role in Career
Decision-Making among University of Sargodha Undergraduates**

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Chapter I

Introduction

Making a career decision is a crucial element of university life, especially for those pursuing subjects like the social sciences where future routes may be less clear than in practical professions. Students must be knowledgeable and self-assured in order to make wise job options, which is why career literacy—which is described as the information, abilities, and tools required to make informed professional decisions—becomes crucial. However, in Pakistan, structured career counseling and guidance services are limited, making it difficult for students to make well-informed career choices (Yousafzai & Yousaf, 2023). Many students rely on informal sources such as family, peers, and social media, which may not always provide accurate or comprehensive career information (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). As a result, students often face misalignment between their academic pursuits and career aspirations, leading to potential job dissatisfaction and underemployment (Iqbal & Malik, 2016). Given these challenges, it is essential to investigate students' perceptions of career literacy at the University of Sargodha. Understanding these perceptions can inform the development of structured career literacy programs, ensuring students can access reliable career-related knowledge and resources. This study aims to bridge the existing gap in literature by providing empirical evidence on how career literacy influences students' career decision-making processes in Pakistan.

According to Jackson and Tomlinson (2020), career literacy is a collection of competencies that are essential for improving employability and confidence in career-related decision-making. It includes a variety of competencies, including knowledge of career options, job search skills, awareness of job market trends, and comprehension of competitive exams. By improving their career literacy, students can better connect their education and goals with the needs of the labor market and negotiate the intricacies of today's work landscape (Hooley & Dodd, 2018).

To assist with career counseling and growth in higher education, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has launched a number of programs, including the Career Counseling and Placement Centers (CCPCs). But in spite of these initiatives, career literacy is still applied unevenly in different institutions, particularly in the social sciences where there may be no

formal assistance (Government of Pakistan, 2021). In order to improve youth employability and economic integration, policies like the National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) also place a strong emphasis on career literacy and skill-building initiatives. However, research indicates that the effects of these policies vary greatly, frequently based on institutional priorities and available resources (Ali & Saunders, 2018).

For Pakistani social science learners, who encounter particular difficulties in finding employment that fits their degrees and interests, career literacy is extremely important. Research shows that many undergraduates are not exposed to the practical requirements of the job market, nor are they aware of competitive exams such as the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) and the Public Service Commission (PPSC), which could increase their employment opportunities (Gore et al., 2017). To ensure that students are not only aware of but also equipped to meet the demands of their chosen careers, closing this gap is essential to facilitating a smooth transition from school to the workplace.

This study is to investigate the views of career literacy and its impact on professional decision-making among social sciences undergraduates at the University of Sargodha, given the gaps in career literacy programs already in place and an absence of empirical research in Pakistan. This study will shed light on how well students comprehend career paths and how well university programs and existing policies facilitate their entry into the workforce. The study will offer useful suggestions for legislators, educators, and students to improve employability and job preparedness by outlining the advantages of career literacy programs in Pakistani universities.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Many undergraduates in Pakistan struggle to make educated career selections due to a lack of comprehensive career literacy, which includes awareness of job opportunities, market demands, and career navigation abilities (Hooley & Dodd, 2018). Although the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has implemented efforts such as Career Counselling and Placement Centers (CCPCs), these resources are frequently not available, causing hundreds of learners poorly prepared for the labor market (Government of Pakistan, 2021). Without enough access to job search skills, competitive tests, or career trajectories, students frequently confront restricted employability and career readiness, particularly in the social sciences, which lack the

structured career support present in other fields (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Although some Pakistani universities, such as LUMS, NUST, and IBA, have established career counseling centers, many public universities, including the University of Sargodha, lack comprehensive career literacy programs. Studies have indicated that over 60% of Pakistani students feel uncertain about their career choices due to insufficient career guidance (Ahmed, 2023). Additionally, surveys conducted by Eduvision Pakistan have revealed that a majority of students rely on parental or peer advice rather than professional career counseling services (Eduvision, 2022). Despite the increasing demand for career readiness, there is a gap in the literature regarding how career literacy directly impacts students' career decision-making processes in Pakistan. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring students' perceptions of career literacy and its influence on their career choice. By examining these factors, this research will contribute to understanding how career literacy can be integrated into higher education policies to support students in making more informed and strategic career decisions.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1. To assess the level of career literacy among social sciences undergraduates at the University of Sargodha.
2. To investigate how career literacy influences students' decision-making processes regarding their career choices.
3. To identify gaps in career-related knowledge that hinder students' ability to make informed career decisions.
4. To explore opportunities for integrating career literacy in undergraduate policy, emphasizing early career awareness.

1.3 Research Questions

Objectives of the study were further broken down into research questions as action steps to drive research. Research questions were stated as follows:

1. How do social sciences undergraduates at the University of Sargodha perceive their level of career literacy?
2. In what ways does career literacy influence the career decision-making processes of these undergraduates?

3. What gaps in career-related knowledge do faculty members and students perceive as barriers to making informed career decisions?
4. How can career literacy policies be integrated into the educational system to promote early career awareness among students?

