

Factors Influencing Students' Choices of Academic Career in Pakistan

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Choice of career is a very complicated decision for students because it establishes the kind of profession they plan to chase in their future life. Mostly, students make career choice during their secondary schooling. The problem they face is matching their career choices with their interests and academic performance while accommodating their parental wishes at the same time. This study aims to identify the factors which play a major role in the choice of academic careers students are currently pursuing in the university, and how certain personal characteristics and academic support may shape their prospective choices for future profession and career. Case study was the chosen approach and the University of Management and Technology (UMT) the selected case. Correlation research was the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. A survey was conducted with three hundred students of UMT randomly selected from three schools and eight undergraduate programs taught in these schools. Self-constructed questionnaire comprising 30 items was used as a tool for survey. Exploratory factor analysis and regression were applied on the data recorded in SPSS 21 to determine the student satisfaction levels with their career choices both in retrospect and prospect. The results indicated that social and peer group factor is stronger than family factor in retrospect of career choices; the economic factor remains neutral, whereas, academic support and self-efficacy build the prospect of continuing the same academic career as a profession. The study identifies the challenges faced by the students in Pakistan of matching their career choices with their abilities extending the research literature regarding the career choices of students in a Pakistani perspective.

Keywords: academic support, career choices, case study, economic factor, family,

Education is a status symbol, much appreciated as resulting in high income jobs (Hui & Lent, 2018; Zaidi & Iqbal, 2012). The changing nature of work: careers, identities, and work lives in the 21st century are making career choices further difficult (LaVeck, 2018) as career interests and aspirations are getting stereotyped and segregated into technical and professional education like accounting, business and finance, or medicine and engineering (Baruch & Vardi, 2016). Career is the blueprint of one's life (Latif, Aziz, & Ahmed, 2016) where, steps once taken forward cannot be retreated easily; therefore, it is the utmost critical choice one makes in lifetime.

Career choice involves a cognitive process regarding selection of a particular vocation or job for future (Kolawole, Osundina, James & Abolaji, 2012). The early choice of academic career binds a

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Contribution of Authors

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person in a profession for life. It is a popular assumption that in traditional country like Pakistan, where youth is dependent upon 'important others' to make decisions for themselves; most of the youth jump into a career following a tradition of family, affection for a friend or infatuation with an ideal. Hardly ever career is chosen scientifically based upon aptitude testing or using other psychological measures. Therefore, it is important to know whether these traditions are continuing or millennial generation have become independent to choose their academic careers objectively and rationally.

In 21st century it is hard to think that youth may have limited career choices, the son of a blacksmith would be predestined to become a blacksmith, or the son of a feudal lord would be born to rule. Professions and careers are no more determined by ascribed status on birth (Todorescu, Greculescu & Popescu-Mitroi, 2015). Fourth industrial revolution has entered Pakistani market as well and effects of globalization and internationalization are immanent in massification of higher education and rapid increase in number of private universities (Arif, 2018; Arif, Ilyas & Hameed, 2017; Naz, 2019). Above all, gender is no more a limitation anymore especially when so many females have also entered the workforce demanding their due right to be considered as serious professional (Arif, Ejaz & Yousaf, 2017).

Student body in higher education is highly diverse demonstrating the key attributes of a millennial who wants to enjoy quality of life with achievement and success (Arif et al., 2017). Emergence of information technology and global connections on social media have made career choice tougher, since student expectations are touching horizon, and higher education institutions in Pakistan are facing troubles in ever escalating demands of students and society from higher education in Pakistan (Arif, Ilyas & Hameed, 2013, 2017). The government and its regulating authorities are also closely monitoring higher education institutions how they are meeting demands of stakeholders, and ensuring sustainable career is one of its key aspects (Hussain, 2017; Usman, 2014). Therefore, it becomes essential to explore not only the trends of career choices, but determine as well which are the key factors influencing students' career choices in private universities of Pakistan.

