

## PERCEPTION OF THE AVAILABILITY AND PROVISION OF CAREER COUNSELLING SERVICE IN COLLEGE

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### Abstract

*This study examines student and staff perceptions of access to and the availability of career counseling services in government colleges in rural areas. The aim was to investigate the level of service availability, stakeholder awareness, and the effectiveness of current counseling mechanisms, since it is essential for students to have informed and educated decisions in both academic and professional choices through counseling sessions. A structured questionnaire was developed and used to conduct a quantitative research study by administering it to 200 respondents, including 150 students and 50 staff members at selected government colleges in rural regions. The results showed that both students and staff highly value career counseling as a way to guide students toward the most suitable educational and career options. However, the data also revealed a lack of formally organized or structured counseling services and trained professionals in these institutions. Inferential statistical analysis indicated a significant difference in perceptions based on gender and role (student or staff), with staff generally showing a more positive attitude toward service provision than students. To address these issues and better support students' career planning, the research recommends appointing professional career counselors, developing counseling infrastructure, holding awareness sessions, and integrating career guidance into the academic system, ensuring rural students receive adequate support for their future planning. This study contributes new insights into how policies and their implementation relate within the context of rural education in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Career counselling, rural education, government colleges, student perception

### Introduction

The world today is becoming a more dynamic place and due to this people have become more competitive meaning that career development has become one of the most important things in education in general and college education in particular. Entering college, students are in one critical period of change in their personalities and their professional lives, and the choices that they can choose now about their paths of studying and career building may long-term affect their professional lives on the whole. When provided in an efficient way, career counselling is seen as a systematic process, which helps students to make their way through the complexity of academic options, career choices, and personal goals (Gati & Levin, 2014). Increasing sensitizations concerning the significance of matching the interests, skills, as well as values with an achievable profession have also seen the importance of career counseling in learning institutions across the different parts of the world.

The scientific quality and quality of services offered to young people may differ significantly depending on the institutional commitment, educational policies in the country and the culture of approach to career planning. It has been widely understood that career counselling is a process that helps individuals to have an awareness of themselves as well as the world of work so as to make career, individual education and life decisions (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). With regard to colleges, it does not just entail assisting students in making a suitable academic major but also equips students in being ready in the real world by way of career readiness, job seeking capacities, drawing up resumes, internships and objectives making. It is both

preventive and developmental, which implies that it is to be introduced early enough and must be maintained throughout the education life of students (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Nevertheless, being the case in most countries, this ideal is alien to many countries including Pakistan. It has been indicated that perception of students towards access to and the importance of such career counselling services determine whether they utilise them or not (Osborn & Baggerly, 2004). In case students learn the services as applicable, responsive, and approachable, the chances increase that they will use them and make more-informed career decisions. On the other hand, when students perceive counselling services as his or her lack or insufficiency, irrelevant or inefficient, they tend to address the people around them (family members, peers, social media and the like) causing possible inaccuracy of the information they receive without professional guidance (Yuen, Gysbers, & Chan, 2004).

Such issue is even more acute in developing countries such as Pakistan where the properly organized and professional career guidance systems only begin to take shape. The availability of trained career counsellors in the Pakistani colleges is not common particularly in government or in semi-government colleges. The common factor in most education facilities is that the school centers more on academic content at the expense of proper development of the students as whole persons that include career planning and life skills (Ali & Jalal, 2018). The parents and the students who have experienced this tend to complain of confusion, anxiety and they are unsure of what to do in future career wise. This turns out to be worsened with the dynamic nature of the job market in the country, rising level of unemployment, and the widening gap between education and employment sectors. As a consequence of this, career counselling has stopped being a useful thing but rather a necessity in uplifting the individual as well as the nation. The greatest issue is the absence of institutional infrastructure to maintain as well as skilled personalities to offer good career counseling.

Although there are a number of high-end exclusive schools and colleges providing these services, large volume of the students studying in the colleges of the public sector fail to get professional career guidance. Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) state that career advice in Pakistani colleges is usually provided by unskilled tutors or employees, also known as untrained teachers, who might stand out as people with no experience of valuable guidance. In addition, they are also impacted by the cultural demands as well as that of the parents forcing them to choose a career in which their preference may be none, say medicine, engineering or civil services due to their prestigious position. The perception is very crucial when using counselling services. In cases when services are technically available, there is a possibility of these services not being utilized as the students may fail to be aware of such services or doubt their relevance. Research indicates that the awareness level and perception of the students towards the counselling centres influence very much on the willingness of the students to utilise these services (Yuen et al., 2004).

