Role of Teachers in Providing Educational and Career Counseling to the Secondary School Students in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a study conducted to explore the role of teachers in career counseling in secondary schools in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. The key findings illustrate that teachers have vital roles to guide students for their careers; they voluntarily act as informal counselors guiding students in their choices of subjects and career paths. In addition, students also see their teachers as role models and attach high value to their advice and guidance related to the subjects and career selection. Practices such as the educated parents providing career guidance to their children and students seeking career information from media are common in both the Government Education Department and the NGO-run private schools in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the findings reflect that the NGO-run private schools have better quality career services for students than the Government Education Department-run schools. Likewise, students in both the education providing systems face numerous challenges related to their career choices. For instance, access to quality and timely information and the scarcity of appropriate resources for career counseling seem to hamper students in both the education providing systems. Hence, career guidance and counseling is a major issue in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan hindering students in making right choices for their future careers.

Keywords: Teachers role in career counseling, nature and challenges of career counseling in secondary schools.
Introduction

Educational and career counseling has become increasingly important over the last decades for students, parents and teachers. It relates to the interests and inclinations of students and the decisions they take for their future careers. In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan not much attention has been paid to students educational and career counseling in the past. This remained as a low priority for two evident reasons: first, there was lack of awareness amongst the teachers, students and parents about the significance of career counseling; and, second, the scarcity of resources didn’t permit schools and policymakers to consider it as a priority. However, with increasing literacy rates and more choices of educational institutions and careers becoming available, people’s interest and realization to understand the role of educational and career counseling in shaping students future is also augmenting. It is because of their indelible impact on students that teachers play increasingly important roles in influencing students’ choices and decisions for their future careers. This study was designed and conducted to understand teachers’ role in the educational and career counseling of students in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. Despite the fact that teachers seem to influence students’ choices and decisions for their future careers at various levels of schooling (i.e., primary, secondary, and university levels), the current study explored the nature of secondary school teachers role in influencing students choices for their future careers.

Background of Gilgit-Baltistan

The region called Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas, shares its borders with China in the north, India in the east, Afghanistan and Chitral in the west and Kashmir in the south. The Gilgit-Baltistan consists of seven districts; they are: Gilgit, Ghizer, Hunza-Nager, Astore, Diamar, Skardu and Ganche. The population of Gilgit-Baltistan is approximately one million people, while the total area of Gilgit-Baltistan is 28000 square miles. It is in Gilgit-Baltistan that the world’s three mountain ranges called Karakorum, Himalaya and Hundukush meet. As a result, some of the world’s highest peaks including K2 are found in Gilgit-Baltistan. The snowcapped mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan are therefore a very valuable source of water for Pakistan. It is the diverse landscapes, forests, and a variety of minerals and cultures which portray the entire region as a natural museum.

Education in Gilgit-Baltistan

Education plays a very important role in the socioeconomic development of a society. It enables individuals to make informed decisions, improves their choices and develops their potentials to play productive roles in society. Gilgit-Baltistan used to be one of the most backward areas in education. However, there has been phenomenal improvement in both children’s access to and quality of education over the last few decades in Gilgit-Baltistan (Shafa, 2003). At present Gilgit-Baltistan has a system of education with schools setup by the Federal Government, community-based schools and other NGOs schools. There are three education providing systems in Gilgit-Baltistan: the Government Department of Education (DoE), Aga Khan Education Services
Pakistan (AKESP) and the Private schools system. A brief description of the three systems follows:

**Government Education Department, Gilgit-Baltistan**

Government Education Department is the largest education provider in Gilgit-Baltistan. There are 1008 government schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, where 115176 students get education from 4946 teachers. For the closer and effective monitoring of schools, offices have been established in each district led by the deputy directors of education (DDEs). There are four directors of education to supervise and monitor the DDEs, they are: (i) the director education (academics), Gilgit, the director education, Baltistan, the director education, planning and development and the directress for the girls schools in GB. The directors of education are accountable to the secretary education that provides the overall leadership to the institution.

