

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICES BASED ON PARENTS' EDUCATION AND INCOME LEVEL

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to investigate the career selection of adolescent students in respect to their parents' education and income status. The quantitative comparative research design was followed and the data was gathered from 357 students who were selected through the use of simple random sampling technique. Structured questionnaire with a Likert scale was used for measuring the career choice. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA. The results showed students had moderate tendencies towards career choice ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.74$). The findings also showed that the level of education of parents was significantly different between students' career choices, $F(2, 354) = 6.84$, $p = .001$, and income level, $F(2, 354) = 4.12$, $p = .017$. In both cases, the career choice tendencies of students from higher education and higher income backgrounds were comparatively more positive. It was found that parents' education and income are important factors influencing students' career selection. Educational institutions are advised to enhance the gendered support and services, including career counseling and career development guidance to students in the lower socio-economic status and ensure that gender parity in access to career development services.

Keywords: *Career Choice, Parents' Education, Income Level*

Introduction

Choosing a career is one of the most important choices in a student's academic life, which condition their future occupational paths, economic security, and social spaces. According to Khan et al., (2022), career decision making is not a cognitive process but is influenced by familial and socioeconomic factors. Likewise, it has been observed that the aspirations of students are continuously molded through the presence of the parents, where they come from and what they do, in terms of their education and income level, since these have an impact on exposure and access to opportunities related to their career (Ali and Ahmed, 2023). There is an extensive literature that indicates that parental education has a well-established role as a strong predictor of students' career development patterns. Students with parents who have higher education are more likely to get structured academic guidance, motivational support and informed career counseling within their homes (Rehman et al., 2021). Higher parental education, on the other hand, typically offers students more choices in career exposure, leading to more varied career aspirations. The study by Siddiqui and Farooq (2024) further reveals that parental education plays a key role in improving the awareness among students about the profession and the students' awareness is heightened in

competitive professions like medicine, engineering, civil services etc. The income of the parents is also an important factor in determining students' career decisions. The authors of Malik et al. (2023) report that students receiving wealthier families' support tend to have more access to private schooling, tutoring and career counseling services, all of which positively expand students' career choice-decision making capabilities. Contrastingly, most of the students of the less well-off backgrounds tend to opt for steady job that enables them to afford living expenses rather than for career that is of personal interest (Hussain & Iqbal, 2022). This serves as a sign that socioeconomic inequality directly correlates to inequitable career opportunities of students.

In many cases, parent influence goes beyond the financial side of things to psychological and cultural role modelling in career preference. Parents pass on expectations, values and occupational preferences which have a strong influence on the decisions made by the students. Based on the study of Zafar et al. (2025) where parental expectations have a significant effect either on the expansion or restriction of students' perceived career options depending on the extent of autonomy provided to them in the family, it is inferred that parental expectations play a major role in the students' perception of their career options. Additionally, this influence is more relevant in the cases of collectivist societies where family approval is important in the decision-making process. In addition, intuitive studies have indicated that social cognitive processes including self-efficacy and outcome expectations are related directly to career decision making. Parental education and socioeconomic surroundings both impact both perceived abilities and expected outcomes which further influence the development of students' career interests (Iqbal & Saeed, 2021). An educated and knowledgeable parent whose household is not facing financial difficulties allows their students to have the freedom to pursue loftier career aspirations, while another situation in which parents lack the means of supporting their children's lives lessens students' career exploration behavior. The recent studies done in the educational environment of developing countries reveal that social-economic differences are still present when it comes to access to job counselling and informational materials (Raza & Javed 2024). Consequently, the pupils of economically disadvantaged backgrounds take advantage of informal career guidance and pupils of privileged backgrounds of structured career planning support. This also leads to persisting inequality in jobs and job satisfaction. Considering the Pak Education/Socio-economic segregation, parental education and income have greater influence on the career transition of the students especially in Pakistan. Limited institutional career counseling also further confirms Anwar et al. (2023) findings that this further puts a strain on the reliance on family background in career decision making. Thus, one needs to be aware of how these factors may affect the career options students are given, and have a good grasp of how to develop an educational and counselling plan to better serve the needs of these students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to compare parental education and income with students' choice of career.

