A Qualitative Study of Career Planning, Exploratory, and Decision Making Behaviors among Young Adults

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Keywords:	ABSTRACT
Career Developmental, Career Planning, Career Exploration, Career Decision-Making, Young Adults	*The research article studies the significance and meaning of career development among young adults. Young adults in developing countries are facing multiple issues of instability and disadvantages and very limited research has been conducted in these countries on exploring career development tasks in their early years of young adulthood. The study focuses on the tasks related to their career planning, exploration, and decision-making that have to be accomplished in the early years of their young adulthood. Data was required from young adults aged 19 to 23 years (M = 21.40, SD = 1.75) to get knowledge about these career developmental tasks. The technique of Focus Group Discussions was used for a better understanding of the career developmental tasks. Term career development was used to acquire information about career planning, exploration, and decision-making tasks in the sample. The findings of the study help prepare young adults to complete career developmental tasks and manage the complexities of their career development process.*

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1   Introduction

Career development is not a step, it is rather a lifelong process starting from schooling years and extending across the life span. It is a process for the identification of interests, making choices, or promoting personal identity in a career. It involves the exploration of career opportunities, promoting relevant values and identity, and adjusting to its working environment through relevant work (Bimrose, McMahon, & Watson, 2017; Cinamon, Flum, & Hardin, 2019; Perera & Athanasou, 2020; Santilli, Grossen, & Nota, 2020; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 2019). Career development includes the manifestation of tasks for self-expression, methods for connection with others, and amalgamation of experiences within the

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career and outside the workplace which ultimately leads to a rise in career interests, career possibilities, and career choices (Kenny, Blustein, & Meerkins, 2018).

It is claimed that career development is a lifelong process starting from schooling years and extending across the life span but still young adult age is the phase of life that is associated with rigorous progress in this direction (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). Young adults tend to complete the identification of career interests, make career choices, and promote personal identity in their chosen careers during the early years of young adulthood (Skorikov, 2007). Keeping in view the purpose of exploring career development among young adults the present study defines career development by achievement over time in three aspects of career; exploration, planning, and decision-making. Many researchers have defined career exploration as a process that involves the identification of goals in a career, the facilitation of the development of a career, and gathering information about self and the external environment (Cheung & Jin, 2016; Taveira & Moreno, 2003). Career planning means a comprehensive plan that encompasses choosing a career, establishing its objectives, and selecting relevant education and programs to develop and improve required skills for achieving those set goals. So the process of career planning includes identification of career goals, self-evaluation for achieving these career goals, and then determining a course of action to achieve those goals.

Across the world, some new trends are emerging in the working environments including globalization, cultural diversities, transforming structures of organizations, flexibility in patterns of employment, and high job insecurities. All these trends have led to uncertainty and complexity in working environments which necessitates flexibility, adaptability, and long-term learning among individuals (Mark L Savickas et al., 2009).

This research explores career development among young adults in Pakistan's collectivistic culture. High-degree change is the highlight of the contemporary world that we are living in (Global Trends, 2030, 2012). There is a prompt change in the careers and working environments, subsequently, there is an increased insecurity in careers and identities. Career development is rather a lifelong learning process (Turner, Lapan, & Turner, 2012) but still, career development has received scant attention in the early years of our youth (Maree, 2018). Future careers necessitate important decisions from students and such decisions are guided by several factors for ultimately leading to success.

To build or maintain a competitive economic advantage for any organization or country in the global market, career development has to be a priority to maximize individuals' career potential for productive work (Biemann, Zacher, & Feldman, 2012). To counter these changes the impact of these changes in society needs to be researched to rethink career development. Greater dependence on information communication technology (ICT), the internet, cellular communication, and social media has brought enormous changes in the living, learning styles, and career development of young adults. Mark L. Savickas (2011) has already forewarned career counselors and parents to prepare the young generation for the modern world rather than wasting time on old practices. Ensuing to that, the focus of this study is to determine the best approaches within the context of the modern world for better exploration of career among young adults.

