

Innovate, integrate, inspire: New approaches to career development in higher secondary schools



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ABSTRACT

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Higher secondary school students transition through career development to jobs or further education. While limited career counseling was available and students are influenced by societal stereotypes, the study focused on students' knowledge of, desire for, and satisfaction with career guidance at school. Using Google Forms, data was gathered from Kerala higher secondary students: Science (76%), Commerce (20%), and Humanities (4%). Students' major career aspirations were in Medical/Health Care (38%), Engineering (30%), Business/Finance (30%), and Science/Research (30%). Students also showed interest in Technology (28%) and Design (26%). The main motivations for career choices were personal interest (86%), financial security (32%), and employment stability (28%). Students relied on social media (68%) and online resources (64%) for career development information, while parents/teachers (30%) and counselors (26%) were less consulted. Key influences included online media (54%) and parents (50%). Students showed varying confidence levels in achieving their goals: very confident (34%), confident but not very (36%), and quite confident (26%). Students suggested career aptitude testing, career guidance sessions, alumni interaction, and industrial visits for career guidance. Findings indicated a need for modern career guidance programs using technology-based methods to inform students about career options.

Contribution/ Originality: This study advances knowledge by highlighting higher secondary students' evolving career interests, emphasizing technology-driven fields, and revealing the growing reliance on social media for career information. It offers new insights into gaps in current school guidance programs and proposes innovative, student-centered strategies to enhance career development effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons career development has become so important for students (especially those entering or finishing school) is that the choices students make at this time may impact almost every aspect of their life, including post-secondary education, work, and how they will live. The need for career development for students is greatly impacted by the students' academic obligations, family expectations/societal pressures, and the number of job opportunities available to them while they are attending secondary school (Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006; Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2015). As a result, many educational systems are recognizing the value in career guidance and career development as part of curriculum development to help prepare students for today's workforce. Students also tend to face barriers to their career development, such as limited access to career counselling, limited access to

accurate and current job market information, failure to receive all of their appropriate options related to the career they wish to pursue, and/or being judged or stereotyped based on the type of career they wish to pursue.

When such barriers are encountered, students often make either uninformed or inappropriate career decisions that could result in long-term dissatisfaction or the inability to achieve their potential in those careers (Yaghi & Alabed, 2021). This paper aims to explore the various aspects of career development among higher secondary school students, focusing on their awareness, aspirations, and challenges in shaping their professional futures. By examining these factors, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of current career guidance practices and propose strategies for enhancing the career readiness of students at this crucial stage, and suggest some innovative ideas to schools or authorities for enhancing students' career development. Additionally, the research sheds light on how individual, familial, and institutional factors influence career decisions, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on youth development (Billett, Dymock, Hodge, Choy & Le, 2022) and education policy.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research in education, psychology, and sociology has provided a great deal of information about the career development of students. According to most researchers, the teenage years are particularly influential in building career aspirations and making educational decisions that will shape occupational options into adulthood; therefore, the last two to three years of secondary school are critical in this regard. There are also many theoretical perspectives and foundations demonstrating that career development occurs over an entire lifetime, with someone's personal interests, abilities, values, and environment being important factors in shaping a person's career pathway (Super, 1990). The Social Cognitive Theory of Career Development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) builds on previous theories by illustrating how a person creates his or her career choices through the exercise of their self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. There continues to be a wealth of contemporary research that builds upon the frameworks of previous researchers regarding career guidance.

Research has been conducted in secondary schools that relates to career awareness and preparedness of students. For example, McMahon and Patton (2018) reported that early exposure to career-related education is related to increased career maturity and decision-making confidence. Similarly, studies conducted by Watson and McMahon (2017) found that students showed improved understanding of their career paths and the educational requirements for those careers as a result of participating in structured career guidance programs. Arulmani, Bakshi, Leong, and Watts (2014) study shows that careers are created within both the socio-cultural and economic contexts of India. Opportunities to work will rely on the role of family and community in the social and economic contexts of every individual student. In fact, these family and community expectations often replace individual student interest when it comes to career aspirations. Bhatia, Rana, and Gregor (2023) confirm that this is true for many higher secondary students in India as well. There are contrary expectations from parents and students regarding the future, thus indicating that there are many Indian adolescents who will have to choose between their parents and themselves in terms of what their future career will be.