Salami (2008) underlined numerous factors influencing students' career choices such as self-beliefs, social identity, intrigue, financial provisions, role models, globalization and the information gathered through media which are pertinent to a career selection. Bandura and his associates regard self-efficacy beliefs as key determinant of future career choice (Bandura, 2012; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001). Researchers have further highlighted that self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of scope of choices regarding academic career, occupational interests and their relentless pursuit leading to personal success (Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia & Roxas, 2015; Guan, Capezio, Restubog, Read, Lajom & Li, 2016; Van Dinther, Dochy & Segers, 2011).

Parents play a very critical role in shaping students choice of career (Chen & Fouad, 2013; Fouad, Kim, Ghosh, Chang & Figueiredo, 2016). Students feel optimistic about their careers if they get adequate social support from their parents, family, friends and teachers (Howard, Flanagan, Castine & Walsh, 2015; Humayon, Raza, Khan & Ansari, 2018). Parents' socioeconomic status and their education have great impact on their children's career choice along with the inherited qualities and the influence of the surroundings in which they are brought up (Osa-edoh & Alutu, 2011; Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin & Lucas, 2013). Students start getting primary guidance from their home, so, if the parents are highly qualified, the students may get good guidance and motivation from their parents (Humayon et al., 2018; Obiyo & Eze, 2015).

Research has established that it is difficult to obliterate this traditional role (Guan et al., 2016), especially in South Asia and the part which was previously recognized as sub-continent including Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Though, peer pressure and influence of media is becoming stronger day by day, but according to Reddy and Rajaram (2015) it is not serving larger good. Swaminathan (2014) reiterated that youth tend to make wrong choices of career in absence of expert guidance from family or teachers. Much earlier Salami (2008) had warned that many students tend to make wrong choices in their career because of ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, or tags attached with certain job types without taking expert opinion. Hence, career counselors insist that students aspiring for an academic career must acknowledge personal abilities, strengths and weaknesses to make higher education a successful experience (Latif et al., 2016; Humayon et al., 2018).

Ikwesiri (2016) asserted, in knowledge age of 21st century, it is convenient for everyone to earn money and stable career by acquiring best knowledge and skills required by industry, and the university is the best place to acquire what is needed in the market (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Sarwar & Azmat, 2013). Therefore, it is vital for students to conduct a thorough career research in order to make the right choice of an academic career comparable with their socio-economic position (Humayon et al., 2018; Noreen & Khalid, 2012; Shumba & Naong, 2012). Moreover, Ahmed, Sharif, and Ahmad (2017) warn if the university students of Pakistan would not make right career choices, it would be impossible for the country to reach the economic goals, the country deems for in the neck-throat competition of neo-liberal economics.

Students' socio-economic background may facilitate or inhibit his aspirations for future education (Humayon et al., 2018; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013; Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Privatization of higher education may deprive several aspiring candidates to continue their education in their desired field, because of poor family finances. The situation is more critical for girls than boys to join the academic career of their choice in Pakistan (Noreen & Khalid, 2012). Gender and social context as well as students' expectancy of the outcomes play a vital role in the choice of career (Aziz & Kamal, 2012; Khattab, 2015).

Gender has been a key feature of many studies examining aspirations for STEM careers (Gil-Flores, Padilla-Carmona & Suárez-Ortega, 2011; Novakovic & Fouad, 2013; Watt, Shapka, Morris, Durik, Keating & Eccles, 2012). Abbasi and Sarwat (2014) stated that segregated system in Pakistan, and females are considered as secondary earners; this attitude force girls choose low profile careers (Aziz & Kamal, 2012). However, situation has changed in favor of females as higher education is becoming more and more equitable in Pakistan (Bordoloi & Das, 2017; Malik & Courtney, 2011), still role of family remains critical; Jamabo (2014) affirmed that educated parents are able to guide their children well, manage resources to meet the expenses and above all are their moral support as well (Saleem, Mian, Saleem & Rao, 2014).