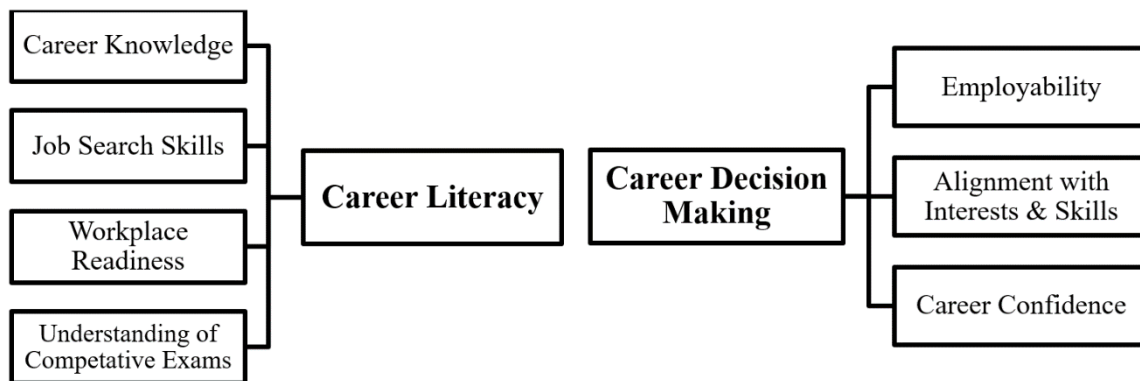
1.4 Significance of the study

This study is noteworthy because it tackles a topic that is sometimes disregarded in established career counseling programs: the urgent need for improved career literacy among Pakistani undergraduates. This study intends to shed light on the unique difficulties these students encounter in navigating career possibilities and comprehending job market expectations by investigating their opinions of professional competence and finding knowledge gaps. The findings of this research can help policymakers create specialized career guidance programs appropriate to the particular requirements of social science students, thereby increasing their employability. The results can also be used as a framework for similar studies in other developing regions with comparable career guidance challenges, and they may help guide policy changes, such as increasing the reach and efficacy of Career Counseling and Placement Centers (CCPCs) within social sciences departments. In Pakistan this study will give policymakers evidence-based insights on the value of career literacy in making confident professional decisions and encouraging more alignment between education and market needs.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework provides an illustration of the ways in which career literacy can affect the students studying social science while making career decisions. Career literacy is influenced by job search techniques, workplace preparedness, career knowledge, and an awareness of competitive tests, all of which help students make well-informed professional decisions. Incorporating career literacy into educational programs will significantly enhance students' self-efficacy in making career decisions. For instance, Reddan (2015) found that integrating career related knowledge and work-integrated learning activities in undergraduate courses improved students' confidence in their career decision-making abilities. Enhancing these aspects will help students to choose a career. It will also enhance confidence in decisions about careers, better career readiness, and career choices that align with personal interests and

skills among students. This paradigm promotes investigating how career literacy influences students' long-term professional achievement and workforce preparedness.



This conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between *Career Literacy* and *Career Decision Making* among students.

1. **Career Literacy** includes four main components:

- **Career Knowledge:** Awareness of potential career paths and opportunities to pursue them.
- **Job Search Skills:** Abilities related to search any particular job according to students abilities and interests such as, resume building, interviewing, and networking.
- **Workplace Readiness:** it means early awareness about work environment, including soft skills and adaptability at work place.
- **Competitive Exams:** it includes awareness of competitive exams and qualifications necessary for certain career paths among students.

2. **Career Decision Making** leads to outcomes in three areas:

- **Employability:** it involves readiness and ability to gain employment among students.
- **Alignment with Interests & Skills:** Choosing careers that match personal strengths and interests of undergraduates.
- **Career Confidence:** Assurance and clarity in making informed career choices in undergraduates.

The framework suggests that increasing career literacy by implementing the mentioned elements improves career decision-making, which in turn has a beneficial impact on employability, professional confidence, and alignment with hobbies and interests.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

Due to the time and financial constraints followings were delimitations of the study:

1. Study was delimited to three departments (Institute of education, Department of Social Work, and Department of psychology) of social sciences.
2. Study was delimited to University of Sargodha (UOS).

Justification for Department Selection:

As we researcher belongs to Institute of Education, it was the motivation behind our topic that why plenty of seniors, fellows, and juniors are still unemployed despite having their gradation. We have selected two other departments i.e., Social Work and Psychology to enrich the study findings. We could have selected all social sciences faculty but due to time and financial constraints study was limited to these three departments.

Potential Limitations Due to Sampling Constraints:

- **Restricted Generalizability:** Since the study focuses solely on the University of Sargodha, the findings may not fully represent students from other public and private universities that may have different career support structures, faculty mentorship, or job placement opportunities.
- **Limited Departmental Scope:** The selection of only three departments excludes perspectives from other social science fields where career pathways and challenges might differ significantly.
- **Small Sample Size:** May not fully capture the diversity of students' career literacy experiences.
- **Self-Selection Bias:** Participants who choose to take part in the study may already be more career-conscious or motivated, skewing results

- **Lack of Longitudinal Data:** The study captures students' career literacy perceptions at a single point in time, Lacks insights into how career decision-making evolves over time.

1.7 Operational definitions

1.7.1 Career Literacy

Career literacy refers to the necessary knowledge, skills, and perspective to make relevant decisions according to needs of labor market. Job hunt abilities, workplace readiness, and proficiency in competitive tests are the crucial skills of career awareness.

1.7.2 Career Decision making:

Career decision-making (CDM) enables undergraduates to assess and select appropriate career paths according to their interests, skills, and values. career decision-making (CDM) is basically influenced by career awareness, self-assurance, market awareness, and goal alignment with both personal and professional objectives among students.

For example, a psychology student deciding between clinical practice, counseling, or research may consider factors such as personal interest in mental health services, job market demand for psychologists, required qualifications, and long-term growth opportunities. Similarly, a social work student may evaluate career options in NGOs, government agencies, or corporate social responsibility roles based on salary expectations, job availability, and passion for community service.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The idea of career literacy has received increased attention in recent years. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, and resources required for making informed professional decisions for undergraduates. With the changing market trends and the increased complexity of career options, students' ability to select appropriate career paths is becoming increasingly important.

Hooley et al. (2018) define career literacy as the ability to understand and efficiently navigate professional possibilities. Their findings emphasize the necessity of students gaining a grasp of various career routes, skills, and workplace requirements before they complete their education. Hooley et al. argue that students who participate in career literacy programs have higher levels of career knowledge, which improves their career decision-making process.

Similarly, Reardon, Lenz, and Sampson (2019) investigate the role of career assistance in helping students comprehend labor market demands and job opportunities. Their findings imply that students who have access to extensive career guidance are better able to identify viable career choices. The research highlighted a vacuum in understanding how social sciences students in economically disadvantaged nations, such as Pakistan, get such guidance.

