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Unveiling Ikigai: Perspectives, Influences and Challenges in Pakistani Context
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Abstract

This pioneering study explores Ikigai among Pakistani academicians, providing nuanced insights into how life purpose is interpreted within their cultural and professional context. Through an in-depth examination of the four dimensions of Ikigai passion, profession, vocation, and mission the study reveals a diverse and interconnected range of meanings, values, and sources of fulfillment among participants. A key finding is the centrality of teaching, which emerges as a dominant theme across all dimensions of Ikigai. It is closely linked with vocational competencies and broader societal expectations, highlighting its essential role in shaping participants' sense of purpose. Teaching is not only viewed as a profession but also as a meaningful contribution to society and personal identity. The study further highlights the importance of personal development, spirituality, and consistent self-care in sustaining a strong sense of purpose. Participants emphasize that Ikigai is dynamic and evolving, requiring continuous reflection and adaptation, particularly in teaching practices to address the diverse needs of students effectively. In addition, maintaining quality time for family responsibilities is identified as a significant contributor to overall life satisfaction and fulfillment. Despite these positive dimensions, the study also identifies several structural and social barriers that hinder the pursuit of Ikigai in Pakistan. These include educational deficiencies, lack of awareness and guidance among youth, and broader societal issues such as intolerance and limited empathy. Such challenges restrict individuals from fully aligning their personal passions with meaningful societal roles. Overall, this research deepens the understanding of Ikigai within the Pakistani academic context and underscores the intertwined roles of spirituality, personal growth, professional dedication, and social contribution in building a meaningful life. It further emphasizes the need to foster compassion, empathy, and supportive educational environments to enable individuals to realize their full potential and contribute to a more purposeful and harmonious society.

Keywords: *Ikigai, Pakistani academicians, purpose in life, qualitative research, teaching profession, cultural adaptation, spirituality, well-being, barriers to fulfillment.*

Introduction

The concept of Ikigai represents a deeply rooted Japanese philosophy centered on finding meaning and purpose in life. Derived from the words "Iki," meaning life, and "Gai," meaning value or worth, Ikigai broadly translates to "a reason for being" or "the joy of living." Although it does not have a precise English equivalent, it reflects a holistic understanding of what makes life meaningful. The idea is closely associated with Okinawa, a region well known for its high life expectancy and strong community bonds. Within this cultural context, Ikigai is not merely an abstract idea but a lived practice that contributes to longevity, happiness, and overall life satisfaction (Werpern et al., 2021).

At its core, Ikigai is shaped by the intersection of four key elements: what an individual loves, what they are good at, what the world needs, and what they can be paid for. Together, these elements form a comprehensive framework that guides individuals toward a balanced and purposeful life. The dimension of "what you love" reflects personal passions and activities that bring joy and fulfillment. "What you are good at" highlights individual skills, talents, and competencies that can be developed and applied meaningfully. "What the world needs" emphasizes contributing to society and addressing broader human or social challenges. Lastly, "what you can be paid for" introduces the practical necessity of financial sustainability. When these four aspects align, they create a sense of harmony through the integration of passion, profession, vocation, and purpose, ultimately enabling individuals to lead a more meaningful and impactful life (Russo-Netzer, 2021).

Components of Ikigai

Ikigai is fundamentally rooted in passion, which reflects an inner drive to engage in activities that bring joy and fulfillment. Discovering one's passion is often a gradual process that involves reflection, persistence, and overcoming setbacks. Failures play a constructive role by guiding individuals toward growth and self-improvement. Rather than avoiding challenges, Ikigai encourages embracing life as it is, fostering motivation, resilience, and adherence to personal principles that support meaningful progress (Raessi, 2021). Closely linked to passion are the ideas of vocation and mission, which together shape an individual's sense of purpose. Vocation refers to a career or calling aligned with personal skills, interests, and values, while mission emphasizes contributing to society through meaningful goals (Galles et al., 2019). Ikigai integrates these dimensions by combining what one loves, is good at, can be paid for, and what the world needs. Research highlights that developing a strong vocational identity grounded in self-awareness of passions and abilities precedes financial and societal considerations, ultimately facilitating both personal fulfillment and social contribution (Baron, 2006; Shane, 2000).

Beyond these practical dimensions, Ikigai carries deep cultural and philosophical significance, particularly within Japanese society where it is associated with harmony, interconnectedness, and balance between individual aspirations and collective well-being. It aligns more closely with eudaimonic well-being, focusing on meaning and purpose rather than mere pleasure (Kumano, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ikigai is also subjective and evolves across individuals and life stages, shaped by personal values, social roles, and life experiences (Kamiya, 1966). Ultimately, it represents a lifelong process of self-awareness, purposeful engagement, and continuous pursuit of a meaningful existence (Steininger et al., 2022).

Global Prevalence of Ikigai

Japan

In Japan, Ikigai is strongly associated with improved physical, psychological, and social well-being. Studies show that individuals with a strong sense of Ikigai experience lower risks of dementia, reduced mortality, better functional health, and higher life satisfaction (Murata et al., 2006; Sone et al., 2008; Mori et al., 2017). It is also linked with lower psychological distress, particularly among men and those with higher socioeconomic status (Okuzono et al., 2022). Research further highlights the importance of social connections, as individuals both young and old often derive Ikigai from relationships and a sense of belonging (Ozawa-de Silva, 2020).

United States (Western Perspective)

Western perspectives, particularly from anthropological studies, view Ikigai through both personal fulfillment and social belonging. According to Mathews (1996), Ikigai can be understood through "ittaikan" (group belonging) and "jiko jitsugen" (self-realization). While men often associate Ikigai with work and women with family roles, there is ongoing debate about whether focusing on a single domain limits well-being. Overall, Ikigai in the Western context reflects a balance between individual aspirations and social responsibilities (Mathews, 1996).