Moreover, the concept of career was first adopted in the West in the context of it being an individualistic and industrialized society developed by the work ethic and freedom of choice, but with the globalization of the world, they all have been carried to other cultures and economies. The manifestation of career development is largely shaped by social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors in different parts of the world (Mark L. Savickas, 2011). According to Stead (2004) language, communication, and relationships are important to understanding notions of career development in a particular culture. Moreover, some personal variables (including relationships with parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and relatives), as

well as some external variables (including local culture, economy, and political environment), are considered important factors that play an important role in shaping one's career (Greenhaus, Callanan, & DiRenzo, 2008). Therefore, career development in young adults needs to be critically examined for all these important personal and external factors. In addition, career developmental tasks in young adults need to be critically examined for planning, exploration, decision-making, and implementation of appropriate career development services and support systems for our new generations. Thus, this study inteds to examine the career development activities or taskes which are initiated by young adults to be successful in their life.

2 Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

The phenomenological, qualitative research method provided the base for examining the career development tasks in young adults. Phenomenological research design has been used to record and analyze in-depth perceptions, feelings, and actions of the participants about the career developmental process. To achieve a clear understanding of this complex process Focus Group discussion technique was used for data collection.

2.2 Participants

A purposive and convenient sampling method was used for the selection of participants in the study. These participants were mainly from three universities in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad, Pakistan. Participants of this study included 35 (50%) males and 35 (50%) females. Samples were young adults aged 19 to 23 years (M = 21.40, SD = 1.75). The number of Focus Group Discussions was 8 including three male focus group discussions, consisting of three female focus group discussions, and two combined focus group discussions. The inclusion criteria for the current study were young adults from some educational institution aged 19 to 23 years, while anyone above 23 or below 19 was excluded. Table 1 provides the details of participants enlisted for the current study as given below.

Table 1
Details of Focus Group Participants

Serial	Gender	Total	Age		Moderator
			M	*SD*	
1.	Boys	8	20.13	0.99	Boy
2.	Boys	8	21.13	2.17	Boy
3.	Boys	8	22.25	0.71	Boy
4.	Girls	8	19.25	0.46	Girl
5.	Girls	8	21.13	1.25	Girl
6.	Girls	8	22.00	1.41	Girl
7.	Girls ($n = 6$) Boys ($n = 4$)	10	23.70	1.06	Girl
8.	Girls ($n = 5$) Boys ($n = 7$)	12	21.17	1.27	Girl
	Total	70	21.40	1.75	-

2.3 Ethical Considerations

Available literature was used for the preparation of the focus group guide. After extensive study of previous literature questions were developed to ensure maximum responses. After seeking acquiring necessary approval from the relevant university administration, these participants were then approached for data collection. To acquire their consent these students were given appropriate verbal information about the purpose of the research, along with their

right to participate or withdraw at any time of their choice without providing reason. All this information was also given on the consent forms for their better understanding. All willing participants were then enlisted for the Focus Group Discussion.

After assurance of keeping the privacy and confidentiality of their identity, all participants were then asked to provide formal permission for recording Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for using it to transcribe the verbatim. Each session of the focus group discussions lasted for more or less 90 minutes and they were recorded and its participants were properly thanked for their time and cooperation during the session. Before the start of each focus group discussion, its participants were given a short briefing to encourage them to share their maximum experiences and observations. During the courses of focus group discussions, it was ensured that each participant in the focus group discussions was taking part in the discussion. Detailed notes were then prepared by using recordings of the FGDs. These notes were then analyzed.

2.4   Data Transcription and Qualitative Code Development

The transcription manual (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used for the manual transcription of obtained data, and the assistance of a qualified research group with five years of experience was acquired for the transcription of this data. A well-established method of Back translation (Squires, 2009) was used for the translation of obtained data into other languages. This involved the translation of source data into the target language and then reverse translation into the source language. The criteria given by Squires (2009) were used to minimize the chance of error and omissions in these translations into other languages.