When students think that the counsellors are caring, skillful and perceived to be friendlier, there are chances that they would be willing to consult on career advice and even take necessary action plans. This implies that the availability and goodness of counselling services should be taken care to raise the achievements of the students. Besides dealing with individual student needs, career counselling also helps towards the achievement of greater goals in terms of educational provision which include high dropout rates, sustained academic performance, and achievement of equity. Professional mentoring can be an important difference to disadvantaged students or even the first generation college students. In such nations as Pakistan where the youth population grows very rapidly, the investment in career support institutions can become an important element of the human capital development of the country (Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Policy wise, Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has understood the value of career counselling and has suggested the universities and colleges to have some career development centres. The problem is, however, that it is not monitored consistently and it is not fully implemented. Most institutions remain to be inadequately structured with lack of career services being well known, coordinated and even staffed in most cases. This gap between policy and practice is the reason why there is a necessity to conduct empirical research that will tie the perception students have on the matter of career counselling services availability and efficacy in their institutions.

The present study tries to explore how students perceive the provision of career counselling facilities in college. It tries to find out whether students know about these services, their level of accessibility as well as the effect these services have to their academic and career decision making. Factors that will be examined in the research will include institutional type (public or private), gender differences, year of study which will be used to understand whether there are any differences in the perceptions or not. The results will be important in pointing out the most critical points of service delivery weakness and providing suggestions in order to improve the institutions and enhance the policies. Learning about the students perception will enable the educational administrators and policymakers to make interventions that are applicable, as well as responsive to the needs of the students. It may also help in coming up with the programs to train teachers, who might be needed to assume a two-fold role i.e. to act as teachers as well as informal career advisors.

In addition, the research will be able to make contribution to the current literature, regarding student support services in South Asia since it will be able to provide comparisons with other developing areas. but, to sum up, nowadays career counselling is not a luxury any more it is the necessity of education systems. Although the positivity of career guidance is well known in international researches, their real accessibility and efficiency in the Pakistani colleges is not known. The views of students are the key to the comprehension of this problem, as they depict the ratio of its practical effectiveness and applicability at the moment of current time. The present study attempts to come up with an elaborate knowledge on how the students view the quality and access of career counselling in their colleges, setting the stage to a wise decision by the teachers, administrators, and policy formulators.

### **Statement of the problem**

Although career counselling is becoming an important matter in the context of helping students make sound academic and professional choices, numerous colleges in Pakistan are still running without planned and open career counselling services. Students in colleges, where they are at the most sensitive stage of their studies, are unable to get the much needed guidance that can help them connect their interests and strengths to their careers as well as what the markets of reality has to offer them. Although it can be said that some institutions provide informal or limited counselling, the nature with which the same students access or rather perceive such services in their respective institutions is however unexplored to some extent. Specifically, it is possible to draw a line between recommendations of policies on the level of career guidance and real practice of the aforementioned services inside college environment.

Majority of the students are either not informed of the existence of career counselling or they get the advice of unskilled people in this regard which results in disappointments, false decision-making and future dissatisfaction with the career work as well. Also, the problem is intensified by social pressure, absence of professional assistance, and the negligence of the institution. With these issues at hand, it is important to embark on research on perception of the students toward the dispensation and the availability of the career counselling services in their various colleges. Appreciation of these perceptions is crucial to the determination of the gaps that exist in the provision of the services and the unaddressed needs of the students with a view

of making recommendations on how the policies and practices of the institutions can be improved. Research in this area, thus, aims at limiting this gap by analysing the level of awareness, accessibility and satisfaction among students in terms of career counselling services in colleges.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine college students' awareness of the availability of career counselling services in their institutions.
2. To assess students' perceptions regarding the accessibility and quality of the career counselling services provided.
3. To identify the challenges and gaps in the provision of career counselling services as perceived by college students.

### **Research Questions**

What is the level of awareness among college students regarding the availability of career counselling services in their institutions?

How do college students perceive the accessibility and effectiveness of the career counselling services provided?

What challenges and limitations do students identify in the current provision of career counselling services at the college level?

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept and Importance of Career Counselling**

Career counselling forms an inseparable part of the contemporary educational system in higher education (post secondary). It is an intentional and orderly procedure which helps people to gain self knowledge, satisfaction on career opportunities and making deliberate choices based on their educational and career lives. Career counselling assists one to discover his or her skills, interests, values and personality qualities which are then matched with possibilities of careers to take. With the world of job market turning all the more competitive, uncertain and skill based, career counselling is turning not into a service, but a need of students, especially those belonging to the transitional phase, such as college (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Career counselling is important in that it has the capability of guiding the students through the maze of career decision-making. As there are many fields of study and job options in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students tend to get confused, stressed and pressurized in an attempt to arrive at a career that fits their potentials and desires. A career counselling offers a guideline of dealing with such dilemmas. It aids students in coming up with realistic preparations, opportunity recognition and selection of available alternatives, logically and based on sound research (Gati & Levin, 2014). Also, in most occasions, it can be used as a preventive measure by lowering the chances of academic withdrawal, dropout, and education and employment mismatch. Career awareness is among the major roles played by career counselling.

