



Social Support, Career Decision Making and, Self-Efficacy as Predictors of Achievement Behavior Among Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

The increasing academic and career-related stress among university students motivated this research to analyze the factors that help students succeed in their educational and professional lives. The study examined the relationship between social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior among university students in Pakistan. A quantitative research method was used, with data collected from 343 university students through standardized questionnaires. Social support was found to have a positive influence on students' self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior. Self-efficacy and career decision-making were identified as strong predictors of achievement behavior. Students who received emotional, informational, and practical support showed higher levels of confidence in their abilities and made better career decisions. The study highlighted the importance of a supportive environment in reducing confusion in career choices, especially in the context of Pakistani culture, where family and community opinions are highly valued.



Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, career decision-making has emerged as one of the most critical challenges for students. It is not merely about choosing a job but also about shaping one's future trajectory. However, many students encounter confusion, lack of guidance, and external pressures from family or society during this process. In Pakistan, the situation is particularly concerning due to limited career awareness and the scarcity of professional counseling services available to students (Ali & Jalal, 2018).

Among the psychological factors influencing career decision-making, self-efficacy plays a vital role. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities and strengths (Bandura,

1995). Students with strong self-efficacy are more confident in pursuing their goals, exhibit greater determination, and approach challenges proactively. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy often experience confusion, avoid challenges, and struggle to make informed career choices (Lent et al., 2000).

Another important construct is achievement behavior, which reflects how students strive toward their goals, such as maintaining motivation, exerting effort, and demonstrating persistence. Students with higher levels of achievement behavior not only perform better academically but also engage more seriously in career planning. Research has shown that self-efficacy and achievement behavior are closely connected, as individuals with greater confidence in their abilities are more likely to set ambitious goals and sustain the effort required to attain them (Zimmerman, 2000).

In addition, social support significantly contributes to the career decision-making process. Social support refers to the emotional and practical assistance provided by family, teachers, and peers. Students often struggle to make effective career choices in the absence of such support. According to Kenny and Medvide (2013), encouragement and guidance from significant others enhance students' confidence in their decision-making abilities and alleviate stress and confusion (Turner et al., 2003).

Taken together, career decision-making, self-efficacy, achievement behavior, and social support are interrelated. Adequate social support enhances self-efficacy, which in turn promotes positive achievement behavior. Collectively, these factors foster more effective career decision-making (Lent, 2005; Lent & Brown, 2013). Understanding these relationships is particularly crucial in contexts such as Pakistan, where students frequently encounter barriers to career planning. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the interplay of these variables among university students. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, counselors, and parents in supporting students' career development.

Career decision-making in educational contexts is a complex process influenced by various factors, including social support and self-efficacy. Students navigate through multiple career options, considering their interests, skills, and potential future outcomes. Social support, provided by family, peers, teachers, and mentors, plays a crucial role in shaping students' career aspirations and decision-making processes. This support can offer guidance, encouragement, and valuable information about different career paths. Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, significantly impacts career choices and persistence in pursuing educational and professional goals. In educational settings, fostering self-efficacy through positive experiences, role modeling, and constructive feedback can enhance students' confidence in making informed career decisions. The interplay between career decision-making, social support, and self-efficacy creates a dynamic environment where students can develop the skills and confidence necessary to navigate their educational and professional futures effectively.

This study holds great value as it highlights how social support can improve students' belief in their abilities (self-efficacy), guide them in making better career decisions, and motivate them to work harder toward their goals. During the transition from school to university life, many students struggle with academic pressure and career planning. By understanding the connection between social support and these factors, this research will help students adjust better and feel more confident about their future.

The findings of this research can also be useful for teachers, counselors, and university staff. It can help them understand the importance of providing emotional and career-related support to students. Universities can use the results to develop more effective support programs, such as career counseling, peer support groups, and workshops, that enhance students' motivation and confidence. In Pakistan, very few studies have focused on the role of social support in the areas of career decision-making, self-efficacy, and achievement behavior.

