Navigating Educational Pathways: How Collectivistic Cultural Norms Shape Educational Choices in College Students

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Abstract

Career planning and educational pathway selection according to personal interest is good and taking a good decision about major selection cause sense of satisfaction in person, however; there are many cultural factors influencing the personal interest of youth and cause hurdles in navigating the educational pathway. This systematic review aimed to review the existed literature on the collectivistic factors influencing the educational pathway selection of youth in South Asian countries. A systematic review was performed using the PRISMA strategy. Google Scholar, ERIC, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science and Science Direct databases were searched for articles published during the timeline of January 2005 to May 2024. Total number of 36 articles were added to this review. The key findings of this systematic review revealed that three main collectivistic factors including Familial factors (Family Preferences, Ancestors profession continuation, Elder siblings Educational paths), Social factors (Social responsibilities and expectations, Professional development opportunities, Gender Specific Professions, Friends Group cohesion, cultural ideology), Interpersonal (Role Model Influence, vocational aspirations) influence the educational pathway selection of students. Personal interest of a student matters the same as the other factors. In individualistic cultures, student is more focused on his goals rather than the choices of other family members.

Keywords: Educational Choices, Educational Paths, Collectivistic Culture, Students

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Introduction

The term culture is considered as the collective approach of the mindset that differ people of one from another (Bubic and ´ Ivaniševic, 2016). Number of studies have revealed that values under the culture have a great influence on the factors that decide and confirm the educational preferences of youths (Tao et al., 2018). On this basis, Western countries showed to be in align with cultures which focused on individualism, such cultures give complete write to a person in deciding independently without any pressure in keeping the concept of freedom, self-reliance and individual identity; while Asian culture are more closely aligned with collectivism, people find themselves bound with societal pressure expectations and benefits of community (Sinha, 2020).

Educational pathway selection refers to the ability of a student to get involve in a thought processes to match and fuse the self-knowledge and abilities with future program knowledge to make educational major choice to lead a futuristic good occupational opportunities. Individuals having trust in identification of their abilities and go with

their personal choices choose the best career that they thought may suits them in future and keep them satisfied that they choose their own fields. This decision-making task has become an important task for many college students (Citarella, 2018). Nevertheless, when individuals are being forced to choose some other major not matched with their choice and abilities it may raise some issue among high school and university students (Lipshits-Braziler et al., 2015).

Education helps us to identify direction of future career. Perhaps, around the globe and specifically in Asian countries, students from school admission to universities have set their minds and consider one liner i.e., what they would like to be in future? Interestingly, majority of the given responses are linked and consider under environmental, societal, and cultural biasness and more specifically of their ancestors back ground. It found that factors influencing educational pathway selection and career choice vary from society to society and culture to culture (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014). Mostly students assume to pursue their education career in professions which may consider as having good job opportunities. Since last decade, professions like medicine, business, computer science, information technology, agriculture, pharmacy, engineering, etc. considered as top professions to the fabulous attention by students due to good market ratio of acceptability and attractive salary packages. By considering these factors from the job market and demand, educational institutions also take initiatives to run the liked programs to fulfil the curiosity of students (Robertson, 2014).

Choosing a subject to pursue in study considered as major and conflict arising issue in collectivistic culture, as it can be associated with some positive and some negative aspects of life like some inequalities of socio-economic status and individual perception about the things. This decision can

be a life changing moment for any child (Robertson, 2014). This decision making process involved a very brief process which is really understandably required for planning and confirmation their final results of choosing major (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). This process needs proper hands-on with positive attitude fostering the wellbeing stability, personal identity and wellbeing (Kunnen, 2013). Sometimes values we obtain from the culture and traits create hurdles in the process of finalizing and choosing careers an individual wants to continue. Mwoleka (2011) in her study opined that in individualistic cultures individuals have a tendency to highly prioritize their personal interests, freedom and other personal unique traits to make good decision on their career and life. On the other side, in collectivist cultures individuals give foremost priority and attention to the values, needs and expectations of their respective families and in-groups than their personal career aspiration.