Gati, Gadassi, and Shemesh (2006) found out that career indecisiveness is closely correlated with emotional distresses and such can be substantially alleviated through proper counselling measures that according to these researchers is time-sensitive. Technology is also changing with regard to career counselling. The digital platforms currently allow students to access career tests, computerised counsellors, job databases and online mentors. Although they are increasing the accessibility and flexibility of counselling in places that are distant or under-served, such tools are not capable of taking over the human aspect of the counseling process. Career selection needs empathetic skills, listening skills and understanding within the context which are likely to be provided in a face-to-face manner. Thus, technology should not be used



as a replacement to career counselling by professional personnel though they may augment it (Sampson, 2009).

### **Career Counselling in the Context of Higher Education**

The role played by career counselling in higher education is rapidly growing as the role played by the global job market rapidly increases and students are supposed to make significant academic as well as professional decisions within the restricted timeframes. Colleges and universities have a key responsibility of ensuring that the students are ready to succeed in their education as well as securing gainful employment. In this case career counselling is like an intermediate between education and work because through it students get to know how to correlate what they study with subsequent dimensions of work. Consequently, career counselling services that are provided in colleges and universities are currently considered to be the inherent part of college student development and responsibility (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Career counselling in higher education is not merely an assistance in selecting a job, but rather it is a complete process of a student in order to learn more about themselves, their aims and interests, their skills and abilities and how to plan a career. Tertiary students are usually under so much pressure to make decisions on the course they want to undertake, major they aspire to be in or even the specialization they are interested in pursuing based on their market interests and needs. But, most of them do not have needed information, awareness, or even support to make enlightened decisions. Career counselling gives the framework and the instrument which can help students perform such tedious task. It helps them realize their interest, values, strength, and weaknesses, in addition to teaching them on job trends, necessary qualifications, and expectations of the employers (Gati & Levin, 2014).

### **Students' Awareness and Utilization of Career Counselling Services**

In a very large number of any educational environment particularly after high school, they come into some very important career choices that can completely change the academic, professional and personal lives of any student. The question is however, that the effectiveness of the decisions is dependent to the extent to which the student is aware of existing career counselling services and made use of them. Studies have always pointed out that although career counselling is an important part of the process of student development, there still lies a major disparity about the access and utilization of career counselling by the students particularly in developing nations (Gati et al., 2001; Watson, 2006).

The awareness contributes greatly to willingness to use such services by the students. Students will not seek such help without sufficient understanding of what counselling involves and how it will help them in their career planning irrespective of its existence in the institutions to which they are enrolled. A number of studies have also pointed to the fact that students usually face no clear idea about what is there in career counselling and the scope. An example can be given of a study, which was conducted by Yuen et al. (2010) and concluded that many students think that counselling only relates to ensuring that their psychological/emotional issues are being handled and not a means of guiding and developing their career.

Due to this misperception, services would not be consumed even when they end up being provided. On the same note, a research was carried out in South Africa where Maree (2013) found out that students in the various public colleges received little exposure to career counselling services and that there was low marketing and no well-structured counselling system. This systematic attempt to develop awareness of career counselling role may be devoid of which there is tendency to get advice on careers to be chosen by informal sources whose knowledge may not be enlightened at all.

### **Perceived Availability and Accessibility of Career Counselling in Colleges**

Career counselling service availability and accessibility in the colleges is a core component in the formation of the students needs of education, career choice and psychological welfare. Availability means that such services are present in an institution whereas accessibility means how accessible they are by the students. Lack of infrastructures of career counselling is observed in most of the developing nations, including Pakistan, particularly in those rural colleges administered through the government, which influences the awareness and usage of such facilities among students (Ali & Malik, 2019). The accessibility or unavailability of services of career counselling is perceived by a number of factors, these factors include presence, promotions of the involved institutions, staff potentials, and policy requirements. This is because when they never think of seeing career counsellors or special career offices or usual career lectures they assume that this is not possible despite informal ways of offering guidance (Hussain, 2018).

