A Qualitative Exploration of the Outcome Expectations in Determining Career Choices of College Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Choosing a college major is very crucial and challenging at college level because selection of college majors at this stage pave a path way for future career. Pakistan being a developing country; career counseling services are scarce for students. It is needed to explore while making choices about career majors what are the underlying perceptions and factors that students think they can get in terms of outcomes from certain careers. It is an important component in career development so that career guidance and counseling can be provided by considering these factors. Research question for this qualitative study was "What are the underlying outcomes for choosing certain careers that students expect? A sample of eighteen intermediate twelve grade undergraduate college students; nine males and nine female participants taken from public and private sector degree colleges were interviewed to get insight about their future career choices and underlying outcomes from these career choices. Results were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings indicated that participant reported medical, engineering, teaching, army and business as their intended future career choices. Moreover, after analyzing results through thematic analysis, outcome expectation was emerged as a broader theme categorized into three sub-themes 1) physical outcomes with sub themes of financial stability and job security 2) social outcomes (including social acceptance and service to humanity and 3) self-outcomes with sub theme of significance of work. Findings have potential implications for counselors and educators to have understanding of outcome expectations that may determine the career paths for students. In this way help can be provided to students for reexamining their beliefs and in turn broadening their career horizons.

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1. Introduction

Every year, in Pakistan, 15 million of students pass their higher secondary school examination (Government of the Punjab, 2019) and then further struggle with college major choices. This is a very challenging and critical decision as this stage because choices of college majors made at this time determine future career aspirations. Pakistan being a developing country and with collectivistic culture, career guidance and counseling services are not available for students. Mostly students decide the career paths randomly and with the guidance of family and other significant members in life (Keshf & Khanum, 2021). It is important to explore and understand the choices they made and the outcomes they expect in perusing certain careers. Research suggested that outcome expectation is an important component in determining interests, goals and career paths (Fouad & Guillen, 2006; Lent et al., 2001). The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions and opinions of

students about career paths and choices at college level so that career counseling should be provided accordingly.

Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 2001) explains how academic and career choices are made. It focuses on cognitive factors like outcome expectation which is basically what people expect from opting certain career while making career decisions. Outcome expectations are the consequences likely to occur in response to a certain behavior (i.e. what will happen if I do this) (A. Bandura, 1986; Fouad & Guillen, 2006; Lent et al., 2001).

Career outcome expectations are basically the hopes of achievements from careers such as making money, acquiring new skills and making social contacts. Outcome expectation is very important component in making career majors and choices because their decisions are based on what they hope to achieve by studying a certain major. This will further determine student's motivation and persistence towards certain careers (Fouad & Smith, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992).

Decisions of the people about career choices directed by how they do envision the outcomes from these choices (Cunningham, Bruening, Sartore, Sagas, & Fink, 2005). They tend to choose those careers which entail them towards positive outcomes (A. Bandura, 1986). These outcomes can be success-related (Lent & Brown, 2006), future benefits in choosing certain career (Betz & Voyten, 1997), academic achievement in certain major (Ferry, Fouad, & Smith, 2000; Flores, Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Fouad & Smith, 1996; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007).

Few researchers explored the factors that people considered as outcomes in choosing a career. Financial concerns effect the decisions of men due to the breadwinning member of the society whereas women tend to consider their social values for career decisions (Saunders, Davis, Williams, & Williams, 2004). Usually, people choose those careers in which they foresee positive outcome (Cunningham et al., 2005). Sometimes, decisions are influenced by future prospects like earning money, discovering new things and getting fame (Candela Agulló, 2008; Eccles, 2011; Morgan, Isaac, & Sansone, 2001; Rogers, Creed, & Glendon, 2008; Sainz, 2007; Su & Rounds, 2015), helping others or social service (Jones, Howe, & Rua, 2000), job opportunities and job market of a certain field (González López, 2005) and high income jobs (López-Bonilla et al., 2012). Moreover, social status or respect in a certain profession also a contributor in career decisions (Gámez & Marrero, 2003). Shoffner, Newsome, and Barrio (2005) focused on positive and tangible outcomes in perusing career choices.

Moreover, in Pakistani context, social status and expectations of getting positive outcomes (Aziz & Kamal, 2012), societal influence, growth opportunities, psychological factor are the factors of choosing medical, engineering, pharmacy and agricultural studies (Pasha & Siddiqui, 2020). Furthermore, many researchers have focused different factors that influence profession selection decisions largely based on student interest, growth opportunities, individual aptitudes and past studies also showed many factors that affect profession selection decisions like occupational charm, societal influence, job security, academic achievements, salary, status and prestige, work autonomy (Sharif, Ahmad, & Sarwar, 2019).

