

# Linkage Between Imposed Career Study, Career Planning, and Employability Perceptions Among Higher Education Students: An Empirical Investigation of Afghanistan

Kardan Journal of Social Sciences  
and Humanities

4 (2) 1–18

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Kardan Publications

Kabul, Afghanistan

DOI: 10.31841/KJSSH.2022.41

<https://kardan.edu.af/Research/CurrentIssue.aspx?j=KJSSH>

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## Abstract

Delving into the health of the education system and unfolding the graduate labour market conditions, this study aims to address the limited empirical analysis of Kabul higher education students' approaches to career planning and perceptions of Afghanistan's labour market. This study has carried out an extensive theoretical and empirical analysis to help enhance the understanding of the impact imposed that can significantly impact students' sense of career planning and the labour market in the bigger picture. The study revealed evidence from a survey among university undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students, a total of two hundred students across various disciplines. The findings show that imposed educational streams negatively impact both students' career planning and the labour market. The study also demonstrates that students who reported positive perceptions of the labour market were the ones who had better control over their careers. There was also evidence that students who experienced less influence on their career choice positively perceived employability and the labour market. In contrast, students who reported negative perceptions of the labour market were seen to have the involvement of other factors while choosing their career field and could not plan their career correctly, resulting in their negative perception of the labour market. The study raises significant implications for higher education policy makers in identifying ways of improving students' transition to higher education and the realisation of the system's set to assist students in better planning their careers to better cope with today's challenging labour market.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Imposed Career Study, Employability Perceptions, Labor Market, Career Planning, Higher Education.

## Introduction

Youth are tangible assets to any country, particularly an underdeveloped country like Afghanistan, where there is a significant brain drain due to ongoing conflict and insecurity. There is an increasing demand for education in a country where just over half (54 per cent) of young Afghans are literate.<sup>1</sup> The current enrolment in higher education institutions, public and private, is more than 300,000 students. On the other hand, half of all high school graduates do not have access to higher education. In this situation, the only weapon in the arsenal is access to education. The educational system directly impacts the country's economic, social, and developmental growth. It is commonly understood that no

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. (2020, Feb 17). The World Bank in Afghanistan.

government can alleviate poverty, achieve sustainable economic development, or produce trained human resources without significant human capital investment. Higher education is broadly implicated in economic terms because of the myriad benefits that it induces. They include a broad range of economic, social, political, and other well-being indicators, including family health, social mobility, social cohesion, political stability, and inter-generational economic and social benefits that impact income and well-being.<sup>2,3</sup> Higher education improves people's abilities and knowledge, resulting in increased innovation, productivity, creativity, entrepreneurship, and technical advancements. Afghanistan suffers from a declining economy due to war, poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education, and low per-capita income. This country is heavily threatened and impacted by rampant poverty and deficient government bureaucracies that provide substandard services due to limited resource availability and capacity constraints.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the unemployment rate that stands close to 40 per cent has left many families to survive on minimal conditions.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the per capita income of people in Afghanistan in 2018 significantly dropped to \$520 from \$621 in 2019.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the net attendance rate in secondary education fell from thirty-seven per cent to thirty-five per cent between 2013 and 2019, driven by declining attendance among girls.<sup>7</sup> In a situation where just over half (54 per cent) of young Afghans are literate<sup>8</sup>, there is an increasing demand for education.

Education is an essential tool for investing in human capital development since it allows individuals to contribute to their economic progress. The literature on the influence on career planning is subtle in scholarly studies, and how students perceive contemporary labour market demands is scarce. The literature suggests that career choice is considered the most significant dilemma and challenge in a student's life, mainly because getting a quality higher education offers opportunities for students to have more prosperous jobs in the labour market.<sup>9</sup> This study aims to explore the relationship between imposed career studies, perceived employability, career planning, and labour market perception of students in Kabul, Afghanistan. It will enhance understanding of the impact of imposed career studies on student approaches to careers, employability, and labour market perceptions. This study further investigates the importance of deciding career choices for students based on their skills, interests, and enthusiasm and how imposed career studies negatively impact students' labour market and employability perceptions. The study aims at higher education policymakers to review the current strategies and procedures in place for students' effective measurement and evaluation methods. There is a need to measure effectiveness and compare the processes against the best practices that other

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, K. H., & Heaney, M. T. (1997). A note on measuring the economic impact of institutions of higher education. *Research in Higher Education*, 38(2), 229-240.

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank. (2013). *Higher education in Afghanistan: An emerging mountainscape*. Washington D.C.

<sup>4</sup> IWA. (2018). Gap analysis of Afghanistan's conflict of interest regulations. Kabul: *Integrity Watch Afghanistan*.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. (2020, Feb 17). The World Bank in Afghanistan.