Most research has indicated that one's interest in a particular field largely determines the ability to make significant choices regarding a future career. Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, and Witko (2006) found that adolescents making their career decision using intrinsic interests as their basis for career choices were more likely to report satisfaction and commitment to their job than those who did not use their intrinsic interests. Likewise, Hirschi, Niles, and Akos (2011) showed that there is a positive correlation between career adaptability and career-life interest congruence, which in turn, is an important predictor for long-term successful career decision-making. Recently, a wide variety of publications have discussed the importance of both parents and teachers for career development. For example, research by Felsman and Blustein (1999) found that emotional support from parents was significantly linked to adolescents' exploration of career options. In contrast, research by Mittendorff, den Brok, and Beijaard (2011)

found that while teachers have a significant role to play in providing academic counselling to students, the majority of teachers do not have adequate training to assist their students with developing careers.

Recent studies have investigated the shortcomings of conventional school-based career counselling programs. Milosheva, Robertson, Cruickshank, and Hall (2021) discovered that numerous services provided by school career service offices were predominantly informational and failed to address students' specific needs. Cloth, Trach, and Cannon (2025) expressed analogous apprehensions regarding the necessity for needs-based, student-centered career guidance services. Technology continues to evolve rapidly as digital and online sources become an important way to access career information. Based on their studies, Bimrose, Kettunen, and Goddard (2015) believe that the career guidance industry will undergo a significant transformation as a result of the implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). ICT also allows users to obtain current, relevant, and time zone-relevant career-specific information and access it in a simple, easy-to-use manner. Kettunen, Sampson, and Vuorinen (2015) agreed that students are better equipped to make informed career choices by utilizing web-based career guidance resources.

Social media is having an increasing impact on how teens view their future careers. As Coman, Dalban, Pitea, Iordache, and Bucs (2025) demonstrated in their research, the majority of teenagers rely on social networking websites to learn more about potential career paths, role models, and lifestyles that are associated with particular professions. Additionally, Boursier, Gioia, Musetti, and Schimmenti (2020) found that social media can influence an individual's career aspirations and self-confidence because viewing career-oriented content impacts the way the viewer perceives themselves with regard to their career.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, new research has more firmly established the shift to career guidance that has been taking place through digital methods. According to Sharma and Alvi (2021), students relied on web-based career sites, attended virtual webinars, and participated in electronic counseling to an extensive degree during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lent (2018) supports the concept that offering students digital career exploration and guidance is no longer considered an option; it is an integral part of providing them with the tools they require to meet the changing demands of their careers. Research, such as that of Saka and Gati (2007), has suggested that many adolescents are confused and unsure about their career success; many adolescents appear confident about their ability to succeed in their chosen career, while many others are not. Creed, Patton, and Prideaux (2006) found that students who did not have enough support for their career development had less confidence in their ability to achieve their career goals.

Research has also supported the importance of assessing students' career aptitude in helping them with their career development. Gati and Levin (2014) suggested that using an aptitude assessment allows adolescents to gain insights into their career-related strengths, thus decreasing their indecision about careers. Puchert, Dodd, and Viljoen (2017) indicated that Indian adolescents who took aptitude assessments gained a better understanding of their subject and occupational options. Innovative practices in relation to career guidance, such as alumni interaction, mentoring programs, and visits to industry, have received attention in the literature. Keller and Whiston (2008) stated that mentoring positively impacts adolescents in terms of enhancing self-efficacy and goal setting. Recent research by Pandita and Kiran (2023) indicated that experiential career learning is an effective method to improve the career readiness of adolescents.