Most rural colleges in Pakistan do not have anything as specific as the counselling department and teachers who may themselves be fully occupied with teaching duties may not even be professionally prepared or even available to teach students how to go about career planning. Students, therefore, give low awareness, and they expect the service of career counselling to be offered in elite or urban institutions only (Shamim & Qureshi, 2020). The problem is additionally aggravated by the aspect of accessibility. Even in those instances there is technically career counselling available to the career counselling has little odds of the students booking appointments or even availing such an assistive facility due to barriers of distance, gender and traditions, non availability of staff, lack of trust and vague processes.

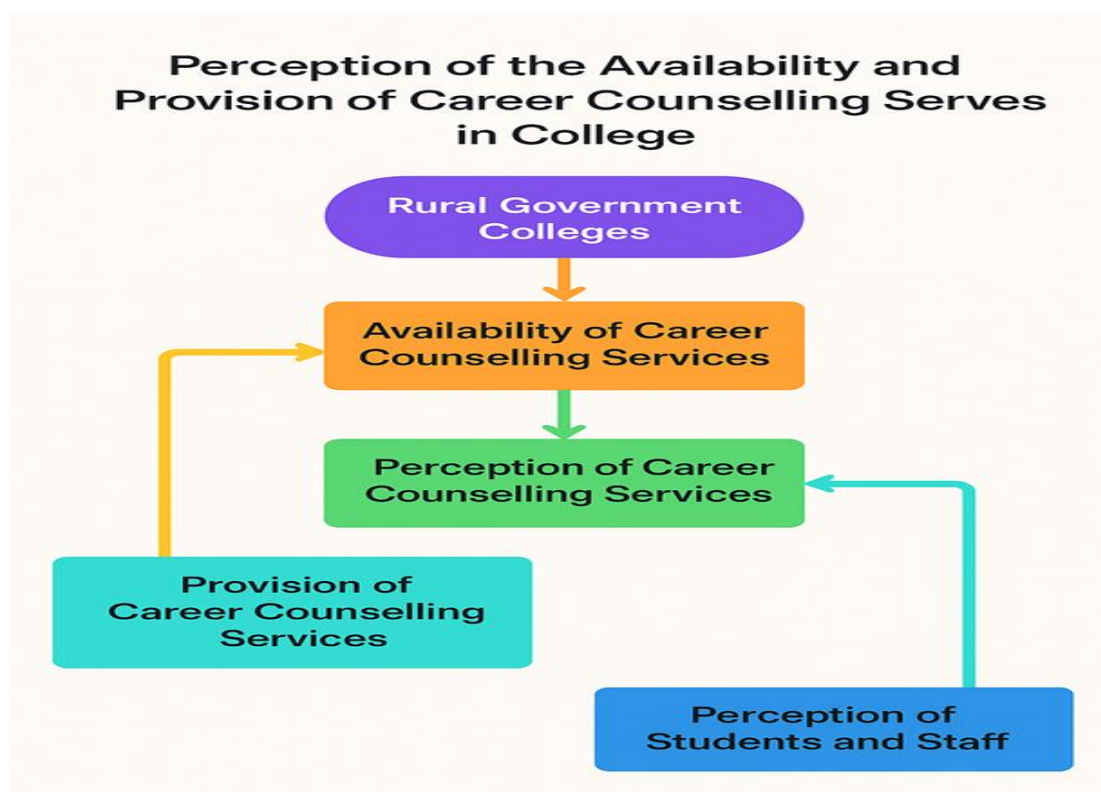
### **Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Career Counselling**

Career counselling is supported by several psychological and educational theories that guide understanding of individual differences, decision-making, and career development. These frameworks help create effective, culturally appropriate interventions, especially in resource-limited settings like rural colleges.

1. **Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice (RIASEC)** groups personalities and work environments into six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Career satisfaction is higher when personality matches job environment.
2. **Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory** sees career development as a lifelong process through five stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. It emphasizes changing self-concept and the need for continuous counselling.
3. **Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**, by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, focuses on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. It is useful for students from underprivileged or rural backgrounds by building confidence and expanding career aspirations.
4. **Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making (SLTCDM)** highlights learning experiences, environmental factors, and unplanned events (happenstance) in shaping career paths—particularly relevant for students with limited access to structured opportunities.
5. **Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise** explains how children eliminate career options based on social norms, gender roles, and perceived abilities. Counsellors can use this to help students challenge limiting beliefs.

6. **Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) Theory** focuses on how individuals process career-related information, emphasizing self-knowledge, decision-making skills, and tools like the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI).
7. **Person-Environment Fit Theory** explores how a good match between personal traits and job environment leads to satisfaction and success.

These frameworks are especially valuable in rural or government colleges where career guidance is minimal. They provide a structured, scientific approach to counselling and empower students to make informed, long-term career choices. Incorporating these models into counselling programs can enhance their effectiveness and relevance.