In light of above cited literature, it was depicted that for provision of career counseling services, it is very important to explore the career choices of students which they consider for themselves to know the vision of students. Secondly to explore the perception of students about the outcomes from these choices. This is an important component in career development and career counseling. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted to explore these research questions "what they want to be in future and secondly what the underlying outcomes for choosing certain careers are". In exploratory study, insight and perceptions of students can be explored in a best way.

2.   Method
A qualitative exploratory design was framed for this study. As the perception of the participants can be explored in a best way through qualitative exploratory study which is why exploratory study was preferred to investigate this research question.

2.1. Sample

Eighteen participants, nine males and nine females were selected from intermediate twelve grade undergraduate college students from public and private degree colleges for interviews. The academic majors of the participants were the pre-medical (n=8), pre-engineering (n=5) and arts and humanities (n=5). Mean age of the participants were 18.5 years with SD= .61. Number of participants were determined by the criteria given by Palinkas et al. (2015) which stated that no of participants can be taken till the saturation point when new interviews do not give new information. In this study, after 18 interviews, data saturation was achieved as further interviews were not resulting in new information (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020); therefore, further interviews were not carried out. Six colleges were selected through purposive sampling technique. Those public and private degree colleges i.e. three male and three female colleges were taken in which three academic majors i.e. pre-medical, pre-engineering and general arts and humanities were offered to students at intermediate level. After taking permission from principals of the colleges, they allowed the researcher to get participants from their classes. One participant from each academic major was taken for interview from each college. Moreover, both gender participants with three academic majors i.e. pre-medical, pre-engineering and general arts and humanities were taken. Those participants were taken who want to peruse for higher education and willing to give interview for the research.

2.2. Instrument

A semi structured interview protocol was prepared to explore why students are making certain career choices. Semi-structured interviews are used to collect information for this study because these consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to get response in more detail (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Career choice theories and research regarding career choice supports and barriers (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996) were discussed and it was assured that each aspect should be covered. Finalized interview protocol consisted of questions regarding career choices and why students are making certain career choices was discussed with the second author of the study and there were no changes suggested by the second author. The following sample questions give an overview of interview protocol. What you want to be in terms of your future career? Why did you choose this career choice?

2.3. Procedure

Pilot interviews were conducted with two undergraduate students in second year of their college studies to check the appropriateness and understanding of interview protocol. Then study was approved from DDPC and Advanced Study and Research Board (AS&RB) of University of the Punjab ensuring its value, practicality and need of current time in developing country. All ethical considerations were followed throughout the research. Permission was taken from the administrations of Government and private degree colleges. An informed consent contained information about research purpose, right to withdraw and audio recording of the data with anonymity and safe storage was signed from the participants before interview. Data was collected within two months. Interview was conducted in Urdu language (the national language of Pakistan) and prompts were used where it was needed to explain the question of the interview. The average time for interviews was 30-45 minutes. After the completion of interviews, participants were thanked for their participation. Then interviews were transcribed word to word keeping and maintaining information of interviews only to the researcher and supervisor. Verbatim included in this write up have been translated to English while assuring that they retain their true meaning. Numbers were assigned to participants instead of their names to keep the anonymity of participants.

3. Results

Transcribed data was analyzed through thematic analysis to extract meaning of unit, codes, sub themes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcribed interviews were rechecked against their recording. Initially, transcripts were read line by line twice by the researcher to note potential codes. In next step, relevant verbatim were placed under relevant codes. Then, themes were reviewed to see their relevance with the data and codes. After that, codes were

converted into potential themes that were coherent and consistent and categorized into sub-themes which were collated into a single supra theme *outcome expectation* (see figure 1 and table 1).

Participants were asked about what career choices they want to pursue and why they want to pursue these choices. Among eighteen participants, eight participants reported that they want to become doctor in future, among them three were females and five were males. Two female participants reported that they want to become Engineers. Total five participants reported their interest toward teaching profession, among them two were males and three participants were females. Two male participants reported their interest towards business profession. One female participant reported her interest towards army. General characteristics of the participants are mentioned in table 2. The answer of why they choose these certain career choices was given under theme of outcome expectations.