<sup>6</sup> NSIA. (2018). Afghanistan statistical yearbook. Kabul: National Statistics and Information Authority.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank. (2020, Feb 17). The World Bank in Afghanistan.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> İÇBAY, M. A. (2005). *A SWOT Analysis on the university entrance examination in Turkey: A case study*. *Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1(1).

countries use to better determine which field matches which student and set admission requirements for each faculty. In doing so, students, based on their skill set, passion, and consent, get involved in the field that they know they can master and become experts in while serving Afghanistan.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Educational Structure and status of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan remains one of the world's least developed countries, despite having over \$1 trillion in proven undeveloped mineral resources. The development will not occur if youths are unable to study careers based on their skills and interests for any reason and are instead forced to study fields that do not take their abilities and interests into account. Lack of specialized studies in schools, absence of public or private organisations to help students decide on careers of study among 150 fields. Outdated learning materials, sometimes even handwritten, and higher education lessons in the local language are all challenges that negatively impact students' career planning and their employability chances in the labour market. Based on their lived experiences, most public university students attend classes only to finish the course and get their degree. When students graduate, they often opt to work in an area outside of their educational background. The labour market requires soft skills such as advanced English and computer skills that students do not master in primary, secondary, high school, or higher education. Unless they join private institutions to learn English, overall, this situation is seen to cause students' frustration in the field of study they have been put in. Overlooking the importance of education causes unemployment and other social, security, and developmental concerns and severe challenges for the country.

In Afghanistan, education begins in primary school and continues through secondary and higher education. After completing twelve years of school, the pupils can take the national university admission examination called "*Kankor*," which was created back in 1966. Students who fail the exams will have to retake them a year later. *Kankor* is held once a year, and students are allowed to participate in it twice throughout their lifetime. In Afghanistan, private higher educational institutions with their own entrance examinations exist. One of the contrasts between public and private universities is that public universities provide free education and offer diverse academic careers. In contrast, private universities offer a restricted number of fields based on student demand, varying for each specialization. Bachelor's degrees (usually four years; there are exceptions, such as veterinary medicine, which takes five years and medicine takes seven years), master's degrees (two-three years), and doctorate/Ph.D. degrees make up the main framework of higher education (at least three years). In Afghanistan, just a few Master's and PhD degree programmes exist, creating a looming problem in expanding educational access. The current higher education system of Afghanistan comprises a combination of 36 public and 140 private sector universities (MoHE, 2020), and the preferred disciplines are medicine, engineering, computer science, economics, and law. Admissions to higher education degrees depend on the available seats at higher education institutions and colleges, apart from

universities and popular majors<sup>10</sup> (Bamik, 2019). The Kankor Examination Committee of the MoHE matches the Kankor score of each student according to the students' choices. It gives them access accordingly, providing that they can obtain the necessary score for entering higher education institutions. Hence, if a student does not meet the requirements mentioned earlier, they will fail the Kankor examination and need to retake the test next year (Hamidullah & Samiullah, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). If a student does not score high enough in any of their chosen fields of study in the Kankor system, they are dropped entirely and are not assigned any field of study, a result known as "result-less" (Ali, 2015). A generic review of Kankor examinations in Afghanistan *sans* specialization, choices for students to select their field of study, the ability of students to undertake the exams multiple times, and the number of students who fail Kankor and their education as challenges (Bamik, 2019).<sup>11</sup> While the research suffers from insufficient methodological rigour and delves into outlandish generalizations, it nonetheless offers contextual information about the organisation and conduct of Kankor examinations in the country. It articulates problem statements that describe issues that affect university entrance for students, universities, and the government. Furthermore, scarce resources, public sector capacity constraints, and social and conflict dynamics have further impacted the efficacy of the Kankor system.<sup>12</sup> The increase in enrolment is "noticeable from 2009 onwards when earlier primary and secondary education expansion began to feed into the higher education sector".<sup>13</sup> Considering the growth in higher education in the country, with a median age of 19.5 and a population growth rate of above 2.38 per cent, the demand for higher education will continue to grow exponentially over the coming years.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.2 Labor Market status of Afghanistan**

Quality education and economic performance are more tightly linked in general; if one improves, the other improves as well, and vice versa. The last decade has been focused on security; most essential stakeholders in Afghanistan have paid insufficient attention to a socio-economic time bomb that threatens to derail all long-term efforts by local and international actors. According to the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations, with children under 15 accounting for 49 per cent of the population. The lack of a structured labour market and long-term employment prospects adds to the country's deep economic and social uncertainties. Furthermore, unemployment and underemployment are undoubtedly two of the country's most intractable challenges, and a lack of productive and good job possibilities is a crucial driver of poverty. Afghanistan has received large amounts of development aid for numerous years, but despite this, Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries. According to the

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<sup>10</sup> Bamik, H. (2019). Restructuring the Kankor examination format; A feasible solution for the existing issues with the current Kankor examination in Afghanistan. *Humanitarian and Socio-Economic Sciences Journal*, (2), 12-29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> World Bank. (2020, Feb 17). The World Bank in Afghanistan.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> CIA World Factbook, 2020

World Bank<sup>15</sup>, the industry employs 18.25 per cent of Afghans (based on a modelled ILO estimate). In June of 2021, the World Bank provided actual values, historical data, forecasts, and projections. The relationship between education and employment is critical for analysing and comprehending Afghanistan's labour market. "Afghanistan's labour laws do not reach international standards, and the government has been unable to begin tackling the country's unemployment problems." Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations. The countries' unemployment rates have been steadily rising over time. Even in rural areas, where over 70% of the Afghan workforce lives and open unemployment is expected to be low, jobless rates remain incredibly high. Women's participation rates in the country are likewise among the weakest in the area. Even though women's participation rates in Afghanistan are declining, their withdrawal from the labour market, the drop in informal work pattern, and the resultant rise in open unemployment may all be tied to safety and security concerns, according to the employment scenario in Afghanistan from 2007-08 to 2018-19.