**Private Sector**

Private sector has emerged as the second largest education provider in Gilgit-Baltistan. The need for private schools was felt as a result of people’s dissatisfaction with the quality of education in the government schools. Some private schools were also opened to provide children the much-needed access to education. However, the private sector is mainly focusing on the quality education. There has been significant growth in the share of education in the private sector during the last few decades. There has been visible increase in the number of schools, as well as the proportion of children enrolled in these schools. Private sector operates schools in all districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. The current statistics show that there are 429 private schools with a population of 43066 students and 2133 teachers in these schools in Gilgit-Baltistan.

**Aga Khan Education Service Pakistan (AKESP)**

There are 126 AKESP schools and eight hundred and twenty two teachers to teach 22141 students in these schools. AKESP’s mission is to “enable many generations of students to acquire both knowledge and essential spiritual wisdom needed to balance that knowledge and enable their lives to attain the highest fulfillment.” AKESP is mainly focusing girls’ education with some enrolment of boys in the co-education classes. AKESP continues to work with the government and communities to develop the models of public/private partnership that play a vital role towards implementing the Education Sector Reforms of the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan.

**Background of the Study**

Lack of educational and career counseling is one of the serious problems faced by students in Gilgit-Baltistan. Our experiences reflect that many students face challenges in choosing right subjects and making appropriate career choices because they don’t get appropriate guidance
on selecting subjects and making career choices relating to their inclinations, abilities and interests. For instance, Rao (2004) states:

“Pupil failure is a serious concern of counseling. Teachers often refer pupils with unsatisfactory academic grades to counselors. But other pupils can also be significantly helped. Counseling is the most important agency which can help young people develop into normal and healthy individuals who are emotionally mature and who can make significant contributions to their communities” (p.206).

It was through recalling our student life experiences particularly in secondary schools that we realized the inadequate, or absence of, career counseling opportunities provided to children in schools. We could vividly recall that as we progressed through schools we had no clear picture of the future career paths. This ambiguity gradually increased as we progressed from primary to secondary schools. Although the stimulation to attend schools primarily came to us from our parents, they were unable to provide us the career guidance as they were illiterate and had no clear idea of careers. It is noteworthy that majority of the parents in Gilgit-Baltistan are uneducated and cannot guide their children about careers. On the other hand, our teachers in the primary and secondary schools should have acted as career counselors but they also seemed to be unaware of the need to direct us to our desired future careers. Nor, were there any institutional arrangements in place to provide career counseling to students.

Individuals in all walks of life require guidance and counseling to make intellectual choices and adjustment in life. Educational and career counseling becomes particularly essential for students who are at the stage of choosing their field of study for their future careers. In view of the increasing complexity, people need help to cope with the challenges of life that would begin with the process of guidance and counseling to students at secondary level.

As a result, the ambiguity related to selecting our career paths grew with us throughout the school and college days. We believe that the issue of providing career guidance to the secondary school students in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan needs to be explored to identify the numerous challenges and possible solutions related to it. Hence, it is based on our past experiences that we designed and conducted this study to gain insights on how the secondary school teachers play their role in providing educational and career counseling to the secondary school students in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Giving his rationale for educational guidance to students Chibber (1999) contends that it is essential:

- “...to monitor the academic progress of students studying in the institution;
- to acquaint the students with the prescribed curriculum;
- to identify the academically gifted, backward, creative and other category of special learners;
- to cater to the educational needs of special learners; and,
The study was conducted in two secondary schools from two different systems (i.e., a private system operating mainly girl schools and the Government Education Department, Gilgit-Baltistan). The purpose of selecting two large secondary schools of two different education systems was to understand the different approaches used and facilities provided in the two school systems, if any. The selection of schools was also aligned with the recommendations made by Rao (2004) who emphasized providing educational and career guidance to secondary school students keeping in view the fact that (i) “At the secondary-school stage the pupils have to make academic choices that ultimately determines their vocational future; and (ii) The pupils are becoming sexually mature” (P.197).