Physical and social environment provided by an institution determines whether the students will continue the same academic career or not, but above all it is the good teaching which keeps students engaged and involved to assure a win for them (Hanson, Paulsen & Pascarella, 2016; Loes & Pascarella, 2015). Student empowerment by their school teachers has also been found to play a significant role in the career selection of the students. Teachers' advice and guidance has proven to be more effective in many cases than that of the career counselors (Edwards & Quinter, 2011; Barley, Bechky and Milliken, 2017). Stephens, Brannon, Markus and Nelson (2015) suggested that it should be the responsibility of the district authorities to make schools capable of providing essential inputs to students who belong to rural areas and help them attain their educational objectives.

Last but not the least, research findings signified that discrimination in some careers also creates barriers for students in choosing certain professions (Ahmed et al., 2017; Chen & Fouad, 2013; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). The cultures in which religious beliefs are strongly enforced, and families strongly promote their religious beliefs and teachings makes religion as one of the strongest factor influencing career choices (Johnstone, 2015). Such trends are perceived as prospective threat to secular thought and state ideals (Adams & Joshi, 2016), e.g., many families force their children to get religious education prior to formal professional education in Pakistan. In such cases the personal identity is shaped in religious rather than professional context.

It is hereby concluded that a variety of factors affect students' career selection. The most important among them are family background, socio-economic status, peer influence and current trends in the market (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2017; Gil-Flores et al., 2011; Humayon et al., 2012). These multifarious are further explored in Pakistani context in the current study.

Conceptual Framework

The study is framed in context of Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory, stressing upon exercise of personal agency in pursuit of career, where a host of external factors are also operating influencing positively or negatively on personal agency and thus shaping expected outcomes. Therefore, the variables of the study are external factors, such as family, social and economic factors, which act in retrospect and the personal agency (self-efficacy) working along other contextual factors, such as academic support provided by the university and related experiential learning to make chosen careers satisfied or dissatisfied. Following Akkermans and Kubasch (2017), careers are considered boundaryless (Bravo, Seibert, Kraimer, Wayne & Robert, 2015) and protean (Presbitero, 2015). Both traditional and proactive career behaviors are taken into account while choosing items for the questionnaire (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Etzioni, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted to identify the role of different factors influencing academic career choices of university students. The study also aims to find out whether the students are satisfied or dissatisfied with their choices of academic career?

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the factors influence student choices of academic career
2. To determine the factors influencing satisfaction with chosen career
3. To find out the factors influencing dissatisfaction with chosen career

Research Questions

1. Which factors influence student choices of academic career?
2. Which factors influence more satisfaction with chosen career?
3. Which factors influence more dissatisfaction with chosen career?

Method

The researcher aimed to determine the influence of the family, academic and other socio-economic factors in making career choices. A survey method was used for this case study. The population of the study included all the students studying in the University of Management and Technology (UMT) situated in Lahore, Pakistan. Three schools of the UMT were selected to collect the data, 100 students each from three schools, School of Engineering, School of Business Management and School of Social Sciences and Humanities were randomly selected among students studying in the 3rd and 4th semester of 8 different programs taught in three schools.

Self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect the data. The items of the instrument were derived from relevant studies on the topic such (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Obiyo & Eze, 2015; Jamabo, 2014; Myburgh, 2005; Edwards & Quinter, 2011). The instrument consisted of thirty (30) items comprising seven factors which included 1) family factors (5 items), 2) social factor (5 items), 3) economic factors (4 items), 4) Self-efficacy (6 items), 5) Academic support (4 items), 6) dissatisfaction with chosen career (4 items), and 7) satisfaction with chosen career (3 items). The items were individually measured on 5 point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3=Neutral, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. The instrument was first pilot tested with 100 students and then validated using appropriate statistical measures. The content validity of the instrument was determined by expert review and face validity for use of language and readability, it was peer reviewed by senior students from English department. The collected data was tabulated on SPSS version 21 for further analysis. The overall reliability value, Cronbach Alpha was found to be 0.945. The construct validity was found by factor analysis discussed below in detail.

