



SCHOOL OF  
EDUCATION

**ADA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**MASTER OF ARTS EDUCATION MANAGEMENT**

**CAPSTONE PROJECT**

**STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF CAREER COUNSELING IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS  
IN AZERBAIJAN**

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Baku, May 26, 2025

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I have read ADA University's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this paper, entitled Students' Awareness of Career Counselling in Private Schools in Azerbaijan, is all our own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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## Acknowledgment

We would like to express our **deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to our supervisor, Dr. Vafa Yunusova**, for her exceptional guidance, continuous support, and unwavering dedication throughout the whole process of this capstone project. Dr. Yunusova worked closely with us at every stage, offering thoughtful feedback, encouragement, and professional insight. Her mentorship went far beyond academic supervision, and this project would not have reached its current depth and quality without her involvement.

In regards to feedback and guidance, we received assistance at every point from our course instructor Dr. Samira Hajiyeva, and we appreciate her academic mentorship. This level of support helped us focus on remaining motivated throughout the research period, which was essential for our success.

Their cooperation coupled with their willingness made it possible to gather information of great value, and for this we would like to show our appreciation at the private school where this study was conducted. We would like to highlight the students as well as the administration and staff of the school. Everything they did greatly helped us in completing the study.

Most of all, we extended our deepest appreciation to ADA University together with the School of Education for the access they granted to the academic resources and the environment which supported the successful completion of this project.

Before moving onto further sections, we would like to present our deepest appreciation to our team members. As we have already highlighted, their dedication, collaboration, and support throughout the way made a great impact on how we reached this point.

### Abstract

This study aims to explore upper secondary private school students' perceptions of career counseling and to examine the extent to which these services support their career decision-making processes in the context of Azerbaijan. Drawing on a growing body of international research that emphasizes the value of early and comprehensive career guidance (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2017), this study responds to a notable gap in the local literature, where student perspectives on career counseling remain largely underexplored (European Training Foundation, 2022; Namazova, 2023).

Adopting an exploratory qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with current students, a graduate, and a career counselor at a private school in Baku. The findings suggest that while students are generally aware of career counseling services, their understanding is often limited and primarily focused on university admission. The timing of counseling interventions, parental influence, and resource constraints within schools emerged as significant factors affecting student engagement and perceived relevance (Sharapova et al., 2023; Zahra & Malik, 2024).

This research culminates in a set of practical, evidence-based guidelines intended to inform private schools and educational policymakers on enhancing the delivery of career counseling services. These recommendations promote earlier, more personalized, and diversified career guidance models to better align with students' evolving needs. A key limitation of this study is the restricted sample size, which, while allowing for in-depth inquiry, limits the generalizability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## **Students' Awareness of Career Counselling in Private Schools in Azerbaijan**

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

Career counseling is vital in shaping students' future academic and professional paths. Effective career counseling systems can efficiently bridge students' interests and future labor market demands (Gysbers et al., 2014). This service is relevant for students in Grade 10 and Grade 11 since they usually make significant decisions about their educational pathways at this stage (Sharf, 2017). Students approaching higher education and professional life need help understanding the changing pattern of the labor market and being informed about the opportunities (Brown & Lent, 2019).

#### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Studies indicate that effective career counseling can enhance students' educational outcomes and career readiness (Crişan et al., 2015). According to Patton and McMahon's (2006) study, while students are aware of career counseling, they hardly ever apply this service until they choose the field they want to study. According to the data from State Statistical Committee (2024), while there are approximately 4100 schools in Azerbaijan, including 34 private secondary schools, information regarding the implementation and impact of career counseling services remains largely unknown. Similarly, Ogunwole's (2019) study concluded that comprehensive career guidance and exposure programs increase students' awareness and equip them with the tools to make informed future career decisions.

According to the European Training Foundation (2024), there is a significant gap in research in concerning the effectiveness of career counseling services in schools across Azerbaijan. By providing students with the necessary information and guidance, career counseling services can encourage them to pursue impactful careers.

Despite the significance of career counseling services for upper secondary class students in making pivotal decisions about their future educational path, there are no significant studies in the existing scholarly literature about this topic in Azerbaijan (European Training Foundation, 2022). Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research in the scholarly literature on how Grade 10 and Grade 11 students studying in private schools perceive this service as efficient in helping them choose their future educational path.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

This study aimed to explore upper secondary private school students' perceptions of career counseling and to investigate how private schools influence their career decision-making.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How do upper secondary private school students perceive the concept of career counseling?
2. Does a private school provide career counseling support?
3. How does career counselling support in private schools influence upper secondary school students' career making?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Career counselling is of paramount interest to educators and policymakers. Economic sustainability and competitiveness in the global arena are highly dependent on a skilled and well-educated working population (UNESCO, n.d.). Despite the pressing need for career guidance, high school students underutilize career counseling services (Crisan et al., 2015). There is a disconnection between students' needs for guidance and their utilization of these services (Mitchell et al., 2007). Although career counseling services are available through government organizations and private educational institutions, no study has focused on

students' perceptions or expectations of these services (European Training Foundation, 2022). According to the OECD (2010) report, there is a strong link between higher education and the labor market since higher education promotes graduates' employment. Career counseling services at upper secondary schools can effectively contribute to this situation by providing students with the necessary knowledge and guidance in choosing their educational path. Moreover, OECD reports (2024) that many 15-year-old students struggle to envision their future work. The longitudinal study (Covacevich et al., 2021) supported that career counseling can help young people transition into their future professional lives.

The lack of research in Azerbaijan in this field makes it challenging to develop resources and policies to support career counseling and tailor them to individual needs. This study is significant because it addresses this critical gap. Moreover, by exploring students' awareness and perceptions, the research will provide valuable insights for schools and policymakers about utilizing these services.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### 2.1. Perceptions of Career Counselling Across Studies

According to Cambridge Dictionary, "perception" is "a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem work". Regarding this definition the term perception in this study was used to refer to beliefs and opinions i.e. perceptions about career counselling in the existing literature.

Identifying factors influencing perceptions of career counselling was highly relevant for the academics, education planners and school authorities to provide this service accordingly to students' needs and changing labour market. Hohenshil et al. (2013) emphasize that students worldwide confront challenges due to the changing requirements of the labour markets. In that sense, career counsellors can be important in guiding students to deal with these challenges. Despite its significance career counselling services in schools often struggle to be established and perceived as significant (Percy & Hooley, 2023).

The public perceptions of career counselling can differ across the world. For instance, Weber et al. (2017) study has revealed that in Europe, for example, countries such as Italy, France and Switzerland have viewed career counselling as a necessary part of the educational experience that helps students make informed career choices, navigate them in an ever-changing job market and increase employability. In particular, the authors underline that, besides specific career-related knowledge, career counselling programs offer students essential life skills such as problem solving, adaptability and resilience. Third, technological progress and economic restructuring in the labour market (Weber et al., 2017) have made it ever more important for people to navigate uncertainty and change. As a result, a full-fledged career counselling program can help the students in a competitive job market by guiding the students through their career paths (the emerging trends in the different sectors and how the students

can set their skills to the market needs). Furthermore, these countries' career counselling models typically advocate for the early introduction of career services, as early intervention can significantly enhance students' decision-making abilities regarding both academic choices and career aspirations. Chen et al. (2004) highlight that such programs, when introduced early in students' educational journeys, have a lasting impact on their career readiness and confidence, helping them make more informed decisions about vocational or academic paths.

However, countries like Türkiye, Montenegro, Georgia and Ukraine encounter barriers to incorporating the career counselling into their educational systems. Chen et al. (2004) argue, however, that in these regions career counselling is rarely regarded as an integral part of the educational process, but rather as an optional or supplementary service, especially for students that are not following an academic route. In countries like Turkey and Montenegro, students who fail in traditional academic subjects are sometimes even perceived as being only in vocational education as a second choice which poses the problem of lack in motivation for career counselling among students. As such, uptake of career counselling services is low, with students either not aware of available resources or dismissive of the benefits being offered to them.

In these countries cultural norms put university education way above career guidance, making the visibility and effectiveness of career counselling services more limited. From the literature on career counselling in these countries, culture needs to change in order to make the services more accessible and more people to take up the services (European Training Foundation, 2022).

## **2.2. Similarities Across Studies**

The existing literature was reviewed, finding recurrent themes in other countries including Italy, Croatia and China.

In particular, value of tailored interventions is notable. The most effective career counselling programs are those that are adapted to meet the specific needs of students especially those from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds. Ahearn (2021) and Sharapova et al. (2023) studies propose that adaptable career guidance programs are crucial for giving all students (regardless of their socioeconomic background) the resources and support they need to make informed career choices. There are some students where they have so many opportunities to interact with career counsellors, but for those from low-income families and for those from rural areas there's the gap and that gap can be filled by tailored interventions.

Moreover, the role of external factors is noted in the extant literature: Socioeconomic status, family influence, and educational policy are significant external factors that shape students' career decisions. In the literature, it is found that students from lower income backgrounds have barriers to accessing career counselling services because of a lack of resources, awareness and time. Yang (2019) and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (2020) explain that these disparities perpetuate similar disparate opportunities for career guidance perpetuating existing social inequalities. Addressing these external barriers is essential to create equitable access to career counselling.

The literature also mentions the lack of awareness in the challenges. Low awareness of career counseling options is a consistent challenge for several studies. Many students do not engage with these services because they are not aware they are there, according to the European Training Foundation (2022). To address this problem, we need to increase the visibility of career counselling services among schools and in public campaigns.

