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## Education as Commodity: Parental Expectations, Institutional Interests, and the Crisis of Learner Agency in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*This study investigates how parental expectations and institutional directives shape the academic and occupational trajectories of pupils enrolled in private schools in the districts of Sheikhpura and Lahore, Pakistan. The analysis conceptualises these externally determined trajectories as “imposed goals” and situates them within the wider critique of the banking model of education, whereby knowledge is deposited rather than co-created. Institutional practices that calibrate curricula, assessment structures, and guidance services primarily to advance commercial interests transform classrooms into revenue-generating sites, marginalising authentic intellectual exploration. Simultaneously, many parents employ psychological conditioning from the earliest years of schooling, exhorting children to pursue culturally prestigious professions such as medicine or engineering, thereby reinforcing narrow definitions of success. Students consequently become commodities within a marketised educational ecosystem; school administrators and teachers steer them toward affiliated colleges and specialised preparatory academies to secure examination performance and institutional rankings, often at the expense of individual aptitude or aspiration. Drawing on qualitative observations, stakeholder interviews, and documentary analysis, the paper interrogates how these intersecting pressures restrict learner agency, perpetuate socio-economic stratification, and undermine the emancipatory potential of education envisioned by critical pedagogues. By illuminating the relational dynamics among families, schools, and ancillary coaching centres, the research advocates for policy interventions and pedagogical reforms that prioritise student-centred guidance, diversified career counselling, and collaborative curricula that honour intrinsic motivation and realities. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on educational equity, human development, and the ethical responsibilities of both parents and institutions in goal formation and holistic wellbeing.*

**Keywords:** Parental Expectations, Educational Marketisation, Student Agency, Critical Pedagogy

**JEL Codes:** I21, I28, J24, Z13

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental driver of empowerment and social transformation in contemporary society, functioning as the primary pathway through which individuals and communities achieve upward mobility and broaden their opportunities for advancement (Sen, 1999; Spring, 2015). In contrast to historical periods when military strength or territorial conquest determined the destinies of nations, today's societies are defined by their capacity for knowledge creation, scientific discovery, and technological progress (Nussbaum, 2010). The drive to better understand and harness the natural world has propelled education to the forefront of development policy, making it a central pillar of national strategies for

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innovation, economic growth, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2020). They shape personal destinies, as well as the fortunes of nations, and have become entirely undisputed. Education increasingly plays an important role in shaping not just individual destinies but also the fortunes of nations.

The educational institutions wield their influence beyond the narrow confines of knowledge dissemination and rudimentary skill development, but lay out ladders through which students can be directed to specific strings in career pathways as well as society's expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Ball, 2012). Through both formal and informal mechanisms, students are often encouraged or subtly coerced to internalize goals and aspirations that may reflect institutional priorities, economic trends, or societal prestige rather than genuine personal interests or individual aptitudes (Apple, 2004; Marginson, 2016). This process of socialization can create an environment where certain professional pathways, such as medicine, engineering, or law, are disproportionately valued as the ultimate markers of academic achievement and social status (Giroux, 2014; Reay, 2017).

Educational institutions frequently capitalize on the achievements of exceptional students, prominently showcasing their success stories in marketing materials, alumni outreach, and public relations campaigns to attract new students and reinforce institutional reputations (Ball, 2012; Brooks, Waters, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). In this context, the accomplishments of a select few become emblematic of institutional excellence, shaping the aspirations of average students and families while perpetuating highly selective definitions of merit and accomplishment (Archer, 2018). As a result, a commodified view of education emerges, wherein success is measured less by holistic personal growth or diverse forms of talent, and more by conformity to externally set benchmarks and the attainment of competitive credentials (Tomlinson, 2017). This approach not only marginalizes students whose strengths or passions lie outside the dominant paradigms but also narrows the broader purpose and potential of education in cultivating well-rounded, critically engaged citizens.