Literature Review

Career decision-making is a complex process influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Students often struggle with uncertainty and conflicting expectations, which can hinder their ability to make effective choices (Koçak et al., 2021). Research highlights that supportive environments and satisfaction with education contribute positively to career confidence and overall well-being (Koçak et al., 2021; Wei & Zhang, 2023). Conversely, a lack of proper guidance may lead to indecision and lower satisfaction with chosen career paths (Ali & Jalal, 2018).

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed, strongly predicts academic achievement and career planning (Bandura, 1995; Betz, 2023). Students with higher self-efficacy are more resilient in facing academic and career challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013). Studies among Pakistani and Chinese students confirm that confidence and emotional intelligence help individuals adapt better to career-related uncertainties and academic pressures (Shao et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2021).

Achievement behavior reflects persistence, motivation, and determination toward academic and career goals. Research shows that students with high achievement behavior are more engaged in learning and perform better academically (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000). Social and psychological resources such as self-esteem and motivation play a significant role in sustaining achievement-oriented behaviors (Martínez & García, 2007; Payne et al., 2007). Positive reinforcement from parents and teachers has been shown to reduce procrastination and increase persistence (Koçak, 2018; Pychyl et al., 2002).

Social support derived from family, peers, and teachers plays a central role in students' academic and career outcomes. Supportive teachers foster motivation and engagement (Oktasari, 2017; Ruzek et al., 2016), while peer relationships provide security, enhance self-confidence, and encourage persistence (Bandura, 1995; Shao et al., 2024). Parental support has consistently been linked with higher motivation, reduced procrastination, and improved career adjustment (Hussain, 2023; Maziti, 2014). Studies also show that social support increases life satisfaction and reduces academic stress and burnout (Ye et al., 2021).

Recent findings emphasize the interrelated nature of these variables. Social support enhances students' self-efficacy, which in turn promotes stronger achievement behavior and facilitates better career decision-making (Lent et al., 2002; Reski et al., 2018). For example, Ruigrok (2020) found that family and peer support reduce decision-making confusion, while Bellò et al. (2018) demonstrated how peer encouragement and parental involvement promote entrepreneurial career intentions. Collectively, the literature indicates that students who experience strong support systems and possess high self-efficacy are more motivated, resilient, and decisive in their career planning.

Rationale

Although extensive research has been conducted on career decision-making, self-efficacy, achievement behavior, and social support in Western contexts, relatively little attention has been paid to these constructs within South Asian societies, particularly Pakistan. Most existing studies have either focused on single predictors of career outcomes or examined these variables in isolation, without considering their combined influence on students' achievement behavior and career-related decisions. Moreover, the unique socio-cultural dynamics of Pakistan, such as strong family influence, limited access to career counseling, and societal expectations, make it essential to explore how psychological and social factors interact to shape students' career choices. Existing research in Pakistan has primarily addressed career awareness and guidance, but has not sufficiently investigated the predictive roles of self-efficacy, social support, and achievement behavior in career decision-making. This study addresses this gap by simultaneously examining the interrelationships among career decision-making, self-efficacy, achievement behavior, and social support among university students. By doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and contextual factors that shape.

Objectives of the Study

- To measure the social support among university students.
- To examine the self-efficacy among university students.
- To analyze the career-decision-making among university students.
- To analyze the achievement behavior among university students.
- To find out the relationship between social support and career making, self-efficacy, and achievement behavior.

Theoretical Foundation of the Study Variables

Social Cognitive Theory: Albert Bandura introduced Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in the 1960s. This theory states that people learn how to behave and make decisions by observing others. This theory states that human behavior is not only the result of personal thinking but is also connected to the social environment and mental processes. According to this theory, people do not just accept the circumstances, but also learn from their surroundings and then make their own decisions (Bandura, 2014). The application of the Social cognitive theory guides students in making the right career choices and increasing their self-confidence. Students can learn from successful people and be influenced by them, and also improve their environment. This model also motivates them to follow successful people. Schools and universities can provide internship programs and mentoring opportunities for students, where they can get practical experience with guidance from successful people. Encouragement from teachers and parents gives students self-confidence, so they can make strong career choices.