In addition, engagement in the early stage is quite meaningful. Research (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018) underscores the benefits of introducing career counselling at an early stage in students' educational journeys. Early intervention allows students to make informed choices

about educational and career pathways; otherwise, they risk falling behind and unnecessary decisions can limit their future opportunities. Cohen-Scali et al. (2018) highlight the need to make career counselling an early feature of both academic and career transitions.

### **2.3. Identified Gaps**

Review of the existing literature on career counselling, although of high-level importance, showed that this service has not been studied sufficiently in terms of its perceptions. The review of career counselling journals incorporates British Journal of Guidance and Counselling and OECD Education Working Papers. Besides, articles which contained the key word “perception” in the career counselling field, were searched through ADA University library search tool, search engines such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholars. A search produced a very limited number of articles that were dedicated specifically to the study of perceptions of career counselling.

A huge gap in literature is that the information about the career counseling perceptions of upper secondary school students in private schools in Azerbaijan has not been researched. While studies (Cohen Scali et al., 2018; Sharapova et al., 2023; Weber et al., 2018) in Europe and other regions have explored students' attitudes toward career counselling, there is limited research on how Azerbaijani upper secondary students in private schools perceive these services. Namazova (2023) and the European Training Foundation (2022) suggest that research which directly captures the views of students is necessary to understand local perception to develop culturally appropriate and effective career guidance strategies.

## **2.4. Controversial Points in the Literature**

### **2.4.1. Parental Involvement vs. Student Autonomy**

The existing literature on career counselling are pervasive in the existing literature of career counselling. According to Zahra and Malik (2024), parental involvement in their

children's career development is important because parents provide the much-needed advice and help in enabling their children to make informed decisions. However, Syazali et. al. (2023), argue that there is a need for more student autonomy in career decision, as students should be given space to take ownership of their career. This debate prompts some important questions about the extent to which ensuring family support in choosing a career is in conflict with what students need to learn to self-manage and take personal responsibility for their own career choices.

#### **2.4.2. Focus on Socioeconomic Disparities**

The literature on the degree to which socioeconomic factors should be emphasized in career counseling research is inconclusive. Furthermore, Ahearn (2021) and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (2020) note that socioeconomic background is a huge determinant of whether students have access to counseling services and career opportunities. Bucelli and McKnight (2021) however argue for a more student specific approach, one that focuses on students' personal stories and career identities as opposed to systemic factors. How then do these differences suggest the need for a more holistic approach to career counselling model that would simultaneously consider the individual and the societal?

#### **2.4.3. Variability in Methodological Approaches**

Second, there is divergence in the literature related to the study of methodological differences across studies. Other studies such as the work of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (2020), were carried out using quantitative methods, including multivariate and longitudinal analysis to evaluate the impacts of career education interventions. Likewise, Ahearn (1981) used mixed-effects regression to define the relationship between a number of other factors that impact career decision making.

However, qualitative approaches as given by Braun and Clarke (2006) used thematic analysis of interview data to give in depth insights into students' personal experience. Last, Zahra and Malik (2024) presented an experimental study that took place in form of randomized group trials to investigate the association between parental involvement and career decision making.

This topic is highlighted with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods which is a more complete capture of the factors that condition career counselling engagement.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The objective of this study is to investigate private school students' perceptions as regards career counseling and their career decision making. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. The aim of this thesis was to find out how upper secondary private school students perceive the concept of career counseling.
2. Does a private school provide support in career counseling?
3. How does career counseling support in private schools influence upper secondary school students' career-decision making?

The research design; data collection and data analysis; ethics and theoretical implications of the study are contained in this section.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study was conducted using exploratory qualitative design. The research design of exploratory and qualitative and therefore flexible, helped to discover how students perceive career counseling and how the schools support decision making, in order to refine the research questions and objectives (Bryman, 2012). Using the interpretivist paradigm, their experiences were seen as subjective and contextual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The researchers are able to explore what people think, using qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). According to Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) qualitative study focuses on understanding something from the perspective of the people experiencing it which is appropriate for studying complex and subjective topics. Quantitative methods are used to determine rich contextual insights that are difficult to quantify (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In that respect, to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions and their experiences about career counseling

qualitative research methodology was used in this study (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi structured interviews were qualitative data. Semi structured interviews allow the researcher to formally collect detailed data on facts and representations, through the use of structured questions and flexibility (Bryman, 2012).

### **3.1.1 Sample size**

For this study six students from Grades 9 to 11 attending a private school in Baku were selected for interviews. Furthermore, one graduate from the previous two academic years was chosen to participate in the study that was designed to gain insight into the effect of the career counseling program on that student's career development. Importantly, graduates can provide retrospective insights into how career counseling determined their decision-making process (El-Awad et al., 2022). Moreover, a career counsellor (N=1) from the same school who also attended the interviews provided full knowledge of students' application to these services (see Figure 1).

### **3.1.2. Setting**

The subject of research was carried out at one of the private schools in Baku, Azerbaijan. As a result of the research ethics, the name of the school is not revealed in the study. This was chosen because of the well-known career counselling services the school already has, and the same school has been actively preparing its students for higher education and employment. It was a setting to gather data about how career counseling services are integrated into upper secondary students' educational experiences in private schools. In addition, the school is chosen because it is accessible to researchers.

### 3.1.3. Data collection

The data was collected through semi structured interviews with students, graduates and a career counselor.

The semi structured interviews with the collection of the qualitative data provide a balance between pre-determined questions and emergent themes that may arise from the interview (DiCicco Bloom and Crabtree 2006). One of the most effective methods for gathering rich, qualitative data on people's thoughts, experiences and motivations is interviewing (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). In addition, semi structured interviews offer flexibility, as per (Creswell & Poth, 2018) allowing the researcher to explore emerging themes whilst maintaining a consistency in the questions.

This is helpful because it then gave the researcher the chance to investigate further into the participant's experiences in more detail, whilst keeping questions consistent across interview (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data is not interested in statistical generalizability but seeks to understand the meanings and interpretations participants give their experiences (Creswell, 2014).

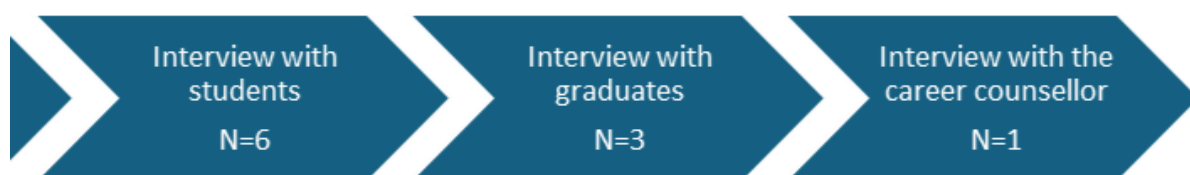
A purposive and convenience sampling was used in the study. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to choose participants who have particular knowledge or experience on the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2013). Through convenience and purposive sampling, a career counselor was also reached as they are professional in the career guidance. Patton (2015) says that purposive sampling is very useful in situations where the researcher wants to know about the experiences of a particular group of people for it guarantees that participants are actually relevant to the research topic. The specific groups of our study are current upper secondary students, recent alumni, and a career counselor. The aim of recruiting current students is to disclose their perceptions of career counseling services.

Additionally, recruiting the second group namely recent graduates is to explore their experience during and after school, as they are now pursuing their education on specific education programs for future employability, and some of them chosen different paths. The interview of career counselors was carried out to explore how school helps students access career counseling services through expert's insights and experience in what services are offered and how they are offered.

Convenience sampling was also used to recruit participants that are ready and willing (Etikan et al., 2016). This method was very suitable for the selection of current students at the school as they were easier to get in touch with and can give quick assistance in the study. The combination of these two sampling strategies guarantees that the study picks up unique insights from key informants and a bigger picture from a larger number of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### Figure 1

#### *Study Sample*



#### **3.1.4. Recruitment of participants**

The researchers wrote to the school authority by email and by the official documents of ADA University asking permission to conduct the study in the school. Official documents informed school authority about the objective of the study and research process. After getting approval from the school authority, we contacted the head of the career counseling department.

After approval by both parties, informed consent forms were distributed to the students and their parents. Informed consents are all participants knowing the aims of the study, their part in the research and their right to confidentiality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through email, the graduate was invited to participate. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that informed consents are vital in order to ensure that participants are ready to participate and that they do so with full knowledge of the study's objective and confidentiality of their responses.

### **3.2. Data Analysis**

The data was manually analyzed. Transcripts of all interviews were initially transcribed verbatim.

Two cycle coding were done on the interview data: initial (open coding) and axial coding.

In the first phase of open coding, the transcribed interviews were searched for key sentences, quotations or important phrases that were highlighted. The data was coded in three primary areas aligned with the research questions: (1) students' perceptions of the value and relevance of career counseling, (2) the support offered by career counselors in guiding students' career decisions, and (3) alumni's reflections on how career counseling influenced their career decision-making.

For the second phase axial coding was used to filter the data. In this phase, connections among categories were found and the property and dimensions for each category were identified. As Saldaña (2009) notes, axial coding "belongs to the subcategories of categories and determines the properties and dimensions of the category" (p.159). This refined and grouped the data into themes which are directly relevant to the research questions. The final categories and themes provided answers to the study's research questions and facilitated a

deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding career counseling. Saldaña (2009) describes coding as "primarily an interpretive act, and it is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (p.4). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further states that data collection and analysis are recursive and dynamic processes and analysis happens at the same time as data collection. The validity of the collected data was discussed in that respect with a few participants.

### **3.2.1. Quality criteria**

This study implements some of the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings such as member checking and triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Returning interview transcripts to participants to check on the accuracy and completeness of the data is known as member checking (Creswell, 2012). Multiple data sources or methods were triangulated to cross check the findings and to strengthen the validity of the study (Patton, 2015).

