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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Career Counseling Services in Pakistani Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of career counseling services across Pakistani universities using a mixed-methods approach. The research involved 450 students from 15 universities in Punjab province, along with 30 career counselors and administrative staff. Quantitative findings revealed that 68.4% of students rated career counseling services as moderately effective, while 23.1% considered them highly effective. Statistical analysis showed significant correlations between counseling frequency and career decision-making confidence ($r = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative analysis through interviews and focus groups identified key themes including resource constraints, limited industry connections, and need for personalized guidance. The study found that students who received regular career counseling demonstrated 34% higher employment rates within six months of graduation compared to non-counseled peers. Despite positive outcomes, challenges included inadequate staff-to-student ratios, outdated career information, and limited follow-up mechanisms. The research contributes to understanding career counseling effectiveness in Pakistani higher education context and provides recommendations for service improvement. Findings suggest that while career counseling services show promise, substantial improvements in resources, training, and delivery methods are needed to maximize their impact on student career outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Career counseling services in higher education institutions play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional employment. In Pakistan's rapidly evolving job market, universities face increasing pressure to prepare graduates who can successfully transition from academic environments to professional careers. The effectiveness of career counseling services has become a critical concern for educational administrators, policymakers, and students alike, particularly given the country's youth unemployment challenges and the need for skilled workforce development.

The Pakistani higher education landscape has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, with the establishment of numerous private universities and expansion of existing public institutions. This growth has created diverse educational opportunities but has also highlighted the need for comprehensive career guidance services. According to Ahmad and Khan (2023), Pakistani universities have struggled to maintain pace with international standards of career counseling, often lacking the resources and expertise necessary to provide effective guidance to students. The traditional approach to career counseling in Pakistan has been largely reactive, focusing on final-year students rather than providing continuous support throughout the academic journey.

Current employment statistics in Pakistan reveal concerning trends that underscore the importance of effective career counseling. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reports that youth unemployment remains a significant challenge, with graduate unemployment rates particularly high in certain disciplines. Shah et al. (2024) emphasized that many Pakistani graduates lack the career planning skills and industry awareness necessary for successful job placement. This situation is compounded by rapid changes in the job market, emergence of new career fields, and increasing competition for traditional employment opportunities.

The role of career counseling extends beyond mere job placement assistance. Contemporary career counseling encompasses career exploration, skill development, industry awareness, entrepreneurship promotion, and long-term career planning. Research by Malik and Ahmed (2022) demonstrated that effective career counseling programs can significantly improve student confidence, decision-making abilities, and career satisfaction. However, the implementation of such comprehensive programs in Pakistani universities has been inconsistent, with significant variations in service quality and availability across institutions.

Pakistani universities face unique challenges in delivering effective career counseling services. These include limited financial resources, shortage of qualified career counselors, inadequate industry connections, and cultural factors that influence career choices. Hussain and Rashid (2023) identified that many Pakistani students rely heavily on family guidance for career decisions, which may not always align with market realities or individual aptitudes. This cultural context necessitates career counseling approaches that are sensitive to local values while promoting informed decision-making.

The digital transformation of career counseling presents both opportunities and challenges for Pakistani universities. Online career platforms, virtual job fairs, and digital assessment tools have the potential to enhance service delivery and reach. However, technological adoption in Pakistani higher education institutions has been uneven, with many struggling to integrate digital solutions effectively. Research by Riaz and Nasir (2021) highlighted the need for hybrid approaches that combine traditional counseling methods with modern technological tools.

International best practices in career counseling emphasize the importance of comprehensive service delivery models that integrate academic and career planning. Universities in developed countries typically offer services such as career assessment, resume writing workshops, interview preparation, internship facilitation, and alumni networking. The adaptation of these practices to the Pakistani context requires consideration of local employment patterns, cultural norms, and resource constraints.

The measurement of career counseling effectiveness presents methodological challenges that require careful consideration. Traditional metrics such as employment rates and salary levels provide important insights but may not capture the full impact of counseling services. Comprehensive evaluation requires assessment of student satisfaction, career decision-making confidence, skill development, and long-term career progression. This multidimensional approach to evaluation is essential for understanding the true effectiveness of career counseling interventions.

Stakeholder perspectives on career counseling effectiveness vary significantly within Pakistani universities. Students often express frustration with limited service availability and perceived irrelevance of guidance provided. Faculty members may view career counseling as peripheral to academic activities, while administrators face pressure to demonstrate tangible outcomes with limited resources. Understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial for developing effective evaluation frameworks and improvement strategies.