**Conceptual Framework**

### Research Methodology

This research applied the quantitative research design, whereby it employed survey method, to collect empirical information on the availability and the coverage of career counselling services provided to the institutions of government colleges in the locality of the rural settings. Population of the research study involved all the students and the academic staff (like teachers, lecturers and administrative counsellors) in the government colleges. The research study adhered to purposive method of sampling so that pertinent institutions and individuals are chosen. This sample was constituted by 150 students and 50 members of staff, summing up into 200 members. The inclusion criteria involved the assumption that the selected colleges should be government-run and rural based. Selection of the participants was done through institutions whereby there is some element of career counselling that was known to be there or there were students expressing the necessity of having the services. This was done by acting

purposefully to make sure its data was relevant; hence reducing irrelevant or uninformed replies.

A structured questionnaire was created to collect data, and it was self-designed; it was designed on the basis of works of other authors. The questionnaire has been developed like that so that it would include sections on demographic questions, awareness on the career counselling services, availability and accessibility of the services and perception of the quality and effect of the services rendered in general. Mostly Likert-type items (where people were asked to scale their opinions in a form of: “Strongly Disagree-medium-agree-strongly agree”) should be used to make analysis easier. The experts in the field of education and psychology had tested the validity of the tool, and clarities, language, and reliability were verified by means of a pilot study.

The information was collected through direct visit to rural government colleges to be studied. College administrations were achieved with legitimate permission to do the survey and this was done by appointment to avoid disruption of classes. The subjects were given sufficient information of the purpose of the study and properly instructed. The principle of confidentiality was guaranteed, and the informed consent was given. Distribution of the questionnaire and its collection in a printed format at the predetermined time guaranteed the high response rate and the reliability of data. The process of collection took place during four weeks.

On acquisition of the filled-in questionnaires, the data were coded and then put into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyze the figures. The demographic features of the participants as well as their general perceptions are presented in terms of descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages). Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to infer a difference in perceptions across the subgroups of students and staff, male and female, etc. This enabled the researcher to come up with trends and major variances in perspective of career counselling services.

This research used ethical considerations to warrant the rights and privacy of all the participants. Participants were completely informed of the purpose and method of the study and were guaranteed that it was not a compulsory study and that the information that they will be giving will remain confidential. To administer questionnaires, the informed consent was collected. Responses were only research-oriented and no forms of personal identity were gathered. The scholar applied all the ethical guidelines as suggested by the academic institution and no damage was caused to any of the participants in the research exercise.

### Data Analysis and Results

**Table 1**

**Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Status, Gender, and Age**

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Status</b>	Student	150	75%
	Staff	50	25%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	110	55%
	Female	90	45%
	Other	0	0%
<b>Age Group</b>	Below 20	50	25%
	21–30	90	45%
	31–40	30	15%
	41–50	20	10%



Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Above 50	10	5%
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

The study included 200 respondents, with 70% students and 30% staff, ensuring a balanced view from both recipients and providers of career counselling services. Gender distribution was fairly even, with 55% males and 45% females, allowing for gender-based insights. Most participants (70%) were aged below 30, indicating a majority of youth, mainly students, while older age groups represented staff. This mix offers diverse perspectives, making the findings relevant for designing inclusive and age-appropriate career counselling programs in rural colleges.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics for Section B — Awareness of Career Counselling Services

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
B1	I am aware that career counselling services are available at my college.	3.45	1.10
B2	I know where to access career counselling services in my college.	3.20	1.08
B3	Information about career counselling is shared with students/staff.	3.60	1.00
B4	I have seen promotional materials (banners, posters) about these services.	3.10	1.15
B5	I have attended any session related to career counselling.	2.80	1.20
B6	Career counselling services are clearly explained in orientation.	3.25	1.05
B7	Staff encourages the use of counselling services.	3.55	0.95
B8	I believe the college takes interest in student career development.	3.75	0.90
B9	Career counselling is considered important by college administration.	3.65	1.00
B10	There is a formal department/office for career counselling.	3.00	1.10

Section B responses show that there is a medium number of individuals that are familiar about career counselling services among the respondents. The item that had the highest mean score ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) was that which indicated that college is interested in career development of the students and indicated general perception that the institutions support students. The mean score of statements, such as Career counselling is regarded as important within the college administration ( $M = 3.65$ ) and Staff encourages the use of counselling services ( $M = 3.55$ ), was also above average, which means positive perceptions. However, results that were rather low in the case of such items as the sessions attendance ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and the existence of an official department ( $M = 3.00$ ) indicated the lack of correspondence between availability and real use or presence of these services. The general knowledge seems to be there but there is little exposure in actual practice.