### 2.3 Imposed career study

A plethora of studies suggest that students of all genders confront the same dilemma regarding choosing career options. For girls and boys finishing high school and heading to college, decisions about elective subjects, specialised courses, and later careers are equally stressful and challenging.<sup>16</sup> They must consider their selections in light of their living circumstances, interests, and academic success. It's worth noting that both genders place a premium on high-status employment. Job stereotyping has also been noticed between genders, with boys preferring high-paying careers and girls preferring to work in schools and day-cares. A person's passion for a specific profession plays a significant role in deciding on a professional path. When a student is pushed into a career, they may develop low self-esteem and perform poorly. According to Shury<sup>17</sup>, various research has found a helpful link between interests and professional choice. It has also been discovered that people who perform better academically can better evaluate themselves.<sup>18</sup> According to Taneja<sup>19</sup>, a child who grows up in an atmosphere where their parents and their lives support them in harmony is more likely to be dictated to by them. In this case, a child's occupational ambitions are most likely influenced by their parents' occupation. Research studies on professional choice, on the other hand, are heavily influenced by the students' surroundings, society, and family.<sup>20,21</sup> It is stated that emerging countries lead their students towards vocations based on their needs<sup>22</sup>. Various cultures have different acceptance levels for other professions, influencing an individual's career

<sup>15</sup> World Bank. The World Bank in Afghanistan, (2020, Feb 17).

<sup>16</sup> Issa, Abdulwahab Olanrewaju. "An assessment of the perception of library school students towards librarianship at the University of Ilorin: a pilot study." In *Library and information science in developing countries: contemporary issues*, pp. 148-168. IGI Global, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Shury, Jan, and IFF Research Ltd. *Planning for Success: Graduates' Career Planning and Its Effect on Graduate Outcomes*. London: Department for Education, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, Julia, and Steve McKenna. "International experience and academic careers: what do academics have to say?." *Personnel review* (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Taneja, V. R. *Socio-philosophical approach to education*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Goodman, Alan Paul. *Professional choice, socialization, and career development of graduate students in student personnel work*. The Ohio State University, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Popova, I. P. "Professional choice: the influence of the cultural resources of the families of Russian specialists." *Russian Education & Society* 56, no. 10 (2014): 3-23.

<sup>22</sup> Watts, A. G. "Learning for jobs." *The relationship of Career Guidance to VET*. Paris: OCDE (2009).

decision<sup>23</sup>. As a result, socioeconomic variables play a role in influencing students' selection of professional decisions.<sup>24</sup> Due to budgetary restrictions, Ngesi<sup>25</sup> states that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds made poor career choices and picked jobs requiring little training.

On the other hand, in today's environment, the media has a massive influence on decision-making at all levels. Commercial advertising is mainly responsible for gender stereotypes. Various ads and posters provide information about different professions. These signals influence people, and they pursue jobs that are not generally connected with their gender. Children are more educated about scenarios they see on television and movies than they are about reality<sup>26</sup>, which has a significant influence on their career decisions. Similarly, it is claimed that the media, particularly television, trains us to value vocations portrayed as more socially valued in society.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly "television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet, billboards, and marketing materials," are some of the ways we are assaulted with information. These types of commercials have a lasting influence on young people during their personal growth.<sup>28</sup> The lack of knowledge about various occupations is one aspect that determines career choice. Due to a lack of information, students misunderstand vocations, which inhibits them from choosing them.

Several studies show that students are frustrated and depressed due to being forced to choose a career. For example, one of the study demonstrates that numerous elements influence students' career choices and negatively affect students' career planning techniques. The study emphasises parents' effect on their children's professional decisions and shows that parents' influence on their children's lives is evident. The problem arises when parents are unaware of current trends and advancements in the various professional options available. Most of the time, some studies<sup>29</sup> point out, parents have already decided on their children's careers and are simply steering them in that direction. When assessing professional possibilities, they consider job prospects and long-term stability in life. Furthermore, some parents wish to realise their ambitions by forcing a particular job path on their children. An individual's environment, talents, skills, and academic accomplishments impact professional choice. If you make the wrong decision, you may experience failure and disappointment as a result.<sup>30</sup> Studies have noted that men's professional choices are influenced by their financial circumstances, as they

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<sup>23</sup> Liu, Yan, Yina Mao, and Chi-Sum Wong. "Theorizing parental intervention and young adults' career development: a social influence perspective." *Career Development International* (2020).

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, Jeffrey, Marcia B. Harris, and Susan Taylor. "Parents have their say... about their college-age children's career decisions." *Nace Journal* 64, no. 2 (2004): 15-21.