Japan vs. United States

Comparative insights reveal cultural differences in how Ikigai is pursued. Japanese individuals tend to emphasize collective values, often finding purpose in family and social roles, whereas Americans are more inclined toward individual goals and career-based fulfillment. Despite these differences, both groups show dissatisfaction with materialistic lifestyles and often turn to deeper, spiritual or existential sources to find meaning in life.

Germany and South Africa

In Germany and South Africa, Ikigai has been applied in existential coaching to enhance self-awareness and decision-making. Case studies demonstrate that aligning personal values, skills, and life goals through Ikigai helps individuals overcome burnout, rediscover motivation, and make meaningful career choices. This approach proved particularly useful during challenging periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting Ikigai as a practical tool for personal and professional growth (Mayer, 2021).

Turkey

Research in Turkey shows a positive relationship between Ikigai, physical activity, and health among older adults. Individuals with a stronger sense of purpose tend to engage in more physical activity and rely less

on medication. These findings suggest that integrating Ikigai into healthcare practices may improve well-being and promote healthier aging (Belice et al., 2022).

Europe

In Europe, Ikigai aligns closely with the concept of Purpose in Life (PIL), rooted in existentialist philosophy. Both emphasize the human need for meaning and are linked to reduced anxiety, improved mental and physical health, and greater emotional resilience (Ishida, 2011; Ishida, 2012). A strong sense of purpose is often developed through positive life experiences and social support, contributing to long-term well-being and personal growth.

Significance of Ikigai

Ikigai plays a crucial role in guiding individuals especially students toward meaningful life and career choices. It helps them understand their interests, strengths, and goals, enabling more informed academic decisions. For instance, Ikigai-based approaches in education use structured assessments to provide personalized career guidance, allowing students to align their passions with suitable degree programs and future paths (Millán et al., 2023). Beyond education, Ikigai fosters a deeper sense of purpose, motivation, and contribution to society. It acts as a “compass” that helps individuals set goals, explore interests, and find meaning beyond academic or professional success. Frameworks such as the four-circle model (what you love, are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for) further support self-discovery and long-term fulfillment (Eller, 2016; Hamzaid et al., 2022; Kondo, 2007). Importantly, Ikigai is strongly linked to overall well-being and health. Research shows that individuals with a strong sense of Ikigai experience lower stress, better physical health, reduced mortality risks, and greater life satisfaction (Murata et al., 2006; Mori et al., 2017; Tanno et al., 2009). It also enhances resilience, self-worth, and emotional stability, making it a key factor in both psychological and physiological well-being (Ishida, 2014).

Literature Review

Existing literature highlights Ikigai as a multidimensional construct closely linked with health, well-being, and life satisfaction. Research by Randall et al. (2023) identifies health as a primary source of Ikigai among older adults, with strong associations between Ikigai, life satisfaction, and positive emotional states. Importantly, Ikigai is more connected to voluntary social activities such as hobbies, friendships, and leisure rather than obligatory roles like work or family. This reflects its alignment with both eudaimonic well-being (purpose, growth, and relationships) and hedonic well-being (happiness and positive affect). Similarly, Tsuzishita et al. (2021) emphasize that Ikigai significantly predicts quality of life (QOL) among older adults, suggesting that fostering a sense of purpose can enhance overall well-being. These findings collectively establish Ikigai as a key determinant of healthy and meaningful aging. Beyond aging populations, Ikigai has been widely explored as a framework for personal development and performance enhancement. Benty et al. (2023) describe Ikigai as a tool for achieving self-actualization by integrating passion, vocation, mission, and profession. In educational contexts, it supports human resource development by improving individual competencies and guiding purposeful career pathways. Empirical studies in Western contexts further validate its psychological relevance. For instance, Fido et al. (2020) and Wilkes et al. (2023) found that Ikigai significantly predicts higher mental well-being and lower depression levels, although its relationship with anxiety remains inconsistent. Additionally, Roepke et al. (2014) and Kotera et al. (2021) demonstrate that a strong sense of purpose, including Ikigai, is associated with healthier behaviors, improved recovery from illness, and enhanced immune functioning, reinforcing its importance across diverse populations.

Research also highlights the role of Ikigai in shaping behavior, lifestyle, and social engagement. Studies on Japanese university students reveal that Ikigai is cultivated through meaningful experiences, balanced values, and active engagement in enjoyable and challenging activities (Kono et al., 2020; Kono et al., 2022). Similarly, Lashari et al. (2020) demonstrate the application of Ikigai in digital mental health platforms, helping students identify stress, anxiety, and depression. Physical activity and lifestyle factors further strengthen Ikigai, as evidenced by studies linking higher purpose in life with increased physical activity and reduced medication use (Belice et al., 2022). Moreover, gender-based differences indicate that men often associate Ikigai with work and physical health, while women relate it more to relationships

and psychological well-being (Shirai et al., 2006; Fujimoto et al., 2004). These findings suggest that Ikigai is shaped by social, cultural, and individual contexts.

A substantial body of research also connects Ikigai with long-term health outcomes, stress management, and resilience. Studies consistently show that a strong sense of Ikigai is associated with reduced mortality, particularly from cardiovascular diseases, and lower risks of disability and depression (Sone et al., 2008; Tanno et al., 2009; Mori et al., 2017; Miyazaki et al., 2022). Neurological and psychological evidence indicates that Ikigai supports stress regulation by enhancing prefrontal brain function and balancing neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, thereby improving emotional stability and reducing anxiety (Ishida, 2012; Ishida, 2014). Furthermore, Ikigai promotes resilience in challenging situations, including caregiving roles and disaster recovery, by helping individuals find meaning and maintain psychological strength (Yamamoto-Mitani et al., 2002; Ishida, 2011). Overall, the literature underscores Ikigai as a dynamic and adaptive concept that not only enhances individual well-being but also supports long-term health, resilience, and life satisfaction across different contexts (Sazali et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

An Integrated Cognitive-Motivational Model of Ikigai

The Integrated Cognitive-Motivational Model of Ikigai explains how purpose in life emerges through the interaction of cognitive, motivational, and environmental factors. This model views Ikigai as a dynamic process consisting of inputs, core processes, and outputs (Šimleša et al., 2018). Inputs include both situational factors, such as social and work environments, and dispositional traits like personality and causality orientation. These inputs activate internal processes primarily motivation and attention which shape how individuals pursue meaningful goals. Central to this model are psychological mechanisms such as self-determination, awareness, and the fulfillment of basic needs. The outputs of this process include observable outcomes like improved behavior, enhanced performance, better physical health, and overall well-being (Shirai et al., 2006; Sone et al., 2008). A key feature of this framework is the feedback loop, where positive outcomes reinforce motivation and sustain the Ikigai cycle over time. This model highlights that Ikigai is not static but evolves through continuous interaction between internal drives and external conditions, making it a holistic framework for understanding purpose, engagement, and life satisfaction (Nakanishi, 1999).