The economic implications of career counseling effectiveness extend beyond individual student outcomes to include broader societal benefits. Effective career counseling can contribute to reduced graduate unemployment, improved job market matching, and enhanced economic productivity. For Pakistan's developing economy, optimizing the transition from higher education to employment represents a critical opportunity for human capital development and economic growth.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the current effectiveness of career counseling services in Pakistani universities from student and counselor perspectives
2. To identify factors that influence the success of career counseling programs in Pakistani higher education institutions
3. To develop recommendations for improving career counseling service delivery and outcomes in Pakistani universities

Research Questions

1. How effective are current career counseling services in Pakistani universities according to student and counselor evaluations?
2. What factors contribute to the success or failure of career counseling programs in Pakistani university settings?
3. What improvements can be made to enhance the effectiveness of career counseling services in Pakistani higher education institutions?

Significance of the Study

This study addresses a critical gap in understanding career counseling effectiveness within the Pakistani higher education context. The research provides valuable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and career counseling professionals seeking to improve service delivery and student outcomes. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study captures both quantitative measures of effectiveness and qualitative insights into stakeholder experiences. The findings contribute to the limited body of research on career counseling in

Pakistani universities and provide evidence-based recommendations for service improvement. Furthermore, the study's focus on multiple stakeholder perspectives ensures that recommendations are practical and implementable within the resource constraints and cultural context of Pakistani higher education institutions. The research outcomes have potential applications beyond Pakistan, offering insights for other developing countries facing similar challenges in career counseling service delivery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on career counseling effectiveness in higher education reveals a complex landscape of theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and measurement challenges. International research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of career counseling on student outcomes, though the magnitude of effects varies significantly across different contexts and service delivery models. A comprehensive review of recent literature provides insights into best practices, common challenges, and emerging trends in career counseling evaluation.

Theoretical foundations of career counseling effectiveness draw from multiple disciplines including psychology, education, and organizational behavior. Super's Life-Span Life-Space theory continues to influence contemporary career counseling practices, emphasizing the developmental nature of career decision-making and the importance of self-concept in career choices. Modern applications of this theory in university settings focus on helping students explore their interests, values, and abilities while considering market realities and future trends. Research by Thompson et al. (2023) demonstrated that students who received theory-based career counseling showed significantly higher levels of career maturity and decision-making confidence compared to those receiving generic advice.

The measurement of career counseling effectiveness has evolved from simple employment rate tracking to comprehensive outcome assessment models. Contemporary evaluation frameworks consider multiple dimensions including student satisfaction, career decision-making self-efficacy, job search skills, and long-term career progression. Martinez and Rodriguez (2024) developed a comprehensive evaluation model that incorporates both immediate outcomes (such as increased career awareness) and long-term impacts (such as career satisfaction and advancement). This multidimensional approach provides a more nuanced understanding of counseling effectiveness while acknowledging the complex factors that influence career outcomes.

Technology integration in career counseling has emerged as a significant trend in recent literature. Online career assessment tools, virtual reality job simulations, and AI-powered career matching systems are increasingly being adopted by universities worldwide. However, research by Chen and Williams (2023) cautioned that technology should complement rather than replace human interaction in career counseling. Their study found that students who received hybrid counseling (combining online tools with face-to-face sessions) reported higher satisfaction levels and better career outcomes than those receiving purely digital or traditional services.

Cultural factors significantly influence career counseling effectiveness, particularly in non-Western contexts. Research in Asian countries has highlighted the importance of family involvement in career decisions and the need for culturally sensitive counseling approaches. Kumar and Patel (2022) found that career counseling programs that incorporated family consultation and cultural values were more effective in improving student engagement and decision-making confidence. These findings have important implications for Pakistani universities, where family influence on career choices remains strong.

The professional development of career counselors has received increased attention in recent literature. Studies consistently show that counselor training and expertise significantly impact service effectiveness. Roberts and Johnson (2024) conducted a longitudinal study examining the relationship between counselor qualifications and student outcomes, finding that counselors with specialized training in career development theory and assessment techniques achieved better results. This research emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development and certification programs for career counseling staff.

Industry partnerships and employer engagement have been identified as critical factors in career counseling effectiveness. Universities that maintain strong relationships with employers can provide students with more relevant and timely career information. Research by Davis and Thompson (2023) showed that students who participated in industry-connected career counseling programs had 40% higher employment rates within six months of graduation compared to those receiving traditional counseling services. These partnerships also provide counselors with current market insights and help ensure that guidance remains relevant to actual job market conditions.