<sup>25</sup> Kazi, Asma Shahid, and Abeeda Akhlaq. "Factors Affecting Students' Career Choice." *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education (JRRE)* 11, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>26</sup> Trujillo, Nick. "Interpreting (the work and the talk of) baseball: Perspectives on ballpark culture." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 56, no. 4 (1992): 350-371.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> Dominick, Joseph R. *The dynamics of mass communication: Media in the digital age*. Tata McGraw-Hill Education, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Enisan, Catherine Ngozi. "Family characteristics and psychosocial correlates of developmental delay among under-five children in two communities in Lagos." PhD diss., 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmed, Kazi Afaq, Nimra Sharif, and Nawaz Ahmad. "Factors influencing students' career choices: empirical evidence from business students." *Journal of Southeast Asian Research* 2017, no. 2017 (2017): 1-15.

must fund household needs. Whereas women are more concerned with societal ideals and utility.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, according to certain studies<sup>32</sup> (Khan and Wani, 2021), imposed job choices have long-term consequences for kids' intellectual development, affecting emotional intelligence and cognitive growth. As a result of imposed job choices, students experience sadness, attrition, become ineffective citizens, and engage in societal evils. Students who choose their careers are more successful in school and have higher general happiness levels and confidence in their academic abilities. As a result, they have a heightened sense of self-worth and are neither anxious nor upset. Finally, the study concludes that forcing kids to choose a job leads to increased frustration and unhappiness. As a result, parents should learn about their children's psyches and interests to make an informed decision about academic paths rather than force their choices.

#### 2.4 Student perspectives on contemporary Labor market demands

Students are aware of the current graduate labour market's issues and feel intimidated by job rivalry and the daily rise in underemployment. However, the decreasing value of a degree for obtaining graduate-level employment is an apparent source of anxiety for the.<sup>33</sup> People with generalist degree programs, such as the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, as opposed to professional degrees (such as Engineering, Education, and Health), are linked to better employment results. Nonetheless, it is contended that earning a degree is still worthwhile, citing graduates' higher salaries and better job possibilities as evidence. Students recognise the diminishing value of their academic credentials in an uncertain labour market, and thus, gaining a competitive advantage appears to be the only way to boost job prospects. As a result, this study examines how students see the labour market during their studies and how perspectives change among disciplines.<sup>34</sup>

#### 2.5 Perceived employability and career planning

One of the essential worries of students is their self-perceived employability; for example, they are concerned about their skills, experiences, aspirations, and perceptions of their capacity to compete in the externally demanding job market<sup>35</sup> (Rothwell et al., 2008, 153). There are established measures for perceived employability that implicitly draw on the individual's understanding of external labour market conditions.<sup>36,37</sup> Recent research suggests that students have a

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<sup>31</sup> Eccles, Jacquelynne S. "Understanding women's educational and occupational choices: Applying the Eccles et al. model of achievement-related choices." *Psychology of women quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1994): 585-609.

<sup>32</sup> Wani, N. U. H., & Khan, K. "Afghanistan's Kankor examination: Challenges and solutions". *Annual Conference on Higher Education Development in Afghanistan (ACHEDA-21)*, Kabul, Afghanistan. (2021).

<sup>33</sup> Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2016). *Overqualification and skills mismatches in the graduate labour market*. London: CIPD.

<sup>34</sup> Roulin, N., & Bangerter, A. (2013). Students' use of extra-curricular activities for positional advantage in competitive job markets. *Journal of Education and Work*, 26(1), 21-47

<sup>35</sup> Rothwell, A., & Arnold, J. (2007). Self-perceived employability: Development and validation of a scale. *Personnel Review*, 36(1), 23-41.

<sup>36</sup> Buddeberg-Fischer, B., Klaghofer, R., Abel, T., & Buddeberg, C. (2003). The influence of gender and personality traits on the career planning of Swiss medical students. *Swiss Medical Weekly*, 133(39-40), 535-540.

<sup>37</sup> Rothwell, A., & Arnold, J. (2007). Self-perceived employability: Development and validation of a scale. *Personnel Review*, 36(1), 23-41.

reasonable opinion of their employability<sup>38</sup>, yet this could be due to a lack of awareness about graduate labour market saturation.

When it comes to career planning, how an individual sets goals and formulates strategies to achieve their desired outcomes is essential to consider<sup>39</sup>. In addition, career planning is critical for finding work and obtaining fulfilment<sup>40</sup>, particularly in today's dynamic and demanding workplace.<sup>41</sup> The drivers of career planning among students and the influence of the current labour market will aid in the design of improved methods for advancing career planning and achieving positive outcomes. The relevance of professional confidence and control in determining planning is highlighted by social-cognitive career theory. However, other circumstances, such as a lack of resources, financial demands, and labour market conditions, also have a role. In deciding on career planning and control, psychologically-based career theory emphasises the relevance of students' expectations, goals, and involvement<sup>42</sup>.