In consequence, students having difficult times in confronting heavy competition for entrance examinations are likely to suffer from severe psychological instabilities—anxiety, chronic depression, and a low sense of self-worth (Arslan, 2021; Sahu, 2020). Chronic feelings of inadequacy brought about by the unrelenting pressure of conforming to rigid and externally governed standards of success and pervasive fear of failing in academics can lead, in extreme cases, to acute mental health crises like loss of interest in life or suicidal tendencies (Deb et al., 2015; Kumar & Bhukar, 2013). In this scenario, the academic journey runs the risk of being converted into a prolonged period of distress and alienation rather than an enriching experience, facilitating the process of self-discovery and empowerment (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Deb et al., 2015).

The dominance of performance-oriented academic cultures, especially in high-stakes contexts, poses a risk to nurturing a realization of holistically developed, resilient learners who honor individual differences in aptitude, learning style, and emotional well-being (Burgess, 2017). This emphasis on narrow benchmarks of achievement may ignore students with diverse talents or non-conventional aspirations and enhance their sense of alienation and exclusion (Arslan, 2021; Sahu, 2020). Addressing these immediate challenges necessitates a careful assessment of institutional norms and practices, shifting toward student-centered pedagogies with broadened definitions of success, and an embedded structure of psychological support services in institutions (Sahu, 2020; Burgess, 2017; Kumar & Bhukar, 2013). These reforms are paramount to an inclusive academic environment to promote mental health, foster genuine personal growth, and uphold education's original emancipatory promise.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Freire defines the terms traditional educational systems through the terms and phrases: "misguided" and suffering from "narration sickness". In the "banking concept" of education, Freire (1970) says, learning is an unidirectional process by which students are regarded as passive receivers of knowledge emptied by coin vessels or banks into which deposits are put by the teacher. It discourages creativity and critical thinking, rendering students as objects rather than active agents within their education. The central task of the teacher in this system is to "fill" students with information, suppressing their creative impulses and imposing external goals that are often aligned with institutional or societal preferences, such as prioritizing careers in medicine or engineering (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2014).

According to Freire, the more students are encouraged to simply memorize and regurgitate information, the less likely they are to develop a "critical consciousness," the ability to interrogate their reality and participate as transformative agents in society. This banking model entrenches the teacher's authority and marginalizes the student's voice, as "the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply," confusing the authority of knowledge with the authority of the professional (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Consequently, this dynamic enables exploitation within educational institutions, commodifying students and reinforcing systems of inequality, particularly disadvantaging those from marginalized or less privileged backgrounds (Apple, 2004).

In parallel, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development provides a psychological perspective on the detrimental effects of such rigid educational structures. Erikson's (1968) stage of "Identity vs. Role Confusion" describes the adolescent period as a crucial time for self-exploration and the formation of personal identity. If young people are granted the freedom to explore different roles and career options, they are more likely to develop a coherent and confident sense of self. When parents, teachers, or institutions impose such constricting options as forcing children into a particular field, the adolescent has a chance to undergo a sense of disorientation, regret, and dissatisfaction with long-lasting consequences on his/her psychological well-being and agency (Erikson, 1968; Sahu, 2020). The blend of Freire's educational critique and Erikson's psychosocial theory

serves to articulate the need for an environment in which students are empowered to think critically, investigate freely, and collaborate in designing their educational paths.

There is now considerable documentation on the different conditions that influence individuals' long-term objectives. The first and perhaps the most significant determinant is that of the family, with parental influence in particular among the most important (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Parents take on a major role in psychosocial and adjustment development in children, which shapes their aspirations and career trajectories (Lamborn et al., 1991; Noller, 1994). The quality of all such attachments and support, often built up over time, has a long-term influence on the motivation, goal setting, and vocational identity of young persons (Ketterson & Blustein, 1997). Dysfunctional families, characterized mainly by conflict and instability, lead their children to the darker paths of goal clarity and career development (Hargrove et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 1999; Ryan et al., 1996). Excessive parental control can even impede widening the avenue for young people to explore several areas of interest because of narratives from young people who say they feel that their parents dictate what they wish to do in their own lives with regard to the goals they want them to pursue (Schultheiss et al., 2001).