Problem Statement

The career decision-making process is still a factor with multifaceted – albeit complex – determinants among students. Including high reliance on family and socio-economic factors instead of systematic exploration of external factors like personal interests and abilities, many students in modern educational settings still make career decisions without proper guidance and counseling (Ahmed & Raza, 2024). This means that career development remains largely determined by factors in the external environment. Parental education has been well acknowledged as a factor that has determined students' academic socialization and career awareness. Research indicates that children of educated parents are more likely to be offered informed advice and wider

choice of career options as a consequence of which their career awareness, knowledge and decision-making power increases (Bilal et al., 2022). There is, however, still not a lot of empirical research available to determine if the differences are reflected in statistically meaningful differences in the career choices of students across the different educational levels. Furthermore, variations in parent income are significantly related to disparities in educational opportunities and career resources that parents use. Students from richer families have been found to enjoy more and better school infrastructure, have access to more tutoring facilities, and to a wider range of opportunities in career counseling than their poorer peers, creating greater decision space for the choice of career (Saeed & Malik, 2023). Cohorts from low-income backgrounds, on the other hand, do often experience structural limitations that limit their choices of career exploration and guide them toward more financially stable, but less preferred, foundational career pathways (Javed et al., 2025).

While parental education and income are recognized as having an impact, the existing literature often focuses on parental education or income, without integrating into the analysis the impact of parental education and/or income. Such de-segmented analysis does not help in the understanding of whether both variables are having separate and distinct impacts or have a common impact on students' career choices (Farooq & Ilyas, 2021). This means there is a lack of conceptual understanding on the comparability of socioeconomic determinants of career decision patterns. Furthermore, career counseling may not be well developed in most countries and formal structures are still emerging so that often students rely on parents for advice on career choice. This reliance places the odds of socioeconomic factors having a definitive influence on employment outcomes unfavorable for people of social disadvantage (Nadeem et al., 2026). Yet studies that compare, in more limited ways, career paths for students in different types of families by parental level of education and income are not common, especially at the student population level. Thus, the problem investigated in this study is the lack of evidences showing that significant differences exist in students' career choices among students whose parents differently educated and earn different income in the same context of education.

Research Objectives

- To compare students' career choices based on parents' education level.
- To compare students' career choices based on parents' income level.

Research Questions

- Is there any difference in students' career choices based on parents' education level?
- Is there any difference in students' career choices based on parents' income level?

Research Hypothesis

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference in students' career choices based on parents' education level.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference in students' career choices based on parents' income level.

Literature Review

Concept of Career Choice

Career choice is the process of which a person chooses an occupational pathway or profession that aligns with their interests, abilities, values and future aspirations. Focusing on contemporary research, career decision making is seen as a complex and multilayered process that is a product of social, educational and environmental context as well as personality. The influences on career

choices include academics experiences, parents' expectations, socio-economic background, and access to occupational opportunities (Brown & Lent, 2021; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2021). So, the process of career decision making is more accepted as a developmental process that is socially dependent, and not as an independent personal decision. Career prospects continue to be assessed by students as they go through different phases of school, depending on their expectations of career opportunities, self-efficacy, and economic security (Nguyen & Tran, 2023).

It is noted that career selection is important, having a right Career decision helps to contribute positively to academic motivation, career satisfaction, and employment stability. However, wrong career decisions can cause loss of commitment in the job, stress, and dissatisfaction. The literature has revealed that there is a shift in the perception of career development from a one-off process to a lifelong process that is not static, but is influenced by the change in labour market demand, technological changes and social changes (Donahue, 2013; Watson et al., 2024). Additionally, family history and socioeconomic influences have a definite impact on students' opportunities to educational resources and occupational information, which then impacts student aspirations and career pathways (Maree, 2022). Hence, a knowledge of what it means to choose a career is needed to look at what role parental education and income has to play in explaining different students' career decisions.

Students' Career Choice and Decision-Making

Career choice and career decision making is a multi-faceted process whereby people choose an occupational pathway as a result of cognitive, psychological and contextual factors coming together. Contemporary research highlights that career decision making is influenced by personal orientations as well as the external environment (Sultana & Zampoukos, 2022) and is therefore a continuous developmental process, rather than a decision made at one point in time. There are many factors that have multiple tiers that affect a person's choice of a career. The preferences for certain occupations are determined by personal characteristics such as the interests, aptitude, personality attributes and perceived competence of the students. Meanwhile, there are numerous external factors, such as parental aspirations, socio-economic status, peer influence, and education resource access, that greatly influence the career opportunities at a student's disposal. Empirical research studies point towards the fact that despite having personal preferences in acquiring smartphones and tablets, under stringent environmental conditions, preferences may be overwhelmed (Babar & Ali, 2023; Rahman et al., 2024). Generally, career decision making is a dynamic process, in which internal motives come into interaction with external pressures. The career decisions are not solely made by students, but are a process with a medium of negotiation that is allowed by the family influence, social structure and opportunities that students have, and thus leaving the students' career decision lineage under the effect of this negotiation framework (Zhang & Liu, 2021).