Japanese Model of Ikigai

The Japanese model of Ikigai emphasizes balance, harmony, and the integration of personal fulfillment with societal contribution. Rooted in cultural values, it highlights the importance of community, purpose, and longevity. Ikigai is commonly represented through a four-circle framework: what one loves, what one is good at, what the world needs, and what one can be paid for. The intersection of these elements forms a meaningful life purpose that integrates passion, vocation, profession, and mission. In Japanese society, Ikigai is not solely about individual success but also about contributing to collective well-being, reflecting a strong sense of interconnectedness. Practices such as staying active, maintaining social relationships, engaging in meaningful work, and appreciating simple pleasures are central to sustaining Ikigai (Puigcerver & Miralles, 2017). Additionally, cultural contexts like Okinawa demonstrate how Ikigai contributes to longevity and life satisfaction. However, challenges such as overwork highlight the need for balance. Overall, this model portrays Ikigai as a lifelong journey of aligning personal values with societal roles to achieve fulfillment and purpose.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a strong psychological foundation for understanding Ikigai by emphasizing intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic human needs. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), individuals require autonomy, competence, and relatedness to achieve optimal well-being. In the context of Ikigai, autonomy refers to the freedom to pursue activities aligned with personal values and interests, competence involves developing skills and achieving mastery, and relatedness reflects meaningful social connections. These elements closely align with Ikigai's dimensions, where individuals engage in activities they love, excel in, and find socially meaningful. SDT also distinguishes between intrinsic motivation driven by internal satisfaction and extrinsic motivation driven by external rewards. Ikigai integrates both, as individuals pursue meaningful activities that are personally fulfilling while also

contributing to society. However, unlike SDT, Ikigai places greater emphasis on purpose beyond the self, particularly in addressing societal needs. This alignment makes SDT a valuable framework for explaining how motivation and psychological needs contribute to the discovery and sustenance of Ikigai.

Self-Actualization Theory

Self-Actualization Theory, proposed by Abraham Maslow (1962), focuses on the realization of an individual's highest potential, which closely aligns with the concept of Ikigai. According to this theory, individuals strive to achieve personal growth, fulfillment, and purpose once their basic needs are satisfied. Ikigai complements this by guiding individuals toward meaningful activities that align with their passions, talents, and values. Both frameworks emphasize pursuing work that utilizes one's abilities (profession), engaging in activities that bring joy (passion), and contributing to a greater cause (mission and vocation). Self-actualized individuals are driven by intrinsic goals, creativity, and a desire to make a positive impact, which resonates with Ikigai's focus on purposeful living. Furthermore, both theories highlight authenticity and continuous self-improvement as essential components of a meaningful life. By integrating personal satisfaction with societal contribution, Ikigai extends self-actualization beyond individual fulfillment, encouraging individuals to align their potential with broader social needs and long-term life purpose.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology provides a person-centered perspective that strongly aligns with the concept of Ikigai by emphasizing personal growth, self-awareness, and the pursuit of meaning. Developed as a response to behaviorism and psychoanalysis, this approach focuses on individuals' subjective experiences and their innate drive toward self-fulfillment (Rogers, 1951). In relation to Ikigai, humanistic psychology highlights the importance of engaging in activities that reflect one's true self and inner desires. The idea of a "fully functioning person," as proposed by Carl Rogers, resonates with Ikigai's emphasis on authenticity, where individuals pursue passions that bring joy and satisfaction. Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs reinforces the importance of self-actualization, where individuals seek meaningful goals and personal excellence. Ikigai integrates these ideas by encouraging individuals to align their passions, skills, and societal contributions. Moreover, humanistic psychology stresses the importance of positive relationships and contributing to the well-being of others, which parallels Ikigai's focus on interconnectedness and purpose. Thus, both frameworks emphasize personal growth, authenticity, and meaningful engagement as pathways to achieving a fulfilling and purposeful life.

Flow Theory

Flow Theory, introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), explains the state of deep engagement and immersion in activities that are both challenging and rewarding. This concept closely relates to Ikigai, as both emphasize finding fulfillment through meaningful and enjoyable experiences. Flow occurs when an individual's skills are well-matched with the level of challenge in an activity, leading to a state of concentration where time seems to disappear. In the context of Ikigai, this aligns with engaging in activities that one loves and excels at, which fosters both passion and competence. Additionally, Flow Theory highlights the importance of clear goals and immediate feedback, which correspond to Ikigai's mission-driven approach to life. When individuals pursue activities aligned with their values and purpose, they are more likely to experience flow, resulting in increased satisfaction and productivity. Furthermore, both frameworks emphasize continuous skill development and personal growth. By integrating Flow Theory, Ikigai can be understood as not only identifying purpose but also actively experiencing it through deeply engaging and meaningful activities that enhance both well-being and performance.