On the other hand, researchers seem to agree on the idea that for meaningful goals to be achieved and committed to, one needs a certain level of freedom in decision-making for the choice of a career, free from the expectations or obligations of their parents (Crockett & Bingham, 2000; Larson, 1995). Within this particular context of Pakistan, Arif, Iqbal, and Khalil (2019) studied the factors influencing students' choices toward their academic careers. An integrative understanding of how the complex interplay between family, social, economic, and personal factors shapes students' decisions was reached, with family and social support identified as the most effective ones. Meanwhile, when motivated and reinforced by family influence, students were found to demonstrate high levels of confidence and happiness in their chosen academic programs, but when family support was weak or absent, students experienced a lack of satisfaction and faced difficulty in reconciling their career choices with their personal interests and performance within the academic sphere.

As observed by the authors Arif et al. (2019), it is again recommended that parents widen their outlook on career options available in a knowledge-driven economy instead of limiting their children to traditional professions. This may be achieved through providing moral support and also financial support, while not imposing firm expectations for a certain career that offers youth the opportunity to make a practical and fulfilling choice. In addition, this finding draws a greater need for government interventions that open other opportunities for youth development, apart from professional and technical education, thereby engendering a more versatile and flexible workforce (Larson, 1995; Johnson et al., 1999). This holistic approach towards both family and societal dimensions is necessary to foster resilient and self-directed people capable of adapting to a fast-paced world. Contemporary academic discourse has aired some serious grievances about the predicament that is the commercialization of educational institutions, which is gaining alarming ground, particularly in the US, where financial interests sadly have begun to trump educational values. In particular, Molnar and Boninger (2020) show how the rapid quest for profit, largely manifest during the rush to expand digital learning tools in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, works against the very intention of teaching and authentic student learning. Using a grounded theory approach, the scholars demonstrate how data gleaned from digital platforms are often exploited by private companies to market products directly to students, conveniently packaged as "free" education. This practice, according to Molnar and Boninger, results in what they describe as "mis-educative" experiences, in which the core mission of education is displaced by commercial interests, ultimately exploiting students and diminishing the authentic spirit of learning (Molnar & Boninger, 2020; Ball, 2012).

Such trends reflect a broader global phenomenon in which educational institutions may prioritize revenue generation over student-centered pedagogies, especially during periods of technological disruption or crisis (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2014). The commodification of education not only distorts the priorities of schools and universities but also risks reducing students to mere consumers within a marketplace, rather than fostering their development as critical thinkers and engaged citizens (Nussbaum, 2010). In response, Molnar and Boninger (2020) advocate for a renewed emphasis on creative and meaningful learning experiences, urging institutions to resist the encroachment of commercial imperatives and focus instead on supporting students' holistic intellectual growth.

Parallel concerns regarding external pressures on students' educational trajectories have emerged in research from other contexts. Fernandez, Valsalachandran, and Durgalekshmi (2023), in a comprehensive study involving 375 Indian higher education institutions, found that both educational and parental pressures exhibited only a weak correlation with students' career choices. However, what they have shown is that parental stress is useless when it becomes too much, in that it destroys the student's decision making and psychological well-being, while on the contrary a positive family environment fosters confidence and satisfaction in their chosen professions among students (Crockett & Bingham, 2000; Arif et al., 2019). Such evidence requires institutions and families to direct their narrow or coercive approaches into well-informed and holistic guidance for students so that they can develop better choices about their future careers (Larson, 1995; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The research study was conducted in which participants aged 14-18 were mainly targeted, students studying in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and above. The sample comprised sixty-five students: thirty girls and thirty-five boys, with a fair gender representation. Notably, thirty of the participants were from District Lahore and belonged to families with low socio-economic status and marginalized backgrounds; hence, the study looked into vulnerable youth populations. All students were Urdu-speaking, so

the data collection process was smooth. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, and both tools were translated into Urdu to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants. The responses to the interviews were then translated into English for analysis. A privacy-centered aspect of the interviews aided in maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of every participant, and the welfare and safety of each participant were considered. The interviews also took place at different places so as to reduce any risk of stigmatizing or identifying any participating student concerning participation in this study. Before data collection, parents or guardians of all participants provided informed consent for the student participants, who provided their assent following ethical guidelines for research on minors. The sample consisted of students from a range of diverse schools, thus increasing the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. The research process was strictly addressed with ethical consideration toward protecting the rights and health of the participants.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