Methodological Decisions Taken

The qualitative research methodology was used to design and conduct the current study. The decision to employ qualitative research was in line with the recommendation of Eisner (1997) who contends that “there is a growing interest among academics in the use of qualitative form of inquiry in education” (p. 159).

Bogdan and Biklin (1998) suggest that qualitative research offers opportunities for conducting and exploring descriptive research that uses the context and setting to search for a deeper understanding of the person(s) being studied (See also Clarke, 2000; Glasne & Peshkin, 1992). Qualitative research makes the research process a mutually beneficial undertaking. The researcher gains new insights about the topic whereas the research participants get the opportunities to read data regularly about their thought processes and actions. Thiessen (1993) contends that “I made the inquiry a mutually beneficial undertaking: the research participant helped me gain new insights; I, in turn, shared all the data with him.” Beattie (2000) believes that the qualitative research also contributes to leadership development of the research participants.

Qualitative research uses different forms of data which helps in getting valid and reliable results. Patton (1990) states that qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (i) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (ii) direct observation; and (iii) written documents.

Selection of Schools

We studied the role of teachers in the career and educational counseling of students in two secondary schools namely the D.J Girls’ High School Farmanabad¹, Gilgit and the F.G Girls High School Kasheerabad Gilgit. We selected these two schools because of the time and resource limitations. As previously mentioned, one of the two schools (i.e. D.J Girls High School

¹ Pseudonyms have been for all names used in the study
Farmanabad) is a private school managed by AKESP, whereas the F.G Girls High School Kasheerabad is one of the government schools. A brief description of the two schools follows:

**D.J Girls High School Farmanabad Gilgit**

D.J Girls Community High School Farmanabad Gilgit is situated in Farmanabad Gilgit. This school primarily serves the people of lower and middle socio-economic backgrounds. Among students there is great cultural and ethnic diversity. Currently, there are 500 students in this school. In this area, within a distance of three kilometers, nine other schools also exist. These schools include private, government and semi-government schools.

There are total nineteen teachers, nine of them appointed by school management committee (SMC) and ten are NGO-appointed teachers. The head teacher of the school has done her M.ED from AKU-IED. This school has an active and professional SMC managing the school issues related to the community. The community-run classes include class 9th and class 10th, providing both science and arts education, and the nursery class for early year’s education. The NGO-run classes include class one to class 8th. The school has done increasingly well over the years. During 2010 the school got the first position in SSC part I and third position in SSC part two. The building is spread over five kanals and it was built according to the needs of the school. SMC played a key role in the establishment of this school.

**F.G Girls High School Kasheerabad Gilgit**

F.G Girls High School Kasheerabad was established in 1971 as a primary school. It was upgraded to middle school in 1998. When the school community felt that education is important for their daughters then they requested the education department to upgrade the school to higher secondary level. Currently, there are 661 students and 44 teachers in this school. Of all the teachers, 31 teachers are regular and 13 are contract teachers. In addition, there are 18 classrooms, one science laboratory, one library and one staffroom in the school. All the teachers are female but four support staffs are male. There are 73 students in class 10th and 96 students in class 9th.

There is an SMC established to help school with the community related issues. Aga Khan University’s Professional Development Center, North (AKU-PDCN) provides capacity building opportunities to teachers in this school. There is an ECD section managed by the school community. The school has got first position in KIU Board in class10th arts. However, in this school there is no any proper arrangement for student’s educational career, except the voluntary support provided to students by some teachers.

**Accessing Research Participants**

First, we wrote letters to the Government Education Department and the NGO to seek their permission to work in their schools. Similarly, we also wrote letters to individual research
participants (i.e. students, teachers, parents and the school heads) to seek their consent for the research. We requested the research participants to sign the consent forms showing their willingness to participate in the research project. The letter clearly explained the expectations and gave details of how we will take care of the research ethics. We made sure that they felt secured and comfortable in participating in the research project.