The accuracy and credibility of the data were confirmed by member checking. Once the interviews were transcribed the researcher forwarded them to the participants for review. In order to verify the accuracy of the transcription, participants were asked to provide additional comments or clarifications (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **3.3. Limitations**

According to Creswell & Poth (2018) credibility of the qualitative data can be achieved with prolonged engagement. Similarly, Maxwell (2012) adds that to know one case well, researchers need to spend a long-time in the research context. However, due to the limited time researchers were not able to engage for a long time. This is one of the main limitations of this study. Moreover, convenience sampling contributed to the limitations to some extent. The small size of sampling did not allow the team to generalize findings.

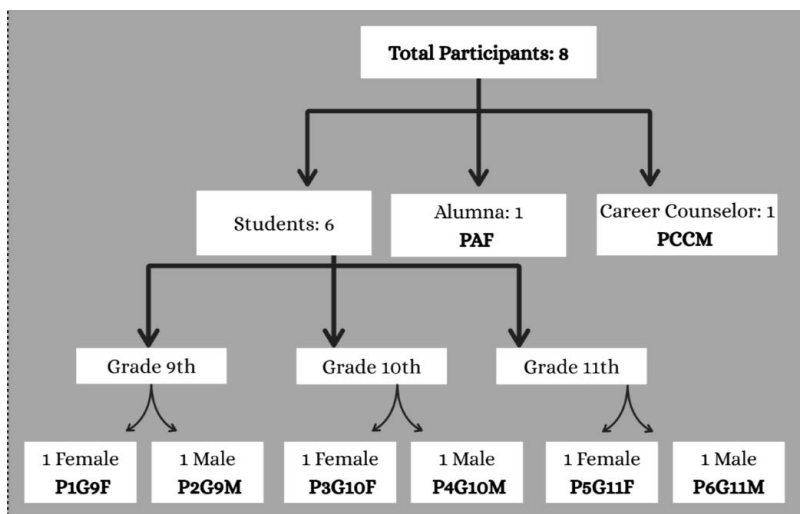
Finally, the limited literature on career counselling in local context did not allow us to analyze the findings critically.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in ensuring the trustworthiness of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants were fully informed about the study's aims, and consent was obtained prior to participation (Singh, 2014). Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with participants' identities anonymized in all publications (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, ethical guidelines outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) were followed to ensure that participants' rights are respected, and their involvement is voluntary.

**Figure 2**

*Participants' Demographic Information*



## Chapter IV. Findings

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to explore how career counseling is perceived in private schools. The secondary aim is to investigate how private schools facilitate and support career decision-making of upper secondary students. In total, interviews were conducted with six current upper secondary students (Grades 9–11), one recent graduate (Alumna), and the school's career counselor. Key themes were identified for each research question through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts.

**Research Question 1 - Understanding of Career Counseling, Awareness and Accessibility, and Student Engagement and Expectations.**

**Research Question 2 - Does a private school provide career counselling support?**

**Research Question 3 - How does career counseling support in private schools influence upper secondary school students' career-decision making?**

**Methods of Career Counseling, Challenges and Gaps in the Support System, and Parental and Teacher Influence.**

The sections below detail these themes supported with representative quotes from the study participants (*see* Table 1) coded for student participants as follows: P1G9F; P2G9M; P3G10F; P4G10M; P5G11F; P6G11M; PAF for the Alumna and PCCM for the Career Counselor (*see* Figure 2).

### **Theme 1: Awareness of Career Counseling**

#### *Student Participants' Definition*

The student participants generally viewed career counseling as a guidance service to help them make informed decisions about their future careers and education. Most student participants described career counseling in terms of receiving advice on choosing a suitable

career path or field of study. For instance, P4G10M explained, “*career counseling helps students figure out what career suits them.*” However, some of student participants initially had a narrow or incomplete understanding of what career counseling entailed. P2G9M admitted, “*I thought it was just about choosing a university*”, indicating an early perception that equated career counseling solely with the university selection and admissions process. In summary, the student participants’ understanding of career counseling ranged from initial views of it as university-related advice to a more holistic appreciation of its role in career decision-making and providing direction for life after high school.

#### *Alumna’s and Career Counselor’s Definition*

The career counselor (PCCM) and the alumna (PAF) shared similar definitions of career counseling, reinforcing the student participants’ perceptions. PCCM defined its role as guiding students in exploring possible career options and helping them connect those choices to their university plans as graduation approaches. He emphasized that effective counseling “can save students a lot of time in terms of going in the wrong direction” by steering them away from unsuitable paths early on. Likewise, the PAF understood career counseling as essentially a form of guidance for students in identifying and pursuing the right careers. Although she confessed, “I never experienced career counseling at the time” as a student, she acknowledged that such counseling was meant to provide professional guidance that she mainly received from her family instead. Both participants emphasized the role of career counseling in helping students explore options and make informed choices aligned with their interests and university plans.

### **Theme 2: Student Needs and Expectations**

Even when the students are aware of the career counseling services, their level of engagement with those services varies, and they hold differing expectations about what the

counseling should provide. A recurring observation was that the younger students were hesitant to actively participate in career counseling until they felt it was immediately relevant. They may view career counseling as something to turn to in Grade 11 or 12, rather than an ongoing process throughout high school.

On the other hand, the student participants who had participated in career-related events or sessions expressed specific expectations and sometimes frustrations regarding the content of the counseling they received. Several student participants hoped for a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond just university admissions. P5G11F, for example, voiced that she “wished career counseling focused on more than just universities.” Some of the student participants echoed the idea that much of the school’s guidance came in the form of university-oriented counseling (such as how to write personal statements or choose among university programs) as opposed to deeper exploration of different professions or self-assessment of interests and skills.

Student participants who engaged with counseling described it as helpful particularly in making educational decisions. For instance, one student participant noted that after attending a counseling session focused on university options, she had greater clarity on the steps needed for applications and felt more confident in her chosen direction. The student participants also appreciated interactive career events (when available) and information sessions, even as they wanted those to be expanded. PAF reflected on this issue of engagement and expectations from his own time at the school: in retrospect, she felt that not all students realized the benefit of career counseling when it was offered, because some (like herself) believed they already knew what to do or preferred to seek family advice. She suggested that many “don’t know about their skills or their motivations” and that a stronger counseling program could help such students engage in self-discovery.

### **Theme 3: Access to Career Counseling**

The student participants' awareness of the career counseling services at their school and the accessibility of those services emerged as another significant theme. Accessibility of the career counseling service was described as somewhat limited or sporadic. P1G9F mentioned that she had only experienced "*one brief session, only seven minutes*" of one-on-one career counseling so far.

The school uses certain channels to promote career counseling and make it accessible, but these may not reach every student equally. According to P2G9M, the school "*sometimes invites people from universities to talk to us*" as a way of exposing students to career and higher education information. These university visits or career fairs are one method to raise awareness, essentially bringing external resources to the students. Additionally, P4G10M described how the school's counselors are introduced to students and made approachable: students are "*made aware of who the career counselors are, and we are asked to approach them if we have any questions.*" He added that during key academic decision points, like choosing course electives, "*the career counselors can sit with you and double check to make sure that ... it's what you really want to do.*" The PCCM himself noted that students do not often seek counseling on their own initiative for career exploration, as "*they often rely on family*" for such guidance, so the school must "*be proactive and repeatedly inform them about this service.*"

The findings revealed that the student participants were aware of the career counseling services, but their access to and use of these services were limited. The majority believed that most of the interactions were brief or occasional while some assumed that they relied more on the guidance provided by their families. According to the findings, the school made efforts to promote awareness through events and career counseling sessions, but these activities did not consistently involve all these students.

**Table 1***Matrix of Analyzed Data*

Research Question	Themes	Codes	Interview Excerpts (with participant codes)
<b>1. How do upper secondary private school students perceive the concept of career counseling?</b>	<b>Understanding of Career Counseling</b>	Guidance for decision-making	"Career counseling helps students figure out what career suits them." (P4G10M)
		University-focused perception	"At first, I thought it was just about choosing a university." (P2G9M)
		Preventing career uncertainty	"I think its main purpose is to help us not feel lost after graduation." (P5G11F)
	<b>Awareness and Accessibility</b>	Late introduction to career counseling	"I first heard about career counseling in grade 9." (P6G11M)
		Limited exposure to services	"I had one brief session, only seven minutes." (P1G9F)
		Promotion through university fairs	"Sometimes they invite people from universities to talk to us." (P2G9M)
	<b>Student Engagement and Expectations</b>	Lack of participation	"I haven't attended career counseling yet because I don't think I need it now." (P3G10F)
		Interest in career alternatives	"I wish career counseling focused on more than just universities." (P5G11F)

The following themes were identified in response to Research Question 2 and are supported by selected quotations from the interviews. A summary of the analyzed data for these themes is presented in Table 2.

#### **Theme 4: Strategies of Career Counseling**

The interviews revealed several methods and resources through which the private school supported students in making career and educational decisions. These methods ranged from group informational sessions to individualized counseling and external networking opportunities. A prominent method reported by the student participants was the organization of **group sessions and presentations** focused on university preparation. For instance, P5G11F noted that "*we had group sessions about university applications*" where counselors or visiting advisors guided the entire class on topics such as choosing suitable universities, understanding application requirements, and preparing necessary documents.

