

From Jobs to Future Careers: Exploring Students' Awareness and Aspirations

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Abstract—Career planning is one of the most defining aspects of a student's life. The nature of work has evolved rapidly due to technological progress, globalization, and changing socio-economic patterns. Today's youth are faced with a broad spectrum of career opportunities, ranging from entrepreneurship and freelancing to creative, digital, and sustainability-oriented professions. However, many students continue to perceive "careers" as synonymous with "jobs," often limited to government or private employment.

This research paper, titled "From Jobs to Future Careers: Exploring Students' Awareness and Aspirations," aims to understand the awareness level of students regarding emerging career opportunities, their personal aspirations, and the kind of support they seek while making career choice

educational and workforce studies. Numerous researchers have explored how students' perceptions, socio-economic backgrounds, and institutional support systems influence their career awareness and aspirations.

2.1 Changing Nature of Careers

According to Nagaraj and Singh (2020), the concept of a "career" in India is still deeply tied to job security, particularly in government or well-established private sectors. Their study revealed that despite growing awareness of entrepreneurship and freelancing, a majority of students continue to prioritize stability over innovation.

Gupta (2022) argued that the rise of the gig economy has transformed how individuals perceive employment. Students now have opportunities to work independently as freelancers, consultants, or digital creators. However, many lack the awareness or confidence to pursue these options due to traditional societal expectations and limited exposure to non-conventional professions.

2.2 Role of Career Guidance and Mentorship

Research by Sharma (2023) emphasized that career guidance programs, mentorship, and industry exposure significantly improve decision-making among students. Educational institutions that integrate workshops, counseling sessions, and career fairs tend to produce more career-ready graduates. Sharma noted that such initiatives help students understand not just job roles but the skills and attitudes required for success in them.

Similarly, Kumar and Thomas (2021) found that lack of guidance and peer influence often push students toward generic career paths. They highlighted that

I. INTRODUCTION

The research revealed interesting behavioral and communication patterns among students.

During the collection of responses, many were found to be clueless about career diversity, and several struggled to articulate their ideas due to language barriers. These issues highlight a deeper challenge, while students have ambition and motivation, their understanding of the evolving job market is limited by inadequate career education and lack of exposure.

This study emphasizes the urgent need for career counseling programs, mentorship, and practical exposure to bridge the gap between education and employability. It also advocates for equipping students with communication skills that allow them to confidently express their career goals.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The transition from traditional jobs to diversified, future-oriented careers has become a major focus in

awareness of emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, digital marketing, green careers, and sustainability-driven entrepreneurship remains low among Indian students.

2.3 Communication and Language Barriers

Language plays a crucial role in how students express their ambitions. Mehta (2024) found that linguistic limitations, especially in non-English-speaking backgrounds, reduce clarity in career

planning. Students often struggle to describe their aspirations confidently, leading educators and counselors to underestimate their interests or abilities. The current study reflects this phenomenon, as many participants gave vague or incomplete responses that may have been influenced by language barriers rather than a lack of aspiration.

2.4 Cultural Influence on Career Perception

Cultural expectations and family influence heavily shape students' choices. Studies like **Das (2021)** highlighted that parental aspirations, societal norms, and fear of uncertainty often lead students to select conventional professions rather than explore emerging opportunities.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research adopts a descriptive and analytical design, aimed at exploring students' understanding of career options beyond traditional jobs and analyzing their aspirations for the future. The descriptive element helps capture students' existing awareness levels, while the analytical approach enables interpretation of their motivations, support needs, and patterns in thinking.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine students' awareness of career opportunities beyond conventional government and private sector jobs.
- To identify students' career aspirations and areas of interest.
- To understand the kind of support students require while making career choices.
- To highlight observed challenges such as lack of awareness and language barriers that influence

students' responses.

3.3 Data Collection

The study uses primary data collected through a structured open-ended questionnaire. Students were asked questions such as:

- Can you name at least three career options beyond government/private jobs?
- What career do you currently aspire to pursue?
- What kind of support would help you the most in making a career choice?

Responses were gathered through written submissions. The questionnaire format encouraged open expression, but many students provided brief or unclear answers, possibly due to limited language proficiency or lack of exposure to career diversity.

3.4 Type of Data

Both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized.

- Qualitative analysis involved categorizing and interpreting open-ended responses to uncover recurring themes and patterns.
- Quantitative analysis was performed by converting these themes into numerical categories and calculating percentages for visual representation.