The rapid evolution of the global job market has placed a higher focus on students' knowledge of future and present job market trends. Jackson and Tomlinson (2020) emphasize that students' employability is inextricably linked to their capacity to keep aware of in-demand skills and opportunities in their chosen area. Their research found that many undergraduates are unaware of developing trends, which has a major effect on their employability.

Competitive tests are crucial to improve employment in specific career options according to needs and interests among students. According to Gore et al. "students who are aware of appropriate awareness of competitive examinations are a selling point when looking for work, especially in industries where these abilities are highly appreciated" (2017).

Bridgstock (2019) underscores the significance of fundamental soft skills including communication, cooperation, and adaptability in equipping students for the job. Bridgstock's

research reveals that many students, particularly those in the social sciences, enter the labor market with inadequately developed soft skills, impeding their transfer into professional employment. This highlights the necessity of preparing students for the profession by teaching them both interpersonal as well as technical skills.

Betz and Voyten (2019) define self-efficacy as students' confidence in their capacity to make educated career choices. According to their findings, students with better self-efficacy are more likely to indulge in proactive job research and make decisions based on their interests and talents. This emphasizes the significance of instilling career confidence in students through focused career literacy interventions.

Fellowships, job training programs, and job shadowing have all been proved to help students make better career decisions. According to Baird and Parayitam “direct experience achieved through these tasks gives students insights into their career choices, allowing them to better align their options with their abilities and interests” (2019).

Online platforms such as LinkedIn and various job portals have become essential tools in career literacy programs, enhancing career development in multiple ways. These platforms facilitate professional networking, allowing students and job seekers to connect with industry professionals, join relevant groups, and stay updated on job market trends (Hooley & Staunton, 2020). Many platforms also offer online courses, certifications, and skill-building resources, which are crucial for career advancement in the digital era (Gilworth & Townsley, 2024).

After reviewing the literature, it was found that there is limited work focusing on career literacy and its role in career decision-making among university students in Pakistan. A study by Pasha and Siddiqui (2019) explored factors influencing professional selection among Pakistani students but did not specifically focus on career literacy. Similarly, Ali and Shafiq (2019) examined students' experiences of career counseling in Pakistan, highlighting the need for more targeted research on career literacy's role in shaping career decisions. This indicates a gap in the literature regarding the direct impact of career literacy on students' career choices in Pakistan.

References:

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how career literacy influences career decision-making among undergraduates at the University of Sargodha.

2.1 Introduction to Career Literacy and Career Decision-Making

Career Literacy includes a set of skills, competencies and knowledge that are essential for students to make informed decisions regarding their career choices. Understanding of trends of labor market, self-evaluation of all the skills, habits and, interests are some key points in career literacy. Career Literacy also includes career pathways awareness, and the ability search for jobs effectively. Many researches have been done on the significance of career literacy in higher education as it provides and equips all the students with guidelines to make informed career decisions which help them to adapt with better employability and adaptability in a today's job market (Smith & Kruger, 2020). There have been various studies which have shown significant about career literacy which can positively impact students' confidence choosing their career choices which leads to better readiness for the workforce in future. This knowledge about career literacy enhances long-term career engagement and success (Johnson & Wang, 2019).

After carefully examining worldwide practices in higher education, most of the countries have integrated career guidelines into curricula which has proved to be beneficial for undergraduates from technical fields like engineering, science and technology related fields and astronomical fields worldwide. There have been various career literacy related programs that have significantly helped students particularly from developed countries to achieve goals related to their field. The programs, such as career counseling and skill-building workshops prepares students to explore various career options and set realistic career goals (Kim & Chen, 2021). The Programs of such nature allows students to understand job market trends and make active choice about careers, thus it helps them to bridge the gap between academic and real-world applications (Liu & Taylor, 2022).

In Pakistan, career literacy programs in universities vary, impacting graduates' employability (Malik & Hafeez, 2021). Institutions like Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) offer structured career services, including counseling and job placement (Khan et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2019). However, many public universities lack such support, leaving students without proper career guidance (Javed & Ali, 2022).

A study on medical students found that while 78% were aware of career counseling, only 37.4% received guidance (Shah, Farooq, & Latif, 2023). The graduate unemployment rate in Pakistan stands at 16.1%, significantly higher than the national average of 6.3%, suggesting a lack of career literacy contributes to employment struggles (Ali, 2024; Khan & Rehman, 2023). Universities with strong career services report better employment outcomes, while those without leave students relying on informal advice, often misaligned with job market needs (Hussain & Rehman, 2021; Shafiq, 2023). Standardizing career services in universities can improve employability and better prepare graduates for the evolving job market (Malik & Hafeez, 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

For examining the role of career literacy, two theories provide key insights in to the phenomena being studied: Career Development Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

2.2.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

This theory was given by Lent, Brown, and Hackett. It is recognized worldwide as a framework for career research. SCCT suggests that students' self-efficacy, expectations from his set goals outcomes are directly related to career decisions made by him. Career Literacy acts as a mediator between enhancing students' self-confidence and self-efficacy that provides them with the courage and resources to choose between different career options available to them. There have been carious studies on SCCT which show the importance of having career literacy in students' life. When they are well-equipped with the skill, they engage themselves in career exploration behaviors, and look for opportunities like job shadowing, informational

interviews that gives them guidelines and directions. This exploratory behavior positively influences their career decision-making process (Lent et al., 1994).

In addition, SCCT tells that students' outcome expectations are increased by informing them about realistic job prospects via career literacy. This helps the students to look for better job opportunities and grow their skills, knowledge and attitudes related to their job. It helps in motivating students to pursue available career opportunities. It has been shown in various researches that interventions in career literacy along with SCCT principles, such as career workshops and counseling by experts of fields (one-on-one), help students to have a clear understanding of their career paths, which boosts their potential and confidence in career decision-making (Brown & Lent, 2020).