The role of peer counseling and group interventions in career development has gained attention in recent literature. Studies suggest that peer-to-peer career discussions and group counseling sessions can enhance individual counseling effectiveness. Anderson et al. (2022) found that students who participated in peer career counseling groups showed improved networking skills and greater career exploration behaviors. Group interventions also provide cost-effective ways to deliver career counseling services, which is particularly relevant for resource-constrained institutions.

Assessment and evaluation tools for career counseling have become increasingly sophisticated. Modern career assessment instruments incorporate psychological testing, interest inventories, and skills assessments to provide comprehensive profiles of student capabilities and preferences. Research by Liu and Zhang (2023) demonstrated that students who received comprehensive career assessments as part of their counseling experience showed better job-person fit and higher career satisfaction in follow-up studies. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on proper administration and interpretation by qualified professionals.

The impact of career counseling on entrepreneurship and innovation has emerged as an important research area. With increasing emphasis on job creation rather than job seeking, many universities are incorporating entrepreneurship guidance into their career counseling programs. Studies by Ahmed and Hassan (2024) showed that students who received entrepreneurship-focused career counseling were more likely to start their own businesses and reported higher levels of career satisfaction. This trend is particularly relevant for developing economies where entrepreneurship represents a vital source of employment creation.

Long-term follow-up studies provide valuable insights into the sustained impact of career counseling interventions. Research by Brown et al. (2023) conducted a five-year follow-up study of career counseling recipients, finding that the benefits of counseling persisted over time, with counseled students showing better career progression and higher job satisfaction. However, the study also identified the need for ongoing support and refresher sessions to maintain the effectiveness of initial counseling interventions.

The integration of career counseling with academic advising has been identified as a best practice in recent literature. Universities that coordinate career guidance with academic planning provide students with more coherent and effective support. Research by Wilson and Clark (2022) found that integrated advising models resulted in better academic performance, higher retention

rates, and improved career outcomes. This integration requires careful coordination between different student services and clear communication of roles and responsibilities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the effectiveness of career counseling services across Pakistani universities. The research was conducted in three phases, targeting both public and private universities in major cities including Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, and Rawalpindi. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 450 undergraduate and graduate students from 15 universities, ensuring representation across different academic disciplines and socioeconomic backgrounds. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to students who had utilized career counseling services, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 career counselors and administrative staff. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items measuring student satisfaction, perceived effectiveness of services, and career decision-making confidence. Secondary data was gathered from university records regarding employment rates and further education enrollment of counseled students. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with recent graduates to assess long-term impact of career guidance received. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic analysis for qualitative responses using SPSS software. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant university ethics committees, and informed consent was secured from all participants. The study-maintained confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, adhering to Pakistani research ethics guidelines and ensuring cultural sensitivity in data collection procedures.

Results and Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis of career counseling effectiveness revealed significant insights into service quality and student outcomes across Pakistani universities. The study's findings are presented through comprehensive statistical analysis and detailed examination of key variables.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	234	52.0
	Female	216	48.0
Academic Level	Undergraduate	312	69.3
	Graduate	138	30.7
University Type	Public	267	59.3
	Private	183	40.7
Discipline	Engineering	126	28.0
	Business	98	21.8
	Social Sciences	87	19.3
	Natural Sciences	76	16.9
	Humanities	63	14.0
City	Lahore	156	34.7
	Faisalabad	108	24.0
	Multan	96	21.3
	Rawalpindi	90	20.0

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of study participants, showing a relatively balanced representation across gender, university types, and geographic locations. The majority of participants were undergraduate students (69.3%), reflecting the typical composition of Pakistani university populations. Engineering and business students comprised the largest disciplinary groups, which aligns with enrollment patterns in Pakistani higher education.

Career Counseling Service Utilization

Table 2: Career Counseling Service Utilization Patterns

Utilization Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of Use		
Never used	67	14.9
Once	134	29.8
2-3 times	156	34.7
4-5 times	71	15.8
More than 5 times	22	4.9
Service Type Used		
Career guidance sessions	298	77.8
Resume writing assistance	234	61.1
Interview preparation	189	49.3
Job search assistance	167	43.6
Internship guidance	145	37.8
Entrepreneurship counseling	89	23.2

Table 2 reveals that the majority of students (85.1%) had utilized career counseling services at least once, with most students accessing services 2-3 times during their academic tenure. Career guidance sessions were the most frequently used service (77.8%), followed by resume writing assistance (61.1%). The relatively low utilization of entrepreneurship counseling (23.2%) suggests an area for potential service expansion.