Another major task in this study was to transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of results. This was necessary before the data analysis. Responses were coded into different themes for building a thematic codebook by using a deductive method of Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rogers, 2018). The researchers used the thematic codebook to examine the recorded responses. Researchers also created new codes where it was considered necessary. Multiple definitions and relevant components of career development were also identified by the researchers during the review of the literature on the subject. This led to the identification of theoretically similar contents from the transcribed data, which further assisted in grouping these similar contents into broader themes. The set procedure for qualitative analysis was followed throughout this coding process.

These coding categories were then sent for review by five PhD-level experts with qualitative research experience. Their role was to review coding categories and align data collected through FGDs in different set categories. The results of the review were then verified through a committee approach as per the set procedure for qualitative analysis. For this purpose, a committee of seven participants was composed for focus group discussion and they were provided with the coding categories beforehand for attending the committee with preparation and appropriate suggestions. This discussion helped remove some overlapping coding categories after identification by the committee members. Moreover, consensus was built for more appropriate coding and for some new emerging themes as identified for putting under new categories.

3   Findings and Discussions

The clear distinction among all emerged themes and their contents was ensured with the help of extensive qualitative analysis of all components of career development among young adults. The data-driven approach was used to cluster data into major categories and sub-categories as listed in the following Table 2:

Table 2
Categories and Sub-categories of Career Developmental Tasks among Young Adults

#	Major categories	Sub-categories
1	Career planning	Choice of subjects (electives and optional), program of study
		Finding out educational and job possibilities
		Planning part-time jobs
		Future-oriented goal making
		Participation in extracurricular activities
		Learning new skills
2	Career exploration	Social, electronic, and print media
		Gaining information from one's social circle (family, friends, teachers, seniors, professional associations, and other networks)
		Attending Career related seminars/workshops/job fairs
		Doing internships
3	Knowledge about the world of careers	Awareness of skills, abilities, requirements
		Education, and training need
		Work conditions and working hours
		Financial and promotional aspects
		Duties and responsibilities of particular careers
		Information about the range of careers in a particular field
4	Career decision making	Trying self in different situations
		Calculating one's strengths and weaknesses
		Identifying possible choices
		Identifying market trends/scope & current employment opportunities
		Taking responsible actions
		Persistency
		Flexibility (with changing context of work environment)
		Compulsory or prescribed careers (chosen by family)
		By chance selection of subjects/majors and careers
5	Feelings about the career development process	Hope/optimism for the future
		Curiosity about learning new things (careers/opportunities)
		Satisfaction and confidence (with choice of majors/career field)
		Feeling Progressive & Ambitiousness (to effort for career success)
		Feeling uneasy about the CD process
		The CD is an unpleasant process
		Scared for committing oneself to a particular career
		Being doubtful and confused

The data presented in Table 2 has been illustrated after organizing them into major categories and sub-categories along with components of career development in Figure 1.