As a result of the previously mentioned studies and research findings, this study's primary purpose is to assess the awareness of career development among higher secondary school students. The specific focus of the research is to understand the primary career field that students are interested in pursuing. While many higher secondary schools provide career development clubs or cells, it is unclear if those programs are adequately addressing the needs of students or meeting the expectations for growth and progress. In addition, in many higher secondary schools, career development activities are delivered in various styles; therefore, this research identifies some significant enhancements to the current career development process and introduces various innovative techniques that can make these programs much more focused on generating positive results and being system-oriented.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey-based research design to assess the career priorities, awareness, needs, and perceptions of higher secondary school students regarding career development. The survey instrument consisted of 15 questions, comprising both quantitative (10 multiple-choice questions) and qualitative (5 open-ended questions) formats, designed to capture comprehensive data on students' career goals, motivations, sources of career information, satisfaction with current career guidance programs, and suggestions for improvement. Using Google Forms as a platform, the questionnaire was sent out to students at selected higher secondary schools throughout Kerala via the internet. Students completed the questionnaire when they had some time (approximately 10-15 minutes), and they responded to the questions at that time. The sample was made up of students from three different streams, consisting of 76% Science, 20% Commerce, and 4% Humanities. Regarding gender distribution, there were 82% females and 18% males.

Information collected through the data concerned the student's major area of career interest (Career Interest), motivating factors (Motivation), where they found career information (Source of Career Information), how confident they felt about achieving their stated goals (Goal Achievement Confidence), who influenced their career paths most (Influential People in Career Development), and their level of satisfaction with the current career development session offered by their school (Career Development Session Satisfaction). Additionally, the questionnaire asked students for suggestions on how to improve career guidance programs, including preferred activities and resources.

Quantitative data were analyzed to identify trends and percentages in career interests, motivational factors, and satisfaction levels. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were examined to extract key themes and suggestions for innovative improvements in career development practices within schools. This mixed-method approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the current state of career development awareness among higher secondary students and facilitated the identification of gaps and opportunities for more effective, student-centered career guidance interventions.

4. RESULT AND DATA ANALYSIS

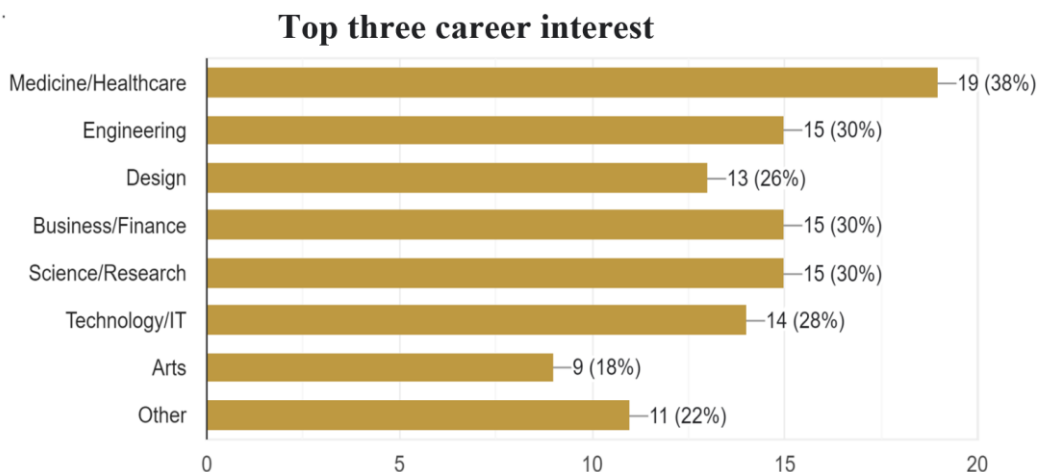


Figure 1. Major career interests of students.

