# Career Guidance Efficacy in Secondary Education: Workforce Preparedness Analysis

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**Abstract:** *Career guidance programs are increasingly recognized as essential tools for equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate future employment landscapes. This study highlights the increasing importance of such programs, especially in India, where rapid societal and economic changes necessitate well-prepared graduates. This qualitative case study explores the structure, implementation, and outcomes of a career guidance program at a secondary school The study aims to understand stakeholder perceptions, identify program strengths and weaknesses, and suggest improvement areas. Participants include students, teachers, parents, counsellors, and school administrators. Data collection methods involve document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations. The research examines the program's effectiveness in preparing students for career decision-making and identifies key factors influencing its success. Areas explored include program structure, stakeholder perceptions, strengths, challenges, and recommendations for improvement.*

**Keywords:** Secondary school students, job prospects, career guidance, student career preparation, secondary education, job readiness, employment skills, Career guidance programs

## 1. Introduction

Career guidance programs are increasingly recognized as vital tools in equipping secondary school students with the skills, knowledge, and direction necessary to navigate future employment landscapes. Several studies have investigated the effectiveness, methodologies, and innovations within these programs, highlighting their transformative impact on students' professional readiness and decision-making. One significant factor that may have an impact on someone's health is their vocational background. It is the result of a lifetime of work. It establishes some of the most fundamental aspects of a person, such as their income and type of employment, and so shapes their outlook and personality. (Ain, S. N., Gilani, M. A., & Lone, K. S., 2021). Students in high school are about to enter the world of adulthood, which is full of challenges and uncertainty. In addition to offering a regular academic curriculum, schools should also offer career advice programs that aid in moulding and mentally preparing pupils for the future. This is another duty of the educational institution. This underscores the critical importance of career counselling services today. The main motivation for establishing this kind of service is to get pupils ready for a career they feel they have the patience and aptitude for. Through such a program, they could be able to gain a deeper grasp of their skills and interests and how to combine them to create a long-term, meaningful profession. As a result, these programs can help students develop personally in terms of their interests and skills. Research consistently underscores the positive outcomes of career guidance interventions in secondary schools. Sharapova et al. (2023) demonstrated that school-based career guidance significantly enhances career-related skills, knowledge, and beliefs among students. Their meta-analysis found a moderate-to-high effect size in career-related outcomes, suggesting that these interventions not only improve students' career attitudes but also bolster their future time perspectives and decision-making.

### Background of career guidance programs

Programs for career counselling are mostly used in school settings. They are intended to support young people in making well-informed professional decisions that are consistent with their objectives, aspirations, and the dynamics of the workplace. The services offered by instructors and counselors in both educational institutions and secondary schools are included in these programs. This crucial duty falls under the purview of the secondary school counselling and guidance department. The scientific and arts tracks are available to continuing students. They can enroll in technical streams if they have a certain career path in mind. This is a crucial decision to make. Making a well-informed professional decision now will pay off later in life with a successful career. As India grapples with rapid societal and economic changes, structured career guidance interventions are increasingly recognized as a way to equip secondary school students with the skills and knowledge needed for the workforce.

### Importance of preparing students for future employment

Students should begin preparing for their future careers as early as possible. Schools and colleges play a significant role in fostering an environment that encourages entrepreneurship, creativity, and the pursuit of greatness. They are also in a position to offer career advice to students. A study by Whiston and Buck (2019) highlights the importance of evaluating career guidance programs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. However, children in India have limited access to career counselling services within the educational system. As a result, graduates from these institutions often have little or no employable skills. Higher unemployment

rates are the outcome of these graduates' frequent failure to satisfy the requirements needed to meet the expectations of the labour market. A study by Sajitha et al. (2023) focusing on dental interns in Kerala found that many students lacked access to effective career guidance, leading to heightened anxiety and uncertainty. Governments are being compelled by the evolving tendencies in the global economy to recognize the significance of graduating students equipped to face the obstacles of the job market. This study will emphasize how crucial it is to get adolescents ready for the workforce and how rapidly initiatives that provide them the knowledge and skills they need for future occupations should be implemented.

### Advantages of Career Guidance Programs

Career counselling has several advantages, such as:

- Career counselling can assist people in finding careers that align with their personality, interests, and skill set. People can use this method to make well informed decisions regarding their job choices.
- Career counselling can give people accurate and current information about various career paths, employment trends, and schooling needs. People can use this information to make well-informed decisions about their careers.
- Career counselling can assist people in creating specific, attainable career goals. People can stay motivated and engaged while working toward their career goals with the support of this method.
- Career counselling can assist people in acquiring the abilities, know-how, and practical experience required to be successful in their chosen fields of work.
- Opportunities for education, training, and work experience may be part of this process.
- Overcoming career barriers: Career counselling can assist people in overcoming hurdles
- linked to their careers, such as joblessness, discontent with their current job, or a lack of prospects for career growth. This approach may include figuring out different employment options or creating plans of action to get past challenges.
- Career counselling can assist people in discovering meaningful and rewarding careers that align with their beliefs and interests. Both general life satisfaction and job satisfaction may rise as a result of this process.