Figure 1
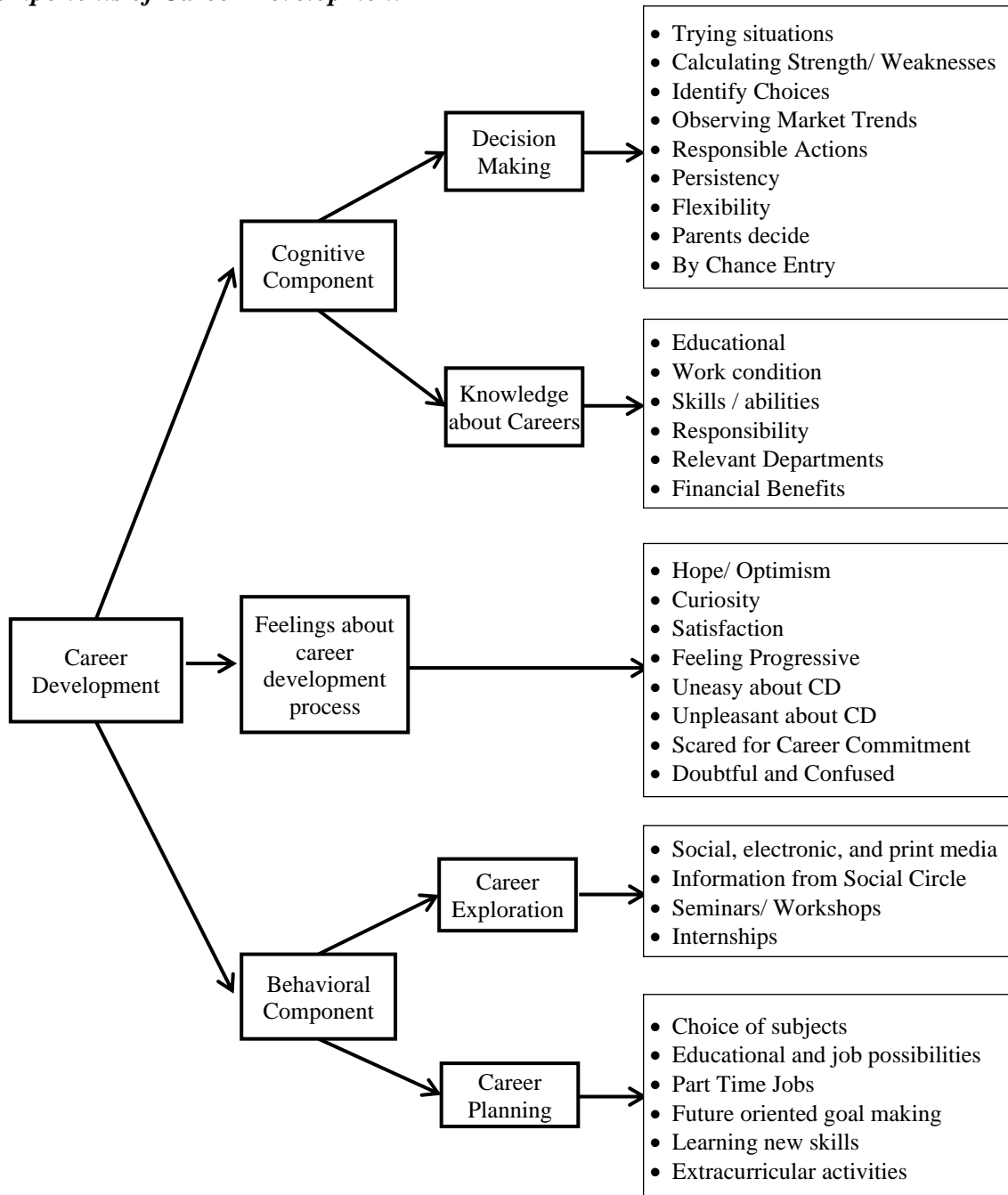*Components of Career Development*

Figure 1 represents three broader components of career development i.e., affective (emotions associated with the career development process), cognitive (having knowledge and decision-making about career development), and behavioral (using resources to plan and explore career fields) encapsulate the data as follows.

3.1   Behavioral Component of Career Development

The behavioral component of career development refers to the actions one performs when exposed to a certain situation. This component of career development refers to exploring and planning by one's preferences and choices of resources one follows.

3.1.1   *Career Planning*

This main category was highlighted by the majority of the participants. Career planning encourages individuals to outline future career development and to participate in planning

activities. This is the procedure through which students come to settle on profession-related choices. Research from Sutrisno and Pillay (2013) revealed that career planning is a continuous process that extends for a long that enables individuals to assess of self, their work, and steps to achieve career choices, and it also enables individuals to think about the course of actions for pursuing their careers of choice. This study also concluded that career planning is not only the process of choosing career goals but also the process of making these goals a reality. Some of the factors that undermine career planning were also highlighted by the participants.

