

Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Career Decision Self-Efficacy among Pakistani University Students

Mubashra Tayyaba^{*1}, Asad Ayaz², Muhammad Sohail³

¹ Clinical Psychologist, Young Psychologist Association, Pakistan. **Corresponding Author**

Email: official.mubashratayyaba@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7690-5839>

² MS Project Management, Department of Management & Social Sciences, Abasyn University, Peshawar, Pakistan. Email: engr.asadayaz@gmail.com

³ Lecturer, Department of Professional Psychology, Rashid Latif Khan University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: mohdsohail0399@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0001-7025-1361

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Abstract

University students frequently encounter complex career-related decisions that require emotional regulation, self-awareness, and confidence in handling uncertainty. Emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as an important psychological resource that may support effective decision-making and strengthen self-beliefs in career planning. Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) reflects students' confidence in completing essential career decision tasks, and identifying its predictors is particularly relevant in the Pakistani higher education context. This study examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of overall career decision self-efficacy and its key domains among Pakistani university students. A cross-sectional correlational design was used with 312 university students (174 females, 138 males), aged 18–26 years ($M = 21.43$, $SD = 2.11$). Emotional intelligence was measured using the Urdu-adapted Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, while CDSE was assessed using the Urdu version of the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and linear regression analyses. Emotional intelligence showed significant positive associations with overall CDSE and its domains, including self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving ($r = .45-.53$, $p < .001$). Regression results indicated that EI significantly predicted overall CDSE ($R^2 = .28$, $\beta = .53$, $p < .001$), as well as each CDSE domain ($R^2 = .22-.28$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a meaningful predictor of career decision self-efficacy among Pakistani university students. Integrating emotional skills training into university-based career guidance may strengthen students' confidence in career planning and decision-making.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Career Decision Self-Efficacy; University Students; Pakistan; Career Guidance

Introduction

Career decision-making is a major developmental task during the university years, particularly in contexts where students face unstable economic conditions, rapid labor market changes, and limited structured career guidance. At this stage, students are expected to explore occupational pathways, evaluate their strengths and preferences, and commit to academic and career goals that influence long-term professional outcomes (Savickas & Guichard, 2023). Within Pakistan, career decision-making can be further complicated by

sociocultural expectations, family involvement in educational choices, and restricted access to professional career counseling services, which may shape students' confidence and readiness to make informed decisions (Touseef et al., 2025; Madeeha et al., 2025).

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to emotional competencies that support individuals in recognizing, understanding, regulating, and using emotions effectively in daily functioning (Mayer et al., 2016). Research indicates that EI is linked with stronger adjustment, interpersonal functioning, and adaptive decision-making processes, especially under psychologically demanding conditions (Zeidner et al., 2022). A systematic review also highlights that emotional intelligence plays a meaningful role in decision-making through mechanisms such as emotion regulation and emotional awareness, which may reduce impulsive choices and improve judgment during stressful situations (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2021). Evidence from Pakistani samples further suggests that emotional competencies are associated with adaptive emotional processing and interpersonal functioning, reflecting the relevance of EI for psychologically challenging and socially embedded decision contexts (Jabeen et al., 2025).

Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) refers to an individual's confidence in performing tasks essential to making effective career decisions, including self-appraisal, occupational information gathering, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving (Betz et al., 1996). From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), self-efficacy beliefs are central to career exploration, persistence, and the implementation of career choices, shaping how individuals respond to obstacles and uncertainty during career development (Lent et al., 2023; Lent & Brown, 2024). Since career-related decisions involve both cognitive evaluation and emotional strain, emotional intelligence may function as an important personal resource that strengthens career self-efficacy by supporting coping, emotional control, and sustained goal-directed behavior (Zeidner et al., 2022).

Empirical evidence supports a positive association between emotional intelligence and career-related outcomes, including decision confidence and effective coping during vocational planning. For instance, studies indicate that individuals with stronger emotional competencies are more likely to navigate career-related difficulties with better self-regulation and adaptive planning (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009). In the Pakistani context, students commonly experience psychosocial pressures that may undermine academic adjustment and decision confidence, including stigma-related barriers and limited psychological and institutional support (Touseef et al., 2025; Madeeha et al., 2025). In addition, emerging evidence links behavioral and psychosocial stressors—such as problematic social media use and related aggression patterns—to psychological dysregulation, which may indirectly reduce students' confidence in self-directed decision-making and planning (Fareed et al., 2024; Awan et al., 2025). Taken together, these contextual challenges highlight the need to examine internal psychological resources, such as emotional intelligence, that may strengthen students' career decision self-efficacy within Pakistani universities.

Despite international research linking EI with career-related functioning, empirical studies examining emotional intelligence as a predictor of overall CDSE and its specific domains within Pakistani university populations remain limited, particularly using culturally adapted Urdu instruments. Therefore, the present study investigated emotional intelligence as a predictor of career decision self-efficacy and its key subdomains among Pakistani university students. By extending SCCT through the inclusion of emotional competencies as a personal input, the study offers evidence relevant to career counseling, student development, and emotionally informed guidance initiatives within higher education settings (Lent et al., 2023; Lent & Brown, 2024).