Beynon et al. find out in his research that students from Chinese-Canadian background focus in choosing a field their family wants them to go with in giving honor to the people of their family. Student mostly influenced by family members and by their decisions due to interpersonal factors values their families very much and even sacrifice their choices and compromise with their interest and selection (Guan et al., 2015). People from collectivist culture from their birth nurture "we" consciousness and belong to strong primary groups were where the members of the groups are bound together through sympathetic contact based on emotions, sentiments and unquestioning faithful to the group and have firm belief that decisions taken in group are superior to the decision taken by individual. In collectivist societies, individuals give priority to the desire, aspirations and the evaluation of the group

members than his/her personal goals and desire (Cherry, 2019).

The study conducted by Mwoleka (2011) discussed the impact of collectivist societal culture on students' career choice. She stated that when the students in collectivistic cultures want to plan and decide on their career, they have to follow in-group decisions. Sometimes, students may have to wait for final suggestion(s) from parents, family members, teachers, or government personnel. This indicates that students' decisions should go along with families, communities and nations' values, needs, expectations and beliefs. Shandhu (2014) presented a commendable and strong evidentiary support to the statement that binational like Asian American adults' choices of career are greatly influenced by the career and educational expectations of their parents'–either these expectations are linked to a specified careers or high level of prestige general expectations. The data provided suggestions to the ancestors including parents and siblings about congruence of cultural values and their expectations to the extrinsic values linked with the decisions of future. Specifically in Asian countries, influence of culture, parental influence, siblings create pressure to change the major for students.

Rationale of the Study

Asian countries considered well known for their collectivistic values settled to make best community influential decisions of individual, including house chores and educational decisions. These cultures normally represent the values of group, their respect towards elder, prioritizing their group preferences over personal ones. In same context students prefer to choose the paths their elders decided to go with instead of their personal choice and commitments. This

review aimed to explore the norms and factors influence the decision of educational choice of student in Asia, as Asia considered among one of the collectivistic cultural societies. This exploration of factors can be important for educationists, counsellors and policy makers to provide them insight about how their supportive role can create a productive environment to a person life and also can contribute the positive mind. This review also aimed to give insight about the balance of personal expectation and cultural norms to promote the cultural congruent personal accomplishment.
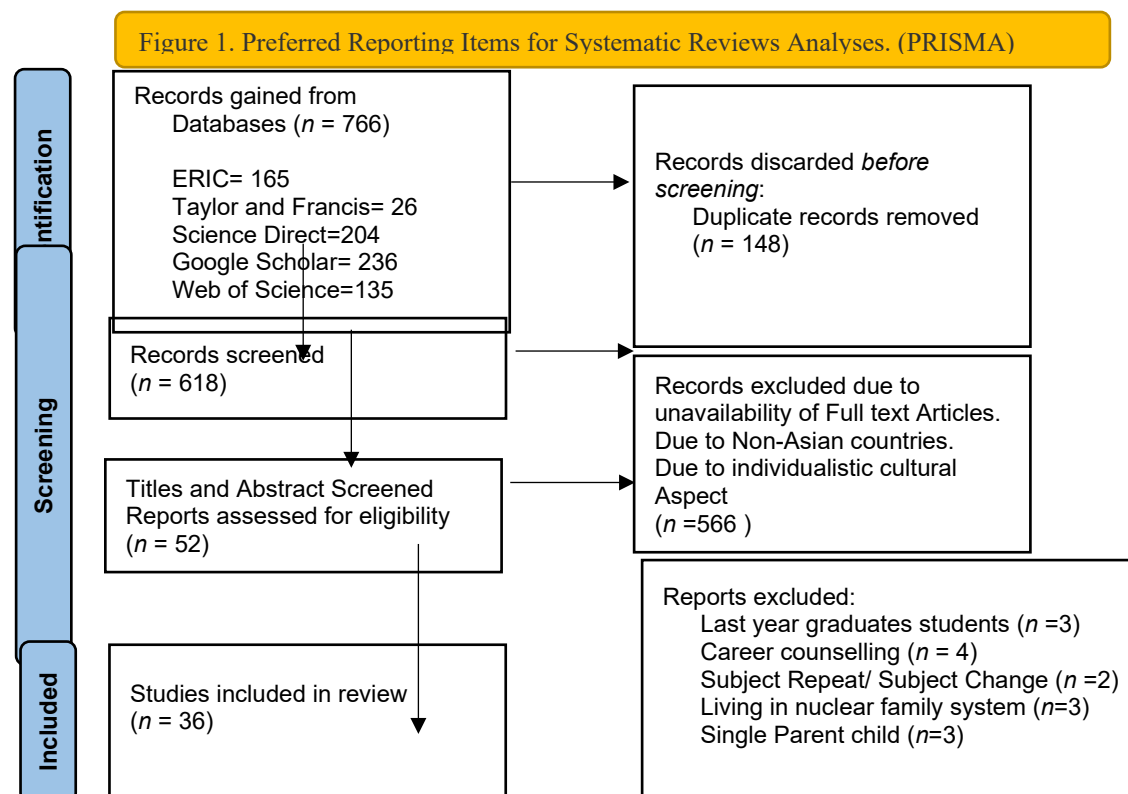
Method