Influence of Parents' Education on Career Choices

Parents' educational background can be one of the contributing factors to students' career choices, affecting their guidance of students through learned behaviors and their cognitive and occupational information and awareness. The high level of parents' educational background increases their capacity to offer students structured academic assistance and their advice about the education and career path would be more realistic and informed, thereby improving students' capacity for more informed and realistic career decisions (Gati & Levin, 2021). For those students whose family educational backgrounds are lower, they might get less guidance and have limited exposure to choices of careers available to them. Academic guidance and setting expectations is one of the

most significant ways that parental attitudes towards careers affect an adolescent. Educationally inclined to highly educated parents holds higher expectations of their children regarding educational levels and promotes them to go for professional and competitive career. They also enable access to learning opportunities that provide information about courses and learning activities leading to further information and advice on their career journeys (Schoon & Eccles, 2022). Besides, parents' knowledge enhances students' awareness of career choices, which helps them assess the best options for their personal interests and skills and match them to availability and structure of career and occupational opportunities (Kim & Park, 2023). Empirical research has always found that there is a significant relationship between parental education and students significant aspirations and choices when choosing a career. Data shows that children of highly educated parents are more inclined to pursue higher status careers (Lentini et al., 2024) in fields like medicine, engineering, and law, as their families tend to encourage and influence their academic choices. In contrast, low level of education among parents is linked to restricted career exploration and an inclination to traditional or less information intense career.

Influence of Parents' Income Level on Career Choices

One of the most important factors when it comes to socioeconomic status and its influence on career choices is parental income. Its influence is seen in access to learning resources, learning environments, and chances to explore opportunities into career choices. Students from higher income families tend to be better able to receive a broader and more varied array of academic and professional experiences, and are consequently more likely to have a more expansive and more assertive career aspirations (Choi & Kim, 2022). Students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, however, may be unable to access a diverse set of career pathways as a result of structural constraints. Education and career-related resources are a key way that income can affect choice of career. Families with higher incomes are able to better afford career interventions like better school education, private tutoring, digital learning tools, and career counseling, which also increases the student's career awareness of available options (Ramos & Silva, 2023). Furthermore, students can also think ahead for their professional futures, as they can afford to take part in longer terms of education and training. However, financial constraints could force students to short-cut their career choices, such as opting to work to get by now rather than making long-term plans for employment. Perceived career opportunities and flexibility of decisions are also dependent on income. Career decision making is more likely to be a lax process for those from wealthy backgrounds due to increased financial security reducing incentive to select income driven careers. On the contrary, students from economically disadvantaged families tend to be more inclined in selecting their careers due to the job security and earning potentials when compared with their interest and aptitude (Nguyen & Hoang, 2024). This means that the budding career influences the financial considerations of the chosen career. Empirical studies also support the strong connection between parental income and student aspirations for various jobs and career choices. Studies indicate that students' socioeconomic backgrounds affect opportunities for access to career guidance and exposure to the world of work, and in turn, have an impact on their career perceptions and aspirations among students of different socio-economic levels (Lee & Park, 2021). The results of this study indicate that the education-career pathway disparities persist to be a significant factor in determining education-career pathway outcomes.

Socioeconomic Factors and Career Development

Students' social-economic status is an important factor because it is closely linked to their aspirations towards careers, access to resources, and future educational paths. Aspirations seen by