3.5 Sampling Method

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. Students from different academic backgrounds voluntarily participated. Their anonymity was maintained to ensure honest responses.

3.6 Tools and Techniques for Analysis

- MS Excel was used to organize and categorize responses into measurable groups.
- Content analysis was applied to identify thematic patterns from qualitative responses.
- Percentage analysis and graphical representation (bar charts and pie charts) were used to interpret trends.

3.7 Researcher's Observation

During the data collection and review process, several key observations were made:

- Many students appeared clueless about future career opportunities, reflecting a limited understanding of evolving professions.

- A few responses were irrelevant or incomplete, suggesting confusion or uncertainty.
- Language barriers significantly affected the quality and clarity of answers. Some students struggled to articulate their thoughts in English, leading to shorter and less descriptive responses.
- Despite these challenges, a few students displayed awareness of entrepreneurship, freelancing, and creative industries — signaling a gradual shift in mindset.

3.8 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on students' perceptions and aspirations. It does not measure employability or actual skill levels but rather explores how informed and confident students feel when planning their careers. The findings provide insights useful for educators, career counselors, and policymakers aiming to strengthen career awareness programs.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the primary data collected through the open-ended questionnaire. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to assess students' awareness of various career options, their aspirations, and the kind of support they need in career decision-making.

The responses were grouped into major themes to identify trends and insights.

It was observed that while a few students demonstrated awareness of modern career options, a significant number appeared uncertain or confused, with some responses indicating language-related expression difficulties.

4.1 Awareness of Career Options Beyond Government or Private Jobs

Students were asked to name at least three career options other than government or private employment.

Category	Examples Mentioned by Students	Percentage
Entrepreneurship / Startups / Business	Entrepreneurship, Consulting, Business owner	25%
Creative Fields	Sports, Arts, Content Creation, Photography	15%
Professional / Technical Fields	Engineering, Law, Pharmacy, Stock Market	20%
Freelancing / Contract-based Work / NGO	Freelancing, Non-profit work, Contracting	10%
Unaware / No Response / Government-only Focus	"No", "Government job", or blank responses	30%

Chart 1: Awareness of Career Options Beyond Traditional Jobs

Interpretation:

- A large portion of students were unaware of non-traditional career options, indicating a strong dependence on traditional notions of "job security."
- Entrepreneurship emerged as the most recognized non-traditional path, reflecting growing interest among youth in business ownership and self-employment.
- Creative and freelancing careers were mentioned by a smaller fraction, suggesting limited awareness of emerging digital professions such as content creation or design.
- The high percentage of "No" or unclear responses implies a lack of career exposure and guidance.
- Language limitations may have prevented some students from naming modern or lesser-known career options.

4.2 Current Career Aspirations

Students were asked to describe their current career aspirations or dream profession.

Career Aspirations	Examples Mentioned by Students	Percentage
Business / Management	CEO, MBA, HR Professional	28%
Technical / Professional Fields	Engineering, Pharmacy, Agriculture, Technology	35%
Creative or Social Fields	Sustainability roles, Arts, Education	10%
Unclear or Generic Responses	“Good job”, “Government job”, “Any job with good pay”	27%

Chart 2: Students' Career Aspirations

Interpretation:

- The majority of students aspire toward technical or management-oriented careers, reflecting the influence of mainstream education and parental expectations.
- Only a small fraction showed interest in creative or socially driven careers, possibly due to lack of exposure or perceived job insecurity in these fields.
- Nearly one-fourth of the responses were generic or unclear, reinforcing the observation that many students are uncertain or hesitant when it comes to specific career planning.
- Responses such as “good job” or “government job” indicate a traditional mindset prioritizing security over passion.

4.3 Support Students Require for Career Decisions

Students were also asked what kind of support or help they would find most useful while choosing a career.

Type of Support Needed	Examples from Responses	Percentage
Career Guidance and Counseling	Guidance from teachers, career counselors	40%
Exposure and Experience	Internships, workshops, training	20%
Family and Emotional Support	Family motivation or financial backing	15%

Self-Assessment Tools	Aptitude tests, personality assessments, reflection	10%
Unclear or Miscellaneous	Irrelevant or single-word answers	15%

Chart 3: Support Needed in Career Decision-Making

Interpretation:

- Most students emphasized the importance of career guidance and counseling, revealing a strong desire for professional mentorship and structured information about career paths.
- Many students also valued internships and workshops as ways to explore different fields before finalizing their career choices.
- Family support remained a significant factor, both emotionally and financially.
- A small percentage recognized the role of self-assessment tools like aptitude tests in identifying strengths and interests.
- Some responses were vague, again reflecting the communication and awareness gap among students.