2.2.2 Career Development Theory

Career Development Theory was given by Donald Super. It lays emphasis on the deliberate progression of career development as a continuous lifelong process just as education; through followed stages that include: exploration, establishment, growth, skills, maintenance, and disengagement. Exploration stage is typically experienced by adults and college students. In this stage career literacy plays an essential role as it enables individuals to assess their interests and skills that leads to choosing better career options available to them. This theory by Super revolves around the concept that choices made for careers are dependent on individual's evolving self-image and his personal development. Career Literacy in his theory acts as an instrument that helps the student to define their self-concept by providing structured guidance on identity formation (Super, 1957).

In Career Development Theory programs related to career literacy particularly higher education are important in guiding undergraduates in choosing the exploration stage. With the help of workshops, sessions that include one-on-one counseling, real-world engagement opportunities like job shadowing, undergraduates are able to clarify their choices on careers with their personal identities, skills and values. This alignment is important in increasing satisfaction in career and its adaptability in later stages of life, as by this student feel more skilled and confident in their selected paths when these paths resonate with their self-concept (Savickas, 2013).

2.3 Career Literacy

2.3.1 Career Knowledge

Knowledge of Career is an essential element of career literacy that includes awareness of available career paths, trends in industry, and requirements of different available jobs. Students make informed decisions related to their future careers which helps them to align their education and skills as per market demands and needs. Various studies have suggested that knowledge in career aids students to understand the qualification, skills and expertise that is need in different jobs and fields. This provides them with realistic expectations to set the goals (Anderson & Vandehey, 2019). Career education programs in universities has significant impact on effective decision making of students. As these programs in universities enhance students' career knowledge by introducing them to diverse pathways of careers. These pathways prepare them to choose between different career choices with more confidence and clarity (Smith & Taylor, 2021).

As per previous researches, students who have high levels of career knowledge have better chances to align their jobs with the skills and interests, reducing the likelihood of dissatisfaction in future (Chen & Arceo, 2020). Universities, particularly in undergraduate level integrate career literacy elements into the curriculum. This helps the students to have better decision making in their job choices. This makes them aware of all the job demands and different job opportunities available to them (Lee & Johnson, 2018).

2.3.2 Job Search Skills

job search skills abilities include online job search engines, networking, interview techniques, and resume writing are helpful for modern labor market. According to Brown & Wilson “ Students with strong job search skills are more likely to land a job after graduation because they can more effectively showcase their experiences and credentials to potential employers” (2020). Higher education programs that teach job search skills assist students in becoming proficient in creating professional documents, getting ready for interviews, and using social media platforms like LinkedIn to further their careers (Martinez & Ross, 2019).

Training in job search techniques has been demonstrated to boost students' self-esteem and lessen the stress related to the application process. Furthermore, as they gain proficiency

in utilizing digital tools and resources for employment opportunities, these skills help students become more adaptable to the changing job market (Garcia & Adams, 2022). Post-graduation student employment rates are positively impacted by institutions that include job search workshops and seminars in their career services (Williams & Scott, 2021).

2.3.3 Workplace Readiness

Workplace readiness includes a variety of abilities and dispositions, including problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and time management, that are essential for success in professional settings. This component of career literacy guarantees that students can move from classroom to professional environments with ease. Employers place a high value on workplace readiness skills, according to research, and they frequently influence hiring decisions (Thomas & Lopez, 2020). Workplace readiness programs assist students in gaining real-world skills that they can use immediately in the workplace, improving their capacity to adjust to organizational cultures and fulfill expectations (Peters & Lee, 2021).

Additionally, research shows that workplace readiness plays a major role in career advancement and job retention because people who possess these abilities are better able to manage the demands and difficulties of their positions (Kim & Hartman, 2020). Organizations that provide experiential learning opportunities, like co-ops and internships, give students practical experience and aid in their systematic development of workplace readiness skills (Stevenson & Rhodes, 2022). Through these experiences, students can hone their work habits and professional manner, which will make them desirable to employers in the future.

2.3.4 Understanding of Competitive Exams

Another crucial sign of career literacy is a thorough comprehension of competitive exams, especially in areas where passing them is required to enter certain professions or higher-level roles. Competitive exams are an essential step for students hoping to land government or public sector jobs because they frequently evaluate a variety of competencies, such as general knowledge, technical expertise, and analytical skills (Ahmad & Malik, 2021). Students can approach these tests with more confidence and increase their chances of success if they are familiar with the format, subject matter, and study techniques (Rahman & Bukhari, 2019).

According to research, students frequently do not understand the prerequisites and preparation required for competitive exams, which results in lost opportunities for career advancement. Students who participate in career literacy programs that offer practice sessions, exam-specific advice, and workshops on study techniques are better equipped to handle these tests (Hussain & Patel, 2020). Additionally, because students are more prepared and use a more calculated approach, universities that incorporate exam preparation materials into their career services report higher success rates among students in competitive exams. (Sharma & Kapoor, 2022).

2.4 Career Decision-Making

2.4.1 Employability

Employability, which refers to the abilities, know-how, and character traits that make a person appealing to employers, is a crucial determinant of career choice. According to research, employability encompasses more than just technical skills; it also involves soft skills, flexibility, and a proactive attitude to professional growth. By giving students' academic knowledge and real-world experience through internships, workshops, and job exhibitions, universities can substantially improve employability among students (Clarke, 2018). Research indicates that students who actively participate in internships and job shadowing activities throughout their schooling are more likely to find relevant jobs after graduation since they will have a more diverse skill set when they join the workforce (Tomlinson, 2017).

Career programs that emphasize employability motivate students to pause and reflect on their career decisions and to keep up with industry expectations by updating their skills on a regular basis. According to Jackson and Wilton (2016), these programs help students develop a career-minded mentality that matches their educational objectives with job openings, so improving their readiness for the shift from school to the workforce.