Results

Descriptive

The descriptive analysis of the data shows that 59% males and 41% female students comprised the participants of survey. Among a total of 300 students, 43% belonged to the School of Engineering, 25% belonged to the Business School, and 32% belonged to the School of Social Sciences of UMT. Analysis of parents' data showed that 12% of the parents had not passed matriculation, whereas, 5% of parents had passed it. 9% of parents had intermediate level education only, 38% were Bachelors, 27% were Masters, whereas, 5% had MPhil or PhD degrees. On the other hand 4% had no education at all. Regarding father's profession the analysis showed that 41% were employed on various jobs in the service sector, 31% were businessmen, and 9% were landlords, whereas, 19% had an alternate source of income not specifically disclosed. The mean and standard deviation of the demographics are shared below:

Table 1

Demographic Values

Demography	M	SD
Gender	1.7800	4.37066
Department	9.4100	3.38175
Parents' Education	3.8700	2.30351
Fathers' Profession	8.9100	3.28171

Factor Analysis

After calculating Cronbach Alpha, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was applied. The results are shared in the table below:

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.936
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6604.884
	df	528
	Sig.	.000

The value of the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy for this set of variables is 0.936, which would be labeled as 'outstanding'. Since KMO measure of the sampling adequacy is certified, and

values of Bartlett's test of Sphericity indicate that correlation matrix thus produced would be an identifying matrix, thus, it is ascertained that data set has correlations, which are appropriate for factor analysis.

The items of the questionnaire were factorized using principal component factoring followed by Varimax rotation normalized by Kaiser; Thus 5 components were yielded in 7 iterations. All items with factor loadings (approximately 0.4 or above) were further used for identifying common factors (Fava & Velicer, 1996; Costello & Osborne, 2005). All factors fulfilled minimum identifiability criteria of at least three items per factor (Fava & Velicer, 1996; Beavers, Lounsbury, Richards, Huck, Skolits, & Esquivel, 2013). Scree plot identified that seven factors (see Appendix A) could be extracted explaining 63.10% of the total variance. Internal consistency of each subscale (factor) was measured by using Cronbach's Alpha which was found to be more than 0.6 for all factors meeting the minimum cut point (Wang, 2003).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product moment correlation was calculated to determine association between the extracted factors. Most of the factors were found to be positively and significantly correlated with each other. The details are explained below.

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Matrix

Factors	Family	Social	Economic	Self-Efficacy	Academic-Support	Satisfied Career	Dissatisfied Career
Family	1	.577**	.541**	.622**	.589**	.601**	.483**
Social		1	.541**	.595**	.580**	.738**	.650**
Economic			1	.741**	.730**	.559**	.314**
Self-Efficacy				1	.838**	.619**	.343**
Academic Support					1	.572**	.266**
Satisfied Career						1	.699
Dissatisfied Career							1

The findings indicate that the highest positive correlation is found between self-efficacy and academic support ($r=.838^{**}$; $p<.000$). The high correlation is found between social factor, self-efficacy and family factor ($r=.738^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.619^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.601^{**}$; $p<.000$) respectively. Family factor shows strong and significant correlation with self-efficacy as well ($r=.622^{**}$; $p<.000$). Economic factors are also highly significantly correlated with self-efficacy and academic support ($r=.741^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.730^{**}$; $p<.000$), whereas, moderately correlated with satisfaction with the chosen career ($r=.559^{**}$; $p<.000$). Social and family factor seem to be moderately associated ($r=.650^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.483^{**}$; $p<.000$) with dissatisfaction with chosen career and weakly associated with economic factor, self-efficacy and academic support ($r=.314^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.343^{**}$; $p<.000$; $r=.426^{**}$; $p<.000$).