Another common support method was **one-on-one counseling meetings** between students and the career counselor. In these individualized sessions, students could discuss their

personal interests and get tailored advice. P1G9F recounted an instance of such personalized guidance, *"We sat together privately, and she told me about career options."*

Beyond in-school sessions, the school provided **exposure to real-world careers** through events like career days, guest speaker series, and university fairs. According to P6G11M, the career counselor invited *"guest speakers who helped me learn about real jobs"* and they were often professionals or alumna from various industries who shared their day-to-day work experiences and career journeys. Most student participants found such talks insightful because they offered a glimpse into different occupations beyond what could be learned from brochures or the internet. PCCM corroborated this approach, explaining that they *"invite professionals from different backgrounds to share their real, day-to-day experiences—without glorifying their jobs so students understand what they are getting into."*

The school's career guidance program also worked in tandem with academic advising. For example, when students must select their courses for the International GCSE or A-Level, the counseling staff provided input to ensure these choices aligned with future career plans. P1G9F recalled being advised that they *"had to decide our GCSE and A-level studies based on what career we want to do"*, indicating that academic and career guidance were integrated at crucial decision points. In some cases, **teachers themselves acted as part of the support system**, especially if they served as homeroom advisors or mentors. Several student participants mentioned that they could approach teachers for advice at any time, or that teachers would share information about career-related opportunities in their subject area (such as science competitions or field trips). An illustrative example came from the P5G11F who discovered her passion for history through school-organized field trips and history competitions; she mentioned that *"after we went on a lot of field trips, I started to love history. And now that's my main subject."* P5G11F's insight showed that while not formal "career counseling" in title, the school's extracurricular activities and teacher initiatives could play a

meaningful role in guiding students toward fields they truly enjoyed, indirectly supporting career decision-making.

In addition to these methods, PAF provided perspective on how the school had supported (or could have better supported) career decisions. She recalled that the school held **virtual university fairs and scheduled career meetings during** his time as a student. These virtual fairs involved representatives from foreign universities interacting with students, which helped him, and others, gain clarity about different academic paths abroad. Moreover, when PAF had to choose between pursuing sport at a professional level versus focusing on an academic career in law, she sought advice from both her teachers and the career counselor. She shared, *"I was approaching my teachers; I was approaching my counselors... they actually motivated me to choose one sphere, what I would like more."* She was confident that instead of pushing her in a particular direction, the staff helped her weigh her passion for sports against her academic goals, ultimately guiding her to a comfortable decision.

#### **Theme 5: Challenges and Gaps in the Career Counseling Support**

While the school offered multiple forms of career guidance, the study also identified several challenges and gaps in the current support system. One major challenge was the **limited personalization and depth** of the counseling experiences for many students. Despite the availability of a counselor, some students felt that the guidance remained too generalized or surface-level. For example, P2G9M shared the following insight *"we didn't have activities to identify our strengths."* P2G9M's insight suggested the program might lack systematic tools or workshops for self-assessment, such as interest inventories, personality/career aptitude tests, or interactive sessions that could students uncover their talents and preferences. PAF concurred with this view in hindsight; he noted that the school "wasn't capable" of offering in-depth career diagnostics when he was there and suggested that adding *"reflection exercises or assessment tests would be really helpful in order to understand what they want in this life."*

Another gap frequently mentioned was the **infrequency and late start of career counseling interventions**. As described earlier, the student participants often only engage in one or a few sessions toward the end of high school. Several student participants implied that by the time they received counseling, they had already made up their minds or felt rushed to decide. PAF reflected that he and others were “pretty sure” about their plans when counseling was offered, which could reduce its perceived necessity. Ideally, as PCCM suggested, career counseling should “*start early, ideally over the last four years of high school*” to gradually build a rapport with students and track their evolving interests. In practice, however, according to the study participants counseling at this school seemed concentrated in the last one or two years.

The student participants also raised the challenge of **career counseling being too narrowly focused on academic outcomes**. Because much of the counseling effort went into university-related guidance, the students interested in non-university pathways or less conventional careers may have received less tailored support. P6G11M remarked that she could sometimes find out more on her own “*just researching the university’s website than asking a teacher or a professional*” hints at a perception that the counseling content might not always go far beyond what motivated students could discover independently. The lack of a broader view, including discussion of vocational training options, gap years, or emerging career fields was not explicitly mentioned by students, but could be inferred as a potential gap given their desire for “*more than just universities*” in counseling.

Finally, resource constraints could pose a challenge: there was typically a limited number of counseling staff (in this case, perhaps just one dedicated career counselor for the whole school). This could lead to short sessions and limited follow-up, as students noted. PAF pointed out the intense **academic pressure** in the school environment, which could

overshadow career planning. She suggested that the counseling program could be improved by helping students balance academic demands with the process of career decision-making.

### **Theme 6: Parental and Teacher Influence**

The influence of parents and teachers emerged as an important contextual theme that could both complement and complicate the school's formal career counseling efforts. **Parental involvement** in students' career decision-making was very strong in this setting, according to the student participants and the PCCM. In many cases, parents served as the primary career guides for students, which aligned with cultural expectations and personal trust within families. PCCM noted that this dynamic could pose challenges for counseling, remarking, "*We are in a triangle: student, parent, and school. It's not enough for the student to understand career choices; parents must also be on the same page.*" Some parents may even resist the ideas generated in counseling; the counselor encountered parents who said, "*I know what's best for my kid*" and were reluctant to accept alternative suggestions (PCCM).

**The teacher's influence** was somewhat more subtle but still noteworthy. The teachers at the private school often developed close relationships with students, primarily through mentorship roles or extracurricular activities, and thereby had opportunities to shape students' thinking about careers. In some accounts, the teachers contributed positively by encouraging their students to pursue subjects they excelled in or to consider career fields related to their academic strengths. Moreover, the teachers sometimes filled gaps in formal counseling by offering advice during class or homeroom. P6G11M mentioned that "*at any time we can reach out through email, text, or calls*" to teachers for guidance, implying that the faculty were approachable and willing to discuss matters beyond coursework, potentially including college and career plans. In PAF's experience, she mentioned even after graduation, "*many teachers were still helping [her] and influencing [her] progress.*"

In conclusion, families and teachers formed an influential support network for students that significantly affected career decision-making. The findings indicated that effective career support in this private school setting required engaging not just the student but also their parents and leveraging the role of teachers. PCCM's perspective underscored this need to involve parents in conversations about career choices so that the student was supported consistently at school and home.

**Table 2***Matrix of Analyzed Data*

Research Question	Themes	Codes	Interview Excerpts (with participant codes)
<b>2. How do private schools support upper secondary school students in career decision-making?</b>	<b>Strategies Utilized in Career Counseling</b>	University-focused guidance	"We had group sessions about university applications." (P5G11F)
		Exposure to careers through speakers	"Guest speakers helped me learn about real jobs." (P6G11M)
		One-on-one counseling sessions	"We sat together privately, and she told me about career options." (P1G9F)
	<b>Challenges in Career Counseling Support</b>	Lack of personalized guidance	"We didn't really have activities to identify our strengths." (P2G9M)
		Short or infrequent sessions	"I only had one career counseling session in school." (P1G9F)
	<b>Parental and Teacher Influence</b>	Parental involvement in decision-making	"My parents always wanted me to be a teacher, but I didn't want that." (P3G10F)
		Teacher support in career choices	"My teachers helped me explore different career options." (P6G11M)
	<b>Areas for Improvement</b>	Need for early intervention	"Career counseling should start earlier, maybe in middle school." (P3G10F)
		More focus on career skills	"Career counseling should also help with skill-building." (P5G11F)
		Parental engagement in counseling	"Parents should be involved in career counseling sessions." (PCCM)

## Chapter V: Discussion

This study explored how upper secondary students in private schools in Azerbaijan perceive career counseling and how these schools support students in career decision-making. This study aimed to examine how students from upper secondary private schools in Azerbaijan perceive career counseling and how these schools help students make a career decision. Several interconnected themes emerged from the findings: how students understand career counseling, their awareness of and access to, services, their engagement with counseling and their expectations, how private schools support career decision making, the challenges and gaps in the support system and the roles of parents and teachers. Concerning the existing literature, this chapter discusses each theme with consistencies or divergences with the prior research. In particular, gaps revealed in Azerbaijani studies (Namazova, 2023; European Training Foundation, 2022) are addressed, findings are matched with international best practices (Weber et al., 2018) and cultural factors including family influence are considered. The study provides insights to help private schools in Azerbaijan improve their career counseling services and concludes the chapter with practical guidelines for them on how to enhance their career counseling services based on the study findings and according to evidence-based strategies.

### Limited Awareness of Career Counseling Services

The main finding was that career counseling is not well known or visible to students, particularly in their early secondary years. Several participants stated that they did not learn of their school's career counseling program until high school. Overall, findings revealed that students had limited exposure to career counselling services in their early years, most of whom become aware only in Grade 9 or later. This trend was consistent in most of the the students' responses. The infrequent interactions with career counsellors appear to have contributed to lack of awareness of the career counselling services. The European Training Foundation (2022) similarly found that many secondary students were simply unaware of the career

guidance resources available, which sharply limited their engagement. In Azerbaijan and similar education systems, cultural norms play a role in this low visibility. Traditionally, schools and families prioritize academic achievement and university admission over career development activities (European Training Foundation, 2022). Our findings echo this trend: career counseling in the private school was not introduced early on, possibly because the school culture (and parent expectations) placed more emphasis on exam preparation and university entrance in the earlier years of secondary school.

These findings align with broader observations in the literature that a lack of awareness is a common challenge in career counseling provision. Researchers have noted that increasing the visibility and understanding of career counseling is necessary to improve student uptake (European Training Foundation, 2022; Weber et al., 2018). In some European contexts (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2018), career counselling is seen as essential, and programs are brought in earlier and advertised as part of education. Unlike our study participants, who did not generally receive counseling until relatively late, there was a gap that needed addressing. Introducing career counseling earlier and more visibly would guarantee students that it was a regular and beneficial part of their education and not an add on. This idea is consistent with the research and action proposed by Namazova (2023) and the European Training Foundation (2022) on the career counseling awareness of local students which stresses that to successfully pursue culturally relevant guidance strategies, local perceptions must be understood. To begin to fill that need, our study documents Azerbaijani students' low awareness. It concludes that, unless career counseling is deliberately raised to a higher profile in schools, many students will not benefit from it.