Finding out educational possibilities and choice of major/subject selection to gain help from to pursue a particular career in the future is very important. What makes a difference, in students either enjoying or hate the career of their choice, is choosing subjects that are most appropriate for that specific career (Koech et al., 2016). It is the right subject selection that decides the career path they are more likely to follow in the future (Komba, 2014). Not only the short-term setting but also the mid and long-term goals setting efforts are necessary to pursue them for career planning. However, some of the participants highlighted that being in a developing country where most people think of the future as uncertain they cannot pursue the career development process and end up with no future career plans.

According to the participants, taking part in and out of institution extracurricular activities is necessary to decide and better plan about the work/career they would prefer or go into after completing their particular degrees. For them, it was necessary to take part in such activities to see how they fit themselves in the work environment and plan accordingly. Moreover, learning new skills to do career planning is very necessary. Besides degree programs, one should also focus on one's certain skills such as communication skills, listening skills, customer dealing/handling skills, and management skills to fit him or herself in a particular career.

3.1.2 Career Exploration

This main category was revealed by the majority of the participants in all focus groups. The level of research and variety of considerations about careers is called career exploration (Navin, 2009). The participants have mentioned that a student must be willing to explore career options by using a variety of educational and career resources and those resources must be efficient in their utility. Career exploratory behaviors normally happen among young adults when they play different roles as part-time, volunteer, or community workers in organizations, schools, or communities.

According to the participants the more resources a person uses to explore career options the more he/she can make a better career development plan. The resources highlighted by the participants were using the internet, watching television that portrays work-related activities, visiting various websites to explore work options, using social media to know about various career options and opportunities, and reading broachers, newspapers, and college/university prospectus to explore one's interest and career options.

According to the participants, talking about their career plans with people for instance any family person in that particular career such as parents, teachers, or professional associations, and observing and listening to the work experiences of family members, neighbors, and professionals help them to explore career options and opportunities as well. Career choice is a very important aspect for young adults and they give it very thoughtful and critical consideration as they are most concerned about their future careers throughout their educational phase either as students of secondary schools or college or university level. Moreover, career exploration has become such an important and complex aspect that students need guidance and assistance from their parents, teachers, and counselors (Hariko & Anggriana, 2019; Korir & Wafula, 2012). Similarly, many social factors, in terms of influence and pressure from peers and friends, from one's social circle are also believed to play a

pronounced role in shaping and modeling the course of career decision-making and career opportunities in a person's life (Mabula, 2012; Mtemeri, 2020; Naz et al., 2014; Obiunu & Ebunu, 2013). Peers, friends, mass media, and parental guidance a major sources of information for a university or college student in the selection of an appropriate subject for following their career of choice (Din, Anuar, Omar, Omar, & Dahlan, 2015).

According to the participants, students also benefit themselves from attending career-related seminars and workshops. In those seminars and workshops, they are given opportunities to know their interest in certain careers by exploring them through these seminars and workshops. But they also added there is less attention paid to such seminars and students seldom know about them. The participants revealed that they preferred doing internships to explore their interest in a particular career under their program of study.

Young adults rely on larger sources of information, guidance, decision-making, and work support and thus are more attracted to larger social networking (e.g.; Linked-In) that may involve connecting with friends, friends of friends, colleagues, teachers, and professionals in that field of career.

3.2   Cognitive Component of Career Development
This component refers to the knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs one has about career development. The participants have mentioned that a student must have some thoughts and knowledge about various career options related to his/her program of study.

3.2.1   Knowledge About World of Careers
This main category was highlighted by the majority of the participants. Career knowledge encourages individuals to outline future career development and to participate in decision-making activities. In short, according to the participants, one must be aware of various options for careers and the details about their requirements.

According to them, to develop one's career one needs to have the awareness of abilities, skills, educational and training requirements, working conditions and hours, financial and promotional aspects, duties and responsibilities, of various career options. The more one knows about these aspects the more a person is set on a career development process.

