

## Magnitude of career confusion among college students in India: An empirical report

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### ABSTRACT

In the early 1900s, America started its initiatives in the field of career choice with an innovative concept, 'right person for the right job'. This motto was well-received by the American society and further became a unique focus of Euro-American educational system. Following this, aptitude (the inborn talent) together with interest was given high precedence in higher education and young people selected their career accordingly. Countries that accepted this new paradigm stands out globally whereas countries that adopted the conventional naive concept 'anybody can do any job' struggle to achieve the desired target. Even after a century has passed, the Indian education system is not able to cope up with the concept and perform poorly in human resource management. Many factors like social status, easily available job opportunity, parental pressure, peer influence drive many young people towards specific streams of study. Once they complete their studies in this scheme, end up in career confusion and struggle in the profession and life. In this framework, this study is aimed at identifying the magnitude of career confusion among college students and, suggests some substantial solutions to social workers, psychologists and educators in guiding young people to build a modern society in the Indian subcontinent. This empirical study collected data from four states of India. Students, parents, teachers and fresh employees were studied. Based on the results, the authors discuss the need for a paradigm shift in thinking and acting so that career confusion can be reduced to a greater extent.

**Keywords:** *Career Choice, Vocational Guidance, Higher Education, Job Selection, Aptitude and Interest*

There is a popular concept among people 'anybody can do any job'. In the developed countries this concept has been challenged since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the concept 'right person for the right job' emerged (Parsons, 1909). This concept is supported by the biological basis of human behaviour and related research findings on brain development. Aptitude, which is an innate talent, which gives easy access to the development of specific skills and talents, is highlighted in this paradigm. In India, this

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concept was practised for many centuries in the ancient days when traditional *gurukula* or *gurukulam* was prevalent. For example, famous *Carnatic* musician select music aspirants by their natural talent to sing Sa - Pa - Sa (Do-Sol-Do) notes of music without any musical instruments to check the innate talent before admitting them to the systematic music classes (Janetius & Mini, 2015). This early concept of education was completely based on innate talents. However, it is forgotten over time, neglected today and seldom practised. Though Western society has adopted the psychological findings and this concept has become very popular, the developing countries have not adopted this scientific knowledge fully and struggle in their productivity. The young college students are the victims of this unscientific approach and suffer in their career prospects and become less productive in the profession.

Career confusion and unemployment are few of the major problems of youth in India, specifically college students. It starts in their selection of higher studies and leads further to the choice of career. The present IT boom and globalisation of the economy has opened the doors for many career options irrespective of college course selection. However, due to lack of skills development, inadequate guidance and clouded information on career development, and other indirect influencing factors, college students struggle in their career choices and professional development (Shilpa & Mini, 2015). Though vocational guidance, psychometric testing and career counselling have become part and parcel of education in the developed countries, India has not yet achieved that intensity.

As many evidence-based concepts in psychology suggest, there are two major players in every career success: aptitude and interest. Aptitude is the inborn capacity that develops in the process of human growth and matures during the time. The aptitude, the natural ability of the brain to perform tasks spontaneously and in ease, gives people confidence, perfection and satisfaction in any position in each career (Super, 1957). In India, except a few metro cities, psychological tools to assess the inner potential of young people are scarce. The scientific psychological assistance young people receive in the developed countries is often replaced by pitiable parental guidance, unprofessional teacher's advice or neighbours' naive directions and friends sympathetic influence (Janetius, 2016). Studies identify the role of IQ, parental socioeconomic status, parental control, the impact of available courses in the nearby colleges, economic security needs and popular social values become influential factors for young people to choose their career in India (Janetius & Hashir, 2017; Arulmani & Nag-Arulmani, 2004). A study done by Mini (2013) on college placement cells in Kerala identified the non-availability of psychological testing services in the urban and semi-urban areas leading to young people's surrender to parental compulsion. Identifying this natural talent plays a crucial role in discerning the right education for skills development and career path for every single success. Similarly, interest for a specific job, though it changes as people grow, and open to many existential realities of life, need to go in tune with their inner talents. Only when both these factors (aptitude and interest) merge amicably, one can expect optimal success in his or her career.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to identify the magnitude of career-related confusion among young people. Further, the study identifies some solutions to solve this pressing social problem that can be undertaken by social workers, counsellors, psychologists, and educationalists professionally.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, longitudinal study collected data from three sources from the states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland in the span of two years. Convenient sampling was used in the selection of subjects, focusing on the availability as a factor of inclusion. Although the prime focus of the research is on the college students, data were also collected from parents, teachers and new employees (fresh graduates) working in the textile industry. The student's data came from two sources: counselling record of 330 students and survey data from 460 students. 265 parents were interviewed, and focus group discussion was conducted among 140 teachers and 84 newly joined supervisors in the textile industry. The data were analysed for basic percentage and then categorised thematically for qualitative analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

No.	Category of respondents	Gender	Number of respondents	Qualification	Total number
1.	Students	Boys	320	UG	580
		Girls	470	PG	210
2.	Parents	Father	177	Graduates	160
		Mother	88	Non-graduates	105
3.	Teachers	Male	58	PhD	28
		Female	82	Masters	112
4.	Newly joined Textile Supervisors	Male	62	UG	64
		Female	22	PG	20

### *Selection of course in college*

Results of student's data shows that 82 per cent of the college students did not consider their inner talents or potentials while selecting their higher studies. 42 per cent of the students selected their studies due to parental influence, followed by peer influence (28%), advice from teachers (12%) for a better job opportunity. Only 6% of the students feel that they have selected the right course and they are very comfortable and confident of success in their future carrier. Nearly 5% of students choose a specific course that was available in the college that is close to his/her house. Few students have no specific reason for choosing a field.