Table 1: Codes, Sub-Themes and Theme

Meaning Units	Codes	Frequency	Sub-themes	Theme
"…The word of doctor with any one increases one's worth and value. People give respect to doctors…." (P2). "…Doctors and their families are given a lot of respect in our society so in this way me and my family will get respect…." (P18). "…People give respect to teachers. They think this profession is good for girls." (P7). "… By opting the field of army, I will get a lot of respect. People give respect to army. My life would be disciplined in this field….." (P12).	Social acceptance	8	Social	Outcome expectations
"…Doctor is a healer. I think this is the best field to serve humanity….." (P8). "…I want to help those poor ill patients who have no money for treatment and loss their lives. I want to make an institute where I can help needy people and give them free treatment and medicines….." (P2) "…In field of Army one gets the chance of serving humanity in a respectable manner…." (P12).	Service of humanity	6		
"…I am sure that my future will be better in medicine. In young age, one can get good job as doctor. Living standard will be improved and I will be financially strong…." (P13). "…There will be financial stability and secure future in medical field. So I want to go in this field…." (P17). "…My future is secure in this field and I will earn good money…." (P8).	Financial stability	6	Material	
"…One can open his medical store after studying in medical field. It's a kind of business. Future can be bright and long-term benefits will be obtained….." (P17). "…One can work privately after completion of degree in medicine and can get job in hospital easily as doctors are needed everywhere so in medical one can earn easily and get job easily….." (P5).	Job security	5		
"…One can do practice till his life. It's very challenging for doctors to treat each patient with different diseases and different complicated cases…." (P8). "…In engineering, I will do work with different software's which would be interesting and enjoyable for me to discover and work with new things…." (P1). "…I like army because of its discipline and tasks associated with this field. I enjoy being disciplined …." (P12).	Significance and interest in work	6	Functional	

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Intermediate College Students

No.	Code	Age	Academic major	Gender	Father's Education	Mother's Education	Father's Occupation	Mother's Occupation	Birth order	No. of Siblings	Institution	Future career choice	Career guidance seminars attended
1	P1	18	Pre-engineering	Male	Graduation	Matric	Businessman	Housewife	3	5	Public	Business	No
2	P2	19	Pre-medical	Male	Matric	Graduation	Government officer	Housewife	1	Single child	Private	Doctor	Yes
3	P3	18	Pre-medical	Female	PhD	Masters	Professor	Teacher	3	4	Private	Doctor	No
4	P4	18	Arts	Female	Masters	Graduation	Company job	Housewife	1	2	Public	Teacher	No
5	P5	19	Pre-medical	Male	Matric	Matric	Job	Housewife	1	Single child	Public	Doctor	No
6	P6	18	Pre-engineering	Female	Matric	Matric	Businessman	Beautician	2	5	Private	Engineer	No
7	P7	18	Arts	Female	Matric	Graduation	Businessman	Housewife	1	3	Public	Teacher	No
8	P8	19	Pre-medical	Male	Matric	Matric	Businessman	Housewife	1	2	Private	Doctor	No
9	P9	18	Arts	Male	Intermediate	Nothing	Clerk	Housewife	2nd Last	6	Public	Teacher	No
10	P10	18	Pre-medical	Female	Graduation	Graduation	Electrical engineer	Housewife	2	3	Public	Doctor	No
11	P11	19	Arts	Male	Primary	Primary	Businessman	Housewife	1	4	Public	No decided	No
12	P12	18	Pre-medical	Female	Graduation	Intermediate	Businessman	Housewife	3	3	Private	Army	No
13	P13	19	Pre-medical	Male	Graduation	Intermediate	Retired teacher	Housewife	2nd Last	6	Public	Army doctor	No
14	P14	18	Arts	Female	Graduation	Graduation	Businessman	Housewife	2nd last	5	Public	Psychologist	No
15	P15	19	Pre-engineering	Female	Graduation	Masters	Businessman	Housewife	Last	1	Private	Engineer	No
16	P16	18	Pre-engineering	Male	Intermediate	Intermediate	Assistant manager	Housewife	2nd last	5	Private	Business	No
17	P17	19	Pre-medical	Male	Matric	Deceased	Primary	Housewife	Last	2	Private	Doctor	No
18	P18	19	Pre-medical	Female	Graduation	Matric	Private job	Housewife	1	2	Private	Doctor	No

3.1. Social outcomes

Some students choose career which is socially acceptable and has worth and status in society. They choose those careers through which they can get respect and social status. As one student mentioned:

> *"The word of doctor with any one increases one's worth and value. People give respect to doctors …..* " (P2).

Some consider medical filed as respectable profession in society and doctors get a lot of respect in society.

> *"I will get respect in medical field because in whole world doctors are given a lot of respect. And in Pakistan, this field is given very importance …."* (P5).

Some students in their narratives reported that there is social acceptance of medical profession in our society. People give worth to you when they see the word doctor with name their family members and parents also get respect

> *"I want to see the word doctor with my name. Doctors and their families are given a lot of respect in our society so in this way me and my family will get respect…." (P18).*

Students who opted their career in teaching said that they will get respect in this career and especially girls said that this is good for them and they will get respect in this field.