Step-wise Regression with Satisfaction with Career Choices as Dependent Variable

Step-wise regression was applied to identify the significant risk factors associated with satisfaction with chosen career, as the dependent variable. The predictor variables considered were family factor, social factor, economic factor, self-efficacy, and academic support. Three models were consequently generated, which are explained below.

Table 4*Step-wise Regression (Satisfaction with career choices as dependent variable)*

	<i>Model</i>	β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>P - value</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>VIF</i>
1	(Constant)		4.904	.000		
	Social	.738	18.960	.000	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)		4.772	.000		
	Social	.572	12.500	.000	.646	1.548
	Self-Efficacy	.279	6.104	.000	.646	1.548
3	(Constant)		3.025	.003		
	Social	.514	10.836	.000	.576	1.736
	Self-Efficacy	.202	4.083	.000	.530	1.887
	Family	.179	3.673	.000	.547	1.829

Economic factor and academic support were excluded from all models signifying that both variables do not pose any risk to career satisfaction. Model 1 explains that social factor is singularly responsible for 73% of the variance in satisfaction with the chosen career ($r=.738$, $P=.000$). Model 2 explains that social factor and self-efficacy collectively influence 84% of the variance in satisfaction with the chosen career (social factor: $r=.572$, $P=.000$; self-efficacy ($r=.279$, $P=.000$). Model 3 explains that social factor, self-efficacy and family factor collectively influence the variance in satisfaction with the chosen career (social factor, $r=.514$, $P=.000$; self-efficacy: $r=.202$, $P=.000$; family factor: $r=.179$, $P=.000$).

Step-wise Regression with Dissatisfaction with Career Choices as Dependent Variable

Step-wise regression was applied to identify the significant risk factors associated with dissatisfaction with chosen career, as the dependent variable. The predictor variables considered were family factor, social factor, economic factor, self-efficacy, and academic support. Three models were consequently generated, which are explained below.

Table 5*Step-wise Regression Dissatisfaction with Career Choices as Dependent Variable*

	<i>Model</i>	β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>P - value</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>VIF</i>
1	(Constant)		6.470	.000		
	social	.681	16.137	.000	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)		4.840	.000		
	social	.588	11.550	.000	.667	1.500
	family	.161	3.155	.000	.667	1.500
3	(Constant)		4.208	.003		
	social	.631	11.768	.000	.592	1.689
	family	.213	3.867	.000	.562	1.780
	AcademicSupport	-.130	-2.390	.017	.576	1.736

Economic factor and self-efficacy were excluded from all models indicating that both variables do not pose any risk to dissatisfaction with career choices. Model 1 explains that social factor is singularly responsible for 68% of the variance in dissatisfaction with the chosen career ($r=.681$, $P=.000$). Model 2 explains that social and family factors collectively influence 74% of the variance in dissatisfaction with the chosen career (social factor: $r=.588$, $P=.000$; family factor ($r=.161$, $P=.000$). Model 3 explains that social and family factors and perceived academic support from university collectively influence the 97% variance in dissatisfaction with the chosen career (social factor, $r=.631$, $P=.000$; family factor: $r=.231$, $P=.000$; academic support: $r=-.130$, $P=.000$).

Findings

The main objective of this study was to identify the role of different factors influencing academic career choices of students of UMT. The analysis of the study was based on the following seven factors: Family, Social, Economic, Self-efficacy, academic support, satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the chosen academic career. It was assumed that traditional factors of family and peer influence are critical in determining career choices. This is partially true in case of UMT students. It is deduced from the correlation matrix that family factor is more associated with positive influencing factors, such as economic support and self-efficacy and induce more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with chosen career. The role of social factor is most crucial both in case of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The regression analysis informed that UMT students' satisfaction with their career choices are influenced by social factors, their personal beliefs of self-efficacy and influence of family. Similarly, dissatisfaction with chosen career is also influenced by social and family factors and the academic support, clearly indicating if right academic, social and moral support is not provided by family, friends and the university, students will not render their academic choices right.