In each school we worked with the head teacher, teachers, students and parents to collect data on the nature of career counseling provided to students. More specifically, in the NGO-run school, the head teacher, five class 10th teachers, five class 10th students, and five parents were included in the research sample. Similarly, in the Kasheerabad School, the head teacher, five class 10th teachers, five class 10th students, and five parents were included in the research sample.

Data Collection

We used different methods for collecting data including the focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, and semi structured interviews. In addition to developing field notes for data collection, we also used tape recorders for gathering data.

Focus Group Discussion

The two major techniques used by researchers to collect qualitative data are participant observation and individual interviews. Focus groups, or group interviews, possess elements of both techniques while maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method (Speindler & Hammond, 2000). Basically, focus group discussions are a way of listening to people and learning from them. In both schools, we held focus group discussions with groups of teachers, students and parents.

Interviews

“The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else’s mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone’s mind but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Therefore, it is critical for the interviewer to make sure the person being interviewed understands that the researcher does not hold any preconceived notions regarding the outcome of the study.

As part of ethical considerations, we sought consent of the research participants and explained the intentions and objectives of the study. We shared with them that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research without giving any reasons to do so. We also assured them that the data gathered would be shared with them for its validity and it would be used after their approval. We repeatedly assured the research participants that the data generated will never be a cause of concern for the research participants.
Analysis and Findings

The data analysis was made through a thematic approach by categorizing the data according to the subsidiary questions of the present study. Significant insights emerged from the analysis of the data collected through different methods. Although the concept of career counseling is relatively new for parents, teachers and students in Gilgit-Baltistan, it is, however, becoming increasingly significant to enable children to make better choices and decisions for their future careers. The major insights gained from the study are presented in the following pages.

Government Teachers’ Role as Career Counselors

The data illustrated that teachers do act as career counselors in schools in Gilgit-Baltistan. In the rural and mountainous area where parents are uneducated, they mostly rely on teachers for their children’s guidance and career counseling. In the following pages we elaborate on the major findings of this study with regard to the government teachers’ role as career counselor.

Teachers as Informal Guides for Students Career Selection

The findings showed that some teachers gave students awareness about the various career opportunities both within and outside the Gilgit-Baltistan context. One of the research participants (students) said: “Because my father’s financial situation is poor to afford my educational expenses, my teacher advised me to take admission in Government College Gilgit after I pass my SSC examination. He has advised me to plan to go to Pakistan Army as a commissioned officer after doing my F. Sc.” (Excerpt from student’s interview).

Teachers give students guidelines according to their own ability. One of our research participants (teacher) said: “In 10th class the performance of my student was low in science subjects because she was less interested in science subjects. She wanted to become lawyer in her life; I suggested her to take political science or civics. Then, she was satisfied and now she is a topper in KIU Board” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Teachers Guide Students in Subject Selection

The data showed that providing career guidance is not obligatory for the government teachers but in most cases teachers act as career guides considering it as their moral responsibility. One of the teachers said:

“We don’t often spend any extra time to provide students career counseling but we see it as our ethical responsibility to give them counseling from time to time. It is essential to conduct seminars and workshops to increase students and their parents understanding on career related issues but in our school we do not have an access to such services. Only those teachers who are committed for the cause of students offer
additional time to their students for career counseling. However, most of this guidance to students is informal and it is related to helping students in selection of subjects.” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Some teachers guide students for choosing subjects which they themselves feel attracted to. The data showed that teachers guided students for choosing subjects in schools. One of our research participants (student) said: “my teacher informed me that you are good at math and your mentality is better for this subject, you choose this subject in future career. If your parents won’t be able to afford your education in an engineering college, you will still be able to take admission in a government college” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

