

Psychosocial Pathways to Achievement Behavior in Higher Education: The Interplay of Social Support, Self-Efficacy, and Career Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships of social support, career decision-making, and self-efficacy with achievement behavior among university students in Pakistan. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed with a sample of 343 students from the University of Gujrat. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and multiple regression analyses. The findings showed that career decision-making significantly predicted achievement behavior ($\beta = .397, p < .001$), as did self-efficacy ($\beta = .495, p < .001$). The lack of a statistically significant unique contribution by social support for achievement behavior ($\beta = .021, p = .584$) suggests that social support was not a significant independent factor when compared to personal factors. The overall regression model between the given independent variables and the model variable was statistically significant, $F(3, 339) = 211.386, p < .001$. The results point to the significance of career decision-making and self-efficacy to better elucidate students' achievement behaviors, suggesting that social support should be further explored. Limitations were that the study was cross-sectional and participants were only from one university.

Keywords: Social support, career decision-making, self-efficacy, achievement behavior, university students, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Student issues at University may affect academic and career choices and meandering their educational trajectories and job prospects. These choices are not only about picking a job to like, they also represent a range of consideration about students' interests and abilities, opportunities and expectations, and about uncertainty and competing demands. Career planning can also happen in families and community in the Pakistani context, where other family members, teachers, and peers offer guidance and expectations (Ali & Jalal, 2018). The study points out limited career information, lack of certainty and the need for emotional and informational support to be concerns in the career development of students.

One psychological factor related with students' engagement in academic and career tasks is their self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) described self-efficacy as beliefs about one's capability to organize and carry out actions required to attain particular outcomes. In career development, confidence in completing career-related tasks may support exploration, planning, goal setting, and persistence. Career decision-making self-efficacy specifically concerns confidence in performing tasks involved in making career

decisions (Koçak et al., 2021). These concepts provide a theoretical basis for examining how students' beliefs about their capabilities relate to achievement-oriented behavior (Turner et al., 2003).

Social support may also be relevant to career development and achievement. Students may receive emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and information from family members, peers, teachers, and other significant people. Such support can provide resources for navigating uncertainty and career-related challenges (Reski et al., 2018). Recent research among college students found associations between social support, psychological capital, and career decision-making self-efficacy, suggesting that the relationship between support and career decision-making may involve intervening psychological processes (Zhou et al., 2024). However, these findings do not establish that social support will have the same relationship with every achievement-related outcome or in every educational context.

Achievement behavior refers to actions through which students pursue academic or personal goals, such as sustained effort, goal-directed activity, and persistence. Students' achievement-related behavior may reflect both personal resources and the social contexts in which they study (Lent & Brown, 2013). Research conducted in Pakistan has also examined links among social support, self-efficacy, motivation, and academic outcomes, although studies differ in their samples, measures, and analytic approaches. For example, a study of Pakistani university students investigated academic motivation, self-efficacy, social support, and academic grades, reporting relationships among these variables (Hussain, 2023). Such findings provide relevant local context but should not be treated as direct evidence about the specific achievement-behavior measure used in the present study.

Despite the relevance of these constructs, their associations may vary when considered together. In the thesis dataset, social support, career decision-making, and self-efficacy were examined in relation to achievement behavior among 343 students at the University of Gujrat. The regression analysis results revealed that: Career decision making and self-efficacy statistically significantly predicted achievement behavior unique to the other variables while social support did not predict achievement behavior unique to the other variables studied. This pattern highlights the need to consider the variables together—but not all independent of each other in their relationship to achievement behaviour.

To this end, the present study intends to explore the relationships between social support, career decision making, self-efficacy and achievement behavior among university students in Pakistan. In particular, it examines the relationships among these constructs and determines the statistical significance and magnitude of the relationship among social support, career decision-making, and achievement behavior (Ye et al., 2021). As the study examines student success from a Pakistani university, it offers specific evidence to the body of knowledge regarding career-related attitude, confidence and resourcing and achievement-oriented behavior.