2.4.2 Alignment with Interests & Skills

Productive career decision-making requires alignment with one's own interests and abilities. According to research, it's critical to select occupations that complement one's interests, values, and talents because doing so increases job happiness and professional success. According to Holland “ Students are more likely to choose career options when they are aware

of their interests and abilities (1997). According to research conducted by Lent & Brown it was found that “ interest inventories and career evaluations are frequently in Pakistani institutions used to assist students in identifying career topics that align with their interests” (2019).

A significant alignment between one's job choices and personal qualities can also lead to increased productivity and engagement at work, as individuals feel more prepared and determined in roles that match their intrinsic abilities (Savickas, 2013). According to Spokane (2020), educational institutions that offer resources for self-evaluation and job exploration enable students to make well-informed professional selections, hence decreasing the probability of career changes or discontent.

2.4.3 Career Confidence

The term "career confidence" describes how confident someone is in their capacity to meet professional objectives and overcome obstacles at work. Career confidence has been demonstrated to have a favorable influence on career decision-making, as assertive individuals are more inclined towards seeking demanding but rewarding job possibilities. Career counseling, interaction with real-world work settings, and mentoring can all help students develop a strong self-concept and resilience in their professional travels, which supports career confidence among students (Bandura, 1997).

Additionally, studies show that professional confidence is essential for career adaptability because it motivates people to welcome change and confront career instabilities with a proactive attitude (Betz, 2004). According to Brown and Lent (2016), students who possess a high level of professional confidence are typically better equipped to handle difficult career decisions because they approach them with confidence and a sense of control over their educational pathways. Students who participate in confidence-building exercises like role-playing and simulation interviews report feeling more empowered to make their own professional decisions (Lent et al., 2017).

2.5 Current State of Career Literacy in Pakistan

2.5.1 National Policies and Initiatives

In Pakistan, career literacy is becoming more widely acknowledged as a crucial element in enhancing employability and assisting students in making well-informed professional decisions. However, there are still a lot of gaps in job awareness today, particularly in subjects like the social sciences where career trajectories could be less straightforward than in engineering or medical. This section gives a summary of the national policies and programs that are in place to close these gaps, with an emphasis on the Higher Education Commission's (HEC) initiatives and partnerships between the public and private sectors to advance career literacy.

2.5.2 Higher Education Commission (HEC) Initiatives

The HEC is essential to the advancement of employability and career counseling initiatives in Pakistani universities. Enhancing students' job-readiness abilities, raising knowledge of various career options, and matching educational outputs with market requirements are the main goals of its efforts. Certain HEC initiatives, like the National Internship Program and university Career Development Centers (CDCs), are designed to give students the tools they need to find employment, including as social networking, interview techniques, and resume writing. Students in disciplines like the social sciences, whose clear career trajectories might not be obvious, benefit greatly from these CDCs.

In order to help fresh graduates, find employment and link them with employers throughout Pakistan, HEC has also launched the Job Portal. Although the focus differs by subject, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), another HEC subsidiary, is responsible for making sure that curricula incorporate skills necessary for professional preparedness. Through targeted employability programs, HEC plays a crucial role in closing the gap between the social sciences and other fields, which frequently struggle to receive the same degree of industry-aligned training.

2.5.3 Government and Private Sector Programs

The Prime Minister's Youth Program and the Kamyab Jawan Program are two examples of government initiatives designed to help young people develop their employability skills, provide training and capital for innovative thinking, and improve their career literacy. Students can obtain practical experience in a variety of fields through these programs' specialized coursework, career advice, and internships. These types of courses can expose students to possible career directions and foster skills related to social work jobs, research groups, and nonprofit organizations.

In Pakistan, the business community has also started to contribute to career literacy. Universities and companies are increasingly working together, and businesses are providing workshops, job opportunities, and internships. These collaborations assist students match their coursework with industry expectations and expose them to the real-world demands of the labor market. Social science students who want to work in a variety of industries, including as business, media, or public administration, need to take advantage of mentorship and job shadowing possibilities offered by programs run by corporations like Telenor, Unilever, interloop, and many others.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the British Council and the Aga Khan Foundation have also created initiatives to help students become more career literate. These NGOs frequently cooperate with academic institutions to offer tools that assist students in making well-informed career decisions as well as career counseling initiatives. In order to give students, the skills they need to handle the challenges of their chosen careers, they focus on marginalized subjects, such as the social sciences.

Although more focused interventions are required to address the particular difficulties experienced by students in the social sciences, these policies and activities show a rising acknowledgment of the significance of career literacy in Pakistan's educational landscape.

2.6 Challenges in Policy Implementation

In Pakistan faces numerous challenges in career literacy especially in marginalized areas. While new initiatives such as National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) and

Kamyab Jawan Program aim to enhance employability and career readiness among youth. The implementation of such initiative is facing many problems that hinder their effectiveness. These problems are deeply connected with systemic, socio-economic, and logistical issues in Pakistan.

2.6.1 Limited Accessibility to Resources

Limited accessibility to resources is also a critical challenge for career guidance resources in Pakistan. Educational institutions in far flung areas lack career counseling centers and also lack in trained professionals. There is also need of digital infrastructure for effective career literacy programs implementation (Hussain & Patel, 2020).

2.6.2 Insufficient Funding

Lack of adequate funding also hinders the successful implementation of career literacy initiatives. These budgetary constraints tend to reduce program quality (Ahmad & Malik, 2021). Rural schools and colleges in Pakistan are still in struggle to afford the resources needed for successful implementing of these programs.

2.6.3 Lack of Trained Professionals

The scarcity of trained career counselors also hinders the successful implementation of career literacy. The lack qualified staff in educational institutions is one of the critical factors that effects students career decisions skills. As stated by Khan et al., “The absence of specialized training for career counselors exacerbates this problem, leaving teachers with little knowledge to address students’ career concerns effectively” (2020).