Family Systems Theory: Family Systems Theory (FST), introduced by Murray Bowen in the 1960s, states that the family is an interconnected system where the behavior of individuals affects others. Family relationships and behaviors are very important in decisions and academic behavior. If the family is supportive, students can make better decisions with more freedom, but if there is a lot of pressure, then they may face struggles (Bowen, 1966). The applications of FST on students' achievement behavior, the schools and colleges can involve the parents in career counseling sessions, so that they can positively affect their children's career choices. Counselors and mentors can play a role in helping students balance family pressures and their interests, so that they choose

a career that suits their interests. Family pressures can be reduced with the help of open communication between students and parents, which gives students more freedom. Schools and universities can adopt policies that involve parents in student career planning and support their academic progress. Students can be taught to make career decisions independently, but at the same time respect family authority so that they can lead successful and fulfilling lives.

Self-Determination Theory: Self-determination theory (SDT), proposed by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, this theory explains how internal and external factors influence students' career decisions and academic success. According to the theory, any individual's true motivation and success depend on three basic psychological needs: autonomy, mastery, and relatedness. If these three elements are provided, students are more determined, hardworking, and successful in achieving their goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory can help students in their career decisions and academic success in many ways so that they can become more independent, complete, and successful. Students should be involved in internships, practical projects, and research activities so that they can learn from experience and face real-world challenges. Positive feedback and encouragement should be given to students and parents to appreciate their achievements and help them further their studies. Educational institutions should introduce counseling programs where students can ask questions about their careers and receive guidance.

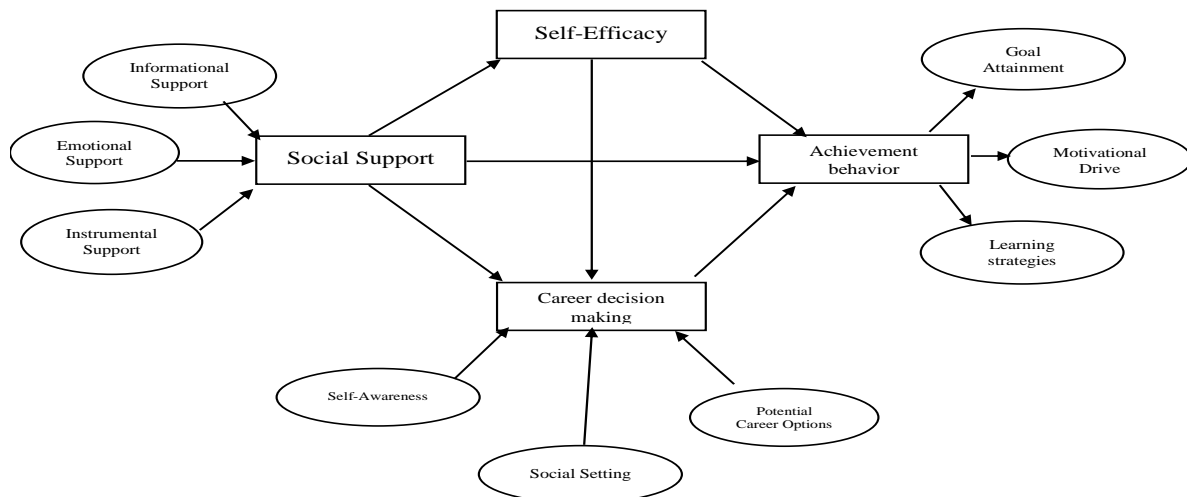


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the Study Variables

Based on the above-mentioned schematic diagram and assumptions, there is sufficient supporting logic to draw the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis

H1: There is a relationship between social support and career-decision making, self-efficacy, and achievement behavior among students.