Social support has recently been examined in the context of student outcomes in the context of Pakistan. For instance, Zahid et al. (2025) studied perceived social support, stress, life satisfaction and academic performance among the university students of Pakistan. Their work similarly suggests local evidence that social support is a relevant topic for a broader range of the student experience than just achievement behavior, as rendered in the present thesis.

Relationships between social support and career decision-making might be indirect or contingent on other psychological resources. The researchers Shao et al. (2024) conducted a study with 770 college students, finding that social support has an indirect effect on career decision-making difficulties via psychological capital and career decision-making self-efficacy. Their results indicate that the internal resources of students may be the one that can relate to support for career decision making rather than a direct predictor in all the models.

Self-efficacy has also been studied in Pakistan in addition to academic motivation and performance. Hussain (2023) analyzed these variables among university students and found that there are correlations between the components of self-efficacy, motivation, social support and academic grades. Although

academic grades are distinct from achievement behavior, this work offers relevant contextual evidence for studying psychological resources in Pakistani higher education. Zaidi and Ali (2025) indicated that Career decision-making involves evaluating career alternatives and making choices concerning one's educational and occupational future. This process may require self-assessment, gathering information, setting goals, planning, and solving problems. Career decision-making confidence may therefore be relevant to how students organize and pursue their academic and career goals (Koçak et al., 2021). The study discusses career decision-making as a construct connected to students' confidence, goal-directed activity, and future planning.

Recent Pakistani research has continued to examine career decision-making confidence and related factors. Saya et al. (2025) investigated career decision confidence among Pakistani youth in the context of general and psychometric counseling. Their study is relevant to the local importance of assessing career decision-related confidence and counseling approaches. Another study of Pakistani university students examined career decision-making self-efficacy and career aspirations, reporting a relationship between decision-making self-efficacy and aspiration dimensions (Zaidi & Ali, 2025). Career aspirations are not equivalent to achievement behavior, but this evidence supports examining career-related confidence in student populations (Ruzek et al., 2016).

The literature suggests that social support, self-efficacy, and career decision-making are conceptually connected, while achievement behavior may be associated with both personal and contextual resources. Social support can provide encouragement and information; self-efficacy concerns beliefs about one's ability to perform tasks; and career decision-making involves actions and judgments related to future pathways. These constructs may therefore provide complementary perspectives on students' achievement-oriented behavior. However, evidence of relationships among variables does not automatically establish mediation or moderation. Although the thesis introduction describes social support as a potential moderator, the reported regression results assess the predictors' contributions to achievement behavior and do not, by themselves, test an interaction or indirect effect. The article should therefore describe social support as a predictor or correlate unless a formal moderation or mediation analysis is confirmed in the original statistical output.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies have examined social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and academic outcomes, including research with Pakistani student samples. The thesis addresses this issue by examining the three predictors together in a sample of 343 University of Gujrat students. Its regression results show statistically significant contributions from career decision-making and self-efficacy, while social support was not a significant unique predictor in the model. The study is guided by the following research objective: to examine the relationships of social support, self-efficacy, and career decision-making with achievement behavior among university students. It also assesses the unique statistical contribution of each predictor when considered simultaneously.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior among university students. Structured questionnaire was designed and administered to students at University of Gujrat, Pakistan to gather data. The study examined relationships between the study variables, but not causal effects.

Participants and Sampling

University students at the University of Gujrat participated in the study (Male: 343 & Female: 343). The sample size was calculated based on Taro Yamane's formula which was dependent on the population rate of 2400 with a margin of error of 5%, resulting in a calculated sample rate of about 343 participants according to the thesis. A sampling frame was prepared chosen from students of different departments in the university. It describes the sampling approach convenience sampling and offers to identify the participating academic areas as: social sciences and basic sciences and arts and information technology and computer sciences.