2.6.4 Technological Barriers

Digital tools and online platforms are crucial for career literacy in Pakistan. However, Pakistan faces severe technological barriers in these areas. As Sharma & Kapoor stated that “Limited internet connectivity, a lack of computer literacy, and inadequate digital infrastructure causes the gap between urban and rural educational settings” (2022).

2.6.5 Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The absence of monitoring and evaluation is one of the major challenges in effectiveness of career literacy initiatives. As stated by Rahman & Bukhari “ it is difficult to measure the impact of these programs without proper tracking mechanisms” (2019).

2.6.6 Political and Administrative Barriers

One of the main barriers in career literacy is inconsistency of political instability and bureaucratic inefficiencies. According to research “ Changes in government priorities and delays in administrative processes disrupt the continuity and consistency of career literacy programs” (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

2.7 Policies Related to Career Literacy in Pakistan

Career literacy in Pakistan is gaining attention through national and regional initiatives. These initiatives are aimed to better equip their students with the required skills and knowledge required for successful career development. These policies aim to incorporate various programs such as skill-building, career counseling, and employability to meet the gap between education and the market demands. In Pakistan, National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) and the Kamyab Jawan Program are the key policies and programs that promote career awareness among youth.

2.7.1 National Youth Development Framework (NYDF)

The government of Pakistan has created the National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) to uplift student's professional, and educational needs. This framework emphasizes the need of skill development and career counseling among undergraduates. These skills are crucial for establishing career literacy among undergraduates. It seeks to provide a comprehensive support network that equips youth to face the demands of the current labor market.

The NYDF emphasizes vocational training, entrepreneurial support, and digital literacy programs, to equip students with both technical and soft skills. These skills are preparing individuals for the current demands of the market. This initiative helps students to identify

their strengths and polish them according to needs of their career paths. It can be achieved through partnerships with educational institutions and private organizations. It highlights the importance of accessible resources, such as job portals and training workshops, to bridge the gap between education and unemployment.

2.7.2 Kamyab Jawan Program

Kamyab Jawan Program is working to improve undergraduates' employability and professional readiness. It provides technical training courses, career counseling, and interest-free financing for undergraduate students. The program aims to give awareness of professional advancement and financial independence to unemployed fresh graduates.

It emphasizes technical and vocational education to address the skills gap in modern industries. It is emphasized through mentoring sessions, job placement services, and training workshops. These programs better equip undergraduate students with the technical expertise required for various professions. It provides them with better job search techniques, workplace readiness, and career planning among students.

2.7.3 Provincial Career Guidance Programs

Pakistan is introducing various regional initiatives to support career literacy and guidance among undergraduates. For example, Punjab is working with educational institutions to establish career counseling centers that aim to assist high school students in making career options. Sindh is working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve vocational training, especially for marginalized groups.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), various Career counseling centers have been working at college level offering various courses and resources to help students comprehend competitive market trends. Baluchistan is also taking small-scale initiatives to promote skill development and increase knowledge of job alternatives among their youth. To provide consistent support for career literacy, strengthening these programs calls for more cooperation and resource sharing among all provinces.

2.8 Global Practices in Career Literacy

Career literacy is crucial for higher education and workforce development in Pakistan. foreign Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have successfully gained career literacy , skill-building activities, and labor market awareness into their educational systems. These initiatives can serve as guidance for Pakistan, to enhance career awareness and employability among their youth.

2.8.1 Career Literacy in the United States U.S.

In the United States, career literacy is embedded between the K-12 and higher education systems. They U.S. have initiated Career and Technical Education (CTE) program to provide their students with both academic knowledge and technical skills according to competitive market trends and needs. It includes career exploration courses, internships, and partnerships with local businesses, to enables their students with practical experience while pursuing their education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

The U.S. promotes career readiness through collaborations among schools, employers, and government agencies. It ensures their students to be fully aware of current trends of labor market and current demands of skills. U.S. also focusing on development of soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving among students, which are ultimately crucial for success in competitive workplace.

2.8.2 Career Literacy in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has initiated career literacy programs in collaboration with Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) and the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance. These programs help their student by delivering high-quality career guidance and personal career planning. It is stated that “they also provide exposure to employers and integration of career education into their curriculum” (Gatsby Foundation, 2014).

The UK model highlights the importance of early career exploration programs for their skilled youth. It also helps their students to develop an understanding of different career paths and the skills required for competitive market trends. The incorporates labor market

information (LMI) into career counseling courses, ensuring students make informed decisions based on real-world data.

2.8.3 Career Literacy in Australia

Australia has adopted National Career Development Strategy (NCDS) to emphasize career literacy. Australia is incorporating career education at all levels of their schooling. They are building self-awareness, career management skills, and labor market understanding among their students. They have initiated many Career guidance hubs and online platforms to educate their youth with current market needs, such as My Future. These programs help students with better career planning tools, job market information, and resources for exploring diverse career paths according to their skills and interests (Australian Government Department of Education, 2020).

2.8.4 Lessons for Pakistan

The global practices in career literacy provide several actionable insights for Pakistan. Following are the key points for Pakistan to consider:

1. Integration of Career Literacy in Curriculum

Pakistan can incorporate career literacy into curriculum at college and university level, like UK's Gatsby Benchmarks. it will ensure early exposure to career planning and labor market trends among undergraduate students.

2. Partnerships with Employers and Industry

Pakistan can also promote partnerships among educational institutions and market by offering internships, job shadowing, mentorships, and practical training.

3. Centralized Career Resources

Pakistan can also establish online career platforms, like to Australia's My Future, that will help our students with accessible tools for career awareness, skill-building initiatives, and insights about job market trends.

4. Labor Market Awareness

like UK, Pakistan can incorporate information about labor market into our curriculum. It will enable students to make informed decisions about current market needs.

5. Focus on Soft Skills and Adaptability

By developing soft skills among students through targeted programs, just like in the U.S., Pakistan can enhance students' employability in an increasingly modern, globalized and competitive job market.