From the study's findings, an attempt is made to carry out an analysis as to how externally imposed career goals from families and educational institutions affect private school students in Sheikhpura and Lahore in Pakistan. Informed by Paulo Freire's Banking Concept of Education and Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, the study examines the parental expectations and institutional practices that limit student decision-making and career choices. In this regard, the theoretical constructs shed light on the issue whereby the autonomy of students and the formation of their identity are subsumed under pressures that tend to force them onto preordained tracks rather than towards their dreams and interests. Three such headings fall out: adverse consequences of parental pressure on career choice, the power of institutional agents as pictured through the Banking Model of Education, and psychological and physical effects due to the combined forces. Each theme sheds light on various aspects of imposed goal phenomena, providing a composite view into the rather complicated praetermitted processes determining students' educational and vocational development. This action-oriented approach thus directs the focus of the research towards family engagement, school intervention, and personal agency with respect to wider social and institutional forces shaping the future of young people in terms of academic and career success in contemporary Pakistan.

##### **4.1. PARENTAL PRESSURE ON CAREER CHOICE**

The first main theme arising from the data focuses on the sheer weight of parental influence in shaping their children's future aspirations, and it can be said to relate closely with Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory stage of Identity versus Role Confusion. This framework situates adolescence as a time of self-exploration and identity, the very time when parental expectations might tend to override an adolescent's preferences and lead him or her into externally imposed decisions regarding pathways chosen. The present study finds that parental attitudes towards career stances and family-driven concerns positively correlate to the degree of freedom enjoyed by the students in making such life-changing decisions. Often, this situation leads the child to be channeled into high areas of respect, such as medicine or engineering, and consequently ignores their interests, aptitude, and ambition.

External enforcement keeps the student away from pursuing passion careers and often points them to disappointment and mismatching tracks that may lead to years of longing and regrets. The data also indicate that this parental influence is not only encouragement but even overt or covert coercions that narrow down the freedom of a student in deciding their future. There are indications of stress due to this conflicting pressure in students who report harassment, anxiety, or despair when aspirations are secondary to family expectations. In the end, it bears testimony to the sometimes detrimental roles that parental expectations play in determining academic and career outcomes, and thus highlights the need for greater awareness and discussion on supporting student agency and well-being as they pursue career development.

##### **4.2. INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE AND THE BANKING CONCEPT**

This series of principal thematic domains analyzes how farfetched the schools are from being agents in imposing professional aspirations, revealing how monetary possession is superior to the real essence of education itself. The broader Freire's "Banking Concept of Education" is critical of the way schools and teachers push students into a specific career line, more often medicine or engineering, out of financial concern for themselves rather than for any articulation of students' individual needs and interests/dispositions. Schools commercially engage, for example, in enticing students to enroll in some of the colleges or specialized academies for test prep that their very successful reputational marketing of such affiliated institutions involves some of their best students in the next cohort so as to keep that connection or revenue stream.

Institutional practice mostly turns into overt or subtle coercion, such that the reasoned career paths of the students are at stake, but which satisfy the school's concerns, not those of the learner. The data showed that such institutional pressures this case, an intense push into some affiliated level of colleges-have a very serious compromise on student autonomy. These would bring home further alienation from possible careers, which might have been in keeping with their requirements as well as talents. Rather than being helpful to students in seeking different educational alternatives, schools reinforce the pressures coming from parents and thus add new limitations on how much influence they perceive themselves to possess, thereby limiting their journey into even more authentic self-discovery. This theme debunks, in many ways, the economic priorities that institutions have adopted, just opening floodgates for distorting into the very purpose of education and turning schools into commercial entities instead of nurturing environments for total development. Students, now in that interaction, are further confused and limited in their informed decision-making regarding their academic and professional futures as it pertains to institutional and parental pressures.