3.2.2   Career Decision Making
This main category was highlighted by almost all of the participants of all focus groups. This category reflects the ways a person decides to pursue a particular career. This category was highlighted in terms of career decision-making abilities after applying all the acquired knowledge and understanding about careers. Career manifestation and career preparedness are the terms used by young adults in this phase of life as an alternative to taking on career tasks that include career exploration, setting career goals, and career preparedness that helps in career decision-making (Hirschi, 2011). For an individual to make career decisions sufficient information about themselves (strengths and weaknesses), about a particular career, career alternatives, market trends, and scope is vital. Certain personality factors such as persistence and flexibility have been considered important for sound career decision-making.

It is claimed by UNESCO (2002) that career decision-making is not a one-time opportunity in a person's life, it is rather a continuing process and can be availed by a person at any moment in life (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Some recent research has revealed that multiple factors influence a person's rational career decision-making or career choice and that the factor of showing interest in a certain career is quite different from factors of having confidence or ability to pursue that particular career and having success in that particular career (Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). Certain factors that undermine the decision-making process have also been reported by participants for instance parents decide the major and career, always considering

new directions deciding majors and careers, need for reassurance about career decision-making, and by chance entries to certain educational institutions and organizations.

According to the participant, trying oneself in different courses in the initial stages of one's program of study helps a person better decide upon a certain major and then pursue a career in line with such a program of study. Moreover, every individual has his/her unique personal strengths and weaknesses which a person must keep in mind to select a major and career in his/her life. Using one's strengths that are in line with certain majors and careers can make an individual do better career decision-making. Appropriate self-assessment of multiple personality factors, including personal career interests, career skills, career values, career priorities, personal career traits, and characteristics, is a major aspect of career decision-making (Abid, 2017).

A person must explore and identify possible major/subject choices for him/herself and then make career decision-making. For instance, when choosing a major and then choosing a career in that field one must identify possible major/subject choices and career choices and select the one that better fits with his/her abilities, skills, and interest. Steps involved in career decision-making include exploring multiple careers, comparative analysis among a variety of careers and their alternatives, confirmation of their suitability, and identification of the most appropriate career. Individuals tend to choose good enough rather than optimal one, therefore, while shortlisting their career of choice individuals tend to look to their further alternatives for comparative analysis in terms of their interests and accessibility and finally, they may compromise on the interest of a particular career for better accessibility of another career even if individuals are comparatively less interested in that particular career (Gottfredson, 2002).

According to the participants, students decide upon careers by keeping in view the market trends or scope of the certain program of study. Being in a third world, developing country, where there is political and economic instability this factor has been given importance. Career decision-making is a cognitive process that involves prospects as it is influenced by the number and types of jobs available in the public and private sectors (Kolawole, Osundina, James, & Abolaji, 2012).

The participants highlighted that taking responsible actions and then keeping oneself on track can lead you to better career opportunities. One who always needs reassurance for certain decisions such as which program of study, subject/major, institution, and career has to be chosen, cannot have sound career decision-making.

In many cases, the subjects/majors and careers are prescribed by parents or one is compelled to choose a particular major/subject and career therefore mostly it means no career development at all. According to them, freedom of choice and selection of major are necessary to pursue a particular career and therefore to take part in the process of career development. Prescribed majors/subjects and career decisions are not successful as researchers have revealed that individuals who are pushed by their families to join a particular career are less interested in pursuing their career goals for satisfaction and rather tend to lose confidence in their abilities (Schooreel, Shockley, & Verbruggen, 2017).

Moreover, certain attitudinal factors that have been reported by the participants which they thought enhance one's ability for career decision-making are persistence in decision-making and flexibility in the changing context of the work environment.

3.3 Affective Component of Career Development
The affective component reflects one's feelings and emotions. Categories under this component addressed what feelings and emotions about the career development process are to be present for successful career development and what feelings and emotions undermine career development.