In Gilgit-Baltistan teachers voluntarily act as career guides to their students. The data showed that it is the ethical responsibility that drives teachers to give career counseling to their students. We concluded from the data that teachers have vital roles in every aspect of students’ life. Besides other things, they give awareness and guidance to their students for choosing their subjects, about their careers and finding solutions to their problems they may face in their educational journey. One of our research participants said: “career counseling is a must for students but we have no time to conduct proper sessions about career counseling. We include this task in our ethical values and we do it sincerely from time to time” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

We concluded from the data that in government schools teachers provide students informal guidance in selection of subjects; however, no formal career sessions are conducted in these schools.

**Career Guidance is Often Limited to Teachers’ Own Subjects and Interests**

Traditionally, teachers were found guiding students towards the particular subjects which they taught in schools. For example, a science teacher was found guiding students to take science subjects for them to select related careers in the years to come; however, this teacher seemed to neglect student’s aptitude and interests. In such cases student often select subjects based on what they were advised and not necessarily based on their own inherent strengths and capabilities. It is also a very common observation that teachers utilize their energies to help students attain good grades. However, with the emphasis on good grades it is also equally important to provide students proper career counseling opportunities. One of our research participants said: “I am a science teacher and I am aware of the importance of science in our lives and I know the challenges faced by students in science subjects. Therefore, I provide counseling regarding the subject I like” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

We also found out from data that teacher counseling to students was directly related with their own interests and abilities. One of the teachers said: “I am interested in mathematics and have often taught mathematics in my career. Therefore, I find myself guiding students in mathematics related issues, including increasing their awareness about the importance and the
opportunities in Math. I don’t recall providing students counseling in other subjects” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Teachers’ role in providing students career counseling regardless of the subjects they teach or like is well recognized. Therefore, it is important for them to possess updated knowledge about emerging professions and must continuously guide students about the various career opportunities. It also becomes the responsibility of the educational institutions in private and public sector to provide career counseling through seminars and workshops in schools on a continuous basis.

Teachers are Role Models and Sources of Inspiration for Students

The findings revealed that teachers having competence in subject and pedagogical knowledge and popular for their humane and friendly approach were seen as role models by their students. Inspired by one such teacher a majority of the five students participating in a focus group discussion shared that they would like to be a teacher like Mr. Nadeem, who is popular amongst and loved by his students. It was clear from discussions that if the teachers are kind and competent in their own subjects, students get inspired and wish to follow their footsteps.

One of the research participants said: “if a teacher is really good at his/her subject students are inspired by him; they idealize such teacher and select his/her subject for their future careers.” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

During the discussions some students also said that during teaching it is essential for teachers to refer to good deeds of the famous personalities. This, they said, helps them in having role models and in idealizing those personalities in their whole life.

AKESP Teachers’ Role as Career Counselor

AKESP as a Better Informed Institution in Students’ Career Counseling

In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, AKESP has been a pioneer to provide career counseling services to students. Though not enough has been done on a broader level for giving professional career guidance to students and their parents, however, good initiatives are taken by the institution to guide the secondary class students about the career opportunities. Most notably, AKESP has been involved in building a professional base for career guidance at school level. A head teacher from an AKESP-managed school said:

“It was until a few years back that AKESP had been very active in providing career counseling. It is worth mentioning that the initiatives taken by AKESP were a success and many students benefited while choosing their careers. However, the lack of funds has hampered the efforts and restricted the career guidance services. As a result, students
have suffered during the most critical stage of their education.” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

The data showed that in AKESP there is a dedicated department for career counseling. Valuable career information is provided by this department to schools from time to time. In addition, the data also showed that teachers conduct sessions about the educational career counseling in schools.