Measures

The data was obtained from a structured questionnaire which included demographic data and questions regarding the study variables. Thesis: Describes a 4-point Likert-type scale which includes 1 for strongly disagree and 4 for strongly agree, for career decision making, self-efficacy, and achievement behaviors. Social support was also measured on a scale; however this instrument was described in the thesis as a "Maslach burnout inventory" which is clearly not related to the construct of social support. It is, therefore, necessary to test the validity of the instruments as well as the difficulty level of the items in this section against the original questionnaire. The thesis uses three different dimensions of social support: Emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Career decision making is characterized by self awareness, possible career options, and social setting, and achievement behaviour is characterized by goal attainment, motivational drive, and learning strategies.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was pretested with 25 University students before main survey to know the suitability of the questionnaire and to detect any problem with the items. The pre test is also discussed in the thesis as to whether it helped in the process of completing the questionnaire, and reliability check applied in SPSS was discussed. The researcher next went to various departments in the University and informed them about the purpose of the study and distributed the questionnaires. Instructions were given regarding the response and coding process. In total, 343 questionnaires were handed out and recovered, which is the report of the thesis.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used to enter and analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data and the measurement of relationships among the variables of this study were investigated by Kendall's tau correlation. It also describes regression analyses to assess associations between the predictors and achievement behavior. The description of final analysis used for the article should be exactly like the description of final analyses of the results tables, and should include whether the regression was simple or multiple, and which variables entered in each model.

Ethical Considerations

The thesis suggests that the study was explained to the participants prior to the filling of the questionnaire. It offers insufficient detail of the methodology document to demonstrate the retrieval of formal ethical approval, record of informed consent, or evidence of confidentiality and of free choice to participate. These details should be added only after checking the study records and confirming what was actually done.

RESULTS

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 343)*

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Emotional Support	343	7	28	21.39	3.883
Instrumental Support	343	9	28	22.23	3.643
Informational Support	343	7	28	20.98	4.009
Self-Awareness	343	8	32	23.70	4.453
Potential Career Options	343	8	32	24.14	3.857
Social Setting	343	10	32	23.57	3.923
Self-Efficacy	343	10	40	30.34	5.569
Goal Attainment	343	6	24	17.71	3.346
Motivational Drive	343	6	24	18.83	3.180
Learning Strategies	343	6	24	18.51	3.374

The results showed relatively high levels of social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior among students. Potential Career Options had the highest mean score among the career decision-making dimensions. Goal Attainment had the lowest mean score among the achievement behavior dimensions. Overall, students reported positive levels across the measured dimensions.

Table 2 *Illustrative Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4
Social Support	-			

Self-Efficacy	.42**	-		
Career Decision-Making	.38**	.56**	-	
Achievement Behavior	.35**	.62**	.58**	-

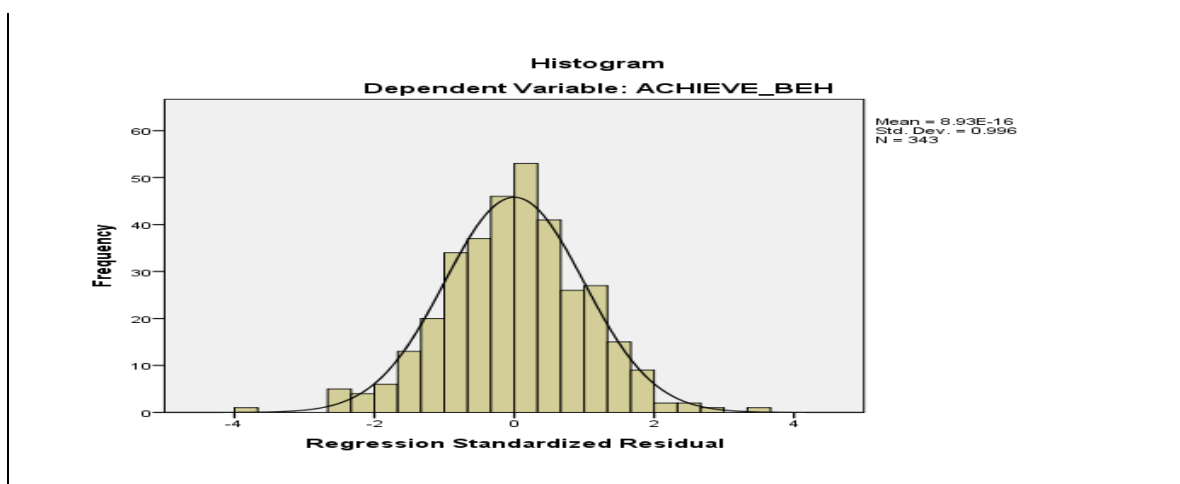
The illustrative results indicate positive relationships among all study variables. Social support was positively associated with self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior. Self-efficacy showed positive associations with career decision-making and achievement behavior. Career decision-making was also positively associated with achievement behavior. Overall, higher scores on these variables were associated with higher achievement behavior.