### **Narrow Perceptions and University-Centered Focus**

Along with a few awareness, students had a restricted view of what career counseling was and at first thought of it as almost exclusively involving university admissions advice. It came out very strongly in the interviews. In addition, findings showed that some students equated career counselling to university guidance and viewed it as support for choosing universities. Participants described their career counseling experiences as career exploration limited to higher education pathways. Although students recognized the value of university-related support, there was a dissatisfaction with the narrow remit of the service. Students were eager to explore a host of career options more thoroughly and learn about their own strengths and weaknesses.

There is a goal, often as university education, as the primary marker of success of secondary schooling. This trend isn't unique to Azerbaijan. Career guidance is frequently conflated with academic advising in countries such as Turkey, Montenegro and Ukraine, with a strong emphasis on helping students get into university rather than providing more general, career exploration, as Cohen-Scali et al. (2018) pointed out. When career counseling does exist outside of this track, it is sometimes treated as a fallback option for students who aren't pursuing higher education.

The report also agrees with this strong cultural focus on university admission within the European Training Foundation (2022) which mentions how post-secondary success is mainly measured by the ability of students to secure a university place. As a result, other career pathways — vocational, entrepreneurial, or creative — are often overlooked or undervalued. When career counseling is so closely tied to academic advising, students may miss out on exploring the full range of opportunities available to them, ultimately limiting their career development. This emphasis can marginalize other career paths and thus narrow the perceived

purpose of counseling. Our study's participants mirrored this pattern: their school's counseling efforts were largely framed around succeeding in the university track, consistent with a cultural norm that viewed a university degree as the default route to *a promising career*. Moreover, European Training Foundation (2022) reports that in Azerbaijan, traditional attitudes prioritize higher education over vocational, and this situation limits the effectiveness of career counseling services and its visibility. The findings from the study site corroborated this notion and career counseling, as implemented, largely meant college guidance, which limited its perceived relevance for any student considerations outside that domain.

However, it is essential to note that this narrow approach does not align with the best practices identified in international research. The strategy itself is broader, in the countries where career counseling is regarded as a vital part of education. For example, Weber et al. (2018) identify comprehensive career counseling programs that go beyond providing information on educational choices to also preparing students with life skills such as problem solving, adaptability and resilience, to deal with an ever-changing job market. The early introduction of those programs begins in secondary school and encourages exploration of a range of careers and the development of skills for lifelong career development. In contrast, the students in the school on which the study was done said they did not receive such broad preparation. A gap was noted in the absence of activities such as self-assessment exercises, discussions of diverse occupations (including vocational trades or emerging career fields) and skill building workshops. A second key finding was that career counselling services were not offering sufficient opportunities for activities, for example, which would help students to identify their skills and interests and explore their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, students missed out on the chance to cultivate the type of self-knowledge and adaptability that Weber et al. (2018) emphasized. In sum, we suggest that career counselling at our participants' school was bounded by a university centric paradigm. This finding pointed to the need to

expand the scope of career guidance in Azerbaijani private schools from a narrowly academic advising model to a more holistic career development model as is recommended by international research and as desired by students.

### **Timing of Counseling and Student Engagement**

Another key theme in our findings is the **timing** of career counseling interventions and the pattern of student engagement. The study revealed that students often engaged with career counseling **very late** in their secondary education, typically only when looming graduation or university application deadlines made career decisions urgent. Even when counseling services were technically available earlier, younger students tended to hold off participation, viewing it as not immediately necessary. The findings also suggested that although students in grades 9 and 10 were aware of the availability of career counselling services they often delayed participation since some of them perceive this service unnecessary. Consequently, career counseling in the observed school was often a **last-minute** or ad-hoc affair, rather than a continuous developmental process. Participants noted that by the time they engaged in counseling sessions (typically in their final one or two years of school), many had already made up their minds about their future paths or had limited time to consider alternatives. In addition, the reflections of alumnus showed the same trend, that by the time students were introduced to this service, they already had a clear plan in mind. The pattern that this suggested was that the late start and infrequency of counseling undermined its potential benefits.

There is also a strong indication in the literature that students fare better if they engage early and continuously in career counseling. Cohen-Scali et al. (2018) propose that career counseling should take place earlier in students' educational pathways (lower secondary or middle school) so as to maximize career development. Early intervention allows students to gradually build career-related knowledge and self-awareness, thereby reducing the risk of

feeling "lost" after graduation, a challenge that several participants identified because of delayed career planning. This finding is consistent with the wider literature highlighting the need to start career guidance in the early secondary years to ready young people for post-graduation transitions. If students start their career exploration process early, they can make incremental (and informed) decisions (such as taking the right elective courses, exploring different fields or building particular skills) long before the final high stakes year. That is our findings, that because the engagement happened late, some of the students did not get to see the value of career counseling until too late. Career counseling should be introduced earlier than it currently is and perhaps even as early as middle school, to give students more time to explore careers and make informed decisions, several participants stated. Consistently, the school's career counselor also expressed a preference for a more continuous approach, suggesting that career guidance should span multiple years rather than being concentrated only at the final stages of secondary education. These perspectives closely align with best practices identified in the literature, which recommend initiating career guidance by middle school or early high school to instill career thinking as part of students' broader development, rather than treating it as an optional add-on at the end (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2018).

The tendency of students to delay engagement also relates to their **perceived relevance** of counseling at different ages. Younger students often did not see immediate value in attending career sessions, whereas older students, when finally participating, sometimes found the sessions helpful but wished they had more time to explore, while the students who participated in counselling sessions found them helpful in immediate tasks such as university applications. These sessions were practical in short term goals and did not provide an opportunity to explore broader career possibilities. This contrast aligns with Sharapova et al. (2023) who highlight the importance of ongoing career counseling to meet students' changing needs and interests. If counseling is only offered at the end, it cannot adapt to or influence the student's evolving

interests over time. By contrast, a sequence of engagements from early on would allow the counselor to build rapport, track the student's development, and provide timely advice at each crucial decision point (subject selection, extracurricular involvement and work experience). The study conducted by Sharapova et al. (2023) and others recommended such a **developmental approach**, wherein career guidance is not a one-time event but a series of tailored interactions. Our findings demonstrated the cost of not following this approach: students engaged late and often underutilized the services, which in turn reinforced the notion that career counseling was only for seniors. Breaking this cycle by normalizing early engagement could increase students' openness to counseling. **It would also help schools better manage counseling than the rushed attempt to reach all students at the end.**

In summary, the timing and engagement patterns observed – late, concentrated usage of career counseling – limit the efficacy of the support offered. Starting career counseling earlier, as both our participants and the literature suggest, could foster greater student engagement and make career guidance a progressive learning process. **This means that if counseling is an ongoing conversation throughout high school, students are more likely to attain real benefit, complete their planning in less haste and make the most of services (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018; Sharapova et al., 2023).**

### **Parental and Teacher Influences**

The role of **parents and teachers** emerged as an influential backdrop to students' career decision-making, both complementing – and complicating – the formal career counseling process. In the context of Azerbaijani private schools, families are deeply involved in their children's education and career choices. Many student participants described parents as their primary source of career guidance. The findings indicated that the lack of career counselling leads students to their family's guidance when making career decisions. This

reliance on parental guidance reflects cultural norms in Azerbaijan and similar contexts where family inference plays a significant role in shaping young people's career choices.

The literature provides mixed perspectives on parental involvement. The involvement of parents can be seen as positive and even crucial. Zahra and Malik (2024) argue that active parental guidance and support can enhance students' career maturity and the ability to make informed decisions. In many cases, parents offer emotional support, resources, and motivation that complement the school's efforts. The findings showed that career counseling had to navigate the relationship between parents and students and maintain alignment with parents' expectations since they play a significant role in shaping students' career decisions. In some cases, parents resisted career counselling services relying on their own judgements. **Parental** influence can be supportive; it can also conflict with the goal of fostering student autonomy in career choices.

In that sense Yang (2019) advocate for caution in this regard, emphasizing that students should be **empowered to make autonomous decisions** about their careers. Excessive parental control might lead to decisions that satisfy the parents' wishes but leave the student disengaged or unhappy in the long run. This debate between parental involvement and student autonomy is a notable controversy in career development literature. Balancing these influences is particularly challenging in contexts like Azerbaijan, where respecting parental authority is culturally ingrained. The findings underscored the balance between respecting parent interference and students' pursuing their career aspirations. Both our findings and existing literature suggest that there is a direct relationship between the parental influence and students' perceptions on career choice (Ladd, 2015). The school could educate parents about modern career pathways and the importance of supporting their child's unique talents, potentially easing the tension between what the student wants and what the parent wants.

Teachers, while not as prominently discussed by the study participants as parents, also play a noteworthy role in career guidance within the school environment. Moreover, their involvement in providing career guidance not only encourages student engagement but also compensates for the limited resources available related to career counselling services. These findings corroborate with the existing literature about the teachers' role in fostering students' career choices. (Betz & Hackett, 2006; Byars-Winston et al., 2017; Nauta et al., 1998). Our findings suggest that career decision-making is also influenced by the network of family, peers, teachers, community members including formal "career counselors" and powerfully resonate with the acknowledgement of supportive teachers and mentors' role as part of a student's **social capital** (McMahon & Patton, 2018).