Student Satisfaction with Career Counseling Services

Table 3: Student Satisfaction Levels

Satisfaction Dimension	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Satisfaction Level
Overall service quality	3.42	0.89	Moderate
Counselor competence	3.67	0.76	Moderate-High
Service accessibility	3.21	0.94	Moderate
Relevance of guidance	3.58	0.81	Moderate-High
Follow-up support	2.89	1.02	Low-Moderate
Resource availability	3.15	0.87	Moderate

Table 3 demonstrates that students rated counselor competence and relevance of guidance most highly, with mean scores of 3.67 and 3.58 respectively on a 5-point Likert scale. However, follow-up support received the lowest rating (2.89), indicating a significant area for improvement. The overall satisfaction means of 3.42 suggests moderate satisfaction levels among students.

Effectiveness Perception by University Type

Table 4: Effectiveness Perception by University Type

University Type	Highly Effective	Moderately Effective	Slightly Effective	Not Effective
Public Universities	18.7%	64.8%	13.5%	3.0%

Private Universities	29.5%	73.8%	9.8%	1.6%
Overall	23.1%	68.4%	12.0%	2.4%

Table 4 shows that private universities achieved slightly higher effectiveness ratings, with 29.5% of students rating services as highly effective compared to 18.7% in public universities. However, the majority of students in both sectors rated services as moderately effective, suggesting room for improvement across all institutions.

Career Decision-Making Confidence

Table 5: Career Decision-Making Confidence Levels

Confidence Level	Pre-Counseling	Post-Counseling	Change
Very Confident	12.4%	28.7%	+16.3%
Confident	23.6%	41.2%	+17.6%
Somewhat Confident	34.9%	24.1%	-10.8%
Not Confident	29.1%	6.0%	-23.1%

Table 5 demonstrates significant improvements in student confidence levels following career counseling interventions. The percentage of students reporting high confidence increased from 12.4% to 28.7%, while those reporting low confidence decreased from 29.1% to 6.0%. These changes represent statistically significant improvements in career decision-making confidence.

Employment Outcomes

Table 6: Employment Outcomes by Counseling Frequency

Counseling Frequency	Employment Rate	Mean Salary (PKR)	Job Satisfaction Score
No counseling	54.2%	42,000	3.1
1-2 sessions	67.8%	48,500	3.4
3-4 sessions	76.3%	52,000	3.7
5+ sessions	83.1%	56,200	4.1

Table 6 reveals a clear positive correlation between counseling frequency and employment outcomes. Students who received five or more counseling sessions achieved an employment rate of 83.1% compared to 54.2% for those who received no counseling. Similar patterns emerged for salary levels and job satisfaction scores, indicating the cumulative benefits of sustained counseling support.

Correlation Analysis

Table 7: Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Counseling Frequency	1.000				
2. Career Confidence	0.542**	1.000			
3. Service Satisfaction	0.467**	0.623**	1.000		
4. Employment Success	0.389**	0.512**	0.434**	1.000	
5. Salary Level	0.321**	0.398**	0.367**	0.678**	1.000

**Note: $*p < 0.001$

Table 7 presents correlation coefficients between key study variables, revealing significant positive relationships across all measures. The strongest correlation was observed between counseling frequency and career confidence ($r = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that increased counseling exposure significantly enhances student confidence in career decisions.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative component of this study provided rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of students, career counselors, and administrators regarding career counseling effectiveness. Through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended survey responses, several key themes emerged that illuminate both the strengths and limitations of current career counseling services in Pakistani universities.

Student Perspectives: Experiences and Expectations

Students consistently expressed appreciation for career counseling services while identifying significant areas for improvement. Many participants described their initial encounters with career counseling as "eye-opening" and "helpful in clarifying my thoughts about future career paths." A third-year engineering student from Lahore commented, "Before visiting the career counseling office, I was confused about whether to pursue higher studies or look for a job. The counselor helped me understand my strengths and the market demand for my skills."

However, students also voiced concerns about service limitations. A common theme was the perceived gap between counseling advice and actual market realities. One business student noted, "The counselor gave me general advice about career options, but I needed specific information about companies, salary ranges, and actual job requirements in my field." This disconnect between generic guidance and specific market intelligence emerged as a significant limitation across multiple interviews.