Major career interests of students, as shown in Figure 1, are medical/health care fields (38%), engineering (30%), business/finance (30%), and science/research (30%). Technology and IT-related fields (28%) are becoming the next career priority, followed by design fields (26%), arts fields (18%), and other fields (22%).

The other important areas of career fields are they responded as listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Other important career fields for students.

S.No	Career interest	Percentage
1	Aviation Field	4.8
2	CA/CMA/ACCA	23.9
3	Cyber Security	4.8
4	Food technology-related	4.8
5	Law	4.8
6	Navy	4.8
7	Railway	4.8
8	Robotics and AI course	4.8
9	Teaching	14.3
10	UPSC	4.8
11	Agriculture related	4.8

The major finding is that some science students also want to take a career in business and accounting fields and arts fields, more than in science fields.

4.1. Motivating Factor to Pursue a Particular Career

In Figure 2, as per their responses, the conclusion is that personal interest (86%) has more influence to pursue a particular career than financial stability (32%), followed by job security (28%), family expectations (20%) and social impact (8%). Students often give more importance to their personal interests when pursuing a particular career.

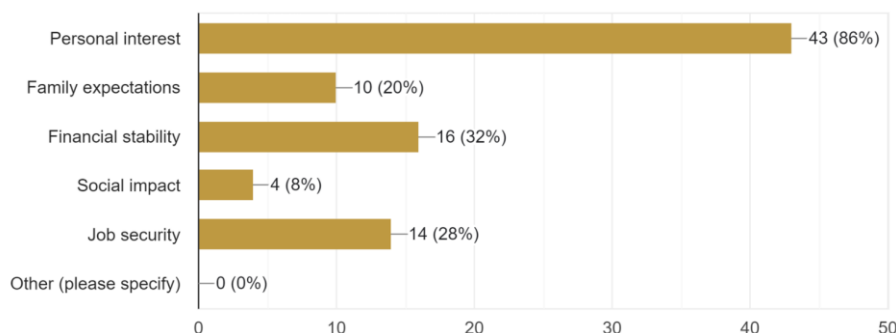


Figure 2. Motivating factors for career pursuit.

Table 2. Importance of career development.

Not at all important	Less important	Slightly important	Quite important	Very important
0%	0%	2%	4%	94%

Table 2 shows 94% of responding students are highly bothered about the importance of career development.

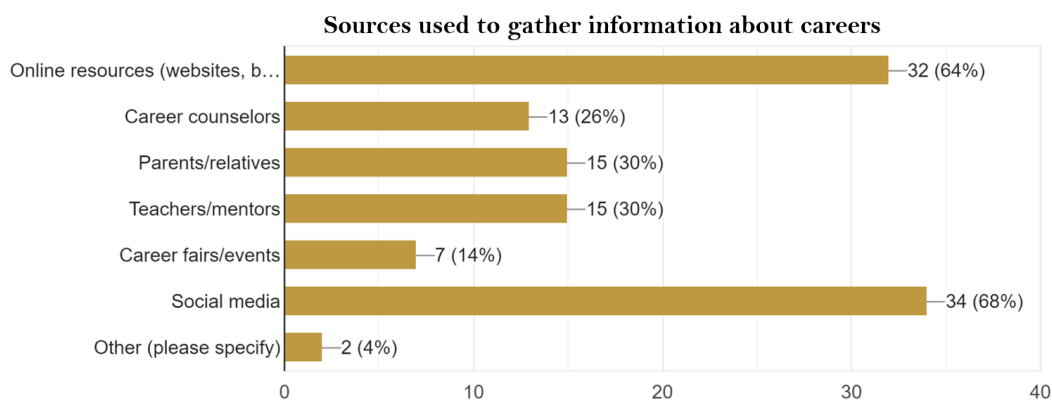


Figure 3. Career information sources.

As per Figure 3, social media (68%) and Online resources (64%) have a crucial role in gathering information about careers among students. Then followed by parents and teachers (30%), career counselors (26%), and lastly by career events (14%).