Meaning-Making Theory

Meaning-Making Theory, largely influenced by Viktor Frankl (1959), focuses on how individuals construct meaning in their lives, especially during challenging or uncertain situations. This theory aligns closely with Ikigai, as both emphasize the importance of purpose and values in shaping human experiences. According to this perspective, individuals derive meaning by interpreting their experiences in alignment with their beliefs, goals, and personal narratives. Similarly, Ikigai encourages individuals to engage in activities that resonate with their passions and contribute to a greater good. Meaning-making also involves finding purpose in work, relationships, and social contributions, which parallels Ikigai's integration of personal fulfillment and societal impact. Furthermore, this theory highlights resilience, suggesting that individuals

who find meaning in adversity are better equipped to cope with stress and challenges. Ikigai reflects this by promoting a sense of direction and motivation even in difficult circumstances. Both frameworks emphasize that a meaningful life is not solely about happiness but about purpose, contribution, and alignment with one's core values, making meaning-making a key theoretical foundation for understanding Ikigai.

Existentialism Theory

Existentialism Theory explores fundamental questions about human existence, freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, making it highly relevant to the concept of Ikigai. Philosophers such as Kierkegaard (1849) and Sartre (1943) emphasized that individuals must create their own meaning in life through conscious choices and authentic living. This idea aligns with Ikigai, which encourages individuals to discover and pursue their true purpose. Existentialism stresses personal responsibility and the importance of living authentically, which parallels Ikigai's focus on aligning actions with personal values and passions. Additionally, the theory highlights the inevitability of uncertainty and challenges in life, suggesting that meaning must be actively constructed despite these conditions. Ikigai reflects this by encouraging individuals to find purpose not only in success but also in struggle and growth. Both frameworks also emphasize contributing to something beyond oneself, reinforcing the importance of mission and societal impact. Ultimately, existentialism complements Ikigai by framing purpose as a personal and continuous journey, where individuals actively shape their lives through meaningful choices and authentic engagement.

Rationale

The concept of Ikigai, meaning "a reason for being," is widely recognized as a framework for understanding life purpose and fulfillment. However, there is limited research on its application within the Pakistani context, where similar ideas are already embedded in cultural, religious, and social traditions. This gap provides an opportunity to explore how Ikigai is understood and experienced by Pakistani academicians. Investigating this is important because perceptions of purpose and happiness are deeply influenced by cultural and religious values, which may shape how individuals define their professional and personal roles. This study aims to examine how Pakistani academicians interpret Ikigai, the barriers they face in achieving it, and its impact on their career design, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and productivity. It also explores how local customs, beliefs, and social norms influence the integration of Ikigai's four components passion, vocation, profession, and mission. A qualitative approach will be used to capture rich, context-specific experiences. The study will provide insight into how academicians navigate challenges in pursuing meaningful work and how achieving Ikigai contributes to their overall well-being and professional effectiveness.

Research Objectives

1. To explore how Pakistani individuals define and understand the concept of Ikigai.
2. To examine the influence of Ikigai on career design and job satisfaction among Pakistani academicians.
3. To analyze how Ikigai is interpreted and culturally adapted in the Pakistani context, considering customs, religious beliefs, values, and social norms.
4. To investigate how the alignment of Ikigai components (passion, vocation, profession, and mission) affects teaching effectiveness and overall productivity of Pakistani academicians.
5. To identify the barriers Pakistani academicians face in pursuing Ikigai.

Research Questions

1. How do Pakistani individuals understand and define the concept of Ikigai?
2. What are the common sources of Ikigai among Pakistani academicians?
3. What challenges and barriers do Pakistani academicians face in pursuing Ikigai?
4. How does Ikigai influence career design and professional development among Pakistani academicians?
5. What is the impact of Ikigai on job satisfaction among Pakistani academicians?
6. How is Ikigai culturally interpreted and adapted within the Pakistani context, considering religious beliefs, customs, values, and social norms?

7. How does the alignment of Ikigai components (passion, vocation, profession, and mission) affect teaching effectiveness and overall productivity among Pakistani academicians?
8. How does the pursuit of Ikigai influence the overall well-being and productivity of Pakistani academicians?

Methodology

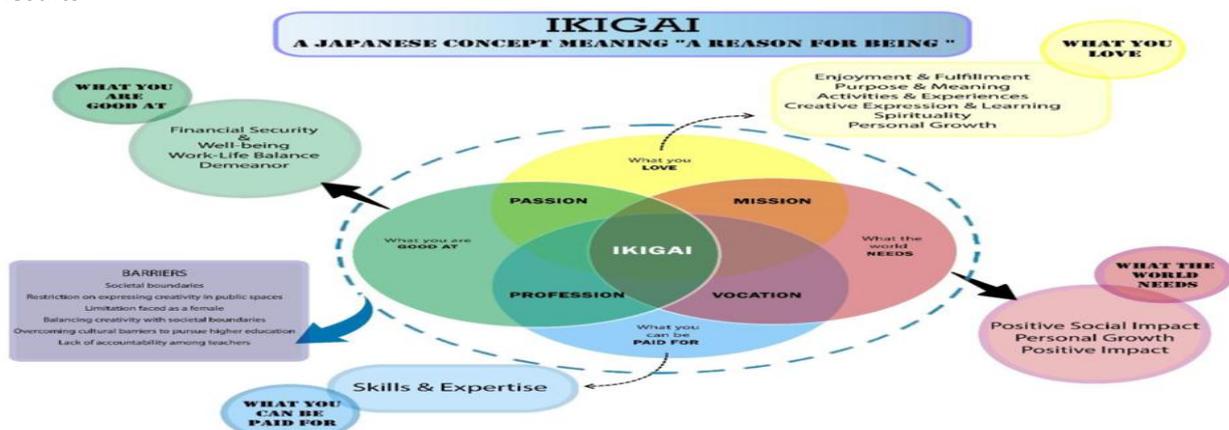
This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the concept of Ikigai among Pakistani academicians. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into participants’ perceptions and lived experiences. This flexible approach allowed participants to openly express their views while enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes for deeper understanding. After data collection, thematic analysis was used to systematically identify patterns, recurring ideas, and meaningful insights related to Ikigai. This approach helped in exploring the significance, challenges, and implications of Ikigai within the academic context in Pakistan. The qualitative design was considered most appropriate as it captures rich, contextualized data and supports a comprehensive understanding of complex human experiences.