In summary, the influence of parents and teachers forms an essential context for interpreting the effectiveness of career counseling. The strong parental involvement observed aligns with local cultural expectations and is supported by literature highlighting family impact (Zahra & Malik, 2024; Namazova, 2023). At the same time, it raises the need for strategies to ensure that such involvement empowers rather than constrains students – a concern echoed by Yang (2019). Teacher involvement, largely positive in our study, suggests that schools can leverage their faculty to reinforce career guidance messages. The implication is clear: any improvement in career counseling services must consider these key stakeholders. Engaging parents through communication and joint activities can make them allies in the process, and equipping teachers with basic career guidance knowledge can expand the support network for students. The interplay between formal counseling and informal guidance at home and in class must be harmonized so that students receive coherent and encouraging support from all sides as they navigate their futures.

### **Systemic Challenges and Gaps in Support**

Despite the diversity of career counseling activities provided by the private school through one-on-one advising, group sessions and career days with guest speakers, the participants continually named a number of systemic issues that hindered the effectiveness of these supports. One of the most important issues that a number of students raised was that counseling was too superficial and impersonal. Participants reported that the guidance tended to be superficial and generic, with too few structured self-assessment activities, including interest inventories, aptitude testing and reflective exercises. This absence hindered students' ability to gain deeper insights into their strengths, interests, and career aspirations. Also, time constraints were mentioned as barriers very often, in which some students described their counseling session as short ones without exploring meaningful things. This is consistent with literature more broadly (Yang, 2019; Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2020), where limited availability of and shallow guidance from counselors can diminish the effectiveness of career development programs overall. The fact that these accounts are not unique, as they correspond to research results which found that schools suffer from a lack of resources such as too few counselors, not enough time or specialized tools which all result in limited outcomes for students (Yang, 2019; Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2020). Yang (2019) points out that when career counseling is under-resourced, it may amount to little more than cursory advice that students could often obtain elsewhere, thereby diminishing its value. Our participants similarly implied that some counseling content did not go far beyond what a motivated student could research on their own (e.g., looking up university information online), which signals a missed opportunity to provide added value through professional counseling.

Another significant gap identified was the **infrequency and late start** of counseling interventions, which we have discussed in the context of timing. Systemically, the school appeared to concentrate its career guidance efforts in the last one or two years of secondary school. Many participants observed that by the time multiple counseling activities (workshops, fairs, meetings) were made available, they were already far along in their decision processes. Ideally, a structured program would scaffold career development from earlier grades, but in practice this school's approach was reactive and condensed. The career counselor himself acknowledged this shortcoming, suggesting that an ideal program would "start early" and build rapport with students over several years, rather than trying to influence them at the last minute. This aligns with broad recommendations in literature for continuous engagement (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018). The current system's late engagement is thus a gap between best practice and practice-on-the-ground.

Additionally, the student participants perceived the **focus of counseling to be too narrow**, chiefly oriented toward academic (university) outcomes to the exclusion of other pathways. It is worth noting that as a systemic issue, this focus meant that those students interested in exploring vocational training, entrepreneurship, creative arts, or other non-university options had relatively **little tailored support**. Even students preparing to study at university had limited perceptions of the counselling services which as guidance often narrowly focused on selecting major rather than discussing diverse professional pathways. Although the student participants did not directly articulate it, they desired to receive more comprehensive career counseling assistance. By not systematically addressing the full spectrum of post-secondary possibilities, the program left a gap for those who might benefit from a broader conversation. This observation echoes the European Training Foundation (2022) finding that in our region, career counseling often lacks legitimacy or emphasis unless it is about getting

into university, which can leave students unaware of or unprepared for other viable career routes.

Resource constraints are an underlying factor for many of the limitations in career counseling. In our research site, there was **likely only one dedicated career counselor** for the entire upper secondary student body. The limited amount of individual attention each student received may explain why one-on-one sessions were brief or why not all students had multiple sessions. The counselor's capacity to implement comprehensive workshops or follow up extensively is inherently constrained by being a single person trying to serve many. The literature confirms that these constraints often result in prioritizing services—mainly for students who are close to graduation (such as those in Grade 11) and for common needs like university applications—while limiting the scope for a more inclusive, developmental approach (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2020). Another constraint highlighted by participants is the **academic pressure within** the school.

Overall, the duration of engagement in career counselling services appeared to be a key concern since it was postponed by students until it was urgent. This trend highlighted the need for earlier and continuous career interventions, supporting Cohen-Scali et al.'s (2018) argument that initiating career guidance during lower secondary education fosters better long-term outcomes. The intense focus on academic performance and exam preparation sometimes overshadowed career planning of students and teachers might treat career-related activities as secondary when facing the immediate demands of curricula and exams. This suggests that without institutional commitment to carving out time and space for career counseling, it will continually be sidelined by other priorities. Furthermore, a more coherent and collaborative strategy involving counselors, teachers, and parents could enhance the effectiveness of career guidance. Strengthening this alignment could offer students more consistent support across different spheres of their educational experience, thereby promoting more informed and

confident career planning, which aligns with Sharapova et al.'s (2023) emphasis, the importance of providing **adaptable and comprehensive support to personalize that content for each student.**

In conclusion, insufficient personalization, inadequate time and frequency, a narrow scope of counseling content, and resource/staffing limitations are the likely shortcomings to contribute to the career counselling services. These challenges are not unique to this school; they reflect broader issues in career guidance systems noted by researchers and international organizations (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018). Our findings demonstrate what happens when those conditions are only partially met: students recognize the value in what is provided (they did benefit from university application help and enjoyed career day events), but they also see what is lacking (personalized discovery of interests, earlier continuous support, guidance for non-academic careers). Addressing these issues – by expanding the counseling curriculum, investing in more counseling staff or training, and integrating career guidance into the fabric of the school schedule – would likely enhance the effectiveness and equality of career support for all students. Indeed, a **holistic approach** that considers both individual student needs and the broader institutional context is needed, as suggested by Ahearn (2021). Ahearn (2021) points out that career counseling research and practice benefit from incorporating both individual-level focus and systemic factors like school resources and socio-economic context. In our case, while students in a private school may have certain advantages (e.g., exposure to universities, engaged parents), the systemic organization of counseling still needs refinement to meet their needs.

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### **Practical Guidelines for Enhancing Career Counseling for Private Schools in Azerbaijan**

This section is based on the findings and supporting literature and offers a set of practical, structured guidelines to improve the career counseling services of private schools in Azerbaijan. The research results in these recommendations as a potential 'product' of the research for schools to follow as a roadmap to fill the identified gaps and bring their practices in line with proven strategies. The insights from the study and the literature review have been used to derive each guideline, so that the suggestions are evidence based and contextually relevant.

**Introduce Career Counseling Early and Continuously:** Career counseling interventions should be begun in middle school or very early in high school and continued regularly through Grade 11 (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018). Schools should implement a developmental counseling curriculum that introduces basic career exploration in lower grades and progressively builds depth in later grades. This could involve age-appropriate activities: e.g., Grade 7–8 focus on self-discovery and broad career awareness, Grade 9–10 on aligning subject choices with interests, and Grade 11 on specific career and education decisions. Early and continuous support ensures that students do not feel rushed at the end and can gradually develop their career plans with confidence (Covacevich et al., 2021).

**Increase Awareness and Visibility of Services:** Proactively promote the existence and purpose of career counseling services to all students (and parents) from the outset. Regular announcements, dedicated homeroom sessions, or school newsletter features can remind students that guidance is available. The European Training Foundation (2022) emphasizes that low awareness is a major barrier to engagement; thus, making career counseling a **visible and normal part of school life**. Schools can host an assembly early each year where the counselor

explains how they can help students or integrate career counseling information into the curriculum (such as a unit in a life skills class). Ensuring students know *who* the counselor is and *how* to reach them for seeking guidance.

**Broaden the Scope Beyond University Admission:** Develop a more comprehensive counseling program that goes beyond just university application guidance. Literature supports the importance of exploring diverse career paths and building life skills (Weber et al., 2018). Therefore, counseling curricula should include sessions on vocational and technical career options, entrepreneurship, creative careers, and emerging fields in addition to the traditional university routes. Workshops on topics like **identifying personal strengths and interests**, goal setting, and employability skills (CV writing, interview practice, networking) should complement college advising. By offering information on internships, vocational training programs, and alternative pathways (e.g., gap years, studying abroad, starting a business), schools ensure that every student – whether academically oriented or not – sees value in the counseling program. A more holistic approach will align with best practices recommended in Europe and elsewhere that treat career development as a lifelong journey, not just a one-time college decision (Weber et al., 2018; Sharapova et al., 2023).

**Personalize Guidance with Assessments and One-on-One Support:** Invest in tools and processes that allow for personalized career guidance. This includes incorporating career assessment instruments (interest inventories, personality questionnaires, aptitude tests) and reflective exercises into the counseling program. Such tools can help students articulate their preferences and open conversations beyond generic advice. Schools should ensure that each student gets opportunities for **one-on-one counseling sessions** at multiple points during their high school years. In these sessions, counselors can review assessment results with students, discuss individual aspirations, and help formulate personalized action plans. If staffing is an issue, small group counseling that still focuses on individual reflection can be a supplement.

The key is to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach; research by Sharapova et al. (2023) and Ahearn (2021) recommends adaptable, student-centered guidance to effectively meet diverse needs. By tailoring counseling to the individual, schools can help every student feel seen and supported in their unique goals.