**Teachers as Informal Career Counselors**

In AKESP, teachers were found relying on various ways to identify student talents for choosing their careers. The data showed that most teachers only knew about the two streams of Faculty of Arts (F.A) and the Faculty of Science (F. Sc.). They guide students to become doctors or engineers because they lack awareness about other educational careers. One of our research participant said: “I am working as an arts teacher in AKESP, I have some ideas about new professions but I know that if our students get higher education they have better chances of achieving good positions in their life. I guide my students to work hard and succeed in their life. I should also say that we are not yet fully aware of the multiple intelligences of students to guide them according to their talents” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Today, students have lots of options for choosing a profession and everyday new professions add to the list. However, new and efficient ways of hunting students’ talents and inclinations to guide them towards careers matching their talents remain unexplored and unutilized.

**Teachers as Bridges Connecting Parents and Schools**

The data showed that in AKESP it is considered teachers responsibility to inform parents about the performance of their children in schools. One of our respective participants said: “Students success in their educational pursuits becomes possible when teachers, parents and student work together.” She further said “if there is ongoing communication between teachers and parents it helps in guiding students about their future careers” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

**Teachers as Shapers of Students’ Future**

One of the AKESP research participants said: “Student’s character is very important as it either facilitates or hampers success in his/her life. Therefore, it is extremely important for teachers to give good guidance to students. In addition, this guidance needs to be regarding the social, moral and ethical values of the student” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview). The other group members also referred to the fact that character is the basic quality of a person. Therefore, people often respect someone who is courteous and well mannered. This argument corroborates what Rogers (1963) believes should be the purpose of education; he contends
that education should enhance the personal development and psychological growth towards a socialized maturity of its client.

The research participants also shared that the effective teachers must build the confidence of their students for their life through counseling. One of our research participant said: “The best teacher is the one who encourages students and builds their confidence. Mostly students can’t continue their studies because of lack of confidence. If teachers build up their confidence then those students must get their higher education and will have a bright future” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

There is the growing realization that it is the role and responsibility of teachers to prepare students for future. Because students will face numerous challenges and problems related to their careers, teachers ought to prepare their students to face the challenges and problems related to their future. One of our research participants said: “Teacher is the one who prepares students for their future and gives them awareness about the future challenges” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Another participant expressed his feelings and said:

“Teacher is responsible to build the character of his/her students. First priority of the teacher is to explore the capabilities and interests of students and give career counseling accordingly. As a teacher we can’t play any vital role for character building of the students. I feel that as a representative of our community we must be ready to facilitate students in every aspect of the educational careers.” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Nature of Career Guidance Provided to Children in Gilgit-Baltistan

The data showed that the career counseling provided in schools varied considerably. For example, in the government school, the nature of guidance was more informal and occasional. However, in the AKESP school, the nature of career guidance was more frequent and formal. In fact, AKESP seemed to be more aware of the significance of career counseling for students. We present the key findings related to the nature of career guidance given in schools in the following pages.

AKESP’s Career Guidance and Counseling Department

We interviewed the coordinator of career counseling at AKESP who has also conducted career planning sessions in few institutions at different locations. In an interview she told us:

“There are various ways through which you can disseminate information to students about their careers. As far as we are concerned we visit different schools and colleges of Gilgit-Baltistan and choose our target population including students from grades 8th to grade 12.
We make presentations focusing the importance of planning, assessing the institutions, and identifying professional institutions” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

However, she reiterated that lack of funding at AKESP has hindered our efforts to provide career counseling to students more widely. Hence, it is highly desirable to allocate resources to provide career counseling to students.