### 4.3. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The students' negative career aspirations are the most distressing of all themes concerning their psychological well-being and career satisfaction. Parents and institutions create psychic conflicts through an environment of anxiety and chronic stress with a strong sense of inadequacy. The students regret their choice of career and wish they could change it, especially when it does not conform to their genuine interests and personal identity. In contradistinction to true aspirations and genuine goals, the ones imposed upon students rob them of motivation and energy and lead them toward dissatisfaction when reflecting upon their academic and professional lives in the future. Under that strain, students tend to escalate their self-doubt and lack of agency, with consequent apathy, mental health issues, and, in the most unfortunate cases, sheer hopelessness regarding future openings in life.

This theme places psychological costs in the pathway of restricting the independence of students whenever making educational and career decisions. Thus, internalized goals convert the processes of education into emotional turmoil, whereas self-governance would have induced actual self-discovery and growth. Therefore, the recommended findings have intrinsic moral weight in favoring the design of extrinsically supportive environments that allow students to retain agency, explore a breadth of interests, and at the same time provide extensive psychological support to counter the damaging effects of imposed expectations. Empowering students to participate actively in shaping their own academic and career trajectories is essential not only for their mental health but also for fostering genuine career satisfaction and lifelong fulfillment.

Table 1 presents the frequency analysis of four key variables that measure the dimensions of parental pressure as perceived by individuals regarding career-related decisions. The variables include family opinions on career, family pushing for an unwanted career, financial expectations influencing career choice, and freedom in career choice. The responses are categorized into five levels: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Family opinions on career show that a significant majority of respondents either strongly agree (38.31 percent) or agree (47.13 percent) that family perspectives play an influential role in shaping their career decisions. Only a small fraction of respondents reported a neutral (11.64 percent), disagree (5.06 percent), or strongly disagree (0.23 percent) stance. This finding underscores the considerable impact of familial attitudes and advice in career planning, which is consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of family as a primary socializing agent in many cultures (Metheny, McWhirter, & O'Neil, 2008).

For a family pushing for an unwanted career, the distribution is more mixed. While a majority agree (52.42 percent) that their family has pushed them toward a career they did not desire, very few strongly agree (0.82 percent). Notably, a sizable proportion disagree (25.59 percent) or strongly disagree (14.67 percent), while some remain neutral (8.74 percent). These results suggest that, although family pressure to pursue an undesired career path is present, there is also a substantial group who do not experience or acknowledge this specific form of pressure. This aligns with findings that individual agency and negotiation play a role in mediating family influence (Whiston & Keller, 2004).

Financial expectations influencing career choice reveal that 23.33 percent strongly agree and 32.78 percent agree that financial expectations from family play a role in their career decisions. However, a notable share are neutral (14.24 percent), and a combined 30.08 percent either disagree or strongly disagree. This indicates that while financial considerations imposed by the family are a factor for many, they are not universally decisive. This trend is corroborated by studies highlighting the diverse factors—including socioeconomic status and family financial goals—that can sway career trajectories (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

Regarding freedom in career choice, 35.64 percent strongly agree and 41.08 percent agree that they experience freedom in choosing their career, while 23.18 percent disagree, with very small percentages in the neutral (0.27 percent) or strongly disagree (0.20 percent) categories. The high proportion reporting perceived freedom suggests a growing recognition of personal autonomy in career decision-making, even in contexts with traditionally strong family involvement (Keller & Whiston, 2008). However, the sizable minority who disagree signal that barriers to career autonomy persist for some individuals.

**Table 1: Frequency Analysis of Parental Pressure Variables**

Variable	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
FOC	38.31071	47.13333	11.64101	5.058257	0.228033
FPUC	0.817766	52.42322	8.735101	25.58983	14.66671
FEIC	23.3263	32.78351	14.23603	20.01599	10.06329
FCC	35.635	41.08421	0.268281	23.18319	0.203365

Note: FOC = Family Opinions on Career, FPUC = Family Pushing Unwanted Career, FEIC = Financial Expectations Influencing Career, FCC = Freedom in Career Choice

Table 2 provides a correlation matrix exploring the relationships between several dimensions of parental pressure and career outcomes. The variables include family opinions on career, family pushing for an unwanted career, parents disregarding career opinion, financial expectations influencing career choice, freedom in career choice, choosing the wrong career due to pressure, and would change career if possible. The correlations reflect the extent to which these dimensions are statistically associated with each other, highlighting important dynamics in career decision-making processes influenced by family context.