**Engage Parents as Partners in Career Counseling:** Develop strategies to include parents in the career guidance process in a constructive manner. Given the strong parental influence in Azerbaijan, schools should not sideline parents but rather bring them into the dialogue. This could involve holding informational workshops for parents about contemporary career pathways and the aims of the school's counseling program or inviting parents to join student-parent-counselor meetings at key decision points. By educating parents on how to support their child's career exploration (and by addressing parents' concerns or expectations), schools can reduce conflict and create a **supportive alliance**. Parental involvement, when guided properly, can reinforce the student's confidence – for example, parents can help explore options at home, encourage internships or extracurricular experiences, and back their child's informed choices even if they deviate from the parents' initial wishes. Research has shown that such aligned support can improve career decision outcomes (Zahra & Malik, 2024), while also respecting the student's autonomy (Yang, 2019). Schools should strive for that balance by making parents partners rather than adversaries in career education.







**Leverage Teacher Mentorship and Extracurricular Activities:** Recognize and formalize the role of teachers and extracurricular programs in career development. Teachers often know students' talents and interests well, as evidenced in our findings where teachers helped some students discover passions (like history or science) through clubs, competitions, or field trips. Schools should encourage teachers to incorporate career-relevant discussions in their subject teaching when appropriate (e.g., a literature teacher discussing writing careers, or a science teacher mentioning engineering fields). Additionally, establishing a mentoring

program where interested teachers or alumni advise students on specific career domains can supplement the counselor's work. Sharapova et al. (2023) highlighted that a multifaceted approach – including external speakers and mentoring enriches career guidance. Our study showed guest speaker events were appreciated so schools should continue and expand these: invite professionals from various industries (including local Azerbaijani professionals who students can relate to) for talks or Q&A sessions. They can also organize field trips to workplaces or career fairs. By embedding career learning in a variety of contexts (classroom, clubs, events), students get more touchpoints to consider their future, and those who might not actively seek the counselor still benefit from exposure through their normal school activities.

**Address Resource Gaps and Program Evaluation:** Finally, school administration should address the resource and structural gaps that hinder effective counseling. This means possibly hiring additional career counseling staff or cross-training existing staff (like psychologists or teachers) to assist in career guidance, to reduce the student-to-counselor ratio. Ensuring that counselors have dedicated time with each grade level (rather than only focusing on seniors) may require adjustments to the school timetable – for example, scheduling periodic career seminars or one-on-one slots as part of the school calendar. Schools could also invest in career guidance software or online platforms that allow students to explore careers independently and at their own pace, complementing in-person counseling. Importantly, schools should **monitor and evaluate** their career counseling initiatives: gather feedback from students (and parents) each year about what was helpful and what was missing. In our research, students clearly voiced what they felt was lacking; creating a formal feedback loop will help the program continually improve. By treating career counseling as an integral part of the educational mission (on par with academic teaching), and allocating budget and time accordingly, private schools can overcome many of the limitations observed in this study. As the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (2020) report indicates, robust program support and adequate

resources are key to providing equitable career guidance and preventing students from falling through the cracks.

In conclusion, these guidelines would help to align the career counseling practices in private schools in Azerbaijan and to make students better prepared for their future. Our research findings and international research and local insights have informed the above recommendations. If these changes which include beginning counseling sooner; extending coverage; tailoring support; involving parents and teachers to greater extent; and enhancing program resources, were implemented, then a better and more comprehensive career counseling system could be created. Such a system would not only address the current limited awareness and narrow focus issues but also empower students with the knowledge, skills, and support network they need to make well-informed and authentic career decisions. Ultimately, by adopting these practices, private schools in Azerbaijan can ensure that career counseling fulfills its vital role in education: guiding every student toward a future in which they can thrive.

<b>WHY THIS MATTERS</b>	
“Empowering every student to make informed and confident career decisions.”	
<b>GUIDELINE</b>	<b>ACTION STEPS</b>
<b>Start Early</b>	Introduce career guidance events 
<b>Boost Visibility</b>	Promote career guidance through assemblies, newsletters 
<b>Beyond University</b>	Explore diverse paths beyond traditional university admissions 
<b>Personalize Support</b>	Apply a program of individual and personalized counseling 
<b>Include Parents</b>	Strengthen parents' involvement 
<b>Empower Teachers</b>	Strengthen teacher involvement 
<b>WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TOMORROW?</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assign a Grade 7 into career sessions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Schedule first parent Q & A meeting <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Create counselor visibility poster	

## Practical Guidelines for Enhancing Career Counseling for Private Schools in Azerbaijan



### Start Early & Continuously

Introduce career guidance from middle school (Grade 7) and continue through high school. Use a step-by-step approach: self-awareness, subject choices, career decisions (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018; Covacevich et al., 2021).



### Raise Awareness of Services

Promote career counseling through assemblies, homerooms, newsletters, and life skills classes so students and parents know how to access help (European Training Foundation, 2022).



### Broaden Beyond University Admission

Include vocational, technical, and creative paths. Offer workshops on employability skills like CV writing, internships, and entrepreneurship (Weber et al., 2018; Sharapova et al., 2023).



### Personalize Counseling

Use assessments (interest inventories, personality tests) and offer one-on-one sessions to provide customized guidance (Sharapova et al., 2023; Ahearn, 2021).



### Engage Parents as Partners

Involve parents through meetings and workshops. Help them understand modern career options and how to support their child's decisions (Zahra & Malik, 2024; Yang, 2019).



### Use Teacher Mentorship & Extracurricular Activities

Encourage teachers to discuss career options during lessons. Use clubs, guest speakers, and field trips to connect learning with real-world careers (Sharapova et al., 2023).



### Improve Resources & Evaluate Progress

Hire or train more counselors. Use online tools and feedback systems to continually improve the program (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2020).

**APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

## Permission letter for School

No \_\_\_\_\_

“ \_\_\_\_ ” \_\_\_\_\_ 2025-ci il

... məktəbin direktoru

cənab/xanım ..... -a

Hörmətli cənab/xanım .....,

Nəzərinizə çatdırmaq istərdik ki, ADA Universitetinin MAEM 2025 “Təhsilin İdarəedilməsi” ixtisası üzrə magistr proqramının ikinci kurs tələbələri Gülarə Məmişova, Aysel Abudova, Tovus Hüseynova, Sürəyya Əlizadə və Zülfiyyə Rəsulovanın apardığı yekun tədqiqat işi üçün (Exploring upper secondary school students' awareness of career counselling in private schools in Azerbaijan- Azərbaycanda özəl məktəblərdə yuxarı sinif şagirdlərinin peşə yönümlü məsləhət xidmətləri haqqında məlumatlılığının tədqiqi) .... məktəbinin ali təhsil üzrə məsləhətçisi və 6 nəfər şagirdi arasında müsahibə keçirilməsi tələb olunur. Müsahibənin məqsədi özəl məktəblərdə 9-11-ci sinif şagirdlərinin peşə yönümlü məsləhət xidmətlərinin effektivliyini necə dəyərləndirdiyini və bu məktəblərin şagirdlərin qərarvermə prosesində onlara necə dəstək göstərdiyini müəyyənləşdirməkdir.

Bu məqsədlə tədqiqatın aparılması üçün şəraitin yaradılmasını Sizdən xahiş edirik.

Əməkdaşlığa görə təşəkkürümüzü bildiririk.

Hörmətlə,

.....

Dekan

**APPENDIX B****Consent Form****Consent Form for Participation in Research**

**Study Title:** Students' Awareness of Career Counselling in Private Schools in Azerbaijan

**Researchers:** Gulara Mamishova, Zulfiyya Rasulova, Aysel Abudova, Tovus Huseynova, Surayya Alizada, Master's Students in Educational Management, ADA University

**Purpose of the Research:** This study aims to explore the perception of career counseling among upper secondary private school students in Azerbaijan. The research will involve interviews with career counselors and alumni to understand their perspectives, experiences, and the support available for career decision-making.

**What You Will Do in This Research:** You are invited to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The interview is planned to be conducted face-to-face at the school; while online interviews will be video-taped. It will follow a semi-structured format, combining predetermined questions with the flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on your responses. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy in analysis.

**Voluntary Participation:** Be informed that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences or loss of benefits. Also, you have the right to decline answering the questions that you do not feel comfortable enough to respond.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses will remain confidential. All collected data will be anonymized and used exclusively for academic purposes. Findings will be presented only in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual participant can be identified in any reports or publications.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:** This interview carries no greater risks than those experienced in everyday life. While you may not receive direct benefits, your participation will provide valuable insights into career counseling perceptions and contribute to potential improvements in educational policies and practices.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this research study, do not hesitate to contact researchers Gulara Mamishova at [gmamishova18745@ada.edu.az](mailto:gmamishova18745@ada.edu.az) , Zulfiyya Rasulova at [zrasulova18624@ada.edu.az](mailto:zrasulova18624@ada.edu.az) , Aysel Abudova at [aabudova18959@ada.edu.az](mailto:aabudova18959@ada.edu.az) , Tovus Huseynova at [thuseynova19406@ada.edu.az](mailto:thuseynova19406@ada.edu.az) , Surayya Alizada at [salizada18869@ada.edu.az](mailto:salizada18869@ada.edu.az) or our research supervisor Dr. Yunusova at [vyunusova@ada.edu.az](mailto:vyunusova@ada.edu.az)

**Consent:** By signing this consent form, you confirm your agreement to participate in the research outlined above.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the terms of this research study and voluntarily agree to participate.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Consent Form for Parents

**Study Title:** Students' Awareness of Career Counselling in Private Schools in Azerbaijan

**Researchers:** Gulara Mamishova, Zulfiyya Rasulova, Aysel Abudova, Tovus Huseynova, Surayya Alizada, Master's Students in Educational Management, ADA University

**Purpose of the Research:** This study aims to explore the perception of career counseling among upper secondary private school students in Azerbaijan. The research will involve interviews with upper secondary students to understand their perspectives, experiences, and the support available for career decision-making.