3.3.1 Positive Feelings About Career Development Process

Multiple participants from both genders have highlighted positive feelings about the career development process during this study. They revealed the connection of their emotions with their major subjects and chosen careers by enjoying and being curious to study further in pursuing their field of careers. Girls highlighted that unless they are satisfied, and have confidence in their chosen fields there is always a low tendency to be in the career development process.

Participants highlighted satisfaction and confidence with career development and that when an individual is satisfied with the chosen subjects/majors at school, college, and university level then they would be mostly satisfied with their career field and would be indulged in their career development. There are many questions to be ascertained including the question if individuals are satisfied with their career of choice if their career path was appropriate, and what is the level of their disappointment if they are not satisfied with their career choice (Kovach Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009). It was also highlighted that if a person feels confidence in his/her chosen subjects/majors, accomplishments, and career field then one can better commit to one's career (Amit & Gati, 2013).

Negative feelings about career development. This category also emerged in the response of focus group participants of both genders. They revealed that when you are unhappy about your chosen subjects/majors since your school years you cannot indulge yourself in your career development. When relating their emotions with career development the boys highlighted that when they feel uneasy and find career development a dull and unpleasant process they cannot follow the path of career development. Moreover, the majority of girls highlighted that when they feel uneasy and scared about committing themselves to a particular career they cannot put themselves in the career development process.

According to them, having confusion about one's chosen subjects/major and program of study means no career development at all. Difficulty in career decision-making is cognitive and can be a lifelong emotional and personality problem (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002; Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008). Feeling scared about committing themselves to particular careers would not allow them to be in the particular career development process. Career decision-making is a complex and challenging process as for some the alternative chosen career might be exactly the one that would have been chosen after systematic and thoughtful decision making while for others the alternative career chosen after thoughtful and systematic decision-making might not be the one of their liking which reveals that it is a stressful process for some individuals (Argyropoulou, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, & Besevegis, 2007) and they seek others' help in career decision making (Vertsberger & Gati, 2015).

4   Conclusion

The process of career planning, exploration, and decision-making, defined as career developmental tasks in vocational psychology and career counseling, has been taken as an important concept of study in these fields. The world is changing rapidly and the future is becoming less predictable which causes uncertainty. Therefore, an enhanced understanding of the process of career planning, exploration, and decision-making among young adults needs an enhanced understanding of the career developmental tasks in such a versatile environment. Moreover, there is a need for greater emphasis on the completion of developmental tasks in young adults to help them set and realize particular career goals with better motivation and competencies.

4.1   Limitations and Suggestions

The present research has raised many questions that need to be examined by researchers in the future. This study has only taken a limited number of students as a sample from three universities located in urban cities of Punjabi and Pashtun speakers of Pakistan. There is a

need for future research on larger and more diverse samples for more generalized findings on the career development of our youth. These future researches may pay more emphasis on the effect of diversity in ethnicity, regional, and socioeconomic background of the sample for more generalized findings on the career development of our youth. Current research recommends testing the outcomes of this investigation on samples from other educational institutional settings even from other cultures and countries. Perception of parents and teachers is also recommended to be assessed.

4.1.1 Implications

Career development in young adults is a vast subject and this research has contributed to its better understanding with emphasis on young adults. This study has contributed to theoretical and practical implications and it also gives recommendations for further research on career development with special emphasis on young adults. The theoretical contribution of the study includes the argument that career development is a complex, multidimensional, and lifelong process that starts from the early years of young adulthood. The practical contribution of the study is the provision of essential empirical data on career exploration, planning, and decision-making strategies in young adults.

The study will help generate strategies with the identification of areas of emphasis for career practitioners in Pakistan to help local students in their career decision-making process strategies. The study will also help in using subjective and objective-oriented approaches to generate career guidance, career education, and career counseling services at school, college, and university levels in Pakistan which may involve interventions to enhance career development with enhanced motivation for career confidence, control, and future orientation, as suggested by Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008). With the help of this study, young adults can be better guided to discover themselves and construct their lives and careers through a better understanding of the career development process in young adults and other people involved in this complex process including career counselors, teachers, parents, and peers.

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