H0: There is no relationship between social support and career-decision making, self-efficacy, and achievement behavior among students.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to investigate the relationships among career decision-making, self-efficacy, social support, and achievement behavior among university students. The target population comprised students from the University of Gujrat across various faculties, including social sciences, basic sciences, arts, and information technology. Using random

sampling, a sample of 343 students was selected based on Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that included a four-point Likert scale to measure career decision-making, self-efficacy, and achievement behavior, while social support was assessed using items adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Before the main survey, the instrument was pretested with 25 students to ensure reliability and clarity. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires, achieving a full return rate of 343 responses. Data were screened, coded, and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic and study variables, while Kendall's Tau correlation and simple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships and predictive effects among social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior.

Result

Table 1:

Percentage Distribution of the Socio-demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Faculty	Frequency(f)	Percentage%
1. Social Sciences	100	29.2
2. Arts	66	19.2
3. Information Technology and Computer Science	59	17.2
4. Basic Sciences	118	34.4
Age of the Respondents		
1. 18-20	154	44.9
2. 21-23	171	49.9
3. 24-26	16	4.7
4. Above 27	02	0.6
Gender of the Respondents		
1. Male	91	26.5
2. Female	252	73.5
Further Education of the Respondents		
1. Primary	06	1.7
2. Elementary	08	2.3
3. Matric	114	33.2
4. Higher Education	207	60.3
5. None	08	2.3
Father Occupation of the Respondents		
1. Agrarian	32	09.3
2. Government Employee	79	23.0
3. Private Employee	68	19.8
4. Businessman	153	44.6
5. None	11	3.2
Family Monthly Income of the Respondents		
1. Upto 50,000	77	22.4
2. 50,000-100,000	163	47.5
3. 1,01,000-1,50,000	50	14.5
4. Above 1,50,000	53	15.5
Residential Area		
1. Rural	192	56.0
2. Urban	151	44.0

Table 01 presents the demographic data of respondents divided into four main academic categories: social sciences (sociology, psychology, economics) at 29.2%, basic sciences (physics, chemistry, biotechnology, zoology, botany, math) at 34.4%, arts (LLB, English, design, and textile) at 19.2%, and information technology and computer sciences at 17.2%. In terms of age, 44.9% of respondents are between 18 to 20 years, 49.9% are aged 21 to 23, 4.7% are in the 24-26 age group, and 0.6% are above 27. The gender distribution shows 26.5% male and 73.5% female respondents. Regarding the educational level of respondents' fathers, 1.7% have primary education, 2.3% have elementary education, 33.2% have matriculation, 60.3% have higher education, and 2.3% have no formal education. The occupational background indicates that 9.3% of fathers work in the agrarian sector, 23.0% has government positions, 19.8% are in private employment, 44.6% are businessmen, and 3.2% are deceased.

Table 2:
Correlation between Study Variables

Study Variables	1	2	3	4
Social Support	1.00			
Self-Efficacy	.374**			
Career-Decision Making	.510**	.576**		
Achievement Behavior	.422**	.722**	.662**	1.00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 indicates correlation coefficients among Social Support, Self-Efficacy, Career-Decision Making, and Achievement Behavior among students. There is a positive correlation between social support and self-efficacy, with a coefficient of $r=.374^{**}$, $p < .01$. This means that the students who have higher levels of social support are likely to have more self-confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals. The correlation between social support and career decision-making is strongly positive, with a coefficient of $r = .510^{**}$, $p < .01$. This means that students who have strong social support and a network system are more influential and operative in set future choices regarding career choices. The statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .422^{**}$, $p < .01$) between social support and achievement behavior shows that students with more social support exhibit stronger achievement-oriented behavior. A strong positive correlation is seen between self-efficacy and career decision making ($r = .576^{**}$, $p < .01$), as well as there are strongest correlation in the table between self-efficacy and achievement behaviour ($r = .722^{**}$, $p < .01$), suggesting that students who have confidence in their abilities are more likely to demonstrate greater motivation and achievement behaviors. The relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that this association is meaningful and not due to chance. In simpler terms, students who receive more support from others are more likely to exhibit positive behavior related to their academic or personal goals, such as setting and achieving those goals.