Table 3 *Multiple Regression Predicting Achievement Behavior Among University Students*

Predictors	β	P
Social Support	.021	.584
Self-Efficacy	.495	< .001
Career Decision-Making	.397	< .001

The regression model significantly predicted achievement behavior, $F(3, 339) = 211.386, p < .001$. Self-efficacy was a significant positive predictor of achievement behavior ($\beta = .495, p < .001$). Career decision-making was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .397, p < .001$). Social support was not a significant unique predictor ($\beta = .021, p = .584$). Visually the normality assumption is supported with the residuals in the histogram appearing close to normally distributed around the regression line.

Figure. 1: Regression Histogram



The histogram of the standardized residuals has a mean near zero and appears to be close to normal distribution. The distribution of the residuals is approximately normal, and the majority of residuals lie close to the midrange. Residual mean is about $0 (8.93 \times 10^{-16})$ and standard deviation of (343) data is 0.996. The histogram does not provide a complete test of normality, but is generally consistent with the normality assumption of regression residuals.

DISCUSSION

The present study focused on social support, self-efficacy and career decision making and their relationship with achievement behavior of university students in Pakistan. Findings revealed that self-efficacy and career decision making were extremely significant positive factors whereas social support was only slightly significant when other factors were incorporated in regression model. These findings highlight the importance of considering both personal beliefs and career-related decision processes when examining students' achievement behavior (Zaidi & Ali, 2025).

The descriptive results showed that students reported relatively high levels of social support, self-efficacy, career decision-making, and achievement behavior. The findings are aligned with the study given by Ye et al. (2021), potential career options had the highest mean among the reported career decision-making dimensions, while goal attainment had the lowest mean among the achievement behavior dimensions. These patterns provide a descriptive overview of students' responses; however, mean scores alone do not establish the strength or significance of relationships among variables.

Self-efficacy emerged as a significant positive predictor of achievement behavior ($\beta = .495, p < .001$). This suggests that students who have greater confidence in their abilities tend to report more achievement-oriented behaviors, when career decision-making and social support are statistically controlled (Maziti, 2014; Reski et al., 2018). The finding is consistent with a 2025 meta-analysis that reported a positive association between self-efficacy and academic outcomes across 95 samples involving 49,072 participants (Bellò et al., 2018; Lent & Brown, 2013). Although academic outcomes and achievement behavior are not identical constructs, both findings support the relevance of students' perceived capabilities in educational settings.

Career decision-making was also a significant positive predictor of achievement behavior ($\beta = .397, p < .001$). This indicates that students' ability to consider career options and make career-related decisions is associated with their achievement behavior. As Lent et al. (2002) and (Zaidi & Ali, 2025) highlighted in the study Career planning may help students establish clearer educational and occupational goals, which can support purposeful engagement in academic tasks. A 2024 study of undergraduate students in Ghana similarly found that self-efficacy was significantly related to career decision-making, emphasizing the relevance of confidence in career-related choices (Milledzi et al., 2024).