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are-

1. What are the major collectivistic cultural factors which influence the educational pathway navigation of college students?

Search Strategy

The search was performed with the duration of December 2005 to May 2024. Eric, Taylor and Francis, science direct, google scholar and web of science data bases were used for search. The keyword and subject searches were used for conducted. Educational pathway selection and its synonym and related terms: "Educational decision" OR Educational Path" OR "Major choice" OR "subject planning" OR "subject choices" OR Field OR Education OR "Career advancement" OR "Educational exploration" AND Youths and terms linked to it: "Youth OR Youths" OR student ∗ OR adolescent OR teenagers∗ OR "Young students" AND variables and factors: "Collectivistic OR Individualistic OR Cultural OR Cultures OR Culture. In search filters in gaining the focused and comprehensive results (OR/AND), The Boolean operators were used.

Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews Analyses. (PRISMA)

Identification

Records gained from Databases (*n* = 766)

ERIC= 165
Taylor and Francis= 26
Science Direct=204
Google Scholar= 236
Web of Science=135

Records discarded *before screening*:
   Duplicate records removed (*n* = 148)

Screening

Records screened (*n* = 618)

Records excluded due to unavailability of Full text Articles.
Due to Non-Asian countries.
Due to individualistic cultural Aspect (*n* =566)

Titles and Abstract Screened Reports assessed for eligibility (*n* = 52)

Reports excluded:
   Last year graduates students (*n* =3)
   Career counselling (*n* = 4)
   Subject Repeat/ Subject Change (*n* =2)
   Living in nuclear family system (*n*=3)
   Single Parent child (*n*=3)

Included

Studies included in review (*n* = 36)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Full text articles of Peer-reviewed Published within the last 20 years in English language only years (2005-2024) were added to the review. Researches which were included within this analysis of final report were focused on educational choices of Asian youth and collectivistic cultures considered as original research articles were included. Only researches conducted on high school students, college students and first year university students in Asian countries were included. End Year University related studies, change of subject related studies and career selection studies were excluded. Studies with personal choices or career counselling of students or counselling of parents excluded. Abstracts having population of students those already in the working mode and below secondary school level were excluded as this review mainly focused on child leave behind their major choices due to some cultural factors and not those doing job along with studies.

All the ethical considerations for PRISMA were identified. 38 articles met the criteria, Figure 1 explains the process of systematic review using the flowchart specifically designed to explain the system of review like PRISMA (Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses) guidance.

Data Extraction

Using coding sheets, data was assessed and extracted. Study variables were checked and included with the demographics of author name, publication year, country where study conducted, design of study, number of participants, their educational level, influencing the choice factors and their major outcomes. The findings have been highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1
Main Findings (N=36)

Author	Year	Method	Sample	Main Findings
Carter et al.	2022	Survey Study	Asian Societies	Family expectations may diminish the individual identity and decision making. Cultural Ideology also play an important role in decision making. Student keep in mind about the culture in selection of Majors.
Huang et al.	2023	Qualitative Survey	500 Chinese College Students	Students tend to prioritize family-approved educational paths over personal interests. They majorly select the ancestor's profession over their own choice.
Steger et al.	2022	Survey Study	Chinese & Turkish Students	Elder Siblings study path Influence the educational Major selection of the younger siblings which may reflect the hierarchical respect of the family.
Heintzelman & King	2023	Longitudinal Study	Korean and Japanese Students	Social ideology and cultural influence play an important role in major pathway selection. Collectivism influences long-term academic choices, with life satisfaction tied to fulfilling societal roles rather than personal goals.
Castillo & Fischer	2023	Qualitative Analysis	Turkish and Chinese Students	Family and societal standards play an important role in educational pathway selection. Community expectation and demands somehow decided the major study pattern of a student.
Fung et al.	2023	Survey & Focus Groups	Hong Kong College Students	In rural areas students are more close their family and siblings. They mostly prefer the fields their parents and siblings ask them to choose. Younger child have flexibility in choosing their own choose field rather than elder one.
Lee & Kim	2022	Mixed-methods study	300 Korean students	Peer group play a significant role in major subject selection of the student. Group of friends majorly choose the subject they consider to be studied together.
Nakamura et al.	2022	Survey	300 Japanese students	Group conformity leads to selection of future subject study and it may go with the alignment of the group norms in choices of educational pathway selection.
Ahmed & Khan	2023	Qualitative interviews	100 Pakistani students	Societal Norms may influence the educational choices of female students, Mostly females choose the major linked to gender-specific programs.