After reviewing the features and advantages of the career guidance programs, Students taking the 10th and 12th board exams might benefit from them. Students who take part in career assistance programs can attain social modelling, which Bandura (1995) identified as the second category in which people build self-efficacy. Numerous research studies have been carried out across numerous nations to investigate the extent of involvement in career exploration as a crucial component of the career development process. According to Rashid et al.'s (2009) analysis of career development invention in high school, there is sufficient engagement in the offered career advice activities.

Thus, in order to eliminate the flaw, a well-structured guidance program is required. Without a guidance program, a youngster cannot adapt to the rapidly changing demands of society. Society is evolving and becoming more complex all the time. Although there is rivalry among secondary school students to choose a bright future career path and earn high exam scores, this causes frustration in the pupils. In this kind of situation, school guidance programs play a critical role in assisting students in realizing their potential, assisting them in overcoming stress and issues, and guiding them through the educational process with ease. Consequently, it is advised that every school have a functional guidance unit that is available to assist students with a range of issues. This will serve to improve the quality of education provided to children as a whole. (Chaudhary, Dr. Priti, January 2012).

## 2. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative exploratory case study approach to deeply investigate the structure, implementation, and outcomes of a career guidance program at the secondary school level. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the program within its real-world context, focusing on the perceptions of stakeholders and identifying areas for enhancement. The main objective of this case study is to examine the function of career guidance cell of a school in helping secondary school students choose their future careers and the key variables factors that affects career counselling services. Three major objectives and questions explored in this study are-

### Objectives

1) To explore the structure and delivery methods of the career guidance program.
2) To assess the perceived effectiveness of the program in preparing students for career decision-making.
3) To identify the strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement in the program.

### Research Questions

1) How is the career guidance program structured and implemented at the school?
2) What are the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the effectiveness of the program?
3) What challenges are faced in delivering the career guidance program?

### Sampling Method:

Purposive sampling to select participants who have direct involvement with or experience in the program. Approximately 30 participants, 15 students from Grades 9 and 10 who have participated in the career guidance program. 5 teachers involved in implementing or supporting the program. 5 parents of participating students. 2 counsellors responsible for delivering the guidance sessions, and 3 school administrators involved in decision-making for the program.

## 3. Data Collection Methods

Content Analysis of the documents was done for understanding the nuances of career guidance program being followed in school, such as session plans, handouts, feedback forms, and student reports. Analysis of the school's policies on career guidance were tracked. Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with students, parents, teachers, counsellors, and administrators in which all the key points were included, perceptions of program effectiveness, satisfaction, and

suggestions for improvement, some questions as sample have been given below,

Students: *"How has the career guidance program helped you in your career planning?"*
Teachers: *"What challenges do you face in supporting the program?"*
Parents: *"What impact have you observed on your child after participating in the program?"*

Two focus Groups discussions were planned, one with students and another with teachers with focus on collaborative discussions to understand collective experiences and suggestions.

Observations and Non-participant observation of two career guidance sessions was done by the researchers and the focus was on session delivery, student engagement, and interaction dynamics. Brief survey was done for students and parents to capture additional perspectives and triangulate qualitative findings.

**Table 1.1:** Interpretations of the responses from stakeholders

| Data Source | Tool | Analysis type | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students | Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations | Thematic Analysis | Perceived benefits, impact on career aspirations, satisfaction with program delivery, identified challenges and suggestions for improvement. |
| Teachers | Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations | Thematic Analysis | Role in program implementation, perceived effectiveness of the program, challenges faced, suggestions for improvement, impact on student learning and behavior. |
| Parents | Interviews, Focus Groups | Thematic Analysis | Perceived benefits for their children, satisfaction with program delivery, identified challenges and suggestions for improvement, impact on their children's career aspirations and academic performance. |
| Counsellors | Interviews | Thematic Analysis | Role in program delivery, challenges faced, effectiveness of counseling strategies, perceived impact on students, suggestions for improvement. |
| Administrators | Interviews | Thematic Analysis | Decision-making processes, resource allocation, program evaluation, perceived impact on school culture and student outcomes. |
| Program Documents, Feedback Forms, Student Work | Document Analysis | Content Analysis | Alignment with program objectives, trends in student feedback, evidence of program impact on student outcomes. |

## 4. Data Analysis

Transcriptions from interviews and focus groups were analysed using NVivo software. Coding were done to identify themes such as program effectiveness, challenges, and stakeholder satisfaction. Emergent themes were aligned with research questions. For the triangulation, cross-referencing findings from interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis was done. Content Analysis was done with the help of documents and feedback forms to identify trends, common themes, and alignment with stated objectives. Researchers acquired ethical considerations by taking approval from the school administration and obtaining informed consent from all participants and assure confidentiality and anonymity of responses.