In contrast, the sociologically based approach affirms that opportunity is organised by external, regulating circumstances and hence identified a strong internal locus of control and self-efficacy as key for finding and realising work-related opportunities, allowing individuals to be less reliant on external influences and more likely to plan to manage uncertain situations. There is some evidence that older students plan more allowing the impact of individual characteristics to be investigated. In addition to gender and age, the effects of residency, socioeconomic level, occupation, and study factors such as stage of study and discipline need a serious re-examination.<sup>43</sup>

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study uses quantitative research. The primary data is collected from students, alumni of Kabul province, and the secondary information is collected from reliable sources, i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, and reports of ministries like the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and Ministry of Education (MoE). A survey was designed in both English and Dari languages to consider the study objectives and was consulted. The survey included a total of ten questions on a Likert scale and some multiple-choice questions as well. Accurate instrumentation is used for this study, and the data collection is close-ended. Likert scale questions measure questions; they are divided into (strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Agree, and strongly disagree). The sharing of questionnaires with students was shared through links to students via email and social media platforms. The questionnaire

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<sup>38</sup> Jackson, D., & Wilton, N. (2017). *Perceived employability among undergraduates and the importance of career self-management, work experience and individual characteristics*. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 36(4), 747–762.

<sup>39</sup> Gould, S. (1979). Characteristics of career planners in upwardly mobile occupations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 22(3), 539–550.

<sup>40</sup> Sury, J. (2017). Planning for success: Graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes. London: Department for Education.

<sup>41</sup> Spilerman, S. (1977). Careers, labor market structure, and socioeconomic achievement. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(3), 551–593.

<sup>42</sup> Singh, S. K. (2015). Academic and psychological consequences of imposed career choices.

<sup>43</sup> Tomlinson, M. (2017). *Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability*. *Education + Training*, 59(4), 338–352.



was distributed widely to ensure a broad range of disciplines and universities in Afghanistan. This research uses the scale measurement since the collected responses strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, which are used to rank. The order does matter in them since they cannot measure the differences.

Both primary and secondary data are collected and used in this study. The primary data is collected from the Kabul province students and alumni. The secondary information is collected through books, research studies, and related journal articles. The population of this study are the students and alumni of bachelor's and master's degrees in different universities and various disciplines; the questionnaire is circulated through email and social media. Among the respondents, sixty-six percent were male, whereas thirty-four percent were female. The study's unit of analysis is the individual level. This study used principal components analysis (PCA) to assess scale validity with all factors and consolidate all feedback into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v. 28.0) and the descriptive statistics to understand the data received.

### **3.2 Principal Components Analysis (PCA)**

Principal components analysis is a dimensionality-reduction technique that reduces the dimensionality of large data sets by reducing an extensive collection of variables into a smaller group that retains the majority of the information in the more comprehensive set.

Naturally, reducing the number of variables in a data set reduces accuracy. Nevertheless, the answer to dimensionality reduction is to exchange some accuracy for simplicity. To summarize, PCA's goal is to reduce the number of variables in a data collection while maintaining as much information as feasible. PCA is employed when a researcher wants to reduce the number of variables but can't figure out which ones to leave out totally. Furthermore, to confirm that the variables are unrelated to one another, When the goal is to make the independent variables less interpretable, it's even better.

### **3.3 Participants' Characteristics**

A total of two hundred students from various Kabul universities participated in the survey by filling out an online questionnaire. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants. The sample primarily covers the population, with a proportionately higher number of males than females: out of 200 respondents, 68 were female, and 132 were male. Students were at various stages of their studies; fifty-seven percent of those polled had a master's degree, with forty-five percent hailing from Kardan University and 55 percent hailing Kabul University. Respondents came from a variety of disciplines and universities both in Afghanistan and abroad.

**Table 1: Summary of Participants Characteristics**

Variable	Sub groups	N	Valid Percentage
Gender	Female	68	34
	Male	132	66
Stage of Study	Bachelor Degree	85	42.5
	Master's Degree	115	57.5
Field of Study ( Bachelor)	Arts and Humanities	28	14.5
	Health and Social Care	18	9
	Social Science	125	57.5
	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math's (STEM)	39	19.5
	Graduate (Bachelor)	87	43.5
	MBA	92	46
	MIR	11	5.5
Field of Study (Masters)	MCS	2	1
	MPM	1	0.5
	LLM	2	1
	MEng	2	1
	Gender Studies	3	1.5
Representation of Uni (Bachelor)	Public Uni	122	62
	Private Uni	78	38
Representation of Uni (Masters)	Public Uni	14	7
	Private Uni	99	89.5
	Foreign Uni	7	3.5
Educational Status of Parents	Up to certain grade lower than high school	70	35
	High school graduate	35	17.5
	Bachelor	55	27.5
	Master	34	17
	Doctorate	6	3
Postgraduate Degree relevant to Bachelor Degree	Graduate (Bachelor)	76	38
	No	57	28.5
Student working status	Yes	54	27
	Missing System	13	6.5
	Unemployed	35	17.5
	Part-time employed in role related to targeted career	10	5
	Full-time employed in role unrelated to targeted career	67	33.5
	Full-time employed in role related to targeted career	88	44

*Note: Arts and Humanities represents: linguistics, Fine Arts, Environmental studies. Health and Social Care represents: Medicine, Midwifery and Veterinary. Social Science represents Law and Political Science, Journalism, Psychology, Business Administration, Public Administration and Education studies.*

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

This study has received data from a diverse range of disciplines from various universities in Afghanistan. The most significant percentages represent business administration and law and political science, respectively, and the lowest percentages are midwifery, psychology, fine arts, different literature languages, environmental studies, etc. The diversity of data collection has helped to have more accurate and reliable results. The table below indicates that more students

opt to switch to a field other than their bachelor's degree. When analysing the data collected on the imposed career study, it points out that various factors impose students to follow career streams other than their expectations and aspirations.