By adopting and promoting these global practices, Pakistan can strengthen its career literacy framework and address gaps in employability and workforce readiness among its youth.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

The purpose of the study was (i). To investigate how career literacy influences students' decision-making processes regarding their career choices. (ii). To identify gaps in career-related knowledge that hinder students' ability to make informed career decisions. (iii). To explore opportunities for integrating career literacy in undergraduate policy, emphasizing early career awareness.' This chapter also discusses details of the population, description of the sample, development and data analysis techniques.

3.1 Research Design of the Study

This study was qualitative. In this study researcher explored the how career literacy influences students' decision-making processes regarding their career choices and also explored gaps in career-related knowledge that hinder students' ability to make informed career decisions.

3.2 Population

The major aim of the current study was to examine the needs of career literacy at undergraduate level and gaps in career related knowledge that hinder students' ability to make informed career decisions. The population was social science department in university of Sargodha.

3.3 Sample and Sampling technique

This study was qualitative so 15 teachers and 21 students from three departments (education, social work, and psychology) were taken as a sample through a convenient sampling technique from the University of Sargodha.

3.4 Research Tool

As relevant research was unavailable in the present study a self-developed research tool was used.

3.5 Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews by self-visits and self-visits.

3.6 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes and patterns according to the objectives of the research. Thematic analysis was used for categorizing the responses.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The present chapter is about the analysis and interpretation of data. Interviews were collected from 15 teachers and 21 students these interviews were analyzed by using the thematic analysis method and interpretations were made accordingly.

4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes in data.

Following are the findings from students.

4.1.1. Understanding of Career Literacy among Undergraduates

- **Lack of early exposure:** Participants highlighted that career literacy was not introduced in schools or early academic stages, leaving students unaware of pathways and requirements until university.
- **Minimal guidance on career paths:** Students still lacked structured information on job skills, market demands, and opportunities.
- Participants often had a limited understanding of career literacy including practical aspects like job preparation and exam requirements.

4.1.2. Challenges in Career Decision-Making

- **Societal Pressures:** Families and societal norms often overshadow individual preferences.
- **Financial constraints:** Limited financial resources prevented participants from exploring diverse career options or accessing career-related resources.

- **Lack of Structured Guidance:** Absence of mentors and formal career counseling leads to uninformed decision-making.
- **Overemphasis on Stability:** Students prioritize immediate financial stability over long-term goals or personal interests.
- **Insufficient Digital Literacy:** Many participants are unfamiliar with or underutilize career-oriented digital platforms.
- **Information Gaps:** Students face significant challenges accessing reliable and comprehensive career information.
- **Lack of Proactive Planning:** Career decisions are frequently reactive, driven by external circumstances rather than strategic foresight.
- **Uncertainty About Scope:** Students lack clarity about job prospects and the practical application of their fields.
- **Reliance on Informal Guidance:** Over-dependence on peers and teachers for advice leads to inconsistent decision-making.

4.1.3. Role of Digital Tools

- **Acknowledged Value:** Participants understood the importance of digital tools for career development, particularly LinkedIn and job portals.
- **Underutilization:** Many students fail to use digital tools effectively due to insufficient awareness and training programs.
- **Preference for Traditional Methods:** Students relied more on teachers, peers, and informal sources for guidance than professional platforms.
- **Barriers:** Limited digital literacy, overwhelming online information, and inequitable access hindered the optimal use of digital tools.
- **Social media:** Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook were primarily used for job updates, but their professional utility was limited

4.1.4. Role of Education and Teachers

- **Teachers as Central Guides:** Teachers are pivotal in sharing job opportunities, encouraging students, and providing informal career advice.
- **Institutional Gaps:** Universities lack structured career support systems, including counseling services, practical workshops, and job fairs.

- **Emphasis on Academics:** Education systems prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical, field-specific training, leaving students underprepared.
- **Informal Networks:** Students rely heavily on teachers and peers for career information due to the absence of formal systems.
- **Uneven Guidance:** While some teachers provide excellent support, others lack the resources or expertise to guide students effectively.
- **Need for Practical Exposure:** Participants stressed the importance of integrating internships, industry linkages, and hands-on learning into academic programs.

4.1.5. Gaps in Career Knowledge and Skills

- **Integrate Internships and Fieldwork:** Universities should collaborate with industries and NGOs to provide hands-on learning experiences.
- **Focus on Soft Skills Development:** Include modules on communication, teamwork, and leadership as part of the curriculum.
- **Enhance Career Guidance Services:** Establish formal counseling centers and mentorship programs to support career planning.
- **Update Curricula:** Align academic content with current industry standards and incorporate technical skill training.
- **Promote Financial Literacy:** Educate students about funding opportunities, scholarships, and affordable resources for skill enhancement.

Following are findings from teachers.

4.1.6. Understanding of Career Literacy Teacher's Perspective

- **Core Components of Career Literacy:** Career literacy includes goal setting, subject alignment, market awareness, skill building, and adaptability.
- **Low Career Literacy:** Students lack proactive career planning and rely heavily on informal sources of guidance due to institutional neglect.
- **Late Introduction:** Career literacy is introduced too late, missing critical decision-making stages during high school and early university education.
- **Empowerment through Career Literacy:** Understanding career options boosts confidence and clarifies navigating the job market.

- **Key Challenges:** Students and institutions focus narrowly on immediate job preparation, neglecting broader aspects of career literacy like networking, adaptability, and long-term planning.

4.1.7. Observations on Student Challenges

- **External Pressures Dominate:** Family and societal expectations heavily influence students' career decisions, often discouraging exploration of unconventional fields.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Students face significant challenges in understanding career paths and market demands due to minimal guidance and limited institutional support.
- **Reactive Planning:** Career decisions are often made reactively rather than proactively, with students adopting a trial-and-error approach.
- **Resource Gaps:** Institutions lack structured programs like career counseling, job fairs, and workshops, leaving students dependent on informal sources.
- **Skill Deficiencies:** Soft skills, technical knowledge, and digital literacy are underdeveloped, reducing students' competitiveness in the job market.
- **Fear and Demotivation:** Anxiety about the future and a lack of role models contribute to students' low confidence and motivation to explore career opportunities.