The table shows the results of regression model analysis of Social Support, Career Decision-Making, and Self-Efficacy as predictors of Achievement Behavior among students. The regression model significantly predicted the achievement behavior with 65.2% of variance ($R^2 = .652$, $F(211.386, P > 0.001)$). The constant term has a coefficient of 5.678, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.012$), indicating the baseline level of Achievement Behavior when all independent variables are zero. The significant predictors included Career Decision-Making had a stronger effect with ($\beta=0.397$, $p=.000$), showing a significant positive impact on achievement behavior, and similarly, Self-Efficacy also significantly predicted the achievement behavior with ($\beta=0.495$, $p=.000$), while social support ($\beta=.021$, $p=.584$) was not significantly predicting the achievement behavior.

Table 3:
Coefficient Results of Social Support, career-decision making, and self-efficacy as a predictor of Achievement Behavior among Students

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients(B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t	P-Value	95% CI for B
Constant	5.678	2.236	-	2.539	.012	(1.279)(10.077)
Social Support	.019	.035	.021	.548	.584	(-.050) (.088)
Career Decision-Making	.350	.038	.397	9.112	.000	(.641) (.883)
Self-Efficacy	.762	.062	.495	12.349	.000	(.275) (.426)

Dependent Variable: Achievement Behavior

Table 4:
Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	P	Std. Error of the Estimate
.807 ^a	.652	.649	211.386	0.000	5.085

The overall regression model significantly predicts the achievement behavior with 65.2% of variance ($R^2=.652$, $F(211.386)$, $P>0.001$). Career decision making and self-efficacy were statistically significant predictors, while social support was not significantly predictive of the achievement behavior among students.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how social support influences the self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior among university students, whereas self-efficacy and career decision-making also influence the achievement behavior. The results show that these variables are closely connected to each other and together influence students' academic and career outcomes. This study provides insights into how external support, self-efficacy, and career decision-making work together to shape students' achievement. These findings are specifically important for a developing country like Pakistan, where students face emotional, academic, and social pressures.

The first main connection is identified between social support and career decision-making. Students who got support, motivation, and helpful advice from their family, friends, or teachers were able to make better and more confident career choices. Gati et al. (1996) discuss that a supportive environment reduces confusion in career choices. In Pakistan, where family and community opinions are highly valued, the role of social support in career decision-making becomes even more important. Students mostly rely on their close relationships, such as parents or friends, to help them make important life decisions, especially in situations where formal career guidance is not available in many educational institutions.

Social support is also closely linked with self-efficacy. The results indicate that students who receive emotional, informational, and practical support tend to believe more in their abilities. These findings support Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that confidence in one's capabilities can be developed through encouragement, observation of role models, and emotional

reinforcement (Bandura, 2014). In highly competitive academic environments like those in South Asia, especially Pakistan, students often face high expectations and stress. In this setting, external support helps them stay motivated, reduces anxiety, and builds the confidence needed to overcome challenges. The findings suggest that social support, while not a direct driver of achievement behavior, helps students build the inner strength (self-efficacy) required to perform well (Ruzek et al., 2016).

Interestingly, the study also found that social support had a positive connection with achievement behavior, though the relationship was weaker compared to the other variables. This implies that while social support contributes to student success, its influence is largely indirect by strengthening self-efficacy and decision-making skills. These findings align with Koçak et al. (2021) as they help differentiate between factors that provide emotional strength and those that directly influence performance. In essence, social support creates a nurturing environment that encourages growth but does not alone guarantee success without the presence of personal motivation and direction.