### 3.4 Reliability Analysis

As shown in table 2, Cronbach's Alpha of the collected data has a value of 0.687, which is greater than 0.6 and means that there is internal consistency in the collected data and the collected data is reliable.

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
ICS	.644
CP	.655
LMP	.696
EP	.621

*Note: ICS stands for (Imposed career study), CP (Career planning), LMP (Labor Market Perception), EP (Employment perception)*

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

**Table 3: Relevance of bachelor degree with Master's degree**

	N	Percent
Graduate ( Bachelor)	76	38
No	57	28.5
Yes	54	27
Missing System	13	6.5

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

### 3.5 Measures

Except for background information, all items were operationalized and summarized using Likert agreement scales. The principal component analysis (PCA) was used to assess scale validity with all factor loadings. For reliability, Cronbach's alpha is employed to evaluate inter-item consistency of scales, both of which exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.687. Respondents first described their attributes (see Table 3). The educational attainment of parents was used to determine socioeconomic position. Literature has shown that a parent's education influences their child's professional choice (Grissmer, 2003; Ogunlade, 1973). It's also been discovered that their parents' schooling affects a student's professional choice. Literature also supports the idea that a student's parents' educational degree is the most crucial determinant in their career choices (Grissmer, 2003; Ogunlade, 1973). As children's first teachers, parents serve as guides, advisors, and counselors. According to Bladeless, as mentioned in Nyarko-Sampson (2013), parents put emotional pressure on their children when it comes to professional choices. They seek independent advice on the job path that they believe is best for their children. They are never concerned about the child's preferences. According to a study by Mickelson and Velasco (1998), women have a more significant influence on their children than fathers. Another research-backed fact is that youngsters prefer to talk about their intentions and preferences with their mothers rather than their fathers (Muthukrishna & Sokoya, 2008). According to the data gathered, thirty-five per cent of the student's parents are illiterate or have studied to a grade below high school, 27.5 percent are bachelor, and 17.5 percent are high school graduates.

**Table 4: Educational Status of Parents**

	Frequency	Percent
Up to certain grade lower than high school	70	35
High school graduate	35	17.5
Bachelor	55	27.5
Master	34	17
Doctorate	6	3
Total	200	100

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

Students were classified as full-time and part-time employed in roles related to their targeted career, full-time employed in positions unrelated to their targeted career, part-time employed in roles unrelated to their targeted career, and unemployed in terms of work experience. According to the figures below, forty-four percent of students work in fields unrelated to their field of study, and 17.5 percent are unemployed. Only 33.5 percent work full-time in a job linked to their profession, and five percent work part-time in a position connected to their academic field.

**Table 5: Student Working Status**

	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	35	17.5
Part-time employed in role related to targeted career	10	5
Full-time employed in role unrelated to targeted career	88	44
Full-time employed in role related to targeted career	67	33.5
Total	200	100

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

#### **4. Analysis**

Initially, the study examined the mean differences in respondent perceptions of the labour market, but none were found. The mean differences for all the remaining elements were then investigated, with just a tiny percentage reporting significant differences. As a result, the combination was declared acceptable. As the study relies on self-reported data, Harman's single factor test was used to assess standard method variance. As the overall variation of all variables was less than 50%, common method bias was not a significant concern in this research. Normality was assessed for variables and checked the z values were to be within the span of -1.96 to +1.96, and they were within the normal limits. The study employed SPSS 28.0 to analyse the data. The mean and standard deviation of variables related to labour market perspective, perceived employability, career planning, and determinants of imposed career study were calculated using descriptive approaches first. Bivariate correlations were used to determine the relationship between variables, and multiple regression was used to investigate the research questions and hypotheses. All four variables (career planning,

imposed career study, employability perception, and labour market perception) were employed for regression analysis.

#### 4.1 Results

The mean and standard deviation for each item are shown in Table 6. These are briefly reviewed before examining the relationship between imposed vocational studies and labor market perceptions and employability perceptions.

**Table 6: Mean and Standard Deviation**

	Mean	SD
<b>Imposed academic field</b>		
Your own personal expectations/ aspirations	2.50	.47
Parent's personal expectations/aspirations	3.17	.63
Mutual consent between you and your parents	2.37	.93
Kankor Exam	3.30	.58
Financial standing of parents	2.34	1.0
Friends/Peers	1.96	.46
Job prospects related to a particular career	2.64	1.12
Teachers	1.94	.39
Social Media/ News/Magazines/Internet	1.93	.36
<b>Career Planning</b>		
I often think about and plan for my future career	3.32	.60
I am aware of the future career choices I need to make	3.17	.63
I look to explore all the potential career options open to me	3.07	.66
I work on enhancing my employability a lot	3.29	.58
I work hard to increase my employment	3.36	.60
Field research and informational interviews should be conducted to decide between different fields to pursue i.e. meeting with people in different positions or industries that you are interested in and asking them questions about their job	3.27	.60
Societal perception of different professions and industries influences my career path	2.59	.89
I work on enhancing my employability a lot	3.30	.53
<b>Labor Market</b>		
I believe there is a good range of job opportunities for current graduates	1.99	.97
The competition for jobs is a concern to me	3.23	.72
I feel that many graduates are likely to be employed in jobs below graduate level	3.23	.68
I feel that it is difficult for graduates to enter the jobs of their choice	3.45	.60
The uncertainty of casual and fixed-term work concerns me	3.08	.69
I am quite anxious about the job market	3.27	.72
Vacancies are announced for formality purposes, the candidate are preselected	3.31	.74
It's hard to get employed without having people to recommend you	3.22	.76
It's very unlikely to be employed while having no prior	3.27	.75