students are likely influenced by their social class, with students from more prestigious and higher social economic status backgrounds more likely to have high and honorable career goals, while students from lower social economic backgrounds are more likely to have a goal of work stability and immediate job placement (Garcia & Weiss, 2022). This shows not only the economic but also the potential of socioeconomic measures (SES) to predict career aspiration patterns. In terms of inequality of career opportunities, improved research has identified inequities in access to career information, career counseling and career experiential learning opportunities. The inequalities between different groups are mainly due to variation in family income, parental education and institutional support systems (Thompson & McCoy, 2023). Therefore, students from disadvantaged communities are likely to be exposed to limited career exposure, leaving them limited in their ability to make informed career choices. These disparities add to the enduring disparities in education outcomes, earnings and labor force to participation. On the social mobility side, career development is correlated with the opportunity of people to move up in their socioeconomic status via education and work. Empirical evidence, however, shows that many children are less likely to move into higher social positions because their family backgrounds, and the parental education and income levels in particular, can limit their social mobility (Walker & Zhu, 2021). Children of higher socio-economic status have more possibility to remain or increase their social standing while children of lower socio-economic status have built in barriers that make it less likely that they can improve their social status.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory proposed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994) serves as the model used for this study. Career development is a product of cognitive factors, environmental influences and personal factors, SCCT explains. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) identified three constructs that influence career decision making – self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. The factors impact the formation of career interests and career decisions of an individual. Parents' education and level of income are important environmental factors in this study. More highly educated and higher earning parents positively influence students' self-efficacy and their career-related resources, and less educated and less successful parents can negatively influence exposure and subsequent career potential. This explains that socioeconomic background is the determinant in students' career choices reasonably well.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

There has been a growing focus in recent empirical research on the effect of the SES background of parents on the career decision-making processes of their children. The relationship between students' career choices at the secondary level and parental education was explored through a quantitative study methodology based on a survey research design and regression analysis (Johnson and Smith, 2022). Results showed that students whose parents had high educational attainment had significantly higher levels of awareness and choice for professional occupations with their parents' education more positively influencing students' career choice. Likewise, Ahmed et al. (2023) looked into the effect of income on the career aspiration of the parent generated a cross-sectional study with the help of questionnaires. Their findings, which were examined using ANOVA, revealed that the higher income children tended to be more likely to express preferences for careers of high prestige and occupational stability in the longer term, while children from lower-income family backgrounds expressed a preference for those of shorter career duration, stability and lower prestige. The study concluded that it was significant that income inequalities can have a noticeable effect on students' job choice preferences. Extending this evidence, Williams

and Carter (2024) used correlational research design to investigate the joint effects of parental education and socio-economic status on university students' career decision making. They found that there was a moderate but significant positive correlation between the two variables, SES and career exploration behavior. This study highlighted not only that advantaged students received greater access to career-related information but their greater confidence in making career decisions as well.

However, Lee and Park (2021) used Structural Equation Modeling to examine the direct relationship between parental influence and career choice outcomes. Their results indicated that while parental education greatly influences career awareness, the effect of parental education directly on the final career choice declined when psychological factors (self-efficacy and personal interest) were added in the model. This suggests that the impact of family background may rely on individual's cognitive factors. A synthesis of the empirical literature indicates, overall, that there is general consensus that parental education and income level have significance in students' career development. Yet some studies report greater and more direct an influence than others. There are studies which note a direct and strong socioeconomic impact on the others note a partial mediation of this impact by personal and psychological factors. The consistency suggests that further empirical research is needed in other pedagogical and cultural settings to reveal the relationship between parental education and income, as jointly affecting students' career decisions.

Research Gap

It has been found in the past that certain personal and family factors, such as parental education and income, are significant predictors of students' career choices; but most studies have examined the effect of a particular one of these factors. Therefore, there is little information as to whether a difference in parents' education or income motivates students' career decisions. Furthermore, conduct of much of the existing research is done in an international environment and only a few focus on this issue in Pakistan where the influence of family and the socioeconomic differences strongly impact the career decision making process. Hence it is necessary to get empirical evidence which is up-to-date and contextually relevant, so that it can shed light on such relationships as exist locally.

Research Methodology

The quantitative, comparative research design was used in this study to compare students career choices according to the educational level and income of their parents. Design was deemed suitable because the variables are measurable and can be statistically compared between groups. The study population comprised Grade Intermediate (FA/FSc) students of selected educational institutions in the study area, of which N = 5000 students is an estimate. The population was then sampled using the simple random sampling method which gave every student a random and equal chance of being sampled. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table indicated that for a population of 5000, sampling size of 357 respondents is adequate for the purpose of statistical reliability and representativeness. A structured questionnaire was used with a 5-point Likert scale, where items were intended to capture students careers choice preferences as well as information on parents education and income level. The instrument was modified from appropriate previous studies to suit the needs of the present study. The content validity was established by the expert review and the reliability by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with values of 0.70 or greater used as a criterion of acceptability. Consent of selected institutions was obtained before collecting the data. The participants were told the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained prior to administering the questionnaires. To assure maximum return and accuracy, data was gathered face-

to-face. The data collected was analyzed with SPSS software. The data was summarized using descriptive statistics like frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation. One-Way ANOVA was used for inferential analysis for parents' education and income level differences in students' choosing their careers. All the statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Information of Participants