The study included seven academicians (five females and two males) aged between 25 and 50 years from Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Participants were selected based on their professional teaching experience and prior awareness of the Ikigai concept. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the four components of Ikigai, initially consisting of 36 questions. After pilot testing with two participants and expert review, irrelevant and unclear questions were removed, and necessary additions were made, resulting in a final set of 27 questions. To ensure cultural relevance and clarity, the interview questions were translated into Urdu. Each interview lasted approximately 50–55 minutes, allowing detailed discussion of participants’ understanding and experiences of Ikigai.

Participants	Age	Gender	Profession
1	29	Female	Academician
2	39	Female	Academician
3	34	Female	Academician
4	49	Female	Academician
5	38	Male	Academician
6	40	Female	Academician
7	25	Male	Academician

Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and voluntary participation was ensured, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and informed consent was obtained before conducting interviews. Permission was also taken to record the sessions for accuracy. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, involving steps such as transcription, coding, and categorization of data. Relevant information was coded, and patterns were identified to form initial themes, which were later reviewed, refined, and validated against the full dataset. Final themes were defined and interpreted in relation to existing literature, leading to the final conclusions of the study.

Results



Explanation of Model

In this model, the concept of Ikigai is examined through the context of teaching as a meaningful and multidimensional endeavor that integrates passion, vocation, profession, and mission, ultimately contributing to both personal fulfillment and societal development.

Passion:

Participants expressed that teaching is not simply a job but a deeply fulfilling and meaningful activity that provides emotional satisfaction and spiritual enrichment. Through teaching, they experience a strong sense of purpose, deriving joy from supporting students’ learning, personal development, and positive transformation.

Vocation:

For the academicians, teaching goes beyond financial stability and serves as a meaningful life pursuit that supports work–life balance, personal development, and professional refinement. It allows them to continuously enhance their skills, improve their teaching practices, and maintain overall well-being, making it a sustained calling rather than just employment.

Profession:

Teaching as a profession was described as a source of broader social contribution rather than only monetary reward. Participants emphasized that their role enables them to influence society positively by shaping students’ knowledge, attitudes, and capabilities, thereby contributing to social progress and collective development.

Mission:

At the core of participants’ Ikigai lies the mission of driving positive social change through education. Teaching is perceived as a powerful tool for fostering resilience, encouraging personal growth, and empowering individuals to overcome social and educational barriers. Participants highlighted their desire to challenge restrictive norms, break cultural limitations, and promote inclusive access to education.

Barriers and Societal Constraints:

Despite strong dedication and a sense of purpose, participants reported multiple barriers affecting their pursuit of Ikigai. These include limited opportunities for creativity, gender-based restrictions, cultural biases regarding women’s education, and institutional challenges related to accountability and teaching practices. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated resilience in navigating these challenges and emphasized the importance of reforming societal structures and adopting innovative educational approaches.

Passion Table

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Initial Codes
Passion (what you love)	Enjoyment & Fulfillment	Passion for cooking; love for adventure; enjoy outdoor activities; time unawareness during exercise; self-care as fulfillment; therapeutic fulfillment; fulfillment as cleaning (finding joy in the process); kindness (intrinsic motivator); positive social interaction; communication awareness (enjoyment of connection); self-awareness (enjoyment of understanding self); kind gesture (intrinsic motivator); sharing laughter; feel joy from full sleep (physical wellbeing contributes to enjoyment); feel excitement after rest (physical wellbeing contributes to enjoyment); enjoyment in nature; parenting bonding; feeling excitement for traveling; appreciation of good food; finding joy in dance activities; lost track of time during research (enjoyment of the process); unaware of time while reading
	Purpose & Meaning	Standing up for oneself (finding purpose in action); therapeutic involvement (helping others); motivation for teaching (enjoyment of helping others); alleviating loneliness of others (finding purpose); creativity and innovation; fulfillment for achieving high goals (achievement as a motivator); persistence and overcoming challenges; empathy as personal growth; non-materialistic mindset as a strength; positive contribution

		through respectfulness; promoting respect in personal and public interaction; cleanliness as a significant societal issue; addressing aggressive communication style; appreciation of nature; tree planting as a proactive environmental action; promoting equality
	Activities & Experiences	Parenting bonding; appreciation of good food; finding joy in dance activities; happiness derived from simplicity; watching movies and TV series; enjoying music; memorable travel experience; excitement for understanding poetic language
	Creative Expression & Learning	Love for sketching and painting; importance of continuous learning; creativity sparked by new tasks and projects; feeling of hope generated by creativity; mind and body activation through tasks; finding meaning through creative tasks; reflection on philosophical and ideological themes (enjoyment)
	Spirituality	Belief we are created for a meaningful purpose by God; importance of individual existence; feeling sense of fulfillment when others benefit from you; importance of having personal beliefs; feeling of divine presence and support in life journey; satisfaction communicating with God during prayer; spiritual reflection; search for God
	Personal Growth	Fulfillment is goal setting and achievement; daily fulfillment; fulfillment as journey not destination; effort leading to fulfillment; self-belief; support from parents and teachers
	Learning & Knowledge	Engaging in highly intellectual activities; decoding complex philosophical or psychological concepts; stretching cognitive ability through tasks; deep thinking about life; early exposure can lead to better understanding; commitment to completing challenges, thoughts and ideas; continuous learning; recognition from a mentor; appreciation of the unconscious mind

Passion Table Interpretation

Ikigai, a Japanese concept meaning “a reason for being,” consists of four key components: passion, vocation, profession, and mission. This section focuses on the first component, passion, and explores how Pakistani academicians experience it in their lives. The findings highlight that passion is deeply connected to enjoyment, fulfillment, meaning, spirituality, personal growth, and learning.

Passion in Enjoyment and Fulfillment

Participants described passion as a strong source of enjoyment and inner fulfillment. Many expressed that teaching is their central passion, as it allows them to support student growth and feel a sense of purpose. They reported that witnessing students’ progress gives them deep satisfaction and enthusiasm. As Participant A stated:

“Cooking leads me to creativity when I make new things, and if the taste is good then I feel passionate and it is a great experience for me.”