4.1.8. Gaps in Career Knowledge

- **Lack of Awareness:** Students struggle to understand career pathways, industry scope, and emerging opportunities in their fields.
- **Technical Skill Gaps:** Curricula are outdated, and students lack exposure to modern tools and technologies.
- **Soft Skills Deficit:** Communication, confidence, teamwork, and leadership skills are underdeveloped.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** Students are not trained to use professional platforms or explore online resources effectively.
- **Resume and Networking Skills:** Basic career preparation skills like resume writing and networking are missing.
- **Market Trends:** Students are unaware of market dynamics, leading to a mismatch between education and industry demands.

- **Reliance on Informal Guidance:** In the absence of structured counseling, students depend on peers, family, or teachers, which often results in incomplete or outdated advice.

4.1.9. Suggestions and Policy Integration

- **Curriculum Integration:** Career literacy and skill-building topics should be embedded into academic courses.
- **Career Counseling Services:** Establish dedicated teams or integrate guidance into academic advising for better accessibility.
- **Workshops and Job Fairs:** Universities should host hands-on workshops and regular job fairs to connect students with industries.
- **Entrepreneurship Education:** Encourage self-employment through entrepreneurship-focused modules.
- **Industry Linkages:** Strengthen partnerships with companies for internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs.
- **Modernized Curricula:** Update syllabi to include technical, soft, and digital skills aligned with current market needs.
- **Financial Inclusivity:** Provide scholarships and affordable programs to support career readiness initiatives.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Introduce tailored mentoring systems with alumni engagement for individualized guidance.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the study. This chapter also includes the study findings, discussion, and recommendations for the policy makers. The main purpose of study was to analyze the “Perceptions of Career Literacy and Its Role in Career Decision-Making among University of Sargodha Undergraduates”.

5.1. Summary

The current study aimed to explore “Perceptions of Career Literacy and Its Role in Career Decision-Making among University of Sargodha Undergraduates”. The objectives of the study were: (i) To investigate how career literacy influences students' decision-making processes regarding their career choices. (ii) To identify gaps in career-related knowledge that hinder students' ability to make informed career decisions. (iii) To explore opportunities for integrating career literacy in undergraduate policy, emphasizing early career awareness. The study focused on four key themes, which were formulated after an extensive review of the literature: (i) Understanding of Career Literacy. (ii) Observations on Student Challenges. (iii) Gaps in Career Knowledge and Skills. (iv) Suggestions and Policy Integration. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to align with these themes, consisting of 11 questions validated by subject matter experts (SMEs). The population of the study comprised university faculty and students from the social sciences department of the University of Sargodha. A total sample of 21 students and 15 teachers was selected using a convenient sampling technique. The findings revealed gaps in technical, soft, and digital skills, limited career literacy awareness, and external influences such as societal pressures impacting career decision-making. Based on the findings, practical recommendations were proposed to integrate career literacy into

undergraduate programs through curriculum updates, hands-on workshops, mentorship programs, and structured career counseling systems.

5.2. Findings

1. Career literacy is not introduced at an early academic stage, leaving students unaware of career pathways and requirements until university.
2. Students lack structured knowledge on job skills, market demands, and opportunities.
3. There is minimal guidance on practical aspects of career readiness, such as job preparation and competitive exams.
4. Societal Pressures: Family expectations often influence career decisions, discouraging exploration of unconventional fields.
5. Financial Constraints: Limited resources prevent students from accessing career-related programs or diverse options.
6. Lack of Guidance: Mentors and formal career counseling are largely absent, leading to uninformed and reactive decision-making.
7. Digital Barriers: Many students lack digital literacy and fail to effectively use professional platforms like LinkedIn.
8. Information Gaps: There is a scarcity of accessible, reliable, and comprehensive career information.
9. Teachers play a central role in informal career guidance due to the lack of formal systems.
10. Universities focus heavily on theoretical knowledge and do not provide enough practical training or exposure to industry needs.
11. Existing career counseling services are inconsistent, and practical exposure such as internships or job fairs is limited.
12. Students lack technical and soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership).
13. Digital literacy and awareness of professional platforms remain underdeveloped.
14. Basic job preparation skills, such as resume writing and networking, are inadequate.
15. There is an absence of structured programs like career workshops, counseling centers, and mentorship opportunities.
16. Curricula are outdated and misaligned with modern market trends.

5.3. Recommendations

1. Career literacy topics might be integrated into university curricula to provide students with foundational knowledge on job market trends, job readiness, and career pathways.
2. Modules on career decision-making might be introduced to help students align their education with market demands and personal goals.
3. Universities might establish career counseling centers staffed with trained professionals to offer personalized guidance on career planning.
4. Career counseling services might include workshops and one-on-one mentoring to support students in making informed career choices.
5. Training in job search techniques, such as resume writing, networking, and effective use of digital tools, might be prioritized to improve job readiness.
6. Collaborations with industries might be strengthened to offer internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs for students.
7. Digital tools and platforms, such as LinkedIn and job portals, might be promoted through training sessions to ensure students can effectively utilize them for career development.
8. Career literacy programs might be introduced in earlier academic stages, such as high school or the first year of university, to encourage proactive career planning.
9. Interest inventories and career assessments might be used to help students identify their strengths and align them with suitable career paths.
10. Career decision-making processes might be formally incorporated into university graduate policies to ensure structured support for students' career planning.
11. Policies might encourage universities to host career fairs, workshops, and networking events regularly.
12. Government policies might mandate career counseling and skill development initiatives across universities, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
13. Increased funding for career literacy programs might be prioritized to ensure equitable access to career-related resources for all students.

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