**Table 3**

Descriptive Statistics for Section C — Perceived Importance of Career Counselling

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
C1	Career counselling helps in identifying individual strengths.	4.10	0.85
C2	Counselling supports making informed career decisions.	4.20	0.80
C3	It reduces confusion regarding academic choices.	4.05	0.95
C4	Career guidance helps in goal setting and planning.	4.15	0.90
C5	It motivates students/staff to work toward clear career objectives.	3.95	0.88

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
C6	Students who attend counselling perform better academically.	3.85	0.90
C7	Career counselling is essential in rural areas where opportunities are fewer.	4.25	0.75
C8	Career services should be a regular part of college systems.	4.30	0.70
C9	All students/staff should be encouraged to use career services.	4.00	0.85
C10	College should collaborate with outside professionals for career support.	4.05	0.80

The respondents were in great agreement in the importance of career counselling especially when it comes to career counselling as seen in Section C. The high mean values were attained in the majority of the statements in this section, particularly in the following aspects of the role of counselling in informed decision-making ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ), its usefulness in rural areas ( $M = 4.25$ ), the fact that the career services are to be a standard component of the college system ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). These results show that the respondents or the students and staff are fully aware of the important role that career counselling plays in personal and academic progress. Standard deviations in general are also dissimilar which is an indication of similarity in level of response and understanding of the meaning and importance of career guidance in all the sample.

**Table 4**

Descriptive Statistics for Section D — Provision and Effectiveness of Services

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
D1	There is a designated career counsellor in my college.	2.90	1.20
D2	Career counselling sessions are held regularly.	2.80	1.15
D3	The sessions are informative and practical.	3.10	1.00
D4	Students/staff receive individual attention during counselling.	3.00	1.05
D5	Counsellors are qualified and knowledgeable.	3.35	0.95
D6	The college evaluates the effectiveness of these services.	2.75	1.10
D7	Suggestions from students/staff are considered in improving services.	3.05	1.00
D8	Career counselling is easily accessible.	3.15	0.98
D9	The services meet the career-related needs of students/staff.	3.00	1.00
D10	I would recommend these services to others.	3.25	0.90

This table was interpreted by using a matrix style of classification. Most of the items in Section D that examine provision of career counselling services and how effective they are have rather moderate and low average scores. Averages on the statement about the availability of a designated counsellor were at 2.90 ( $SD = 1.20$ ), whereas sessions regularity were graded even lower at 2.80 ( $SD = 1.15$ ), which is close to suggesting that participants look at the provision of services as not coming on a regular basis and somewhat disorganized. Although the factors on which counsellors quality was graded were a little bit higher ( $M = 3.35$ ), the overall picture seems that there is much to be done to improve the access of the services, their frequency and evaluation rates. The means of the items like, effectiveness evaluation, incorporation of suggestions, were lower (2.75 and 3.05 respectively) which indicates the problematic situation in the feedback mechanism and follow up procedures.

**Table 5**

Awareness of Career Counselling by Respondent Type

Respondent Type	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Student	150	3.18	0.64	2.91	0.004
Staff	50	3.52	0.57		

An independent samples t-test showing the mean level of awareness of career counselling of students and staff was conducted as a result of which Table 5 was obtained. The average score of students was 3.18 (SD = 0.64) and 3.52 (SD = 0.57) in the case of staff. The difference comes out to be significant with calculated t-value of 2.91 with a significance value of 0.004 ( $p < 0.01$ ). It implies that not only are the staff members fully aware of the concept and availability of career counselling but also it exists in the rural government colleges among students.

**Table 6**

Importance of Career Counselling by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	100	4.10	0.55	1.34	0.182
Female	100	4.25	0.51		

In Table 6, I calculated the t- test applying the independent samples test to determine some differences in the perception of the importance of career counselling in a path to gender. The mean score of the given respondents is slightly higher among the female ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) than among the male counterparts ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) but the p-value of 0.182 shows that the t-ratio of 1.34 is not significant. Therefore, male participants and the female ones both appreciate the need to use career counselling services with an equal measure.

**Table 7**

Provision of Career Counselling by Age Group

Age Group	N	Mean	SD
16–20	80	3.22	0.60
21–25	100	3.40	0.55
26–30	20	3.60	0.58

**Table 7.1**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.140	2	1.070	3.46	0.034

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Within Groups	57.300	197	0.291		

Table 7 and 7.1: demonstrate the results of one way ANOVA that was conducted in order to evaluate the dissimilarities in the perception of the opinion of the offering of career counselling between different ages. The 16 20 year olds came up with a mean of 3.22, the 21 25 age category scored 3.40 and 26 30 group was 3.60. The F-statistics of 3.46 and the p-value of 0.034 suggest that there is an existence of a significant variance between the age groups. Surprisingly, the older participants felt that their career counselling was done better perhaps because they have had more exposure or maybe they were just mature.