## 5. Limitations

- Results may not be generalizable beyond the selected school due to the case study design.
- Participant responses might reflect social desirability bias.
- Observations could be influenced by the presence of the researcher.

## 6. Analysis

This was the qualitative study which deliberately focused on how career guidance programs help students get ready for the workforce and what factors are most important in determining these programs. Its goal was to review published evidence or papers related to career guidance programs because they are important and help students become more focused on their careers, so schools and other educational institutions must

work quickly to implement these kinds of programs. This study was essentially a review of other papers written on this topic and their importance and needs in schools has been analysed, in this research.

**Document analysis**
Data from document analysis represents that Alignment of program materials with curriculum -70%, frequency of updates- 60%, evidence of student engagement with materials-56%, consistency in feedback mechanisms-78%. It shows program needs further planning.
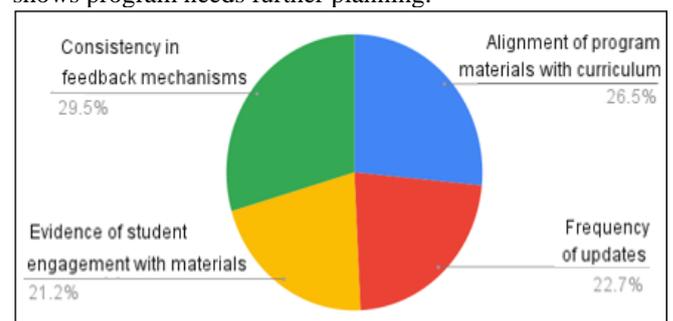


**Figure 1.1:** Alignment of career counselling program with curriculum

**Interviews**
Interviews with all the stake holders shows that perceptions of program effectiveness - 75%, satisfaction levels- 80%, identified strengths and weaknesses-85%. It represents that students can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of career guidance sessions and identify areas for improvement.
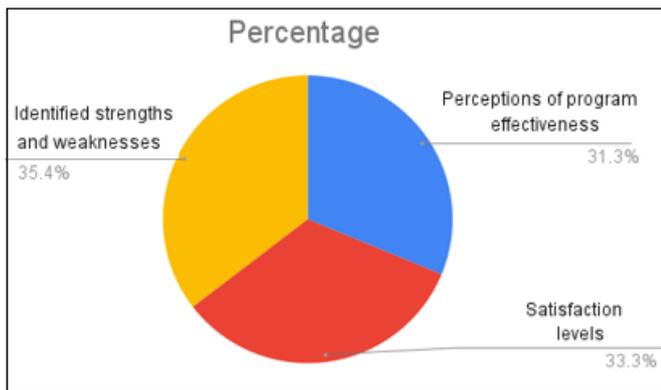
**Figure 1.2:** Perceived Effectiveness of the Program

**Focus Group Discussions**
Discussion brought these points in light, need for Early Career Guidance, More Targeted Career Guidance, Importance of Practical Experience, Addressing Student Anxiety and Uncertainty, program strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions, identification of common themes and emerging issues. By addressing these strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions, schools can further enhance the effectiveness of their career guidance programs and better prepare students for their future careers.

**Non-participant Observation**
The observation was focused on -Session structure, facilitator's role, student engagement, interaction dynamics, use of resources. Session structure was well-planned, clear transitions between activities variety included a mix of activities, such as presentations, group discussions, and individual exercises. The facilitator adaptable to unexpected questions and discussions. Role of facilitator was satisfactory, and he/she demonstrated knowledge of career paths, educational options, and industry trends. Facilitator used a variety of techniques to keep students engaged, such as asking questions, using humour, and providing real-world examples.

Student Engagement was reasonable students participated actively and attentively.

**Brief Surveys**
Quick assessment of student and parent satisfaction, identification of additional insights and perspectives were under consideration for the survey and it reflected that Socio-economic factors can influence students' career choices and opportunities. Self-confidence and self-awareness also plays a vital role in career choice. Interactive activities and engaging presentations kept students interested. Technology can play an important role and incorporating technology tools like career exploration websites and virtual reality experiences to enhance learning.

**Activities Observed**

**Workshop on Career Exploration:**
Description: Students participated in a two-hour workshop facilitated by a career counselor. The session included presentations on trending career fields, group activities to identify personal interests, and quizzes to map personality types with career paths.

