

Beyond Graduation: Evolving Career Expectations among Undergraduate Degree Holders – A Study in Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka

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Abstract: This study examines the evolving career aspirations of undergraduate students in Dakshina Kannada district, shaped by contemporary socio-economic trends and technological advancements. Traditionally, students aspired to secure stable employment in government or private sectors. However, a noticeable shift has occurred, with many young graduates now seeking careers that offer personal growth, autonomy, work-life balance, and a sense of purpose. The growing influence of digital technologies, online work opportunities, and social media platforms has significantly reshaped how students perceive their future careers. Family and peer influences remain strong determinants in shaping career decisions, alongside individual values and external economic factors. Using a descriptive research design, primary data were collected from 100 undergraduate students through structured questionnaires. Secondary data were sourced from academic journals and credible websites to support the findings. The results indicate that 49% of respondents prioritise salary as a key factor in their career choices, while 42% are guided by family expectations. Additionally, 79% reported modifying their career goals in response to current job market trends, and 44% identified limited employment opportunities as a major concern. Notably, 69% of the students have undertaken additional training or skill development programs to enhance their employability. These findings highlight the need for dynamic career guidance, curriculum alignment with industry needs, and greater emphasis on skill-based education to meet the changing aspirations of undergraduate students.

Keywords: Career goals, Undergraduates, Career Aspirations, Employment Trends, Digital Influence.

I. Introduction

The transition from college to career has become increasingly complex for today's undergraduate students. In earlier times, earning a degree was widely considered a sufficient qualification for securing stable employment. However, with rapid technological advancements, a shifting global economy, and rising competition in the job market, this assumption no longer holds true. Employers now seek candidates who possess not only academic knowledge but also additional competencies such as communication skills, digital proficiency, and hands-on experience. In response to these changes, the career expectations of undergraduate students have also evolved. While traditional career paths in government and private sectors continue to hold appeal, many young individuals are now considering diverse alternatives such as entrepreneurship, freelancing, start-ups, and passion-driven roles. The desire for meaningful work, flexible schedules, financial stability, and personal growth significantly shapes their career choices.

This study focuses on the career expectations of undergraduate degree holders in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka—a region known for its educational institutions, diverse academic streams, and a growing student population. Students in this region are influenced by multiple factors, including family expectations, peer influence, local job availability, individual interests, and exposure to digital platforms and online work opportunities. Given the socio-economic diversity of Dakshina Kannada, students often face unique challenges in aligning their academic qualifications with market demands. Those from rural and semi-urban areas may face limited access to career resources, industry exposure, and professional networks. Yet, they also have the potential to benefit from government initiatives, digital platforms, and emerging employment sectors.

This study aims to explore the evolving career expectations of undergraduate students in Dakshina Kannada. By examining their career preferences, perceived challenges, and levels of preparedness, the research seeks to offer valuable insights for educators, institutions, policymakers, and employers to better support students in navigating their professional journeys and achieving their career goals.

Objective

- ❖ To investigate the career goals and aspirations of recent graduates in the region, identifying trends and factors influencing their expectations.
- ❖ To examine how different fields of undergraduate study (eg, arts, science and commerce) shape career aspirations, job expectations and perceived opportunities in DK.
- ❖ To explore the external and internal factors (such as family expectations, local industry opportunities and personal interests) that guide career decisions of graduates from this district.

- ❖ To evaluate how the local job market, industry growth and economic condition in DK influence the career expectation and decisions of undergraduate degree holders.
- ❖ To identify whether graduates feel adequately prepared for the job market and explore perceived skill gaps, training needs and the impact of such gaps on their career expectations.

Statement Of Problem

Many students in Dakshina Kannada are finishing their college degrees, but they are not always sure about what to do next. They may dream of certain jobs, but they do not always know if those jobs are available or if they have the right skills. Some students feel pressure from their families to choose certain careers, while others are unsure because there aren't enough job opportunities nearby. Also, what they studied in college might not match what companies are looking for in employees. Even though a lot of students have big dreams, they often feel confused or unprepared when it's time to start working. There haven't been many studies that ask students from Dakshina Kannada directly what they expect from their careers or what problems they face. This study wants to fill that gap. It will help us understand what kind of support graduates need to get the jobs they want and to build a good future.

II. Methodology

Both primary and secondary data serve as key components of this study. The main tool used for collecting responses is a structured questionnaire, which was distributed among undergraduate students from various colleges across Dakshina Kannada (DK). A total of 100 samples were collected from this region.

Primary data refers to firsthand information gathered directly from the respondents. In this study, primary data was collected through a survey involving undergraduate students, using a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions.

Secondary data, on the other hand, refers to information that has been previously collected and analysed by others. This includes data obtained from websites, articles, and other published sources.

Scope Of The Study

This study explores the career expectations and job aspirations of undergraduate students in the Dakshina Kannada district. It seeks to understand their ambitions, goals, and the various factors that shape their career choices—such as their academic stream (Arts, Science, or Commerce), family influences, availability of local employment opportunities, and individual preferences. The study also examines whether students feel adequately prepared for the job market or believe they need further skill development and training. By focusing on this particular region, the study aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and employers to help them support students in achieving their career objectives. Ultimately, the study sheds light on the future aspirations of graduates in Dakshina Kannada and the obstacles they may encounter along the way.