Author	Year	Method	Sample	Main Findings
Nguyen et al.	2023	Mixed-methods study	250 Vietnamese students	Peer and group influence highly lead to determine the educational Major subject, and lead to the choices that adhere with group expectations and ignore to the personal interests.
Ali et al.	2013	Qualitative	20 Pakistani students	Student pursue with academic subject seems to have better job opportunities and salaries in market
Khan	2011	Quantitaive	200 Pakistani students	This study main findings showed that teacher play an important role in selection of the program.
Rauf	2013	Survey Method	100 Pakistani students	The main findings of the study showed that parents' choice of subject remain the first priority for students to pursue in their academic journey.
Murtaza et al.	2012	Mixed Method	356 Pakistani students	Student choose the program, their ideal teacher having degree in. This study showed two major factors include Ideal Person influence and Teacher influence.
Kiani et al.	2013	Quantitaive Method	482 Pakistani and China students.	Student mainly choose the things which vocationally inspire them. Societal expectations also play an important role in it.
Obinu and Ebunu	2010	Quantitative	200 Nigerian Students	Student personal interest somehow clash with the choice of the peer group and outcome expectations.
Marini et al.	2023	Quantitative	120 UAE females	Student mainly choose the profession, his parents pursuing, for example if parents are doctors their child also want to be a doctor as an influence of parent's occupation.
Mutekwe & Modiba	2011	Qualitative	20 Zimbabwe Students	Family members rather than parents and siblings also influence the decision of student major choice.
Aguele and Agwagah	2007	Quantitaive	316 North Ghana Students	Religious and social culture are main factors in choosing a subject for pursuing the study. This study explored that some programs are associated with gender.
Modiba and Maphosa	2011	Qualitative	20 Zimbabwe Students	Student majorly prefer to go with the subjects expected to have good income and salaries in future.
Faitar and Faitar	2013	Quantitative	315 Indonesian Students	Student inspired by teachers and mostly focus on what they feed them about selecting future paths and fields.

Author	Year	Method	Sample	Main Findings
Ahmed et al.	2017	Quantitative	120 Pakistani Students	Student didn't make their mind for any specific program, they see the merit and in what field they got admission easily, pursue with it. But financial issues main influence in choose of the college.
Abbasi and Sarwat	2014	Quantitative	370 Pakistani students	Student prefer to choose the fields having good option of Salaries.
Ghuangpeng	2011	Mixed method	209 Thailand Students	Community and cultural values influence the educational pathway selection of the students.
Kim et al.	2016	Mixed Method	420 South Korea Students	Student while taking decision about the education and related fields, they consider the culture as important factor. They see what their culture may accept and in what field he/she may get value.
Maduwanthi	2023	Quantitative	60 Srilankan Students	This study revealed that lack of emotional support from family may cause wrong decisions to the child. Family support is important in field selection.
Mao et al.	2017	Quantitative	312 Chinese Students	Siblings play an important role in selection of the Education major to pursue for study in upcoming years.
Merayo & Ayuso	2023	Quantitaive	1562 Students	Family have more influence towards females to choose what they ask them to or to choose what is according to their cultural best.
Nguyen & Tran	2018	Qualitative	25 Vietnamese college students	Role model cause an influence on selection of major subject selection
Ahmed & Saleem	2015	Quantitative	161 Pakistani students	Role model paid a great influence on the selection of major of students.
Maria	2024	Qualitative	12 Female Pakistani students.	Rigid Social system is an important factor in rural areas
Bakar	2018	Qualitative	13 Pakistani students.	Gender segregation play a major concern of family for females in persuasion of their dream education. Due to inequalities, they have to choose the career they didn't interest much.
Arif et al.	2019	Mix Methodology	200 Pakistani students	Shortage of female instructors in school prevent female students to pursue their studies in their desired fields especially STEM Fields.