Similarly, Participant F shared:

“When I am traveling, I feel very passionate. I also go hiking every 15 days and gym daily.”

Participants also linked passion with self-care and emotional well-being. Self-care routines, therapeutic practices, kindness, and positive social interaction were frequently mentioned as sources of fulfillment.

Participant A noted:

“I feel fulfilled when I give therapeutic sessions to my clients and see satisfaction on their faces; that moment is very passionate for me.”

Participant E added:

“Kindness and positive social interaction are significant sources of fulfillment for me.”

Outdoor activities such as gardening, hiking, and connecting with nature were also identified as meaningful passion sources, especially for mental and physical well-being.

Passion in Purpose and Meaning

Participants emphasized that passion becomes meaningful when it is connected to purpose. Teaching, helping others, and self-growth were repeatedly described as purpose-driven passions.

Participant A explained:

"My passion is meaningful when I support myself and others at the right time; it makes me enthusiastic."

Participant D highlighted creativity as a core driver:

"When I create something new or innovate, it motivates me. Contributing creatively makes me feel that I am bringing something unique to the world."

Overall, participants viewed passion not only as enjoyment but also as a meaningful contribution to others and society.

Passion in Activities and Experiences

Participants reported that everyday experiences also contribute to their passion. Family time, especially with children and spouses, was highlighted as a strong emotional source of happiness and fulfillment.

Participant B stated:

"When I spend time with my children and husband, it makes me very happy and enthusiastic."

Similarly, Participant D mentioned that quality family time provides emotional satisfaction and balance in life. Leisure activities such as watching movies, listening to music, traveling, and engaging in simple pleasures were also described as important sources of joy.

Passion in Spirituality

Spirituality emerged as a major dimension of passion among participants. Many expressed that their belief in God and spiritual connection provides life purpose, strength, and emotional peace.

Participant F shared:

"I have full faith in the One who created me. This belief gives me strength to do everything."

Participant E added a reflective perspective, expressing gratitude and satisfaction through spiritual belief and thankfulness to God.

Prayer was repeatedly identified as a major source of peace and fulfillment.

Participant B stated:

"Regular prayers give me happiness and peace."

Participant F further explained:

"When you fall into prostration, you forget all your worries."

Passion in Personal Growth

Participants linked passion strongly with personal development, goal achievement, and self-belief. Achieving goals, whether academic or personal, was described as deeply fulfilling.

Participant D stated:

"Achieving meaningful goals in life is very special for me."

Participant F added:

"Achieving high goals that were not even planned makes me very passionate."

Participants also emphasized that fulfillment is a continuous journey rather than a final destination.

Participant E noted:

"Fulfillment is about the journey and progress, not just the destination."

Self-confidence was also identified as essential for growth.

Participant A explained:

"I know I am doing my work best because I understand individual differences as a psychologist."

Academic milestones such as completing a PhD were also seen as highly meaningful achievements that reflect dedication and passion.

Participant E shared:

"Doing my PhD was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life."

Passion in Learning and Knowledge

Participants identified intellectual engagement and continuous learning as key aspects of passion. They described enjoyment in understanding complex ideas, solving intellectual challenges, and expanding cognitive abilities.

Participant G stated:

"I enjoy highly intellectual activities. Decoding philosophical ideas gives me great satisfaction."

Continuous learning, deep thinking, and academic curiosity were consistently highlighted as essential drivers of passion and Ikigai.

Vocation Table

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Initial Codes
Vocation (what you are good at)	Financial Security & Wellbeing	Monetary work purpose; financial means of acquisition; job satisfaction; achievement satisfaction; importance of peace (value); importance of mental wellbeing; must earn respect; focus on physical health; gym routine adherence; adequate sleep (physical & mental wellbeing); enthusiasm for daily activities (mental wellbeing); productive day ahead (mental wellbeing); contentment with self-care (mental wellbeing)
	Work-Life Balance	Balancing professional life and personal passion; personal fulfillment as a mother; enjoyment in teaching (satisfaction); teaching productivity (satisfaction); work satisfaction and positive outcomes; recognition and successes; positive feedback from students
	Demeanor	Approachable behavior; listening skills; encouraging communication; trustworthiness; respecting privacy; confidentiality; leadership; proactive behavior; professional dedication; task enthusiasm; maintaining positive relationships

Vocation Table Interpretation

Ikigai, meaning "a reason for being," consists of four components: passion, vocation, profession, and mission. This section focuses on vocation, which refers to what individuals are good at and how they apply their abilities in professional and personal life. The findings show that vocation among participants is mainly shaped by financial security, well-being, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and professional demeanor.

Vocation in Financial Security & Well-being

Participants highlighted financial stability as a core element of their vocation. They emphasized that earning enough to meet basic needs and achieve financial independence is essential for a stable and meaningful life.

Participant C stated:

"Paisa is very important; without financial stability life cannot function properly in society."

Participants also linked vocation with physical and mental well-being. Healthy routines such as exercise, proper sleep, and self-care were described as essential for maintaining productivity and professional performance.

Participant A explained:

"If I am physically and mentally healthy, then I can perform better in my professional work."

Job satisfaction and achievement were also important motivational factors. Participants expressed pride in professional success and recognition.

Participant E shared:

"I received an international best teacher award due to my skills and performance."

Overall, participants viewed mental peace, respect, and job satisfaction as key outcomes of a successful vocation.

Participant C added:

"Without mental peace, nothing feels right in life."

Participant F emphasized:

"Respect in society comes from doing your work with sincerity."

Vocation in Work-Life Balance

Participants described teaching as both a profession and a source of satisfaction. Many expressed strong enjoyment in their work, especially in engaging with students and contributing to their learning.

Participant A stated:

“Teaching is my passion and profession; I am a skilled teacher.”

Participant B shared:

“I am fully satisfied with my profession because I perform it in the best way.”

Participants highlighted that success in teaching is linked with student satisfaction and long-term impact.