Limitation

The study has certain limitations. It does not capture the experiences of all graduates, as individual goals, backgrounds, and opportunities can differ significantly from person to person. The focus is limited to undergraduate degree holders, excluding individuals with diplomas, postgraduate qualifications, or those without formal education. Additionally, since career expectations and job market conditions are dynamic and continuously evolving, the findings of this study may become less relevant or outdated over time.

III. Literature Review

❖ Watts & Fosket (2013): In their article “Career education and guidance in the context of the curriculum” In, emphasize that the transition from higher education to the professional world is a critical phase in the lives of undergraduate degree holders. They argue that career decisions are no longer based solely on academic qualifications but are increasingly influenced by employability, cultural values, and access to career guidance. The article highlights how personal aspirations, socio-economic conditions, and labour market trends shape career expectations. In regional contexts such as Dakshina Kannada, these factors are further influenced by family expectations, the nature of the local economy, and the availability of relevant opportunities. The authors underscore the importance of integrating career education into the curriculum to address both global and local factors affecting graduates' career paths.

❖ Mishra and Tripathi (2021): In their article “The role of institutional cultural and alumni influence on student career choices in Indian college” explain that a student's career choice is strongly influenced by their college environment. Important factors include the college's culture, successful alumni, and inspiring role models like teachers and seniors. These influences often lead students to choose similar careers, especially in colleges known for specific subjects like science or commerce. This is common in regions like Dakshina Kannada. Their article helps me understand that, along with family, the college also plays a big role in shaping career goals.

❖ Raj & Nair (2020): In their article “Disciplinary Differences in Career Aspirations Among Indian Undergraduate Students” The field of study pursued by undergraduate students significantly shapes their career trajectories and professional expectations. argue that graduates from different academic disciplines exhibit distinct career inclinations Arts students often aspire towards careers in teaching, civil services, and public sector employment, motivated by a desire for social impact and job stability. In contrast,

Commerce and Science graduates are more likely to pursue careers in the private sector, particularly in finance, technology, or scientific research, where corporate opportunities and higher earning potential are perceived to be greater

❖ Ghosh & Fouad (2016): In their article “Family Influence on Career Decision Making: Validation in India”) studied how families influence career decisions in India. They found that family members, especially parents, have a big impact on what career a person chooses. In India, career choices are often made together with the family, not just by the individual alone. Family values, opinions, and money situation all affect these decisions. This study is important because it shows that career advice should consider family influence, especially in countries like India where family plays a strong role. Understanding this can help improve career guidance and support for young people.

❖ Agarwal & Dutta (2020): In their article “Bridging the Employability Gap: Challenges Faced by Indian Graduates in the 21st Century” the disconnect between academic training and market expectations Graduates often report lacking in soft skills, industry exposure, and technical competencies. In DK, initiatives by local institutions to bridge this gap through internships and training programs are emerging but may not be uniformly effective. The perception of being inadequately prepared affects confidence and alters long-term career aspirations.

IV. Findings

- ❖ A significant portion (62%) of the respondents are female.
- ❖ Nearly half (48%) of the participants reported a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. Additionally, a majority (59%) of the respondents identified securing a job as their main career objective within the next five years.
- ❖ A considerable number of respondents (42%) indicated that achieving expertise in their chosen field is their ultimate career aspiration.
- ❖ Additionally, nearly half of the participants (49%) stated that salary and financial benefits play a major role in influencing their career choices.
- ❖ A significant portion of respondents (42%) identified family expectations as the most influential factor shaping their career aspirations.
- ❖ A large majority (79%) reported having revised their career goals in response to changing job market trends.
- ❖ A majority of respondents (65%) reported having accessed career counselling or mentorship services.
- ❖ Most participants (75%) expressed optimism about reaching their career aspirations.
- ❖ Additionally, 60% of the respondents believed that their field of study adequately prepares them for job opportunities within Dakshina Kannada.
- ❖ When it comes to career choices, 43% showed a preference for pursuing jobs in the corporate or private sector.
- ❖ Moreover, a significant portion (62%) indicated that family expectations have a strong influence on their career decisions.
- ❖ A majority (67%) expressed a willingness to pursue their careers within the district. Furthermore, 61% of respondents felt that the local job market provides competitive salaries when compared to other regions.
- ❖ Over half (56%) believed that economic conditions play a significant role in shaping career choices in Dakshina Kannada.
- ❖ Lastly, a large majority (69%) had taken part in training programs or certification courses to improve their skill sets.

V. Conclusion

The study highlights that career expectations among undergraduate students in Dakshina Kannada are shifting due to changing industry demands, better access to information, and rising aspirations. While many aim for higher education or professional courses, there is growing interest in skill-based jobs, entrepreneurship, and global careers. However, limited career guidance, low awareness of emerging fields, and socio-economic challenges hinder informed choices. Educational institutions must bridge the gap between academics and career readiness through counselling, industry partnerships, and skill-building programs. Strengthening these areas will help students make informed decisions, align their goals with market needs, and support regional and personal development.

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