Educated Parents as Sources of Career Information for their Children

Educated parents are a source of career counseling for their children. Those parents who are educated provide information regarding the scope and interest of their child. Such parents get updated information on current careers and they easily discuss the career related issues with teachers. One of our research participants said: “I am an educated mother and I know about the nature of my children. Therefore, I am in a better position to guide my children on the kinds of professions they might go for in future” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

It is also worth mentioning that most parents force their children for choosing their educational careers. For instance, some parents wanted their children to become doctors and engineers and it was not based on their children’s interests and inclinations. One of our research participants said: “my parents forced me to become a doctor but I wanted to become a teacher. I am very confused in choosing career” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview). We came to know that due to parents’ pressure students suffer many challenges and problems. The data showed that mostly students chose their careers due to family pressure. One of our research participants said that: “mostly our family members are in medical field; therefore, my father also wants me to take admission in medical field but I do not want to choose medical field; I want to become a popular singer in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan.”(Excerpt from teacher’s interview). Family background has great influence on student careers.

Media as a Source of Career Information

The data showed that students get career related information from media including television, radio, internet, telephone and newspapers. When they get information from media they analyze it and choose their career according to their needs and ability.

Internet is a modern source of gathering and giving information to the people. Internet facilitates searching for required information from the website and one can get a lot of data about his/her interest and needs within a few seconds. Our respective teacher said that: “Information technology is very fast nowadays, all the students are well aware about multimedia, they easily search about careers and their importance and easily select their careers. They watch many T.V programs and they search internet easily and select their careers. Internet is the latest version of information technology where they easily access the world demands and scope of the relevant subjects. Students also apply for
scholarships to get higher education using the internet facility” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Career Counseling Challenges in Gilgit-Baltistan Schools

Gilgit-Baltistan is a backward area and its rugged and difficult terrain makes life of the people even more challenging. As it is true in other fields of life, people face numerous challenges in the area of career counseling in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. We share our findings on the challenges of career counseling in Gilgit-Baltistan in the following pages:

Lack of Awareness about Different Careers

When teachers lack the basic concept of career counseling, they tend to remain aloof from the new knowledge created through research and new advancements taking place in the world. One of our participants said: “In government schools we do not have any concept of career counseling and in fact, I am ashamed to consider myself a teacher because we do not give proper guidance to students and hence we cannot play our role as teachers in professional terms” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview). One of the AKESP teachers told us: “we guide the students according to their needs, interests and abilities.”(Excerpt from teacher’s interview). It can be, therefore, safely concluded from these statements that the government schools have not yet realized the importance of providing students career guidance opportunities; whereas, in AKESP there is at least some system of career guidance available to students and their parents.

Furthermore, parents interactions with and their decisions for their children’s careers have far-reaching implications for the success of their children. In Gilgit-Baltistan, parents often give priority to education of their children but proper knowledge about guiding their children for future careers is lacking. Consequently, students face serious challenges in selecting their careers. It is critical to include parents in helping students shape their careers and be part in their decision-making. It is also important for teachers to identify students’ strengths and appraise parents about them and inform them of various options available to their children based on their aptitude and interests.

Poor Quality of Education

The quality of education provided to students in government schools is low and it is an increasing source of concern for parents. Since the medium of instruction in the government schools is Urdu, students find it extremely challenging to cope with the English-medium instruction in their higher studies. This could be attributed to numerous factors including the outdated policies of education, inadequately or untrained teachers, lack of resources and the absence of essential early childhood education and co-curricular activities in schools which is an efficient way to detect the aptitude of a student. The overall mismanagement of the system and the notoriously lacking accountability mechanism also add to the deteriorating standards of
education in the public sector, which, in turn, pose numerous challenges for the reform initiatives like career counseling.

Inadequate Human and Financial Resources

Gilgit-Baltistan is a less developed region of the country and, therefore, there are numerous challenges to provide career counseling to students. Unfortunately, the budget allocated for education is meager and, therefore, there are no sufficient funds required for the career counseling and for higher education in colleges and universities of high repute. One of our research participants said: “I wanted to give good education to my child but due to my financial problems, I was unable to put my child in a college or university” (Excerpt from parent’s interview). The issue of educational resources is huge as it hinders the efforts to improve the quality of education provided to children in schools. Due to lack of resources teachers can’t give the information about careers. One of research participant said: “in government sector there is a big challenge for teachers due to financial problems. We have no funds for conducting workshops and seminars about career counseling” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview).