4.4 Qualitative Observations

- Beyond quantitative results, several qualitative patterns emerged:
- Students' tone and phrasing indicated a lack of confidence when discussing career topics.
- Some used minimal language or repeated common phrases like “good job” or “government job,” showing limited vocabulary and linguistic hesitation.
- A few displayed curiosity about entrepreneurship or sustainability-related roles, which is a positive indicator of changing mindsets.
- It was clear that students were more familiar with traditional professions they have seen around them (like engineering or pharmacy) than with digital or creative industries.

4.5 Summary of Analysis

Overall, the data reveals:

- Awareness about emerging careers beyond traditional jobs remains low.
- Many students expressed vague aspirations,

- lacking clarity or direction.
- Language and exposure gaps limited the quality of responses.
- However, there is an encouraging interest in entrepreneurship and self-driven careers among some students.
- The demand for guidance, mentorship, and experiential learning is strong and consistent.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore students' awareness of modern career opportunities and understand their aspirations beyond the traditional boundaries of government and private employment. Based on the data analysis and direct observations during the research, several key findings have emerged.

5.1 Major Findings

1. Limited Awareness of Non-Traditional Careers

A significant portion of students displayed a lack of awareness regarding alternative career options. Many either left the question blank or mentioned only government or private jobs. This highlights a strong influence of conventional thinking in career planning and a lack of exposure to modern professions such as data analytics, digital marketing, content creation, or sustainable entrepreneurship.

Even though a few students mentioned careers like entrepreneurship, freelancing, and consulting, these responses were relatively rare, suggesting that **the idea** of self-employment or innovation-driven careers is still in its early acceptance stage among students.

2. Traditional Professions Still Dominate Career Aspirations

The majority of students aspire to pursue careers in technical or professional fields such as engineering, pharmacy, or agriculture. A large number also expressed interest in managerial roles like HR, MBA, or CEO positions. While these aspirations are valid, they indicate a strong academic alignment toward formal employment rather than entrepreneurial or creative paths.

Only a small segment of students showed interest in creative, sustainability-driven, or socially impactful

professions. This suggests that while students aim high, they often lack awareness of the diverse ways in which success can be achieved.

3. Career Decision-Making Relies Heavily on Guidance

The majority of students mentioned that they would benefit most from career guidance, counseling, and exposure programs such as workshops or internships. This reflects an awareness of the importance of external support, even if students are uncertain about the specific careers they want to pursue.

The desire for guidance also points toward an institutional gap, while students are motivated, they are not adequately supported by structured career planning systems in educational institutions.

4. Language Barriers and Expression Limitations

One of the most notable observations during the data collection phase was the language barrier. Many students struggled to express themselves fluently in English, resulting in incomplete or ambiguous responses.

This challenge does not necessarily indicate a lack of ambition but rather an inability to articulate aspirations effectively. The researcher observed that students often had ideas or preferences in mind but lacked the linguistic confidence to express them clearly. This barrier may also contribute to their lack of participation in workshops, interviews, and professional events.

5. Confusion and Uncertainty Among Students

A portion of responses such as "no," "good job," or "government job" indicate confusion or hesitation. Many students appear to be in a transitional stage, aware that career choices are evolving but unsure how to explore or pursue them. This confusion underscores the importance of building career literacy within academic institutions.

5.2 Discussion

The findings of this research align closely with previous literature. Similar to Sharma (2023) and Kumar & Thomas (2021), this study confirms that career awareness among Indian students is limited,

and traditional aspirations dominate due to cultural expectations and lack of guidance.

The presence of language and communication challenges, as observed by Mehta (2024), was evident in the collected data. Students often seemed to have potential and curiosity but could not express them effectively, leading to underrepresentation of their real interests.

Furthermore, Nagaraj & Singh (2020) and Gupta (2022) emphasized that the global career landscape is shifting rapidly with the growth of freelancing, digital entrepreneurship, and sustainability-driven professions. However, these shifts are not yet reflected in students' awareness levels, as the majority continue to equate career success with secure employment.