Most students use social media and online resources to gather information about careers by checking career-based personalities' feeds, interviews, and vlogs. Through this, they can collect more data about careers and institutions, creating a virtual imagination. This process can boost their interest in career development, providing a broader understanding and inspiration for their future paths.

4.2. Entrance Criteria to Get the Specified Course

Most people are bothered about how to reach a particular course and institution, knowing about entrance exams like JEE, NEET, CUET, UCEED, etc., but meanwhile, those with knowledge about specific courses don't know their entrance procedures.

4.3. Assessing Short-Term and Long-Term Goals of Students

Students are very conscious about their life goals and aims. As Figure 4 shows, they are looking forward to the sustainability and financial stability of their life. In short-term goals, they are giving importance to their goals and their preparations, and at the same time, in their long-term goals, they specify sustainability and financial stability in life and its importance.

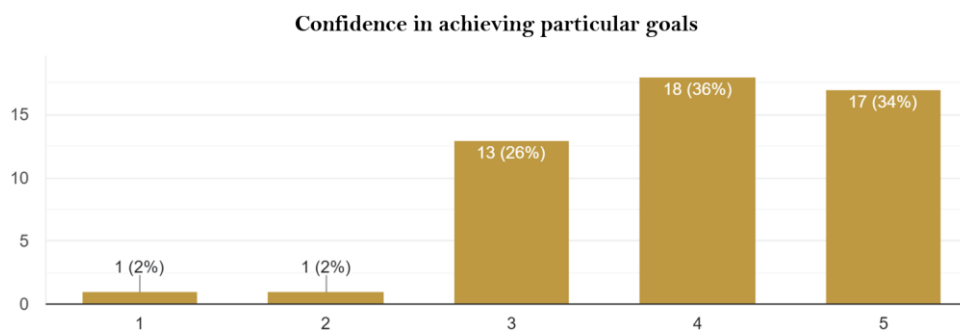


Figure 4. Students' confidence in achieving goals.

36% are confident about their career achievement, but not very confident. At the same time, 34% are very confident about their career achievement. 26% of students are quite confident, and 2% each are less confident and not at all confident in career achievement.

It shows that even though most people are not highly confident about their achievements. They have a lot of confusion and fear about their future.

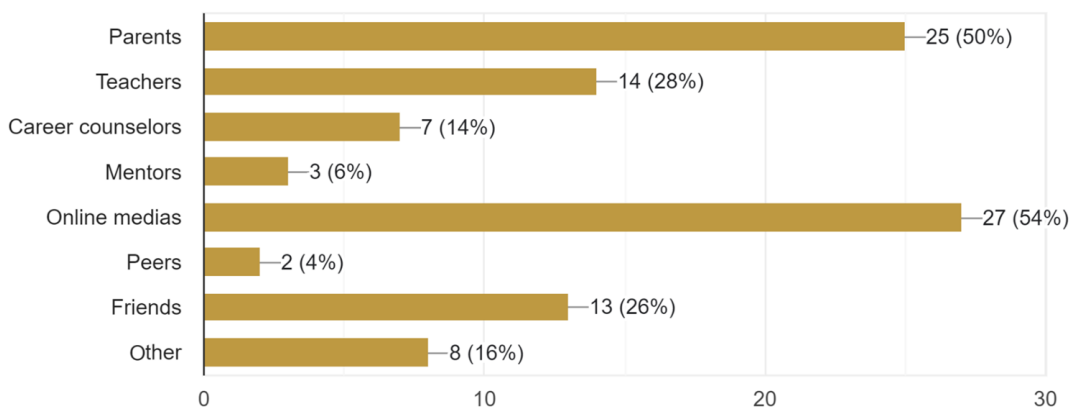


Figure 5. Influential persons in career development.