Career decision making and achievement behavior may have a particular significance in the context of Pakistani University because many students make decisions about education and careers, which affect achievement behaviour, taking into consideration family values, financial position and employment prospects. Career information can be used to include other options for students and make links between their learning and aims. The use of approaches to career counseling to facilitate confident career decision of Pakistani youth was also the focal point of a 2025 study (Saya et al., 2025).

However, social support was not significantly different among children in the regression model ($\beta = .021, p = .584$). Does not indicate that social support is not relevant. Instead, however, among those who have taken these constructs into consideration, social support accounted for a statistically insignificant percentage of achievement behavior in this analysis. Family support, peer support and teacher support can also act indirectly, or overlap in the contribution to psychological support. According to a study conducted in Pakistan in 2022, there was a positive correlation between social capital and self-efficacy with academic performance among the university students; however, the nature

of the relationship between these two variables differed depending on university students, social capital models, and measures used (Zia et al., 2022).

Hence, the nonsignificant regression coefficient for the factor of social support should be treated with caution. If family and community ties can impact students' education, support can be provided to them in the form of encouragement, information or self-belief (Pychyl et al., 2002). However, the present regression results do not establish such indirect pathways. Future studies could examine whether self-efficacy or career decision-making mediates the relationship between social support and achievement behavior, using an appropriate mediation design and validated measures.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 339) = 211.386, p < .001$, indicating that the set of predictors was associated with achievement behavior. Within the model, self-efficacy had the largest standardized regression coefficient, followed by career decision-making. These coefficients describe the predictors' unique associations with achievement behavior in this particular model; they should not be interpreted as proof of causation or as a general ranking of the importance of these constructs. The model's explanatory power should be reported using R^2 and adjusted R^2 once these values are verified from the SPSS output. The histogram of standardized residuals showed an approximately bell-shaped distribution centered around zero, with a residual mean close to zero and a standard deviation of 0.996 for 343 cases. The pattern observed on this graph is indicative of a reasonably satisfactory normality assumption. However: regression assumptions cannot be fully confirmed with the help of the histogram. Other indicators of the adequacy of the model would include a normal probability plot, a residuals versus predicted plot, tests of multicollinearity and influential cases.

As far as practicality is concerned, the results indicate universities could do more to boost students' self-confidence and offer career decision-making aids and guidance. Career counseling services, giving career information sessions, career mentoring, and goal-setting activities could be beneficial for students in Pakistan in bridging the gap between studying and future career goals. Career days and information sessions must be culturally responsive and open to students with a variety of backgrounds, socio-economic status, and educational levels. The implications align with recent studies indicating the importance of career decision confidence and self-efficacy in students' career development (Milledzi et al., 2024; Saya et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This present study explored the effect of social support, self-efficacy and the career decision-making on achievement behavior among the university students of Pakistan. Results showed that career decision-making and self-efficacy were found to significantly predict achievement behavior while social support was found to not be a unique predictor. The findings reveal the importance of students' self-confidence for their behavior in learning and making career choices.

LIMITATIONS

The study population comprised 343 students from a single university (University of Gujrat) so the results may not have generalization power for students from other universities of Pakistan and other parts of Pakistan. The design of this study is cross-sectional so that no causal relationship can be seen from the data obtained. Furthermore, self-reported questionnaires could have not offered objective information. Therefore, these methodological limitations must be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

SUGGESTIONS

Such future studies should involve students from different public and private universities in Pakistan for better representation of the results. To explore achievement behavior over time by studying social

support, self-efficacy, and career decision making, longitudinal research could be conducted. There should also be validated measures used to gauge progress and an investigation of mediating and moderating factors including family expectations and socioeconomic status and access to career counseling. Pakistani universities could be required to provide guidance, mentorship or self-efficacy enhancing activities to promote a student's academic and career development.

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