Participant D noted:

“Many of my students still say that their success is because of my guidance.”

Others emphasized career clarity and consistency in choosing teaching as a long-term vocation.

Participant F said:

“I never thought of any profession other than teaching; I am consistent in it.”

Overall, work-life balance was achieved through aligning passion with profession, leading to satisfaction and stability.

Vocation in Demeanor

Participants identified professional behavior as a key part of their vocational identity. Important traits included communication, leadership, trustworthiness, and approachability.

Participant D explained:

“I am approachable and a good listener; it helps me understand students better.”

Participant C added:

“Open communication builds stronger teamwork and improves professional relationships.”

Leadership and proactive behavior were also highlighted as essential for managing responsibilities effectively.

Participant G stated:

“Being proactive helps in handling challenges before they become problems.”

Participant E shared:

“I am often called to motivate or negotiate because of my communication and leadership skills.”

Thus vocation among participants is not limited to earning or professional skills. It is a balanced combination of financial stability, physical and mental well-being, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and professional demeanor. These factors collectively contribute to their sense of Ikigai by aligning personal capability with meaningful and sustainable professional life.

Profession Table

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Initial Codes
Profession (what you can be paid for)	Skills & Expertise	Teaching skills
		Therapeutic skills
		Development through training (skill enhancement)
		Learning (skill enhancement)
		Skill enhancement
		Counseling skills
		Empathy
		Working on students’ development
		Transferring knowledge (professional skill)
		Boosting economy through pay and taxes
		Positive audience impact
		Counseling ability
		Mentor role
Effective guiding		

Profession Table Interpretation

Ikigai, a Japanese concept meaning “a reason for being,” is composed of four core elements: passion, vocation, profession, and mission. This section focuses on profession, which refers to what individuals are paid for and how their professional skills contribute to personal and societal development.

Participants emphasized that profession is strongly connected with skills and expertise, particularly in teaching, counseling, and therapeutic practices. They highlighted the importance of continuous skill development through training, learning, and professional practice. Teaching was not only seen as a job but also as a structured form of knowledge transfer that supports student growth and development. Empathy and counseling abilities were identified as essential professional competencies. Participants noted that understanding students’ emotional and psychological needs strengthens trust and improves learning outcomes.

One participant stated:

“Developing strong therapeutic and listening skills helps me understand the emotional needs of my students and guide them effectively.”

Overall, profession was viewed as a multidimensional responsibility that includes mentoring, guiding, and contributing positively to both individual development and broader societal and economic improvement.

Mission Table

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Initial Codes
Mission (what the world needs)	Social Impact	Providing quality education
		Solving societal issues through kindness
		Healing through counseling
		Positive teacher-student relationship
		Ethical and moral actions
		Profession benefiting society
		Education for global improvement
		Youth skill development
		Contribution to economy
		Positive national development
		Empowering students
		Self-directed learning development
		Societal change through education
		Commitment to beneficial actions
Personal Growth		Empowering clients and students
		Respect and satisfaction from others
		Self-care and self-compassion
		Continuous self-improvement
		Self-awareness and reflection
		Curiosity and lifelong learning
Positive Impact		Personal responsibility
		Promoting respect and equality
		Educational promotion
		Innovation and capacity building
		Positive influence on society
		Volunteering and service
		Discipline and cleanliness education
		Responsibility development

Mission Table Interpretation

Ikigai’s fourth dimension, mission, reflects what the world needs and how individuals contribute to societal well-being. Participants strongly associated their mission with education, empowerment, and social transformation.

A major finding was the emphasis on social impact through teaching and counseling. Participants viewed education as a tool for creating independent, self-directed learners who contribute positively to society and the economy. Strong teacher–student relationships were considered essential in fostering a supportive and effective learning environment.

One participant stated:

“I aim to make my students independent so they can succeed without relying on others.”

Another highlighted:

“A respectful and open classroom environment helps students learn better and grow confidently.”

Participants also connected mission with national development and youth empowerment, emphasizing that education strengthens both individuals and society.

In addition, personal growth was seen as part of the mission. Self-care, reflection, and continuous learning were considered necessary for effectively serving others.

Finally, participants highlighted positive societal contribution, including promoting equality, respect, discipline, and community service. They viewed themselves as agents of change contributing to social harmony and development.

Barriers Table

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Initial Codes
Balancing Passions & Societal Expectations	Societal Boundaries	Restriction on creativity in public spaces
		Gender-based limitations
		Balancing creativity with societal norms
		Negative norms about women’s education
		Cultural barriers to higher education
		Dependency challenges
		Lack of accountability among teachers
		Need to improve teaching methods
		Resilience in overcoming obstacles

Barriers Table Interpretation

This theme highlights the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that affect individuals’ pursuit of Ikigai, particularly among academicians.

Participants reported that societal expectations often restrict creativity and professional freedom, especially in public or institutional settings. These limitations are more pronounced for women, who face additional gender-based constraints in education and professional development.

Cultural norms regarding women’s education were identified as a major barrier, limiting opportunities for higher education and career advancement. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated strong resilience in continuing their professional and educational pursuits.

Institutional challenges such as lack of accountability among teachers and outdated teaching methods were also highlighted as obstacles to professional growth and effective teaching.

One participant reflected:

“Even when systems are not supportive, I try to continue improving myself and my teaching practice.”

Despite these barriers, participants emphasized adaptability, persistence, and continuous learning as key strategies for overcoming societal and professional constraints.

Discussion

This study is the first attempt to explore the concept of Ikigai in the Pakistani context, focusing on how academicians interpret its four components: passion, vocation, profession, and mission. Data were collected through interviews, and findings highlight culturally shaped understandings influenced by values, religion, and social norms.

Passion

Findings show that Ikigai is individually interpreted, with participants expressing different life purposes such as helping others, teaching, guiding students, and motivating people. However, a shared pattern emerged: teaching was identified as a central passion and source of meaning for all participants. They reported that witnessing students’ growth through their efforts brings deep satisfaction and purpose. This aligns with prior research emphasizing passion as a key source of fulfillment and meaning (Kamiya, 1966; Baron, 2006; Shane, 2000; Raessi, 2021).