Lack of Career Counseling Services

In Gilgit-Baltistan, and particularly in public sector, the concept of career counseling is almost non-existent. It is essential to provide guidance and counseling to students particularly at the secondary level because from this stage students start making up their minds for their future and strive their career goals. It is therefore highly desirable to provide students and their parents detailed information about the career paths, i.e. about various fields of studies, about different subjects and their scope, procedure of admissions, procedure of admissions in colleges; detailed information about scholarships in Pakistan and foreign financial assistance programs. One of our participants said: “Mostly in government schools, there is no concept about career counseling. In fact, I used to provide counseling to my students as a teacher. But we can’t give any proper guidance to students if we are not trained in this field as a teacher. We can guide students according to their needs, interests and abilities.”(Excerpt from teacher’s interview). We concluded from the findings that there is no proper career guidance in government schools except some teachers voluntarily provide students information about careers. Hence, students face numerous challenges and difficulties in selecting their careers.

Little awareness about career counseling among policymakers

It is interesting to note that the policymakers remain oblivious about the newly emerging careers and their significance for students. Science and technology has become so advanced that almost every day new careers emerge as a result of advancements taking place in various fields. Hence, it is imperative for the policymakers to pull up their socks against this growing challenge. Most of the policymakers remain unaware and neglect career counseling at the basic level. When educational agencies have no policies to adhere to, then maintaining a particular standard remains a mere dream. Policymakers must formulate policies to make it mandatory.
for schools to start implementing career counseling initiatives. Co-curricular activities must be made essential at school level to accurately assess and hunt the talents and interests of students at an early stage.

Lake of Awareness about students multiple intelligences

Pluralistic nature of life on earth is well recognized as no two organisms look alike. In line with this popular statement, people do not seem to be equal in every respect. Diversity is evident in people’s physique, temperament, intelligence as well as in wealth and social position. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences advocates for accommodating human diversity in how learning take place. Each type of intelligence encompasses a certain characteristics and a student excelling in any one of these particular characteristics reflects his/her inclination to achieve success in that area.

Teachers from both private and public sectors stated about multiple intelligence. For instance, one teacher said: “we have students with different approaches and they can be divided into various groups based on their approach as they belong to different cultures and regions which create an enormous impact on their learning.” Further, she stated: “one year back we did not know about the psychology of the students but after availing the professional development opportunities provided by AKU-PDCN through its Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP), our knowledge of multiple intelligences developed and we really enjoyed using it in our day-to-day teaching” (Excerpt from teacher’s interview)

Conclusion

This paper illustrates the key findings of the study on the role of teachers in career counseling in the secondary schools in Gilgit-Baltistan. As discussed previously, the study was conducted in two large secondary schools which represented the two educational systems called the Government Education Department and AKESP, a private schools system in Gilgit-Baltistan. The findings of this research are revealing in many ways. For instance, there is a very visible difference in the approach used by the two education systems to provide career counseling services to students in schools. There is less awareness and sense of significance in the Government Education Department on the need of career counseling in schools. The findings highlight that some teachers use traditional ways of giving career counseling to students on voluntary basis. It is not obligatory for teachers to act as career guides in government schools. However, in AKESP there were appreciable practices of giving guidance to students in schools. In fact, AKESP has a dedicated section on career counseling for students which is an evidence of the institutional realization and commitment to provide career counseling to students. However, it is noteworthy that in the recent past this section has become less active due to the financial constraints faced by AKESP. Furthermore, the findings also showed that in both the education systems some parents play their roles in guiding their children for their careers. Likewise, students seeking career related information from the print and electronic media was a common practice in both the education systems.
The findings are significant with regard to understanding the various aspects of career guidance needs, current practices and challenges faced by students and teachers in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. We are hopeful that these findings will provide a foundation to the future researchers to build on the insights provided by this study.

References