### *Job preference*

Among the undergraduate students, 86% of the students say that they are not clear about their job preference once they complete their studies. Majority of the PG students choose their higher studies influenced by their peers (65%) for better job availability. The study results point out, for most of the students, their choice of courses is not based on their aptitude and interest. Another important factor identified is the desire for government jobs (34%). It is also identified that the attraction for a government job is based on the concept that it is relaxing and leisurely (71%), job security and pension benefits (62%); only a very low percentage of the students (12%) who look for a government job with a genuine interest to serve the public.

### *Parental attitude*

Most of the parents give priority to easily available job opportunities (78%) and social prestige (68%) to guide their children to a specific field of study. Nearly 37% of the parents revealed that they forbid their children from taking courses like fashion designing,

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agriculture, hotel management, and similar vocational courses. They find jobs related to these fields less prestigious. Also, some parents tend to attribute the success and failures to supernatural powers or superstitious beliefs rather than the selection of a specific course or college for their children.

### *Knowledge and attitude of teachers*

Nearly 94% of the teachers have no clear idea about various psychometric tests that are available to measure the aptitude of the students. Nearly 68% of the teachers still believe that anybody can do any job if they work hard.

### *Attitude of new employees*

Data collected from newly joined supervisors in the textile industry shows that 38% took Commerce, 32% took Computers, 16% took Business related studies, 12% took Commerce with Computer Application and others Maths, English and Engineering in their Undergraduate studies. Except for those who studied BBM (bachelor's in business management), none of the supervisors have any background knowledge about working in a company or fundamental knowledge about the dynamics of human behaviour, except for a couple of days of training given by the HR in the workplace after joining. 34% of them are comfortable in their selection of jobs in the specific industry and 57% of the employees are ready to shift to other industries and jobs if they get an opportunity. 87% of the employees never thought that they would take up jobs as supervisors or in the textile industry. They studied undergraduate courses as per the availability of seats in the nearby colleges, guided by their parents who consulted some educated people in the villages regarding the easy availability of jobs, based on their friend's suggestions, sometimes all or some of the factors put together. Also, they were prepared mentally to do any job. Surprisingly, the reason for those who took BBM course is not their innate interest in business studies rather the presumed belief that it is easy to pass in the exams. Nearly 87% of the subjects in this category target salary as the prime concern for clinging on to their job as textile supervisors. They are prepared for job-hopping if a little higher paying job is available in any field.

*From the study results, the following issues related to the vocational choice of college students are identified,*

1. There is no clear knowledge among students regarding aptitude and interest while selecting a specific course in college. Therefore, career confusion creeps in the final year.
2. Schools or colleges do not offer any scientifically proven psychometric testing to students, to identify inner talents and to plan future based on aptitude and interest.
3. Students face the direct or indirect pressure of parental obsession in their selection of courses in higher education; they are also carried away by peer influence.
4. A good number of students opt for any graduation leading to any job, irrespective of their academics.
5. Students are quickly attracted by easy jobs and higher salaries. Once they take up a job, confused and defied by job roles which they are not able to identify and articulate.

The confused Indian college students' situation can be avoided only if there are explicit awareness among parents, teachers, and students that aptitude and interests play a vital role in success. The common belief that anybody can do any job is not applicable today. However, indulging in this conventional concept leads to confusion while selecting a job and failure after selection. Therefore, a specific paradigm shift should be mooted at multiple

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levels for a social transformation. The Indian educational system does not have a strict entrance test for colleges to identify aptitude and interest before they are admitted for a specific stream of study. Even though entrance tests are introduced for some professional courses, to fill the seats, they are seldom followed by most of the private colleges. Even the highly prestigious entrance exam (CAT) conducted by Premier Institutions measure only the verbal and numerical ability of the students in giving admission to Management courses, whereas the foreign GMAT exams measure specifically the managerial aptitude of the students (Janetius & Mini, 2015). Therefore, Indian society requires a paradigm shift and some policy change in higher studies and career choice are needed.

### Suggestions

The following suggestions are proposed based on the findings of the study.

1. Regular awareness programs in schools and communities should be organised for parents and students for a paradigm shift – from unscientific to scientific approach - regarding job selection and higher education preferences.
2. Schools and colleges should give preference to psychometric testing to help students to identify their inner talents.
3. Mandatory career counselling in the schools and colleges demand social workers and counsellors and the government should take necessary steps.
4. The government should introduce strong aptitude-based entrance policies for a meaningful career prospectus for the younger generation.

### CONCLUSION

The study highlights the current career confusion of college students and fresh graduates. Psychology explicitly affirms that aptitude, interest and the related personality variables play an important role in the success and failure of any career or business enterprise, the thought has not penetrated the Indian society. Consequently, parents, teachers and the students are unaware of the scientific knowledge on the functions of the brain and the role of inner potentials in any skilled performance. As such, anybody can do any job concept prevails in society. Educational institutions do not offer necessary psychometric testing and guidance services to students. This adds to the confusion of the younger generation and pulls down the overall job performance and job satisfaction over time. The society needs a paradigm shift in career choice and the government and other concerned bodies should focus on this area on a priority basis.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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