Vocation

Participants highlighted that family and personal responsibilities play an important role in shaping vocational meaning. Fulfillment was associated with meeting family needs and maintaining work-life balance. Additionally, personal growth was seen as a continuous process rather than a final goal, where progress itself brings satisfaction (Mathews, 1996; Steininger et al., 2022).

Profession

Profession was strongly linked with skills, expertise, and continuous development, particularly in teaching, counseling, and therapeutic abilities. Participants emphasized empathy, knowledge transfer, and adapting teaching methods to diverse student needs. Teaching was viewed as both a professional responsibility and a source of enjoyment, aligning with prior studies highlighting the connection between teaching effectiveness and skill enhancement (Kamiya, 1966; Randall et al., 2023; Russo-Netzer, 2021).

Mission

Participants defined their mission as contributing to societal betterment through education, empowerment, and community engagement (Murata et al., 2006). They emphasized volunteerism, moral responsibility, and creating positive social change (Mayer, 2021). Self-care, lifelong learning, and personal development were considered essential for sustaining this mission. Good physical and mental health was also seen as necessary for effective professional performance and life purpose (Belice et al., 2022; Okuzono et al., 2022; Kondo, 2007). Participants further highlighted that personal growth, empathy, and self-compassion strengthen their ability to positively impact others (Benty, 2023).

Overall, findings suggest that Ikigai among Pakistani academicians is primarily centered on teaching as a unifying source of passion, vocation, profession, and mission, with strong emphasis on social contribution, personal growth, and cultural values shaping life purpose.

Key Findings

This study is the first attempt to explore Ikigai among Pakistani academicians, revealing how the concept is understood within a local cultural context. A key finding is the strong role of spirituality in shaping Ikigai. Participants linked their life purpose to belief in God, prayer, and divine presence, which provided peace, direction, and emotional fulfillment. Another important finding is that teaching emerged as the central Ikigai element across all four dimensions passion, vocation, profession, and mission. Participants consistently viewed teaching as a source of meaning, skill, income, and social contribution. They also emphasized mentoring, student development, and improving society through education. Additionally, professional demeanor (communication, leadership, trust, and approachability) significantly contributed to vocational satisfaction and effectiveness. The study also identified major barriers in achieving Ikigai in Pakistan, including lack of basic education, limited self-awareness, youth misguidance, intolerance, inequality, lack of compassion, and weak institutional accountability.

Limitations

1. Ikigai is a Japanese cultural concept, and participants may interpret it differently in the Pakistani context.
2. Limited prior research in Pakistan restricted theoretical comparison and depth of analysis.
3. The small qualitative sample limits generalizability across Pakistan's diverse population.
4. Ensuring diversity in age, gender, and socioeconomic background was challenging.
5. Limited access to relevant academic literature reduced the scope of the review.
6. The subjective nature of Ikigai made analysis complex and interpretation-dependent.

Implications

1. Educational reforms are needed to address lack of awareness, guidance, and basic education, enabling individuals to discover life purpose.
2. Self-awareness, career counseling, and skill development programs can help individuals align passion with profession.
3. Ikigai can guide Pakistanis toward meaningful careers in education, healthcare, and social development sectors.
4. Encouraging lifelong learning and skill development is essential in an evolving job market.

5. Economic realities should be integrated with Ikigai by promoting entrepreneurship and skill-based careers aligned with personal fulfillment.

Suggestions

1. Adapt the Ikigai concept to align more closely with Pakistani cultural values and norms. This could involve conducting preliminary studies to develop a culturally relevant framework of Ikigai that resonates with Pakistani participants. Collaborate with local cultural experts and psychologists to ensure the adapted concept is both valid and reliable.
2. Provide participants with comprehensive explanations and examples of Ikigai before collecting data. This can include workshops, detailed informational materials, or interactive sessions to ensure a consistent understanding of the concept among all participants. Utilize digital libraries, academic networks, and interlibrary loan services to access a broader range of academic literature.
3. Collaborate with international researchers and institutions that may have better access to relevant resources on Ikigai and related concepts. Use mixed methods (surveys and interviews) to reduce bias, ensure anonymity, and design neutral questions.

Conclusion

This pioneering research marks the first exploration of Ikigai among Pakistani academicians, shedding light on the unique interpretations and implications of this concept within Pakistani culture. Through an in-depth examination of the four main components of Ikigai passion, profession, vocation, and mission the study reveals a diverse array of life purposes and sources of fulfillment among participants. Key findings highlight the centrality of teaching as both a passion and a purpose for participants, underscoring its alignment with vocational skills and societal needs. Additionally, personal growth emerges as a significant source of passion, intertwined with participants' sense of Ikigai, alongside the profound influence of spirituality on their purpose and fulfillment.

Participants highlighted the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet diverse student needs, emphasizing the dynamic nature of their vocation. Personal growth was further supported by a strong commitment to self-care, recognizing its importance in maintaining their physical, emotional, and mental health. This commitment enables them to continue their mission-driven work effectively. Additionally, participants found meaning in their work, family, and children, with dedicating time to family contributing to their sense of satisfaction.

Overall, the study underscores the intertwined nature of personal growth, professional passion, and self-care in achieving a fulfilling and purposeful life.

This research not only enriches the understanding of Ikigai in the Pakistani context but also highlights the importance of spirituality, personal growth, and societal contribution in achieving a fulfilling and purposeful life. It emphasizes the need for addressing societal barriers and nurturing compassion and empathy to facilitate individuals in their pursuit of Ikigai. Through teaching and service, participants exemplify the alignment of passion with mission, embodying the essence of Ikigai in their lives.

The study also uncovers various barriers hindering Pakistanis in their pursuit of Ikigai, including lack of basic education, youth misguidance, and societal issues such as decreased compassion and increased intolerance. Addressing these barriers is essential to empowering individuals to align their passions with societal needs and foster a more purposeful and fulfilling society.

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