In this technological and modern era, online media (54%) has more influence on students' career development. They see many achievements, universities, and lifestyles of personalities in the same field they aspire to join. This can boost their interest in that field, and they hope to be like that. At the same time, parents (50%) also influence their career development. They understand their parents' ambitions and their situations regarding their children. This can influence students to develop more potential toward particular goals.

But here, mentors have less importance (6%). The main reason will be that the ideal will not be ideal to them, and they don't meet the students' needs and other things that they want to develop their interest and career, as shown in Figure 5.

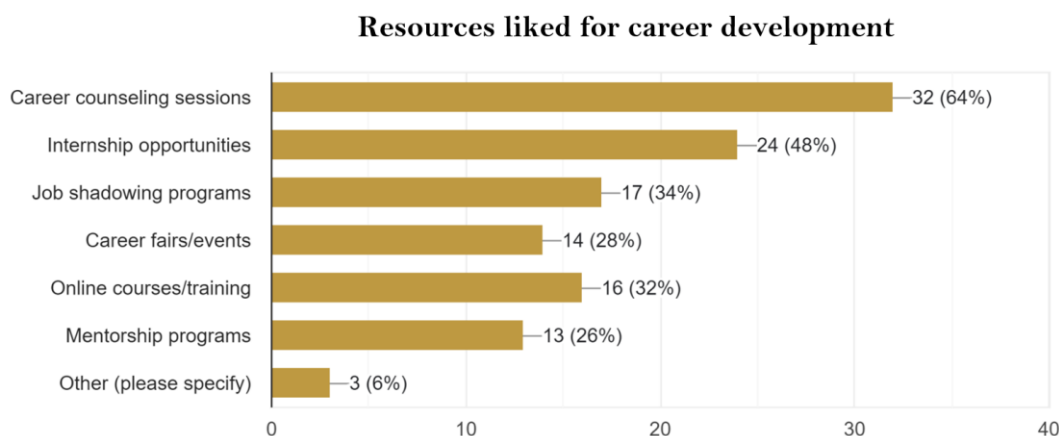


Figure 6. Career development resources.

In Figure 6, Career counselling sessions (64%) have a greater influence on students. Through it, they can achieve many opportunities and collect information about the various courses and career opportunities. At the same time, students give less importance to career events (28%) and mentorship programmes (26%). This may be due to a lack of experience with these types of events and proper mentorship.

Table 3. School career development session satisfaction.

School career development session satisfaction	Not at all satisfied	Less satisfied	Satisfied	Quite satisfied	Highly satisfied
Percentage	20%	18%	36%	14%	12%

4.4. Current School Career Development Session Satisfaction

Table 3 shows that most students are not very satisfied with current school career development activities, but they are also okay with that system. Many factors influence this, such as academics, proper information collection, and effective career sessions.

4.5. Students Expected Activities from Teachers

Students are highlighting many changes from teachers, such as career-oriented classes and inclusiveness based on students' needs, rather than focusing solely on academics. They would like to take aptitude tests aligned with subjects. Teachers should help students understand their abilities and organize career sessions. Between classes, teachers need to inform students about related courses and opportunities. Moreover, students prefer entrance-oriented classes over exam-oriented ones. These are major suggestions from students, expected to help teachers develop students' career paths effectively.

4.6. Improvement Suggestions About the Current Career Development System of the School

Most students are satisfied with the current career development system of the school, but they also point out some major changes and improvements. These include an aptitude test for all students, weekly classes on specific career options, interactive sessions with alumni in particular careers, career club activities, and industrial and institutional visits.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several important insights into career development awareness and preferences among higher secondary school students, aligning with and extending prior research in this area. The predominance of traditional career choices such as medical/health care, engineering, and business/finance (each around 30-38%) reflects the continued societal emphasis on established professional fields. However, the notable interest in emerging areas like cybersecurity, robotics, AI, and food technology indicates a shift towards modern, technology-driven careers, corroborating (Serbes & Albay, 2017) assertion on the evolving demands of the workforce and the need for education systems to adapt accordingly.