> *"People give respect to teachers. They think this profession is good for girls…." (P7).*

Another male participant mentioned similar views regarding teaching profession showing the worth and respect in society and what social acceptance they can get in this field.

> *"Teaching is considered a respectable profession in our society. So, this is the reason of my decision to opt teaching profession. Getting education is not something but spreading knowledge is real work and considered respectable in our society…" (P9).*

Student who mentioned his future career in army showed the similar views showing the respect and worth from this profession.

> *"By opting the field of army, I will get a lot of respect. People give respect to army. My life would be disciplined in this field….." (P12).*

Narratives of participants from interview data who showed their intention towards doctor as future career stated that they choose this field because they wanted to serve the humanity and especially poor people. In this they can serve their nation.

> *"I want to help those poor ill patients who have no money for treatment and loss their lives. I want to make an institute where I can help needy people and give them free treatment and medicines….." (P2).*

Another participant reported

> *"Doctor is a healer. I think this is the best field to serve humanity….." (P8).*

Below given extract of participant indicates that doctors can give emergency help to the needed ones and in this way they can serve the nation.

> *"I want to help people who are in pain. By becoming doctor, If I found someone in emergency somewhere I can give aid to them….." (P10).*

Participant from army reported that army is the best place to serve the humanity which is why I opted this as career.

> *"In field of Army one gets the chance of serving humanity in a respectable manner…." (P12).*

3.2. Physical Outcomes

Participants who reported their future intention towards medicine reported in their narratives that they will be financially strong by becoming doctor. As they can get government jobs as well as they can do private job as doctor. So, their future will be bright as well. Money is considered the major outcome of any profession. As participant stated:

"I am sure that my future will be better in medicine. In young age, one can get good job as doctor. Living standard will be improved and I will be financially strong…." (P13).

Participant reported that they expect a good salary in this field and in this way their future will be bright and secure.

"Financially, medicine is good profession. Doctors get handsome salary and my future will be good. I will earn money and will be independent…." (P18).

Another participant from pre-medical group reported similar views that*:*

"There will be financial stability and secure future in medical field. So, I want to go in this field…." (P17) and one other said "My future is secure in this field and I will earn good money…." (P8).

The extract of participant from engineering profession indicated that basic purpose was the earning a good salary behind this decision. In this profession one can earn a handsome salary and future will be bright. As participant reported:

"I want to choose that field in engineering through which I can support my father. I will choose my line after a lot of thinking so that I can earn well for my family and parents…."(P15).

Participants reported their intention toward those careers in which they can get jobs easy and they assured of the job security. One participant said:

"One can open his medical store after studying in medical field. It's a kind of business. Future can be bright and long-term benefits will be obtained….." (P17).

Some participants reported that in medicine field, jobs are secure and even in private practice one can earn money. As participant said:

"One can work privately after completion of degree in medicine and can get job in hospital easily as doctors are needed everywhere so in medical one can earn easily and get job easily….." (P5).

One participant showing business as intended profession said:

"I am interested in business because in jobs no matter how much one work hard, one can get limited salary….." (P16).

Participants who reported their future career business described that in job one can get limited salary and in limited resources one has to meet his needs and has to work under some one's supervision.

"I was not interested in job. I cannot work under supervision. In job one can think in limited resources as one can get limited salary so he has to manage everything in that salary. In business, there is little risk but one can go fast with hard work and in few years one can succeed…." (P1).

3.3. Self-outcomes
Some students decide their major because of the type and significance of the work as they will get chance of challenging and different kind of tasks and enjoy doing work in their intended fields. One participant who reported their intention towards medicine stated:

"Every new patient come with different symptoms or diseases. Doctor get chance to learn from each patient. Doctor cannot get fed up from his field. Even after retirement, doctor can continue his or her work. One can do practice till his life. It's very challenging for doctors to treat each patient with different diseases

and different complicated cases….." (P8) and one other said *"In medical field I think I have to do new researches when patients with different diseases will come for treatment and their treatment will be very challenging for doctor. I really like these kinds of tasks and readings with new innovations and treatment procedure…." (P5).* And *"In medical profession, there are a lot of challenging tasks. There are day and night shifts. Doctors had to do duty for late hours and in this way, they are serving humanity. To excel in this field, one must be updated regarding knowledge and new procedures in medicine. So, life is very challenging in this field…." (P2).*

Participant intended to opt engineering as career reported:

"In engineering, I will do work with different software's which would be interesting and enjoyable for me to discover and work with new things…." (P1).