The demographic factors gender, parents' education and their profession does not significantly influence any of the factors, thus, their explanation has been excluded from description.

Discussion

Results of the current study show that there is a strong correlation in the data set. As expected family factor plays strong in producing positive feelings of self-efficacy, strong social relationships, and art to utilize academic support, thus producing self-confidence and satisfaction with the chosen academic career (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017) leading to boundaryless and protean careers. However, the strongest influencer is the social group students join, the peer pressure, the kind of role models they adopt, and help they seek in choice of the university paves their way to satisfied academic career. These findings corroborate many others, such as (Chen & Fouad, 2013; Fouad et al., 2016). The future concern in career research seems to bring into light social context, and the role of unexpected events that may impact career development.

Economic factors did not seem to play strong role in career choices according to the results. Since students belong to private university, therefore, financials are not a huge challenge for them; nevertheless strong socioeconomic back ground seems to strengthen students' perceptions of self-efficacy and satisfied career; this finding corroborates with others such as (Van Dinther et al., 2011; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Etzioni, 2015). Social and economic factors are the strongest "Push factor" driving students to either direction of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their relevant career choices; whereas, family factors seem to act as "pull factor"; students feel enthusiastic and satisfied when they perceive that they are in a field of their choice in higher education, where they can take a

role model from family or teachers (Osa-edoh & Alutu, 2011; Salami, 2008).

Comparatively, it has been observed through results that dissatisfaction with chosen career is caused by weak association with family, weak economic factor (Jamabo, 2014) lowly perceptions of self-efficacy and academic support; in this case the social influence is not working the right way and the students does not feel confident enough to lead a satisfied career; instead they fell into doubts about their choices, whether or not they will be able to compete in studies. Unable to sustain strong self-efficacy beliefs, they think about changing the career path and look for alternate opportunities. Fouad et al (2016) opined that it is important to understand the social context of Asian students, especially, how religion and culture shape choices of students; moreover, parents and families need more counseling that young teens so that confrontation should be avoided culminating at loss of family values, trust and bonding.

Finally, the results of this study have reflected that when students are making career choices, the outcome expectations, especially their self-efficacy beliefs about their own performance play a very influential role in their final decisions. This finding is in line with other studies such as (Garcia et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2016; Myburgh, 2005; Saleem et al., 2014).

Conclusions

From the discussion carried out above, it is concluded, that social and family factors are the strongest factors influencing students' choices of their academic careers. Strong associations between self-efficacy, and social, economic and family factors lead to enhanced satisfaction with career choices; whereas, weak associations results in poor satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the academic career choices students take while entering the university.

Suggestions for Improvement

Based on the findings of the current study, the researcher recommends that:

The parents have to prepare children for future careers. They must play their role effectively by providing a variety of career information taking into account their needs, interests and other personality factors. Above all they must allow their children discover their talents. Parents must look up to professional advice to provide their children academic, social and economic support. Parents should not impose certain choices on their children; they should also try to educate themselves about the variety of careers available in post-modern knowledge economy, and not just financially but morally support their children to make best choices for themselves and the family. The most significant influence is that of social factors, and everyone must act responsibly and do not spread misinformation about any career.

The government should not promote only professional education in science and technology, but provide ample chances to youth to grow in all walks of life. Career counseling must begin at in middle education rather than secondary or higher secondary school education. Students should be well informed of their potential capacity by the persons who offer career advice to them ensuring that students become well aware of the demands of a career they have chosen for themselves.

Career counseling should continue at professional level in the university, and the counselors should provide psychosocial encouragement to students and support career accomplishment once it is chosen by the student. The academic advisors must also provide full knowledge and support to students about their potential strengths and weaknesses and teach them to bank on their strengths to proceed smoothly on their career path.

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