experience		
<b>Perceived Employability</b>		
I feel my skills and experiences will be sought after by future employers	3.145	.61
I believe that I will do well when competing with other graduates for jobs	3.355	.56
I feel confident to enter my targeted profession when I graduate	3.07	.76
I have to study English language and computer skills to be able to find a job	3.62	.51
Internships facilitated by the higher education helps students enter the job market and gain experience	3.43	.59
It's easier for females to get a job	3.06	.87

*Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0*

Given the absence of empirical study on students' perceptions of the state of labour market needs, the researcher created nine measures to capture labour market perception. All of this is related to the likelihood of obtaining a desired job, as well as the causes of unemployment and underemployment. The computed Cronbach alpha for the items was .696, and PCA revealed a single construct, with factor loadings ranging from .367 to .832 and a factor explaining 3.661 of total variance. Table 7 shows bivariate relationships for each of the tested constructs, and as such, the values are less than 0.6, thereby reflecting no collinearity issues.

**Table 7: Bivariate Correlations (N=200)**

	CP	ICS	SLM
Measure	1	2	3
1. Career planning	1		
2. Imposed Career Study	-.131	1	
3. Status of Labor Market	.241	-.051	1
4. Employability Perception	.474	-.056	.403

*Source: Data output from SPSS V28.0*

#### **4.1 Labor Market Perception and Career Behavior**

To proceed with regression, the data was examined for multicollinearity. The VIF and tolerance figures fall within the normal range and indicate that the data does not have any collinearity issues, as presented in Table 9. Furthermore, the first item on the list for the labor market's perceived state showed a poor view of the labor market. Students' mean assessments (Table 7) revealed some ambiguity and concern about the labor market's soundness. Students appeared to be aware of the difficulties associated with underemployment and the limited number of work opportunities accessible, and understood the intensity of competition in the labour market very well. According to the mean scores for perceived employability, the majority of respondents lacked confidence in their ability to succeed in the labor market. The findings revealed that the respondents appeared to have internalised the duty and relevance of career management but had doubts about their ability to do so.

The factors influencing the respondents' labour market attitudes were investigated using multiple linear regression (Refer to Table 8). Labor market perception is a regressand in the table, whereas imposed career study, career planning, and employability perception are regressors. Based on the coefficients in table 8, career planning and employability perception have significant statistical significance in the labor market, whereas imposed career study does not. Its relevance is 0.744, which is more than 0.05. If career planning increases by one value, there will be a positive change of 0.071 in the labor market perception. The more individuals plan their careers, the more the perception of the labor market will be positive. On the other hand, for the imposed career study, the value is negative, which means that if careers are assessed, there will be a negative impact on the labor market. Eventually, the table below indicates a positive relationship between the labor market and the employability perceptions of students.

**Table 8: Coefficients- Labor Market Perception**

			Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	St. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.71	.31		5.52	<.001		
Imposed Career Study	-.018	.05	-.02	-.32	.744	.983	1.018
Employability Perception	.37	.07	.37	4.87	<.001	.776	1.289
Career Planning	.071	.08	.06	.80	.422	.765	1.308

Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0

**Table 9: Coefficients DV (Career Planning)**

			Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.88	.24		7.66	.081		
Imposed Career Study	-.07	.04	-.10	-	.109	.996	1.0
Employability Perception	.39	.06	.44	6.32	.091	.836	1.19
Labour Market Perception	.05	.06	.05	.80	.422	.837	1.19

Source: Data output from SPSS v. 28.0

The table 9 indicates that the figures are in the normal range i.e. between 0.10 and maximum less than 10.0, thus there is no collinearity issues present in this data. Further to add, the results suggest the negative association of imposed career study on career planning. The rest variables (employability Perception, and labour market perception) are in positive relation with career planning.

## **4.2 Discussion and Implications**

The study points to some significant areas of concern that indicate that imposed career study is being applied to students in Afghanistan and is a challenge. Since it negatively impacts students' approaches to career planning and affects their perceptions of the labor market and employability chances. Meanwhile, the importance of planning one's career will positively impact students' interest in their field of study, resulting in robust and confident graduates who will capitalize on growth in specific sectors/industries.