Family opinions on career show moderate to strong correlations with most other variables. The correlation with family pushing for an unwanted career is 0.194, suggesting a weak but positive association: when family opinions are more influential, there is a slightly increased likelihood of being pushed toward an undesired career path. The correlation with parents disregarding career opinion is higher (0.380), indicating that families with strong opinions on career also tend to disregard the individual's preferences, which is consistent with literature on the authoritative role of family in career choices (Whiston & Keller, 2004). The association between family pushing for an unwanted career and parents disregarding career opinion is moderate (0.476), highlighting that family pressure and disregard for individual preferences often go hand in hand. This dynamic is echoed in studies where parental over-involvement can undermine autonomy and lead to increased career-related stress (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). The highest correlation in this column is with freedom in career choice (0.933), but as the sign is positive, it could indicate a complex relationship where families exert both pressure and offer some form of perceived autonomy, or it may reflect a coding artifact. Careful examination of measurement scales is warranted in such cases.

Financial expectations influencing career choice are moderately correlated with both family pushing for an unwanted career (0.517) and parents disregarding career opinion (0.527), suggesting that where there is financial pressure, it is often accompanied by direct or indirect parental pressure regarding career direction. The association between financial expectations and the chosen wrong career due to pressure (0.372) also supports findings that financial imperatives from family can steer individuals into paths they might not otherwise choose (Metheny et al., 2008).

Freedom in career choice displays an exceptionally strong positive correlation with family pushing for an unwanted career (0.933), which may seem counterintuitive. This could suggest complex family dynamics or possible nuances in how freedom and pressure are experienced or reported by respondents, again suggesting the need to review item phrasing or coding. There is also a moderate correlation with parents disregarding career opinion (0.439) and a lower association with financial expectations influencing career choice (0.190). Chosen wrong career due to pressure shows a strong correlation with family opinions on career (0.627) and would change career if possible (0.872), indicating that those who feel they have chosen the wrong path due to family or financial pressure are also more likely to express a desire to change careers. These results align with established models of career regret and dissatisfaction where external influences play a dominant role (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Would change career if possible is highly correlated with several variables, including choosing the wrong career due to pressure (0.872), parents disregarding career opinion (1.074), and financial expectations influencing career choice (0.900), reinforcing the strong association between external parental pressure, dissatisfaction, and the desire for career change. These very high correlations may suggest issues with variable scaling, redundancy, or multicollinearity, warranting further statistical investigation.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Model 1**

Variables	FOC	FPUC	PDCO	FEIC	FCC	CWCDP	WCCP
FOC	1.0000						
FPUC	0.19392	1.0000					
PDCO	0.379914	0.475907	1.0000				
FEIC	0.101933	0.517423	0.527096	1.0000			
FCC	0.362122	0.932567	0.43913	0.18978	1.0000		
CWCDP	0.626985	0.39539	0.379199	0.371741	0.022153	1.0000	
WCCP	0.588907	0.805967	1.074436	0.900278	0.556212	0.872206	1.0000

Note: FOC = Family Opinions on Career, FPUC = Family Pushing Unwanted Career, PDCO = Parents Disregard Career Opinion, FEIC = Financial Expectations Influencing Career, FCC = Freedom in Career Choice, CWCDP = Chosen Wrong Career Due to Pressure, WCCP = Would Change Career if Possible

Table 2 displays the correlation matrix for variables that capture the influence of school and teachers on students' career trajectories. The variables include school expects a specific career path, school encourages affiliated colleges, school subtly encourages a specific field, school financial benefits, teachers encourage personal academies, and teachers point out specific careers. The correlation coefficients reflect the strength and direction of the relationships among these institutional and teacher-driven pressures. The school expects a specific career path to have strong positive correlations with all other variables. Notably, its correlation with school encourages affiliated colleges is 0.897, with school subtly encourages specific fields at 0.852, with school financial benefits at 0.693, with teachers encourage personal academies at 0.760, and with teachers point to specific careers at 0.993. The near-perfect correlation between school expectations for specific career paths and teachers' pointed specific career (0.993) indicates a very strong alignment between school-level expectations and explicit guidance from teachers regarding students' career directions. This finding supports the assertion that institutional norms and teacher behavior often reinforce each other, contributing significantly to shaping students' career decisions (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

A school that encourages affiliated colleges also demonstrates high correlations with other factors. Its strongest association is with school financial benefits (1.048), which may suggest multicollinearity or overlapping constructs in the data, perhaps

indicating that recommendations for affiliated colleges often coincide with financial incentives for the school or students. The high correlations with school expect a specific career path (0.897) and school subtly encourages a specific field (0.700) underscore the tendency for schools to foster particular educational pathways, sometimes through direct and indirect means (Ma & Yeh, 2010).