This discussion indicates that educational institutions must redefine their approach to career education. Instead of preparing students solely for existing jobs, schools and colleges should train them for adaptability, creativity, and continuous learning—skills that are essential for future careers.

5.3 Researcher's Observations

- Many students seemed clueless about emerging professions such as digital media, finance, or technology-driven careers.
- Language limitations affected the quality of responses, particularly among those who had strong ideas but weak articulation.
- Students showed enthusiasm for career growth but lacked direction.
- The need for professional career counseling was strongly evident, as most students expressed dependence on external guidance rather than self-exploration.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The study titled “From Jobs to Future Careers: Exploring Students' Awareness and Aspirations” set out to understand how students today perceive career opportunities, their level of awareness about emerging professions, and the kind of support they need while making career decisions.

The findings clearly indicate that while students are ambitious and goal-oriented, their career awareness remains confined to traditional job roles. The majority still associate success with government or private employment, showing limited exposure to evolving professions such as digital entrepreneurship, freelancing, creative arts, or sustainability-related work.

Furthermore, a recurring issue observed throughout the research was the language and expression barrier. Many students struggled to communicate their ideas fluently, resulting in incomplete or vague responses. This indicates not a lack of interest, but rather a gap in communication confidence and access to proper career education.

It is evident that institutional and social structures continue to shape students' understanding of careers. There is a pressing need to shift from a “job-seeking” mindset to a “career-building” and “skill-development” approach. Awareness, exposure, and confidence-building should form the foundation of modern career education.

In conclusion, the study highlights that today's students are navigating a rapidly changing world but lack the right tools and guidance to explore it effectively. With structured mentorship, experiential learning, and communication training, they can transition from being job-seekers to career innovators of the future.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to bridge the awareness and preparedness gap among students:

1. Strengthen Career Guidance and Counseling

- Educational institutions should establish career counseling cells and organize regular career orientation programs.
- Expert mentors and industry professionals should interact with students to help them explore various sectors and job trends.

2. Introduce Skill and Personality Assessments

- Students should be encouraged to take career aptitude and personality tests to identify strengths

- and interests early.
 - These assessments can help align personal interests with professional possibilities.
3. Promote Experiential Learning Opportunities
- Colleges should partner with industries to provide internships, workshops, and hands-on projects.
 - Early exposure allows students to understand the practical aspects of different careers and make informed decisions.

4. Enhance Communication and Language Skills
Institutions should integrate communication development and language enhancement programs into the curriculum.

Building confidence in self-expression will enable students to present their goals clearly in both academic and professional contexts.

5. Encourage Entrepreneurial and Creative Thinking
- Entrepreneurship cells and innovation hubs should be established to help students turn creative ideas into real ventures.
 - Exposure to case studies, startup talks, and financial literacy sessions can build an entrepreneurial mindset.

6. Involve Parents and Community
Parents play a crucial role in shaping career perceptions. Career awareness sessions for parents can help them support their children in exploring diverse opportunities instead of pushing them toward conventional careers.

6.3 Implications of the Study
The results of this study hold significant implications for educational policymakers, teachers, and career counselors. They highlight the urgent need to integrate career education, skill development, and psychological support into mainstream education.

By doing so, the next generation can be better equipped to meet the evolving demands of the job market, not as employees limited by choices, but as innovative professionals empowered by awareness.

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ANNEXURE

1. Age
2. Gender
3. What course are you currently studying?
4. Are you aware of careers other than your course?
5. Can you name at least three career options beyond government/private jobs? (do not answer yes or no)
6. What career do you currently aspire to pursue?
7. Do you plan to pursue higher studies (like MBA,

MSc, PG courses)?

8. Do you see yourself working abroad in the future?
9. Who influences your career choices the most?
10. Have your teachers ever discussed career options beyond regular jobs?
11. Have you ever spoken to a career counsellor?
12. Would you prefer working for a company rather than being self-employed?
13. Do you think choosing a career you love is more important than choosing a career that pays more?
14. Do you agree that soft skills and technical skills are more important than degrees?
15. Do you think schools and colleges should include career awareness sessions?
16. Do you think the future of work will be very different from today?
17. What is the biggest challenge in choosing your dream career?
18. Do you feel confused about what career options exist?
19. Suggest what kind of support would help you the most in making a career choice?