Students showed high engagement during interactive activities. However, some expressed confusion about the relevance of certain career paths to their interests, indicating a need for more tailored discussions.

**Mock Interview Session:**
Description: A mock interview exercise was conducted with Grade 10 students. Volunteers from local businesses acted as interviewers, providing real-time feedback.

Students demonstrated varying levels of preparedness. While confident communicators performed well, others appeared nervous, highlighting a potential gap in soft skills training.

**Individual Counselling Sessions:**
Description: Each student had a one-on-one session with the school counsellor to discuss their academic strengths, career interests, and potential challenges.

Students appreciated the personalized attention, but the limited time (15 minutes per student) often felt insufficient to address deeper concerns.

**Career Counselling session in group:**
Description: The school hosted a one-day career counselling session by hosting professional carrier counsellor, resource persons from vocational training centres, and businesses. Students interacted with students to explore career and educational pathways.
The session successfully exposed students to diverse opportunities. However, some students expressed difficulty navigating the overwhelming amount of information.

**Aptitude test:**
Description: Grade 9 students opted for an aptitude test conducted by professionals. The test results were discussed with students and parents individually and provided the reports.

students and parents showed curiosity and asked insightful questions about the job roles and skills revealed during the test" for better readability. Teachers noted that this experience sparked interest in careers that students had not previously considered.
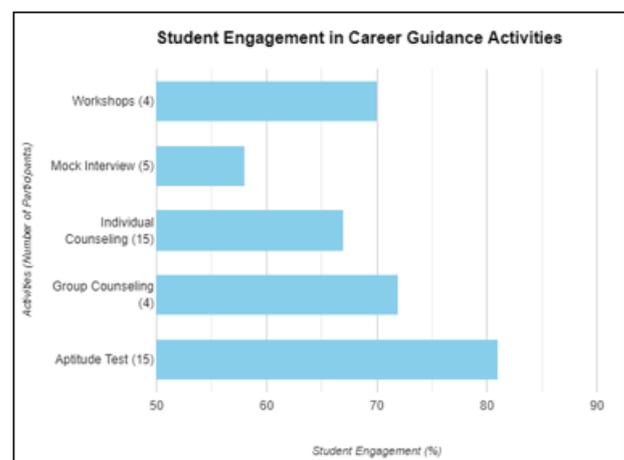


**Figure 1.3:** Student engagement in Programs

X-axis: Activities (Workshops-4, Mock Interview-5, Individual Counseling-15, Group Counseling-4, Aptitude Test-15)

Y-axis: Student Engagement 70%, 58%,67%,72%,81% Respectively.

**Strengths of the Program**

Holistic Approach of the program is major strength of this program as it incorporates a mix of activities, catering to various learners, providing them real-world exposure by Mock interviews and industry visits which provided students with practical insights of different industries and their working. Student-Centric Design of the program makes it unique for the growth of learner and personal counselling sessions ensured individual needs were addressed.

**Challenges Observed**

resource constraints and limited counselling staff restricted the duration and depth of individual sessions. Gaps in sessions and interest of students hinders the smooth functioning of the sessions and other activities. Few students and parents were confused and they were unsure about their career interests.

**Student Feedback**

*"The career fair helped me learn about colleges I hadn't considered before."*
*"Mock interviews boosted my confidence for real-life interviews."*
*Constructive:*
*"More sessions on soft skills would be helpful."*
*"I wish we had more time during the counselling sessions."*

## 7.  Recommendations

Schools must enhance Soft Skills Training and incorporate additional workshops focusing on communication, problem-solving, and leadership.

Planning of tailored guidance sessions by using student interest surveys to customize sessions for more personalized advice can be fruitful. Schools may use additional counsellors or partner with external organizations to expand service coverage.

Follow-Up Mechanism must be developed to establish a tracking system to evaluate student progress and the program's long-term impact.

## 8.  Conclusion

The career guidance program at studied Secondary School provides a valuable foundation for preparing students for future employment. While the program demonstrates significant strengths, addressing the identified challenges can enhance its effectiveness and ensure that students are better equipped to navigate their career pathways.

It is essential that those in this industry work toward fostering a climate that is more informed and favourable for future generations, given the widening gap that exists between skill development and job availability as well as the rising unemployment rate in our nation. It shouldn't deter people from considering career counselling as a possibility for

themselves, even when current coaches are having difficulties with similar issues. Every field has unique difficulties, yet these are obstacles that are designed to be overcome. Despite the benefits, career guidance faces challenges in ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Programs must address disparities in socioeconomic backgrounds and integrate cultural sensitivities to be truly effective. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of labour markets necessitates that career guidance systems continuously update to reflect emerging industries and skills.

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