Author	Year	Method	Sample	Main Findings
Tabassum	2012	Survey	200 Pakistani students	Majority of Matriculation students blindly get aspiration from the careers being limelighter in the days, vocational aspiration consider as major factor of influence.
Nadeem et al.	2021	Qualitative	575 Pakistani students.	Trending Job market influence the personal interest of student and they choose the trendy subject in education field.
Kemp & Zhao	2016	Quantitative	116 Chineese Students	Male gender Like brother and father is major one contributing in major selection of education and profession of females.

Main Findings

After detail review of literature, mainly three themes were identified and several subthemes were identified in each main theme umbrella.

1. **Familial Factors**

In literature 10 studies were identified which explored that familial background and pressure disturb the personal choice of student and influence the major decision of their career. Articles explore three subthemes under the main umbrella include continuation of Ancestors profession, Parents choice pressure and elder siblings' pathway influence on younger sibling major selection. Two articles were identified which discuss that Child are forced to choose the profession of their child, so they have to study what their ancestors have to. Huang et al. (2023) reported in their research that student tend to choose the education path suggested by their parents, not only suggestion but they prioritize the choice of their parents and grandparents over their own personal interest. Mao et al. (2017) also discussed that siblings of family mostly choose their family educational paths and pursue with same choice and move into same business and degrees.

Some articles discuss about how family preferences cover the personal interest of student and student give preference to their parents' choice because their parents decided from childhood about what their child be in future.

Carter et al. (2022) discussed that expectations of family suppress the identity of an individual student and he give the top priority to their parents' choice due to respect and honor of the parents which consider good in collectivistic culture. Castillo and Fischer (2023) explain in his research that somehow family make their mind due to societal standards and their own egoistic boundary and they consider their child to follow the pattern they have decided for them. They want to meet expectations of community and resist the difference of child personal choice and their own choice. Rouf did his research in Pakistan and found that parents choices are considered top priority when student is deciding about their major in college. Later, Ahmed and Khan (2023) revealed that societal norms played an important role in setting the mind of parents about choices of the major of their child. Both male and female child face this issue but in rural areas female faced this issue more than male due to societal expectations and norms. In collectivistic culture 21% students take up the major subject of their parents' choice and ignore their own personal interest, and try to make career in suggested one.

Mostly students take advice from their elder siblings about choosing a major. Steger et al. (2022) explained that elders siblings guide their younger siblings about choosing educational major in keeping the view of familial choices and hierarchy. In rural areas where there is no guidance available from any one, elder educated siblings play an important role in help younger ones in choosing it and force them to pursue it without this concern that other has some interest in the field or not and younger siblings have to follow the field they have been suggested by elder ones. Mostly they guide younger siblings to choose the same field they are studying (Fung et al., 2023).

2. **Social Factors**

This is the second major themed influential perspective of collectivistic society explored under this review. This review identified 13 articles which majorly explored the societal expectations, developmental opportunities, social responsibilities, cultural ideology, gender segregations and Specifications and friend's group cohesion also play an influential role in selection of major in collectivistic culture. An important aspect of collectivistic culture which influences the selection of major selection for any student is their responsibilities as a person, as human being and a bread earner. Heintzelman and King (2023) focused that culture and social ideology shaped the mind of a student in choosing major and it definitely pressurize them to choose the cultural expected degree over their personal choice. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2023) explained that friend group influence is a great role player in career selection, at the time of middle age the child is more nearly attached to their per group and they consider them self as a group to be live all of their life. Somehow, they sacrifice their own choice over their group choice. Moreover, Modiba and Maphosa (2011) underrated this trend of peer influence and social responsibility and explored another

important factor which promise them a better financial and secured future. In line with this, Nadeem et al. (2021) identified that what is trendy in market place influence the student choice of selecting any major and pursue with it. Combine, all of these studies create a powerful impact in shaping the future study selection of students. Three studies limelight the importance of professional development stance in modifying and selecting the educational choices of student. Ali et al. (2013) explored that child studying in college mostly go with the programs in future he thought to be with promising job market and trend with good salaries in future. Tabassum (2012) motivated this idea that desire of being prominent in career lead the student towards the decision of their educational field.