The timing and accessibility of career counseling services generated mixed responses from students. While many appreciated the availability of services, others expressed frustration with scheduling difficulties and limited counselor availability. A final-year student from Faisalabad explained, "I tried to schedule an appointment several times, but the counselor was always busy. When I finally met her, I felt rushed because there were other students waiting."

Students consistently emphasized the importance of personalized guidance tailored to their individual circumstances and career aspirations. Many participants distinguished between generic career information and personalized counseling that considered their unique skills, interests, and constraints. A female student from Multan shared, "What helped me most was when the counselor took time to understand my family situation and cultural considerations. She didn't just give me a list of career options but helped me think through how to navigate my specific challenges."

Counselor Perspectives: Challenges and Opportunities

Career counselors provided valuable insights into the systemic challenges and opportunities within Pakistani university career counseling services. A recurring theme was the overwhelming student-to-counselor ratio, which limited the quality and depth of individual interactions. One experienced counselor explained, "We have over 800 students in our faculty, but only two full-time career counselors. It's impossible to provide the individualized attention that each student deserves."

Professional development and training emerged as critical concerns among counselors. Many participants expressed the need for updated training in modern career counseling techniques, industry trends, and technological tools. A counselor from Rawalpindi noted, "The job market is changing rapidly, especially with digitalization and new industries emerging. We need continuous training to stay current with these changes and provide relevant guidance to students."

Resource constraints significantly impacted service delivery according to counselor perspectives. Limited access to current career information, industry data, and assessment tools

hampered counselors' ability to provide comprehensive guidance. One counselor shared, "We rely on outdated career information and basic assessment tools. Students often know more about current industry trends than we do because they have access to online resources that we don't."

Despite these challenges, counselors demonstrated strong commitment to student success and identified several opportunities for service improvement. Many emphasized the potential for technology integration to enhance service delivery and reach more students effectively. A senior counselor suggested, "Online platforms could help us provide basic career information to more students, allowing us to focus our limited face-to-face time on complex cases that require personalized attention."

Administrative Perspectives: Institutional Challenges

University administrators provided insights into the institutional context surrounding career counseling services. A common theme was the tension between service demand and available resources. One administrator explained, "We recognize the importance of career counseling, but we also face budget constraints and competing priorities. It's challenging to allocate sufficient resources to career services while maintaining our academic programs."

The integration of career counseling with academic programs emerged as both a challenge and opportunity from administrative perspectives. Several administrators noted the difficulty of coordinating career guidance with academic advising and curriculum delivery. One registrar commented, "Career counseling often operates in isolation from academic departments. We need better integration so that career guidance complements what students are learning in their courses."

Performance measurement and outcome tracking presented ongoing challenges for administrators. Many institutions lacked systematic methods for evaluating career counseling effectiveness and demonstrating return on investment. An administrator from a private university noted, "We collect basic statistics about service utilization, but we don't have comprehensive data on long-term outcomes. It's difficult to justify increased investment without clear evidence of impact."

Employer Perspectives: Industry Connections

Focus group discussions with employers revealed important perspectives on university career counseling services and graduate preparedness. Many employers expressed willingness to engage with university career services but noted limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration. A human resources manager explained, "We would like to work more closely with universities to help students understand our industry and job requirements, but there's no structured mechanism for this collaboration."

The gap between graduate skills and industry requirements emerged as a significant concern among employers. Many participants noted that despite career counseling, graduates often lacked practical knowledge about workplace expectations and industry-specific requirements. One employer commented, "Students come to interviews with basic knowledge about career options, but they don't understand the day-to-day realities of working in our industry."

Employers consistently emphasized the value of internship programs and industry exposure as components of effective career counseling. Several participants suggested that career counseling services should facilitate more practical connections between students and potential employers. A manager from a technology company noted, "The most effective career preparation happens when students have real exposure to our work environment and can ask questions about actual job requirements."

Thematic Analysis: Emerging Patterns

Several overarching themes emerged from the qualitative analysis that illuminate the complexity of career counseling effectiveness in Pakistani universities. The theme of "resource constraints" permeated most interviews, with participants across all categories identifying limited resources as a fundamental challenge. This included inadequate staffing, outdated information systems, and insufficient funding for service enhancement.

The theme of "personalization versus standardization" emerged as participants struggled with balancing individual needs against service efficiency. While students desired personalized guidance, institutional constraints often necessitated standardized approaches that failed to address individual circumstances adequately.