**Table 8**

Awareness and Importance of Career Counselling		
Variables	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Awareness × Importance	0.42	0.000

Table 8: The Pearson correlation of the Table 10 is an analysis of the correlation between awareness and the perceived importance of career counselling services. There is a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship with the correlation coefficient (r) equaling to 0.42 and the p-value of 0.000. This implies that the more the people are sensitized on career counselling, the more the importance such services are held by respondents.

**Table 9**

Pearson Correlation — Importance and Provision of Career Counselling

Variables	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Importance × Provision	0.46	0.000

Table 9: Table 11 indicates that there is Pearson correlation between the importance of career counselling and provision of such. The amount is 0.46 (p = 0.000) thus showing that there is a moderately significant positive relationship. This implies that the participants who believe and consider career counselling to be of high priority also view it as a more accessible service in their institutions.

**Table 4.10**

Pearson Correlation — Awareness and Provision of Career Counselling

Variables	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Awareness × Provision	0.38	0.001

In table 10, Pearson correlation is used to explain the relationship between awareness and provision of career counselling. The correlation value is 0.38 and the value of significance is 0.001 and therefore it is a statistically significant and positive correlation. The implication is



that the better the people know about career counselling services the better they perceive their provision as well.

**Table 4.11**

Provision of Career Counselling by Respondent Type					
Respondent Type	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Student	150	3.22	0.63	2.15	0.033
Staff	50	3.45	0.56		

Table 11 shows the result of independent samples t-test between the student and staff on perception of provision of career counseling. The average score of students was 3.22 and that of staff is better at 3.45. A significant difference is revealed by the t- value of 2.15 and a value of significance 0.033 ( $p < 0.05$ ). We can draw an implication that employees think that the career counselling services are better equipped rather than the thoughts among the students.

**Table 4.12**

Awareness of Career Counselling by Gender and Respondent Type Interaction					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Gender $\times$ Type	1.842	1	1.842	3.98	0.048
Error	90.526	198	0.457		

Table 12: ANOVA Table 14 entails a two way ANOVA dealing with determining the interaction effect of gender and type of respondent (student /staff) on the awareness of career counselling. The F-value of interaction is 3.98 and its p-value is 0.048 and is found to be significant. This is an indication that there is a significant interaction between gender and awareness by nature of the respondent who can either be a student or staff which should further be investigated.

## Discussion

This research work was meant to test the perception of the provision of career counselling services and their availability in government institutions in the rural localities in which the institutions are located. A total of 150 students and 50 staff members of rural public colleges were sampled in the study that focused on how well or to what degree are career counselling facilities available and recognized. According to the results, it stands clear that, in spite of the estimated general agreement concerning the significance of the career counselling, its practical application in selected rural colleges has remained quite weak, underdeveloped, and mostly informal. The initial important finding entailed that the level of awareness of career counselling services offered in their institutions was low amongst the students.

The other respondents had no such services or thought that it was not formally available (majority of the respondents). This result is consistent with the one of the study by Nasir and Munir (2020) that stated that rural learners in Pakistan do not usually get access to structured guidance as a result of negligence on the part of the institution and absence of trained personnel. Lack of career guidance systems also leads to loss of direction in establishing a wrong career. Besides, the fact that the availability and actual provision of the services vary looks like there is a gap in communications between administration and the students. A better informed staff perception also revealed that most of the colleges did not have formal career counselling units. Teachers and administrators were well conscious of the significance of career counselling but they abhorred the lack of resources, policy and institutional scope to put in position. This result is in line with the study of Yousaf and Ahmed (2019) which indicated that in most of the rural regions of Pakistan, career counselling is not regarded as an obligatory service, and accordingly, is not a priority.

The fact that a distinct guideline is not provided by the education authorities worsens the problem since individual colleges have no clue as to how they should about such services efficiently. The other important finding of the research is gender difference in perceptions. Women students were more interested in getting career guidance than the men students. The latter point might be explained by the fact that the social, cultural and mobility realities of female students in the rural environment tend to be more complicated when making career choices. In this way, career counselling, which is conceptualized in terms of care in this sense, is viewed not only as a service but also as a possible means of empowerment and towards direction.