Self-efficacy is a very influential factor in determining achievement behavior. Those students who believed in their ability to succeed were found to be very motivated, persistent, and goal-oriented. These results support the research findings by Zimmerman (2000) show that high self-efficacy is associated with more effort, resilience, and achievement. In societies where external resources like career counseling, internships, or advanced training are limited, the role of self-confidence becomes even more critical. Those students who have strong confidence in their ability are better able to set goals and are persistent in their educational and professional journeys.

Career decision-making also plays an important role in shaping achievement behavior. This study showed that students who have clear goals and well-defined career plans are more focused and determined in their efforts. These results are in accordance with the Cognitive Processing theory, which emphasizes the importance of structured thinking and goal setting in effective career-making decisions. In Pakistan, most students experience career confusion due to limited exposure, lack of proper guidance, or family pressure to follow the suitable paths. The findings of this study suggest that when students are given the space to explore their interests and make proper decisions, they are more likely to perform well and achieve their goals. This research also shows that self-efficacy and career decision-making have also direct impact on student achievement; the interconnected nature of these variables suggests that focusing on just one aspect may not be sufficient for meaningful growth.

The research by Arif et al. (2019) shows that in Pakistani society, where students are mostly expected to follow family traditions or choose careers based on social status rather than personal interest, the pressure can affect self-efficacy and decision-making ability. When students are supported emotionally and allowed to pursue their own interests, they can build stronger self-efficacy and perform better. However, when students are pushed to achieve particular careers or judged harshly for their choices, it can weaken their motivation and lead to confusion. These findings are valuable for educators, parents, and policymakers. Educational institutions should introduce career counseling services, mentorship programs, and workshops for the students so they can build self-confidence and help students to explore their interests.

The results showed that students who received more social support had better career decision-making, higher self-efficacy, and stronger achievement behavior. Furthermore, emotional support teaches self-awareness and self-efficacy, which in turn positively affect achievement behavior.

Regression analysis showed that both self-efficacy and decision-making are strong predictors of achievement behavior. This thesis emphasizes that it is important to provide students with a strong social support system because their system improves their career design, increases self-efficacy, and plays an important role in academic and career success.

Conclusion

This research analyzes the role of social support in career decision-making, the self-efficacy of students, and examines the factors that affect the academic and professional success of university students. This study shows that when students receive social support, like emotional support or practical support, they can make better career decisions, their confidence increases, and their attitude towards success is positive. This study includes data from 343 university students, which was collected by standardized questionnaires and analyzed using tests like Kendall's tau b correlation. The results showed that students who receive support from family, friends, and teachers are very confident; they mostly contribute to making the right decisions and achieving their academic and professional success.

On the contrary, students who do not receive adequate social support have very low self-esteem, low motivation, and poor performance. This makes it clear that when a supportive and encouraging environment is created for students, it is important to provide them with a place where they can openly express their difficulties and receive guidance. The thesis has shown that self-efficacy and career design are strong predictors of successful behavior, so there is great promise in increasing students' confidence in their abilities and guiding them. This research suggests that further studies should be conducted so that universities and support networks can play a better role in helping students succeed according to their full potential.

Recommendation of the Study

There are some recommendations for further research:

- Future research should also include students from different universities to better understand career-decision making and success behaviors.
- Methods such as interviews or discussions can be used to better understand students' experiences of social support and coping.
- More attention should be paid to the support provided by family, friends, and institutions to help students make their own career decisions and build self-confidence.
- Emotional well-being programs are needed to protect students' mental health so that they can avoid emotional exhaustion.
- Universities should start programs that play an important role in building students' confidence, such as providing mentorship, workshops, and counselling.
- Long-term research is needed to understand how social support and self-confidence impact students' lives and careers.

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