Some studies examined how different expectations according to gender significantly shape the choices. Ahmed and Khan (2023) found that female student feel more pressure from society and its norms in selecting the major and the association of some professions to some gender specific things lead them to choose sometime oppose to their choice. These norms force them to choose the programs showing their traditional shadow in it. Aguele and Agwagah (2007) found in the result of their study that with societal factors there are some religious factors also involved in the selection of the subject. Some religious factors didn't allow females to choose the majors where field work involved. In some rural areas female students have to sacrifice their choices only because of religious role associated gender, lack of female instructors in some schools prevent the female students to explore their favorite field. Bakar (2018) contributed that gender segregation is major point to be considered by parents when choosing subject, college or field for students which restrict them to pursuit in their personal field of interest.

Grouping with the friends is major element of the collectivistic culture and it strongly cast magic effect on the decision making of a person. Lee and Kim (2022) experienced that peer group at teen age Is like family superior to any other thing. Student feel comfortable with their peer group and they don't want to get separated from them. Group conformity diminish the choice of a single person if major people of the group want to pursue with same thing, so any one considering some separate domain will have to exit the group or to left the subject. This emotional decision in later life makes them thought about the foolishness they have achieved in life (Nakamura et al., 2022).

Three important articles in sighted about the influence of cultural ideology in taking educational decisions. Carter et al. (2022) briefed in the study that student who thought about making progress in their desired academic field and discipline they have to face the obstacles of that cultural ideology with considering norms of their cultures when choosing their academic persuasion. Similarly, Kim et al. (2016) found that culture prevent some student to take better choice for their career. Student living in collectivistic culture have to fade off their desires and listen to the society and cultures.

3. Interpersonal Factors

6 articles were identified that explored the cast of role model and vocational aspiration discussion on the selection of subjects in college life.

Nguyen and Tran (2018) found that student in middle age make someone their role model and every time they want to be like them despite of knowing the challenges and obstacles their role model have been gone through, they want to study the same subjects their role model did. Another research conducted in Pakistan found that role model acts as an important role in the selection of students' educational pathway, as their ideal figure became inspiration for them (Ahmed

& Saleem, 2015; Murtaza et al., 2021). The other three articles focus on the role of vocational aspirations in driving students' educational decisions. Moreover, Kiani et al. (2013) claimed that students mostly carry the field that go with their dominant figure in relatives, family or either in society like Tv screen or in reality.

Discussion

This review aimed to explore the literature combine with the influencing factors of the decision making of students while choosing major subjects. Findings of the review repeatedly indicates that some factors are contributing and influencing the decision making of the students. These factors are familial, social, and interpersonal intertwined with decisions students take. In many cases educational decisions are go with the expectations of the family, ancestor's profession continuation, and the elder siblings influence indicating the importance of family playing role in shaping the academic decisions. These factors of family emerged as dominant influence showing in the studies by Carter et al. (2022) and Huang et al. (2023). Steger et al. (2022) put the contribution to this by investigating the role showing how elder siblings' educational choices motivate the younger one and distract them to achieve their real, which in later age move towards the dissatisfaction or change of subject, repetition and failure also. Moreover, expectations of society, ideologies of culture, and roles of gender accordance complicate the decision-making processes of students. These factors and pressure from society indicating collectivistic culture get hype on personal interest. Same as often lead students to prioritize collective values over personal interests, sometimes at the expense of their individual aspirations. Interpersonal influences, including the impact of role models and vocational aspirations, also emerge as critical determinants, guiding

students towards fields that align with the expectations of their peers and mentors.

Implications

This study can provide a great insight to the educators for creating a good and respectable learning environment, so student can explore himself in a good manner. This not only help them in self-discovery but also strengthen their decision making. For policy makers it can be a sensitive matter as they have to be flexible enough in their education system to give free hand to the students in self-discovery. Policy makers may also introduce the programs that help the student in balancing between culture and personal interest by adding mentoring programs including family influencer and professional role model. Education counsellor can also play an important role in creating policies for people obliging culture in their daily life and involving family members in discussions and exploration activity of personal interest of child.

Contribution of Authors

Aleena Arshad: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Arooj Arshad: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [A.A.] upon the reasonable request.

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