**What You Will Do in This Research:** Your child is invited to participate in an interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The interview will follow a semi-structured format, combining prepared questions with the flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on his/her responses. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy in analysis.

**Voluntary Participation:** Be informed that the participation of your child in this study is completely voluntary. He/she may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences or loss of benefits.

**Confidentiality:** His/her responses will remain confidential. All collected data will be anonymized and used exclusively for academic purposes. Findings will be presented only in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual participant can be identified in any reports or publications.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:** This interview carries no greater risks than those experienced in everyday life. While the student may not receive direct benefits, his/her participation will provide valuable insights into career counseling perceptions and contribute to potential improvements in educational policies and practices.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this research study, do not hesitate to contact researchers Gulara Mamishova at [gmamishova18745@ada.edu.az](mailto:gmamishova18745@ada.edu.az) , Zulfiyya Rasulova at [zrasulova18624@ada.edu.az](mailto:zrasulova18624@ada.edu.az) , Aysel Abudova at [aabudova18959@ada.edu.az](mailto:aabudova18959@ada.edu.az) , Tovus Huseynova at [thuseynova19406@ada.edu.az](mailto:thuseynova19406@ada.edu.az) , Surayya Alizada at [salizada18869@ada.edu.az](mailto:salizada18869@ada.edu.az) or our research supervisor Dr. Yunusova at [vyunusova@ada.edu.az](mailto:vyunusova@ada.edu.az)

**Consent:** By signing this consent form, you confirm your consent for your child to participate in the research outlined above.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the terms of this research study and voluntarily agree for my child to participate.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Tədqiqatda İştirak Üçün Razılıq Forması

**Tədqiqatın Başlığı:** Azərbaycan Respublikasında Özəl Məktəblərdə Şagirdlərin Peşəkar Karyera Məsləhətçiliyindən Xəbərdarlığı

**Tədqiqatçılar:** Gülarə Məmişova, Zülfüyyə Rəsulova, Aysel Abudova, Tovuz Hüseynova, Sürəyya Əlizadə, ADA Universitetinin Təhsil üzrə Menecment ixtisası üzrə magistr tələbələri

**Tədqiqatın Məqsədi:** Bu tədqiqat Azərbaycan Respublikasında yuxarı sinif şagirdlərinin karyera məsləhətçiliyi haqqında təsəvvürlərini araşdırmağı hədəfləyir. Araşdırma çərçivəsində yuxarı sinif şagirdləri ilə müsahibələr aparılacaq və onların karyera ilə bağlı qərarvermə prosesində mövcud dəstək və təcrübələri öyrəniləcəkdir.

**Tədqiqatda Sizin Öhdəlikləriniz:** Övladınız bu tədqiqat çərçivəsində müsahibədə iştirak etməyə dəvət olunur. Müsahibə təxminən 30 dəqiqə davam edəcək və yarı-strukturlaşdırılmış formada aparılacaqdır. Bu o deməkdir ki, əvvəlcədən hazırlanmış suallar təqdim olunacaq, eyni zamanda cavablara əsasən əlavə suallar verilə bilər. Müsahibənin məktəbdə üzbəüz formatda keçirilməsi nəzərdə tutulub; lakin onlayn seçim də mövcuddur. Sizin razılığınız əsasında müsahibə səs yazısı şəklində qeydə alınacaq və dəqiq təhlil aparılması üçün transkripsiya ediləcəkdir.

**İştirakın Könüllü Olması:** Nəzərinizə çatdırırıq ki, bu tədqiqatda iştirak tamamilə könüllüdür. Övladınız istənilən vaxt heç bir səbəb göstərmədən iştirakdan imtina edə və ya prosesdən geri çəkilə bilər. Bu halda ona qarşı heç bir mənfi nəticə və ya imtiyaz itkisi olmayacaqdır.

**Məxfilik:** Övladınızın verdiyi cavablar məxfi saxlanılacaqdır. Toplanmış bütün məlumatlar anonimləşdiriləcək və yalnız akademik məqsədlər üçün istifadə ediləcəkdir. Araşdırmanın nəticələri yalnız ümumiləşdirilmiş şəkildə təqdim olunacaq və heç bir fərdi iştirakçının şəxsiyyəti açıqlanmayacaqdır.

**Potensial Risklər və Faydalar:** Bu müsahibə gündəlik həyatda qarşılaşılan vəziyyətlərdən daha yüksək risk daşımır. Şagirdin bu tədqiqatda iştirakı ona birbaşa fayda verməsə də, onun fikirləri karyera məsləhətçiliyi ilə bağlı anlayışların formalaşmasına və təhsil siyasətinin təkmilləşdirilməsinə töhfə verə bilər.

**Əlaqə Məlumatları:** Bu tədqiqatla bağlı hər hansı bir sualınız olarsa, aşağıda adları qeyd olunan tədqiqatçılarla və ya tədqiqat rəhbərimiz Dr. Yunusova ilə əlaqə saxlaya bilərsiniz.

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Razılıq: Bu formaya imza atmaqla, övladınızın yuxarıda izah edilən tədqiqatda iştirakına razılıq verdiyinizi təsdiq edirsiniz.

Mən, \_\_\_\_\_, tədqiqatın şərtlərini başa düşdüyümü və övladımın bu tədqiqatda iştirakına könüllü şəkildə razılıq verdiyimi bəyan edirəm.

İmza: \_\_\_\_\_ Tarix: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### Interview Questions for Current Upper Secondary School Students

##### Background Questions:

1. What grade are you currently in?
2. How long have you been studying at this school?
3. Have you had any formal career counseling sessions at your school? If so, how many times have you had career counseling sessions? What type of sessions (e.g., individual, group, or workshop) have you had?

##### Perceptions of Career Counseling:

4. What does the term "career counseling" mean to you?
5. What is its main purpose for students in upper secondary school?
6. When did you first hear about career counseling at your school?
7. What was your initial impression or feeling about it?
8. How is career counseling promoted at your school? Why do students need to seek out career counseling assistance? Be specific and elaborate on it.

##### Career Counseling Experiences:

9. Can you describe your most recent interaction with a career counselor? If you haven't yet used the career counseling services, what has influenced your decision not to engage with them?
10. What was discussed, and how did it impact your career decision-making?
11. What type of support do you get from career counselors to make decisions on your career and educational path? Was it adjusted to your personal interest? If so, how did you know? Be specific and elaborate on it.
12. What tools or resources (like assessments, career planning guides, or websites) are available to help you explore career options at your school? How useful are these tools or resources? Be specific and elaborate on it.
13. What type of information about higher education or specific career paths does your school career counseling services provide? Be specific and provide some insight in this regard.

##### Support for Career Decision-Making:

14. What activities are done to assist students in identifying their strengths and skills (e.g., through assessments or self-reflection)? In what ways have these activities helped to shape your career choices?
15. What type of support does your school provide to help students choose between different career options or educational pathways (e.g., vocational vs. academic tracks)?

##### Challenges or Limitations:

16. In what ways does career counseling in your school address the diverse career interests and goals of all students (e.g., traditional academic paths vs. vocational careers)?
17. What are the challenges you've faced regarding your future education or career?
18. How does career counseling assist in overcoming them? Be specific and provide at least three examples.

### Interview Questions for Alumni

1. How would you define career counseling based on your experience after graduating?
2. How has your perception of its value changed since leaving school?
3. Can you describe your experience with the career counseling services at your school?
4. How did you feel?
5. Which aspects were most useful in preparing you for your career or further education?
6. In what ways did career counseling influence your academic or career choices after graduation? Be specific and provide a few examples.
7. Looking back, what challenges did you face in transitioning from school to university or the job market?
8. How did career counseling help you navigate them?
9. What gaps in the career counseling services have you found after graduating?
10. What additional support would have been beneficial?
11. How well does the career counseling services at your school align with the real-world challenges you encountered after graduation?
12. What activities could have made them more practical or effective?
13. What career guidance did you seek after leaving school? Be specific and elaborate on it.
14. In what ways did your school career counseling services impact your approach to career planning and professional development? Be specific and provide some examples.
15. What advice would you give to current students about making the most of career counseling services?
16. If you could redesign the career counseling program based on your post-graduation experience, what key improvements would you suggest?
17. Reflecting on your career journey so far, what role do you think career counseling should play in better preparing students for life after school?

## Interview Questions for Career Counselor

### General Understanding & Role of Career Counseling

1. How would you define the role of career counseling in your school?
2. What are the main objectives of the career counseling services provided to students?
3. How do students typically learn about the career counseling services available to them?

### Students' Awareness & Engagement

4. How actively or frequently do students seek career counselling?
5. How do you encourage students to use these career counselling services?
6. What are the common misconceptions or misunderstandings students have about career counseling?

### Implementation & Effectiveness of Career Counseling

7. What strategies do you use to guide students in making career-related decisions?
8. How do you ensure that students from different backgrounds or with different career aspirations receive relevant guidance?
9. What structured programs, events, or workshops are available to help students explore career options? Be specific and provide a few examples. To what extent are they effective? Be specific and elaborate on it.

### Impact & Challenges

10. What impact has career counseling had on students' decision-making? Be specific and elaborate on it providing a few examples
11. What changes in students' career awareness or decision-making skills has career counselling services made over time?
12. What are the main challenges you face in providing career counseling services?
13. How do you address these challenges? Be specific and exemplify a few ways out?

### Collaboration & Future Improvements

14. How do you collaborate with teachers, parents, or external organizations to enhance career counseling services?
15. What improvements could be made to better support students in their career decision-making process?