Editorial

Embedding Career Development in Education Systems: Evidence, Innovation, and Implications

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Career development has long occupied an uneasy position within Indian education—acknowledged rhetorically, addressed sporadically, and often relegated to the margins of schooling and training systems. Recent developments, however, suggest that this situation is no longer tenable. Empirical evidence, constitutional interpretation, and workforce trends together point to a compelling conclusion: career development must be embedded systematically within education systems if learners are to navigate transitions with clarity, confidence, and wellbeing.

Two decades ago, a large Indian regional survey of close 8,000 adolescents and youth, in 10 different regions of the country conducted in 8 languages showed that less than 1% of the individuals surveyed had access to career guidance (Arulmani, & Nag-Arulmani. (2005). A recent survey of over 21,000 students in Classes 9 to 12 across 14 districts in seven Indian states (UNICEF-YuWaah, & iDreamCareer, 2025), study found that only about one in ten students had access to professional career guidance during their critical decision-making years. Arulmani and Nag-Arulmani (2005) in the same study found that the mean consolidated career awareness score obtained by this sample was 13.21 (SD: 10.88). Given that the maximum score obtainable on this test is 84, this is an exceptionally low score, indicating a surprisingly low knowledge about the careers on the list. These findings indicate that very little has changed over 2 decades and starkly illustrate the magnitude of the challenge. High levels of uncertainty regarding subject and course choices, strong familial and social pressures, and limited consideration of individual aptitudes or interests characterised students' experiences. Such findings underline a structural gap rather than an individual deficit—one that leaves young people navigating complex educational and occupational pathways with minimal support. Emerging initiatives, including recent efforts by national boards to strengthen counsellor training, indicate growing recognition of this gap, though the challenge of scale and quality remains formidable.

This empirical concern has now acquired explicit normative and legal significance. In a landmark judgment delivered in July 2025 (Sukdeb Saha v. State of Andhra Pradesh & Ors., 2025), the Supreme Court of India affirmed mental health as integral to the fundamental Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. Importantly, the Court's binding guidelines for educational institutions explicitly mandate regular career guidance and parental sensitisation programmes, recognising the role of informed career decision-making in mitigating academic pressure, distress, and anxiety among students. Career guidance, in this framing, is no longer merely a facilitative service or an optional add-on; it is positioned as a core institutional responsibility linked to student wellbeing and dignity.

The longer-term implications of neglecting career development are visible beyond educational settings, in the world of work. Recent Gallup reports (e.g., Gallup, 2025) consistently indicate high levels of disengagement, stress, and job-switching intentions among Indian employees. While disengagement cannot be attributed to any single cause, persistent misalignment between individuals' interests, capabilities, and work roles raises important questions about how career choices are shaped, supported, and sustained over time. Seen together, patterns of inadequate guidance in schooling and disengagement in adulthood point to a continuum of unmet career development needs rather than isolated failures at particular stages. it is against this backdrop that the contributions in Issue 14 of the Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning assume particular significance. Collectively, the

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six papers move the conversation away from fragmented interventions towards evidence-informed, culturally responsive, and system-embedded approaches to career development.

Two papers from Kerala illustrate how structured, large-scale initiatives can be integrated within public education systems. **Joseph and colleagues** describe the design and implementation of the Learner Aptitude and Profiling (LEAP) programme, a state-level initiative reaching over 1,28,000 students at two key developmental stages. Grounded in systems-oriented and lifespan perspectives, LEAP demonstrates how aptitude assessment, interest exploration, and contextual support can be combined within a bilingual, school-based platform to enhance self-awareness and reduce career-related anxiety. Complementing this work, **Menon and colleagues** report the development of the Kerala Career Interest Survey (KCIS), a culturally relevant, interest-based tool designed specifically for Grade 10 students. Together, these studies underscore the importance of contextual validity, linguistic accessibility, and scalability in career guidance practice.

Anil Kumar and Saraswati's systematic review of Indian doctoral research offers a valuable meta-perspective on school-based career interventions. By synthesising evidence from theses conducted over more than two decades, the review highlights both the demonstrated effectiveness of structured interventions and the continued dominance of piecemeal approaches in practice. Their analysis reinforces the need for sustained, theoretically grounded programmes rather than isolated workshops or one-time assessments.

Extending the discussion beyond India, **Milosheva and colleagues** examine career information literacy among Scottish secondary school students, identifying digital skills, social skills, and resilience as essential competencies for informed decision-making. The inclusion of resilience as a core element is particularly salient, reminding practitioners that access to information alone is insufficient without the capacity to engage with uncertainty and complexity—an insight highly relevant to contemporary career education globally.

Two papers focus on transitions between education and work in regulated and marginalised contexts. **Marpna, Plain, and Pariat** analyse the implications of the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021, highlighting how regulatory reforms reshape professional pathways and create new demands on career educators and counsellors. **Malathi and Ramkumar's** qualitative study of vocational education among tribal students in Karnataka provides grounded insights into how culturally embedded vocational models can enhance career maturity, ease transitions, and expand life opportunities for first-generation learners.

Taken together, the papers in this issue affirm that career development is best understood not as a discrete event but as a developmental, relational, and systemic process. They point to three overarching implications. First, career guidance must be embedded institutionally—within curricula, teacher roles, and policy frameworks—rather than delivered as an ancillary service. Second, cultural and contextual responsiveness is not optional; it is central to relevance, equity, and effectiveness. Third, career development must be linked explicitly to wellbeing, capability, and lifelong engagement with work, not merely to immediate educational choice. As India grapples with rapid educational expansion, workforce transformation, and rising concerns about youth wellbeing, the need for coherent career development systems has never been more pressing. The contributions in this issue offer both evidence and imagination—demonstrating what is possible when career development is taken seriously as a public good and a shared institutional responsibility.

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