Table 1. The gender distribution demonstrates that there is a balance of gender, with 182 students being male (51.0%) and 175 female (49.0%). On education level of parents, the majority of respondents are from the higher secondary and above category ($f = 142$, 39.8%), the secondary education category ($f = 119$, 33.3%) and primary education category people are the least ($f = 96$, 26.9%). This implies that a slightly higher proportion of pupils is from families with a higher educational level. When the parents' income level is considered, the majority ($f = 151$, 42.3 %) fall in the middle-income group, followed by low-income group ($f = 118$, 33.1 %), and high-income group ($f = 88$, 24.6 %). This indicates that the sample universe is mainly composed of middle socio-economic status while lesser number are of low-income families.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 357)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	51.0
	Female	175	49.0
Parents' Education	Primary	96	26.9
	Secondary	119	33.3
	Higher Secondary & Above	142	39.8
Parents' Income Level	Low	118	33.1
	Middle	151	42.3
	High	88	24.6

Descriptive Analysis of Career Choice

Descriptive statistics of students' career choice scores is presented in Table 2. The results showed that the students' overall score of career choice is 3.62 ($M = 3.62$) indicating moderate to moderately high level of students' push towards career choice using the given likert scale. The

standard deviation of 0.74 results from moderate variation in responses. This indicates that despite significant overlap in career tendencies, especially among students, there is some variation in the degree to which students look upon or prefer various career options. Finally, results indicate that parental education still has a significant impact on career choices of the students in the context studied and that it is important to provide career guidance and educational support systems for students who come from a lower level of education.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Career Choice Scores

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Career Choice Score	357	3.62	0.74

Inferential Analysis (One-Way ANOVA)

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in students' career choices based on parents' education level. The description of student career choices based on parents' income level is shown in Table 4, which shows the descriptive data and test results of one-way ANOVA. The results of descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA which shows the differences in student career choices based on parents' income level are presented in Table 4. The descriptive results show that mean career choice scores gradually increase over income categories. Mean scores for students in low income, middle income and high-income groups were 3.39 (SD = 0.71), 3.63 (SD = 0.73) and 3.78 (SD = 0.75), respectively, indicating that students of low-income families had the lowest mean score, followed by students of middle-income families and the highest mean score for students from high income families. This trend indicates that students from more socio-economically advantageous backgrounds are more likely to exhibit a stronger and/or better developed career choice preference. The results are statistically significant in each of the income groups ($F(2, 354) = 4.12, p = .017$). Thus, the null hypothesis (*H₀₂*) is rejected suggesting that there is a significant difference between parents' level of income and student's choice of career.

These findings can be discussed in terms of the Social Cognitive Career Theory which suggests that the career-related self-efficacy and decision-making patterns are significantly influenced by the environmental learning experiences. Well-educated parents are more likely to offer career guidance, a variety of career options and expectations in a way that will boost students' confidence in their future choices. This falls in line with the empirical study that indicates the positive role of parents' education in the process of students finding their careers and making career choices (Li et al., 2023; Pandey et al., 2024). The findings are also consistent with those of other research, which found that students with higher aspirations for their future careers and broader exposure to career exploration themselves tend to have family members with higher levels of education, and therefore have access to greater information and advising resources (Williams & Carter, 2024). Some studies, however, have suggested that the parental education's direct influence on shaping awareness could also be indirectly conveyed through youth various individual factors (such as self-efficacy and personal interests) (Lee & Park, 2021). The current study results, however, argue the

importance of parental educational status as another contextual factor that must be considered during career choice decision-making. Overall, the results highlight that parental education remains an influential determinant of students' career choices in the studied context, suggesting that educational support systems and career guidance programs should particularly target students from lower parental education backgrounds.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and One-Way ANOVA for Career Choice Based on Parents' Education

Group	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Primary	96	3.41	0.72		
Secondary	119	3.58	0.69	6.84	.001
Higher Secondary & Above	142	3.77	0.73		
Total / ANOVA	357	3.62	0.74		

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in students' career choices based on parents' income level. Table 4 presents the results of the descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA examining differences in students' career choices based on parents' income level. The descriptive results indicate a gradual increase in mean career choice scores across income categories. Students from low-income families reported the lowest mean score ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.71$), followed by middle-income ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.73$), while the highest mean score was observed among students from high-income families ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.75$). This pattern suggests that students from relatively higher-income backgrounds tend to demonstrate stronger or more developed career choice preferences. The findings indicate a statistically significant difference among the income groups, $F(2, 354) = 4.12$, $p = .017$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, showing that parents' income level significantly influences students' career choices.