School subtly encourages a specific field that is positively and strongly correlated with the remaining variables, most notably with teachers' pointed specific career (0.790), school encourages affiliated colleges (0.700), and teachers encourage personal academies (0.754). This implies that even indirect or subtle encouragements by the school align closely with explicit suggestions from teachers and the broader educational environment. School financial benefits show strong relationships with all other variables, most strikingly with school encouragement affiliated colleges (1.048) and teachers pointed specific career (0.996). The former likely reflects financial ties or incentives associated with promoting affiliated institutions, as suggested by research on educational marketing and partnerships (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

Teachers encourage personal academies that are highly correlated with school expectations, specific career path (0.760), school subtly encourages specific field (0.754), school financial benefits (0.673), and teachers point to specific career (0.643). This demonstrates that encouragement from teachers for students to join specific academies is closely tied to the overall institutional agenda and career path expectations. Such findings are consistent with the literature on the role of teacher advocacy in career development (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Teachers pointed specific career displays very high correlations with school expects specific career path (0.993), school financial benefits (0.996), school subtly encourages specific field (0.790), and teachers encourage personal academies (0.643), reinforcing the interpretation that teachers' direct career guidance is inextricably linked with institutional pressures and benefits.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Model 2**

Variables	SESCR	SEAC	SSESF	SFB	TEPA	TPSC
SESCR	1.0000					
SEAC	0.897013	1.0000				
SSESF	0.852472	0.700273	1.0000			
SFB	0.692874	1.047804	0.764024	1.0000		
TEPA	0.75987	0.537678	0.753821	0.672902	1.0000	
TPSC	0.993135	0.690654	0.789991	0.995737	0.643415	1.0000

Note: SESCO = School Expects Specific Career Path, SEAC = School Encourages Affiliated Colleges, SSESF = School Subtly Encourages Specific Field, SFB = School Financial Benefits, TEPA = Teachers Encourage Personal Academies, TPSC = Teachers Pointed Specific Career

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for variables associated with career alignment, regret, family pressure, and autonomy in career decision-making. The variables include career choice aligned with interest, choosing the wrong career due to pressure, regret career choice, would change career if possible, freedom in career choice, family opinions on career, family pushing an unwanted career, and parents disregarding career opinion. The correlation coefficients illustrate the strength and direction of relationships among these dimensions, shedding light on how alignment with interests and family influences affect career satisfaction and potential regret. Career choice aligned with interest exhibits positive correlations with most other variables, particularly with freedom in career choice (0.721) and family opinions on career (0.564). The strong association with freedom in career choice indicates that students who perceive a higher degree of autonomy are more likely to select careers that match their interests, a finding supported by established career development theories (Keller & Whiston, 2008). The moderate correlation with family opinions on career suggests that even when students align their choices with personal interests, family views can still be influential, reflecting the complex interplay between individual agency and familial expectations (Whiston & Keller, 2004).

The correlation between career choice aligned with interest and chosen wrong career due to pressure is very weak (0.037), suggesting these constructs are largely independent—individuals who select careers based on their interests are less likely to report having chosen the wrong career due to external pressure. Conversely, the association between career choice aligned with interest and regret career choice is moderate (0.392), suggesting that aligning career choices with personal interests reduces, but does not eliminate, feelings of regret. Chosen the wrong career due to pressure shows very high positive correlations with family pushing unwanted career (0.852) and parents disregarding career opinion (0.473), highlighting the link between external family pressures and dissatisfaction with career choices. A high correlation with would change career if possible (1.074) may signal potential issues with variable scaling or multicollinearity, but also reinforces the association between dissatisfaction and the desire to change one's career path (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