This observation can be lent credence with Khan et al. (2021) who noticed that career advice can especially be life-changing to the rural female high school students who have to contend with limited experiences in society. The paper has also revealed that students consulted their peer or other faculty members in general, instead of the career counsellors. This is an informal way which indicates the absence of the formal systems of professional counselling. This form of dependency as much as it is useful in certain situations, may breed false information and exposure of the students to scant knowledge of different career choices. Official counselling needs professional people who have undergone training to be able to evaluate their strength, interests and aptitude and give an informed counsel accordingly. In the absence of this, students can just keep at it to follow time-tested vocations or careers that are welcomed by the society.

One of the structural barriers to effective delivery of the counselling service, which was critical and observed in the study, was the absence of the specific places or offices which would conduct the counselling. The lack of physical infrastructure implies that there is no career counselling incorporated in the institutional design of the rural colleges. This is not only symbolical of the low priority which is paid to such services but actually prevents the establishment of safe, confidential, and professional setting where the students can dialogue their future plans. According to a study conducted by Farooq and Tariq (2018), even the formation of counselling units in colleges boosted the activities of students and minimized the mix-ups in the minds of students concerning higher education and careers.

The general view that emerged amongst staff members administratively was the fact that institutional leadership should have a greater role in the promotion of counselling services. Nowadays, the role of facilitating students is informally shared among the teaching personnel who do not receive any training or are appointed to do such job formally. The given situation results in the lack of congruency in the quality and coverage of guidance. On the contrary in other countries where educational counselling systems are well developed like Finland and Canada, career counselling is an obligatory component to the college services that has designated positions and employed/trained specialists. Such a model is absent in rural Pakistan which means that there is no student support service. Among the more encouraging conclusions was the fact that counselling had a positive perception even among the staff and the students.

The conviction concerning the usefulness of the services shows that regardless of the lack of services, there is every likelihood of establishing well-designed counselling programs. The stakeholders showed their willingness to have regular seminars, one-on-one consultations and in setting education on career issues as part of the academic program. Such degrees of receptiveness can act as a leveraging position in place of policymakers and educational planners to present low-cost and scalable counselling programs to rural colleges. In the study, the researchers have also shown the lack of institutional connections with the job market or careers agencies. The college did not give any account of any affiliation with external job placement agencies, NGOs, and government career offices. This is not in harmony with the employment ecosystem and hampers the scope of the understanding of the market trends, emerging professions and market needs of the students.

This shortfall in education and employment may be closed by possible ways of collaboration, when the colleges conduct career fairs, invite people to give talks, or even online career platform use. The success of these interventions is proved in comparable settings through the studies conducted by different international institutions like OECD (2020). The other outstanding discovery was that in the cases that career counselling was provided it was reactionary and not proactive in nature. Some example, other institutions have the career guidance talks only during the final semester or near to examination periods. In this fashion, there is hardly any alternative left to planning long term or venturing out in various possible careers. The ideal concept of proactive career counselling would then start early into college life such that the students would have enough time to discover their goals, their interests and make plans accordingly. Statistically speaking, there occurred huge disparities between the levels of perception based on the student/ staff type and, based on gender and age variables.

All these differences also present the importance of differentiated and inclusive methods of counselling. It is possible to have a one-size-fits-all model, which cannot respond to differing needs of different classes of students, particularly, in the rural and socio-economically impoverished environments. This study offers its findings, which support the reason of policy changes on the matter of student support services. Career counselling ought not to be viewed as a luxury or as an additional option but instead it must be an essential part of the learning process. The facts indicate that rural students have distinctive problems in career preparation as they endure geographical seclusion, cultural restriction and exposure insufficiency. The solution to these can be offered through institutionalized counselling that will help achieve better education results, easier access to employment and a boost of social position.

### Conclusion

As the study has shown, awareness and positive attitude as far as career counselling in concerned does exist but it is not being practised to a large degree in the rural government colleges of Pakistan. The significant barriers are institutional neglect, scarcity of resources, unavailability of trained individuals and poor policies. Nevertheless, the readiness of students and employees of the university to use such services provides a substantial argument on the possible future interventions. Career counselling when well done can be an instrument of transformation with regards to enabling rural youths to make informed choices thus breaking the socio-economic walls as well as making them useful contributors in national development.

### Recommendations

1. A mobile or online web portal can be established through which rural college learners can seek distant career counselling help.
2. Career counselling and academic advising should be combined accordingly so that a student refers to his/her strengths and interests in making decisions regarding choosing the suitable courses.
3. There should be awareness programs to inform parents and the surrounding people on the potentiality of career counselling on the future of the students.
4. Periodically, feedback on the services provided by the career guidance should be obtained by students and staff so that effective feedbacks may be gathered to enhance the improvement as well as the performance of such services.
5. The government policies must give preference to the funds and planning about the career guidance infrastructure development in the rural educational establishments.

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