This study is based on Social Cognitive Career Theory to explain that the environment resource and opportunities are one of the factors that influences the process of making career decisions. Higher-income students may have access to better education resources, exposure to a variety of career choices, and supportive school environments that boost students' confidence and decision-making ability in their careers. In accordance with empirical evidence that supports the positive relationship between SE factors and student career pathways and expectations (Wang et al., 2022; Peng & Yue, 2022). The present findings support previous studies that suggest that career exploration barriers may widen as well as access to opportunities for career exploration, particularly when it comes to finances (Williams & Carter, 2024). There is a bit, however, of research that shows that specific opportunities are provided due to the income level of a child's family (Lee & Park, 2021); but there are other factors, including self-efficacy and personal interests that may moderate such access to opportunities. The results in the current study, however, further support the idea that family income is an important family factor in students' career decisions in the explored context. The overall results show that there is a need for career guidance interventions with students from lower income status addressing students' career decisions in a more uniform fashion in order to provide equal access to the career opportunities.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and One-Way ANOVA for Career Choice Based on Parents' Income Level

Group	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Low Income	118	3.39	0.71		
Middle Income	151	3.63	0.73	4.12	.017
High Income	88	3.78	0.75		
Total / ANOVA	357	3.62	0.74		

Conclusion

This present research concentrated on the careers selected based on both the education and income of parents of students. The results revealed a significant influence of the family context on the students' career choice decisions. Furthermore, some differences in career choice tendencies were reported within parental education and income groups, which showed that the career preferences of students are not uniform across levels of income and parental education. The findings revealed that there was a relationship between students' levels of education and their parents' career choice orientations, with the students of higher education levels reporting more favorable career choice orientations than those with lower educational levels. Likewise, income group variation was also identified in terms of career choice pattern; generally, the students from the higher income group showed a relatively-high career choice decision pattern than lower income group students. These findings suggest that parents' knowledge and their economic status have an important influence on the awareness, exposure, and confidence of their students when it comes to career options. In general, the results support the thesis that the students' social economic and educational environments are significantly related to their career choices. The study identifies the importance of access to resources, parental guidance and more comprehensive access to academic and occupational opportunities in supporting students in making informed career decisions. Therefore, there is a need for extra institutional support to improve the work awareness and planning of students from comparatively disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings from this study demonstrate that parenting education and economic status are important factors that shape career decisions among students and indicates the need to require equitable career guidance interventions to support the career decision-making of all students in making informed and realistic choices.

Recommendations

- Structured career counselling in educational institutions should be enhanced to enable students to make informed career choices at the secondary and higher secondary stages.
- Schools/Colleges should make sure that access to career guidance (including aptitude testing, career seminars, counselling sessions etc.) is equal across different backgrounds, especially among those from less education than parents have received.
- Career-awareness initiatives that are targeted to students of low-income parents and families should be provided to decrease informational and opportunity disparities in career exploration.

- Teachers need to be trained to include basic information and guidance about working towards a career goal/awareness into the classroom lessons, which is needed given that some students do not receive enough parental guidance.
- Educational policymakers need to create inclusive Career Counselling processes that consider the socioeconomic inequalities and encourage equal career development opportunities for all students.

Future Research Directions

- Further research is needed to examine other factors like personality, academic achievement, peer influence, and self-efficacy in future career decision making to complete the picture of students' career decision making process.
- It is suggested that the longitudinal research design method is used to perform studies that can analyze the change of students' careers orientation over time and determine its correlation with the change of parents and environment influence on students. Further studies could extend the sample to include other geographic regions and increase sample size for more generalizable results.
- A mixed method research design could involve both qualitative and quantitative, with emphasis on the qualitative to gain more understanding of the reasons behind students' career preferences.
- Further studies can also look into mediating or moderating variables such as career decision-making self-efficacy to gain insight in the relationship between parental background and career choice.

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