The data collected, although male-centric, the respondents were either students, graduates, or postgraduate students of bachelor and master degrees. The respondents were from diverse disciplines and faculties, both public and private, that serve as a good sample for the analysis. Interestingly a higher percentage of respondents implied that their master's degree is not relevant to their bachelor's degree, which is a question that can have various reasons. Based on the inquiries related to the ICS, it was identified that there was the influence of different factors while choosing their bachelor's field of study, and the same students have been seen to answer that they work in a role unrelated to their targeted career. The remaining respondents were reported to be unemployed. To better understand the reason behind the ICS, parents' educational status is also taken into consideration. A higher percentage of parents have a student up to a grade lower than high school or were only a high school graduate, which backs up two factors of the factors influencing students' career choice (Parent's personal expectations/ aspirations and financial standing of parents).

Regarding respondents' employability, the collected data highlighted that seventeen and a half percent of the respondents were unemployed. Forty-four percent of the respondents were working in roles unrelated to their targeted careers. Thirty-three and a half percent of the respondents were working in their roles related to their targeted career, and 5 percent of the respondents were engaged in part-time jobs related to their targeted career. Therefore indicates that a higher percentage of respondents are working in roles unrelated to their career paths.

According to table 8 in the questions related to the ICS, students have responded that parent's expectations and aspirations and the Kankor exam had the most influence on choosing their career paths. They mostly agreed with the CP statements except for the statement (societal perception of different professions and industries influences my career path) that seemed to have a relatively lower mean than the other statements. For the LM statements, the responses are pretty interesting.

The respondents highly disagree that there is a good range of job opportunities available, feel concerned and anxious about the competition in the job market. They believe that vacancies are announced only for formality purposes. Without connections/ references and enough experience, it's difficult for them to get a job. The PE statements expressed positivity for the first three statements that showed their confidence and belief that they would do well in the competition with other graduates and their skills will be sought by employers. They also highlighted that they consider the English language quite important for employability chances



in AFG and pointed out that it's easier for females to secure a job than male graduates.

Students must get a thorough awareness of the current labor market's status and issues; yet, given the documented links between critical career study and the labor market, this must be carefully controlled. In identifying career paths, there is a need to combine students' comprehension of labor market developments. According to the study, students have a wrong opinion of their employability and labor market standing, and the culprit has been identified as an imposed career study.

The study's findings reaffirmed the necessity for ways to involve domestic students in active goal-setting. The importance of students developing a strong sense of career self-management is highlighted because both perceived employability and career control significantly predicted career planning. The importance of goal planning is also highlighted, as those who are proactive in this area are more likely to have a strong job market position.

## **5. Conclusion**

The results of the study showed a wide range of problems faced by graduates in Afghanistan's labour markets, including the variety of available possibilities and competition, particularly in acquiring graduate-level work. At some point in their lives, every student must decide on their career. As the students need to make a critical decision, they will become more poised, stable, and well-equipped, which will eventually lead to the creation of a better fabric for society. Regrettably, career decisions are made with little regard to reality as exercised by the graduates in the Afghanistan labour market. This study demonstrates that students choose to pursue a master's degree in an area other than their bachelor's degree for various reasons, forcing them to study fields in which they have no interest and wind up working in jobs unrelated to their intended careers. All of this results from students' making critical decisions without being thoroughly educated about their options or when unavoidable circumstances hinder them from achieving their objectives.

The findings suggest that people with low perceived employability have a negative attitude toward the labour market. As a result of various factors imposing a career path on them, they become passive in setting career goals, do not fully comprehend the importance, and cannot self-manage their careers. Future studies should explore the role of individuals' sense-making and the meanings they attach to their jobs. It is critical for a better understanding of the ramifications of current graduate employment trends. Achieving self-defined job success is crucial not only for individual well-being but also for institutions whose performance is increasingly assessed by their graduates' employment outcomes. The research offers unique insight into students' opinions of the current labor market and how that relates to their career planning strategies. It also underlines the importance of substantial higher education-led reforms that can lead to a more profitable labor market. This study's findings have important implications for appropriate career development practise and guidance in today's higher education settings.

## 5.1 Recommendations

- Specializations in schools are urgently needed, and students should pursue their selected job route as a result. HEIs must look for ways to incorporate career-related activities into their curricula.
- Students should be given career counselling to help them discover their genuine abilities and interests.
- Students should undertake career choice counselling to have a "longer-term focus on the potential for work instability or job/career change that is related to either personal choice (e.g., a desire for career renewal) or external forces."
- Students, particularly those studying inside the country, should be schooled in career planning to better deal with this circumstance. Putative efforts are needed to encourage them to think about their career objectives.
- The importance of English and soft skills should not be overlooked. Eliminating the language barrier, i.e., requiring the job market and education to operate in the same language, Dari or English, should be given the priority it deserves.

## 5.2 Future Scope

HE institutions should actively improve students' understanding of underemployment and employment outcomes to assist students from all disciplines and backgrounds to obtain meaningful work possibilities. Furthermore, the concerned authorities should have policy measures to properly approach the labor market and not miss any opportunities. To assist students in coping with unstable labor markets. A valuable examination of pathways for boosting employability, focusing on confidence-building among Afghan students, should be considered. Furthermore, the study is needed to connect students with industry through networking, teaching, and learning activities to widen their networks and talents, thus providing students with employment prospects and networking opportunities. Meanwhile, no research has been conducted to identify the primary elements contributing to students' frustration in Afghanistan's higher education system. Thus, this study recommends the same.

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