Regret career choice is also strongly correlated with parents disregard career opinion (0.993), would change career if possible (1.144), and family pushing unwanted career (0.876), illustrating that when individuals feel their career path was chosen under parental pressure or without regard for their preferences, regret and the wish to change are more prevalent. These patterns are in line with research on career regret and the long-term impact of limited autonomy in vocational decisions (Metheny, McWhirter, & O'Neil, 2008). Would change career if possible has strong correlations with regret career choice (1.144), chosen

wrong career due to pressure (1.074), and parents disregard career opinion (0.521), indicating that dissatisfaction, regret, and external pressure are closely interlinked. Freedom in career choice is positively correlated with career choice aligned with interest (0.721) and family opinions on career (0.825), suggesting that autonomy is associated with both personal satisfaction and some degree of positive family support, a nuance found in some family systems where support can coexist with autonomy (Keller & Whiston, 2008).

Family opinions on career also correlate positively with freedom in career choice (0.825) and family pushing an unwanted career (0.649), indicating that while family input is often present, its character can vary from supportive to controlling. Family pushing unwanted career and parents disregard career opinion show high positive intercorrelations (0.940), further supporting the literature that direct and indirect family pressures often co-occur and contribute to negative career outcomes, including regret and the likelihood of changing careers if possible (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Parents' disregard of career opinion also has strong links with regretful career choice (0.993) and would change career if possible (0.521), reinforcing the impact of parental disregard on dissatisfaction and career ambivalence.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Model 3**

Variables	CCAI	CWCDP	RCC	WCCP	FCC	FOC	FPUC	PDCO
CCAI	1.0000							
CWCDP	0.037223	1.0000						
RCC	0.392435	1.251331	1.0000					
WCCP	-0.24923	1.074383	1.144096	1.0000				
FCC	0.720596	0.500885	0.159494	0.243996	1.0000			
FOC	0.563777	0.353168	0.142739	0.309459	0.825231	1.0000		
FPUC	0.102486	0.852389	0.875557	1.170144	0.583323	0.649029	1.0000	
PDCO	-0.06501	0.472961	0.993152	0.521236	0.080656	0.387068	0.939733	1.0000

Note: CCAI = Career Choice Aligned with Interest, CWCDP = Chosen Wrong Career Due to Pressure, RCC = Regret Career Choice, WCCP = Would Change Career if Possible, FCC = Freedom in Career Choice, FOC = Family Opinions on Career, FPUC = Family Pushing Unwanted Career, PDCO = Parents Disregard Career Opinion

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights the significant influence that parents and educational institutions exert on students' career choices. The goals set by parents are often not the same as the ones expected by the child. A lot of parents now deter self-discovery and personalizing goals for their children, as they impose certain goals on them. Just like parents are not developing the individual, even institutions in whose care students are supposed to flourish academically and personally might lead learners toward particular studies that favor institutional interests or sell their products in return for monetary gains rather than developing the learner. Such combined pressure exercised on students by their parents and teachers probably kills their freedom and instills a helpless feeling in them, sometimes with a possible or almost assured psychological distress when students cannot pursue their desired career. In the case of Pakistan and, in particular, this region, District Sheikhpura and District Lahore, mental health issues due to socio-economic effects present challenges to the youth, especially to those coming from a marginalized background; however, these can be addressed through the support of both parents and educators in an alternate way rather than one being directive and the other after supportive enabling roles. The parents, in general, must involve themselves in self-devised career opportunities, as opposed to directing specific trajectories: balanced discussions about the various advantages and disadvantages of potential fields would eliminate just investing in their perspectives. Similarly, it requires that teachers and educational institutions work as mentors and facilitators to promote intellectual curiosity through self-confidence and the right of the learner in decision-making. An environment supportive of freedom of choice and of personal development promotes decision-making based on informed choice in students, reduces psychological pulses through processing, and develops resilience and happiness amidst study and professional challenges. It is high time that all stakeholders realize the far-reaching benefits that would accrue to student agency and well-being rather than short-term, material benefits or societal expectations.

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