The results of the survey reveal a high level of personal interest (86%) in the selection of a career path, indicating that students are beginning to exercise independence in their decision-making regarding which careers they would like to pursue. These findings are consistent with Bardick et al. (2006), who point out that by understanding the student's perspective on their eventual choice of career, the guidance on establishing a career can be customised to the student's situation and personal goals. Financial stability and job security are still very important indicators of a successful career (32% and 28% respectively), indicating that many of today's students are examining their broad economic sustainability issues as part of their career planning. Much of the same conclusion can also be reached based on the findings by Arulmani et al. (2014) about the impact of many socio-economic factors on Career Planning.

Additionally, there has been a shift from traditional counselling methods to the increased usage of social media (68%) and other online resources (64%) for obtaining information about career choices. This shift supports the conclusions made by Julien (1999) regarding the challenges students face in obtaining reliable information about careers, and that social media and the internet have become important tools for filling in this gap. However, there is a notably smaller influence of Career Counselors (26%) and Career Events (14%), indicating there may be deficiencies in institutions' career guidance services, which aligns with Bardick et al. (2006) findings regarding the lack of engagement and efficacy of formal career counselling and the impact of these limitations on students considering career choices.

This study identified participants themselves as being "very confident" in their ability to reach their professional aspirations; however, this low level of self-worth indicates a great deal of doubt and futility surrounding the numerous reasons students might not realize their dreams. As pointed out by Saka and Gati (2007), students' uncertainties can be correlated to a lack of systematic guidance for the career decision-making process and/or social pressures from family and friends, or a lack of structure in the preparation of students for possible careers. Parents and other family members represent a significant influence on the career development process for more than half of the total students surveyed (54 per cent); Middleton and Loughhead (1993) and Felsman and Blustein (1999) express similar opinions as to parents and family serving as the main source of support and mentorship.

This expresses the strong need for new and better approaches to helping students design their careers due to the current ineffectiveness of the approaches identified in this study, through the students' expressed need for aptitude tests, weekly career guidance centres, alumni interactions, and career clubs that would directly support them with their current needs. These approaches to career assistance are similar to recommendations made by Bardick et al. (2006), who stated that students should have an opportunity to participate in the development of their services, and Hiebert (2001), who recommended performing an extensive needs analysis to improve the quality of career guidance. The Group Mentoring and Individual Mentoring Programmes that have been recommended in this study also align

with the research that supports providing students with individualised support to improve their ability to make informed career choices (Arulmani et al., 2014).

Overall, the study highlights the necessity for schools to update their career development programs by integrating technology, fostering student engagement, and involving parents and alumni. This approach will better equip students to navigate the complexities of the contemporary job market, aligning with Serbes and Albay (2017) stress on education's role in preparing students for rapid societal and technological changes.

6. CONCLUSION

The research indicates the changing direction of career development for students in higher secondary school and offers support for new, student-centered approaches used in school-based programs to provide career information for students. Nontraditional career paths are becoming more common and acceptable to students, as well as the increased interest in newer fields such as cybersecurity, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), and food technology, all of which demonstrate the changing needs of today's workforce. Findings indicate that students choose careers primarily based on personal interest; however, financial security and job stability also significantly impact their choice. The use of social media and online resources has superseded traditional forms of collecting career information - i.e., attending career fairs, talking to a career counselor.

Even though students have access to career development sessions at school, many students find current methods of providing career development lacking, indicating the need for additional methods such as using aptitudinal assessments, offering weekly career guidance sessions, engaging alumni in a more interactive manner, and creating career clubs. Teachers and parents must be recognized as major influences on students and support them by providing timely and relevant information about entrance exams and numerous career opportunities. To effectively prepare students for their future careers, schools must adapt their guidance programs to be more inclusive, practical, and aligned with students' interests and the dynamic job market. Implementing these innovative strategies will enhance students' career awareness, confidence, and decision-making capabilities, ultimately contributing to more informed and fulfilling career choices.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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