Participant who reported their intended career in army said the similar views that they enjoy the tasks involved in army field

"I like army because of its discipline and tasks associated with this field. I enjoy being disciplined …." (P12).

Figure 1: Outcome Expectations Determining Career Choices
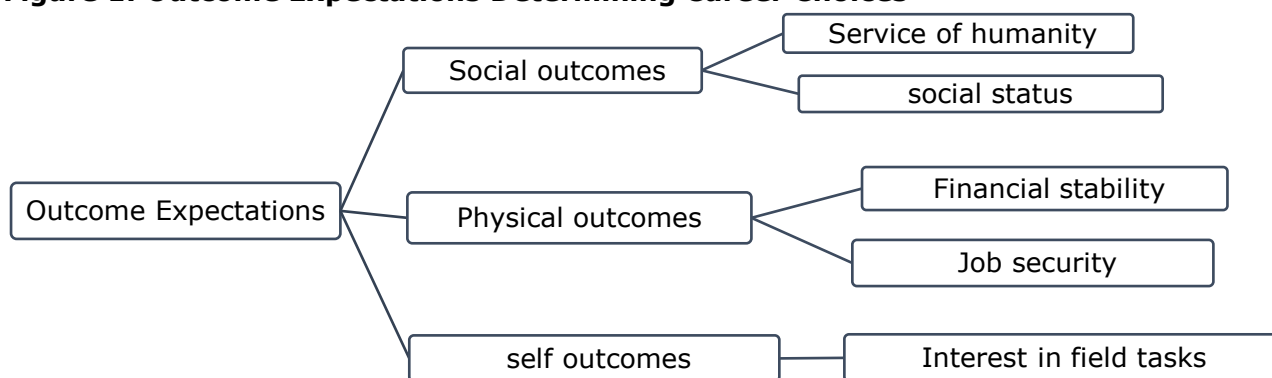
4. Discussion

This study explored the role of outcome expectations in determining career choices of students. A qualitative exploratory study was done to get an insight about the perception of students regarding outcomes they expect from certain careers. Students reported that they wanted to opt medical, engineering, business, teaching and army as their future careers and they choose the respective college majors which will help them in perusing towards their career aspirations. Outcome expectation was emerged as the major theme in interview data with sub-themes of social outcomes, physical outcomes and self-outcomes.

Physical outcome was emerged as sub-theme in which students reported about distal outcome expectations like financial stability and job security. They talked about tangible outcomes like money and job. Reason behind choosing medical, engineering or army profession was the secure and bright future as money is the basic need of time for survival. Shoffner et al. (2005) conceptualize outcome expectations as positive and tangible outcomes.

Social outcome emerged as second sub-theme of outcome expectations in which students discussed about social status; helping and serving humanity. Students tend to choose those careers which are considered most prestigious in society and has social values and secondly, they tend to engage in those careers in which they can help and serve their nation. Reason might be that they and their families want to raise their social status so that society give respect to them and they get some familiarity in the society and secondly financially stable life style which is the basic need of time which is why they preferred and intended to pursue towards the most prestigious careers without knowing their interests and abilities (Sharif et al., 2019).

Self-satisfaction outcomes emerged as third sub-theme in which interest in field tasks are the outcomes which mean that students reported they enjoy doing work and the work environment in their intended fields which they want to pursue. They discussed that they like the fields because of the nature of the work requirements which they like, and this showed their internal motivation to achieve something to get satisfaction (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

5.   Conclusion and Implications

This study has focused on the in-depth exploration of the underlying reasons of choosing conventional careers and what outcomes students expect in opting these choices. Outcome expectation is the most important construct in career decision making. Findings indicated that participants reported three kinds of outcome expectations i.e. physical outcomes, social outcomes and self-outcomes, which they consider for making their career decisions and career choices. Pakistan being a developing country, there are no career guidance and counseling services available. There is a dire need to understand the perception and opinion of students for why they choose the conventional careers so that career counseling can be provided accordingly with rational and logical consequences of opting a certain career. Themes identified under the outcome expectations have implications for research and counseling practice. These factors are very important because they are determining the students' career choices. Counselors can guide students to think deeply about the consequences of their choices either positive outcomes or negative through rationale and logical consequences. This will help them in making realistic career choices and goals and their horizon regarding career availability can be broadened.

There are few limitations of this study. Findings cannot be generalized as data was taken from limited sample and from one city of Pakistan. Future studies can be conducted to get information from those students enrolled in these careers to get information and longitudinal studies can be done to see the difference between the opinions and perceptions of students regarding their outcome expectations from certain fields or academic majors. Future research can also include participants from diverse academic majors to see the differences in perceptions about outcomes.

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