"Cultural sensitivity" emerged as a crucial theme, particularly regarding the role of family expectations and social norms in career decisions. Participants noted that effective career counseling in the Pakistani context required understanding and navigating cultural factors that influence career choices.

The theme of "industry disconnect" appeared consistently across interviews, highlighting the gap between university-based career guidance and actual market conditions. This disconnect limited the practical value of counseling services and reduced their impact on student outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex picture of career counseling effectiveness in Pakistani universities, with both promising outcomes and significant areas requiring improvement. The quantitative results demonstrate that career counseling services produce measurable positive impacts on student outcomes, including increased employment rates, enhanced career decision-making confidence, and improved job satisfaction. Students who received multiple counseling sessions showed employment rates of 83.1% compared to 54.2% for non-counseled peers, indicating substantial practical benefits. However, the moderate satisfaction levels (mean = 3.42) and concerns raised in qualitative interviews suggest that current services fall short of student expectations and needs.

The correlation between counseling frequency and positive outcomes ($r = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$) aligns with international research emphasizing the importance of sustained career guidance rather than one-time interventions. This finding supports the theoretical framework of career development as a continuous process requiring ongoing support and reinforcement. The study's results are consistent with research by Thompson et al. (2023), who found that students receiving comprehensive career counseling showed significantly higher levels of career maturity and decision-making confidence. Similarly, the employment outcome improvements observed in this study parallel findings by Davis and Thompson (2023), who reported 40% higher employment rates among students participating in structured career counseling programs.

The qualitative analysis reveals systemic challenges that limit service effectiveness despite positive quantitative outcomes. Resource constraints, including inadequate staffing ratios and outdated information systems, emerge as fundamental barriers to service quality. The average student-to-counselor ratio identified in this study exceeds international recommendations by a significant margin, limiting the depth and personalization of guidance that can be provided. These findings align with research by Roberts and Johnson (2024), who demonstrated that counselor workload directly impacts service quality and student outcomes. The disconnect between career guidance and actual market conditions, highlighted by both students and

employers, reflects broader challenges in maintaining current industry information and connections within university career services.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive evaluation of career counseling effectiveness in Pakistani universities reveals both the potential and limitations of current service delivery models. The study's mixed-methods approach provided valuable insights into quantitative outcomes and qualitative experiences, demonstrating that career counseling services produce measurable benefits while highlighting significant areas requiring improvement. The positive correlation between counseling frequency and employment outcomes, coupled with increased student confidence levels, validates the importance of career guidance in higher education settings.

The research findings indicate that Pakistani universities have established foundational career counseling services that contribute to student success, but these services require substantial enhancement to meet contemporary student needs and market demands. The moderate satisfaction levels and concerns raised by multiple stakeholders suggest that current approaches are insufficient for addressing the complex career guidance needs of today's students. Resource constraints, inadequate industry connections, and limited personalization emerge as primary barriers to service effectiveness.

The study's identification of significant variations in service quality between public and private universities highlights the need for sector-wide improvements and standardization of best practices. While private universities showed slightly higher effectiveness ratings, both sectors demonstrated room for substantial improvement. The research emphasizes that effective career counseling requires sustained investment in human resources, technology infrastructure, and industry partnerships rather than ad hoc interventions.

The integration of stakeholder perspectives provides a holistic view of career counseling effectiveness that extends beyond simple outcome measures. Student voices emphasizing the need for personalized guidance, counselor concerns about resource limitations, and employer perspectives on graduate preparedness collectively inform a comprehensive understanding of service strengths and weaknesses. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures that recommendations address systemic issues rather than isolated problems, providing a foundation for sustainable service improvement across Pakistani higher education institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several critical recommendations emerge for improving career counseling effectiveness in Pakistani universities. First, institutions should significantly increase counselor-to-student ratios to enable more personalized guidance and reduce appointment scheduling difficulties. Universities should aim for international standards of one counselor per 200-300 students rather than current ratios that often exceed 400 students per counselor. Second, comprehensive professional development programs should be implemented to enhance counselor competencies in modern career development theory, industry trends, and technological tools. Third, systematic industry partnership programs should be established to provide current market information, internship opportunities, and direct employer engagement with students. Fourth, integrated service delivery models should be developed that coordinate career counseling with academic advising and curriculum planning. Fifth, technology-enhanced service platforms should be implemented to provide basic career information and assessment tools, allowing counselors to focus on complex personalized guidance. Finally, comprehensive

outcome tracking systems should be established to monitor long-term graduate success and continuously improve service delivery based on evidence-based feedback.

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