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory, self-efficacy is considered central to career development processes, and emotional competencies may strengthen confidence in career-related decision-making tasks (Lent et al., 2023; Lent & Brown, 2024). In line with prior evidence linking emotional intelligence with adaptive decision-making and self-regulation, the present study proposed the following hypotheses (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2021; Zeidner et al., 2022).

Objectives

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision self-efficacy among Pakistani university students using Urdu-adapted measures. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. Assess levels of emotional intelligence and career decision self-efficacy among Pakistani university students.
2. Examine the association between emotional intelligence and overall career decision self-efficacy.
3. Determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and each CDSE domain, including:
 - self-appraisal,
 - occupational information,
 - goal selection,
 - planning, and
 - problem-solving.
4. Test whether emotional intelligence significantly predicts overall career decision self-efficacy.
5. Evaluate whether emotional intelligence significantly predicts each domain of career decision self-efficacy.

Hypotheses

H1: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with overall Career Decision Self-Efficacy.

H1a: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with the CDSE domain of Self-Appraisal.

H1b: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with the CDSE domain of Occupational Information.

H1c: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with the CDSE domain of Goal Selection.

H1d: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with the CDSE domain of Planning.

H1e: Emotional Intelligence will be positively correlated with the CDSE domain of Problem-Solving.

H2: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict overall Career Decision Self-Efficacy.

H2a: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict the CDSE domain of Self-Appraisal.

H2b: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict the CDSE domain of Occupational Information.

H2c: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict the CDSE domain of Goal Selection.

H2d: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict the CDSE domain of Planning.

H2e: Emotional Intelligence will significantly predict the CDSE domain of Problem-Solving

Method

Research Design

This study used a **quantitative cross-sectional correlational** research design to examine Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a predictor of Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) among Pakistani university students. The design was selected to measure study variables at a single time point and to evaluate statistical associations between emotional intelligence and career decision self-efficacy.

Participants

A total of **312 Pakistani university students** participated in the study, including **174 females (55.8%)** and **138 males (44.2%)**. Participants' ages ranged from **18 to 26 years** ($M = 21.43$, $SD = 2.11$). Students were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs across different academic disciplines. Participants were recruited using **convenience sampling** through university networks and online platforms. Students were included if they were currently enrolled in a university program and provided informed consent.

Measures

Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (Urdu Version)

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the **Urdu-adapted Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale**, originally developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and validated in the Pakistani context by **Batool and Khalid (2012)**. The scale assesses emotional competencies such as recognizing emotions, emotion regulation, and the effective use of emotions. In the present study, the scale showed good internal consistency (**Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$**).

Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (Urdu Version)

Career decision self-efficacy was measured using the **Urdu version of the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (CDSE-SF)** developed by **Betz et al. (1996)**. The scale measures confidence in completing key career decision-making tasks across five domains: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving. In the current sample, the CDSE-SF demonstrated excellent internal consistency (**Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$**).

Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey. Participants were approached through university contacts and social media platforms. Before completing the questionnaires, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. **Electronic informed consent** was obtained prior to participation. All responses were recorded anonymously.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary and no identifying information was collected. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes. The study involved minimal risk and did not include deception. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participants completed the survey.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **SPSS (Version 26)**. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. **Pearson correlation** analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision self-efficacy, including its five domains. **Linear regression analyses** were performed to evaluate emotional intelligence as a predictor of overall career decision self-efficacy and each CDSE domain. Statistical significance was set at **$p < .05$** .

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for Emotional Intelligence and Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) domains are presented in Table 1. Both scales demonstrated satisfactory to excellent reliability in the present sample, indicating consistent measurement of study constructs across participants.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha for Emotional Intelligence and CDSE Domains ($N = 312$)

Variable	M	SD	A
Emotional Intelligence	78.64	11.27	.88
CDSE – Self-Appraisal	19.10	2.85	.87
CDSE – Occupational Information	19.52	3.10	.88
CDSE – Goal Selection	18.90	3.15	.86
CDSE – Planning	19.05	2.95	.87
CDSE – Problem-Solving	19.81	3.20	.88
Overall CDSE	96.38	14.19	.91

Note. CDSE = Career Decision Self-Efficacy.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the association between Emotional Intelligence and Career Decision Self-Efficacy. As shown in Table 2, Emotional Intelligence was significantly and positively associated with overall CDSE and all of its domains. The findings indicate that students with higher emotional intelligence tended to report higher confidence in completing career decision-making tasks.

Table 2 Pearson Correlations Between Emotional Intelligence, CDSE Domains, and Overall CDSE ($N = 312$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional Intelligence	—						
2. Self-Appraisal	.49***	—					
3. Occupational Information	.50***	.66***	—				
4. Goal Selection	.48***	.61***	.62***	—			
5. Planning	.47***	.60***	.61***	.63***	—		
6. Problem-Solving	.53***	.65***	.66***	.65***	.63***	—	
7. Overall CDSE	.53***	.84***	.85***	.85***	.84***	.87***	—

Note. $p < .001$. CDSE = Career Decision Self-Efficacy.

Regression Analysis

Linear regression analyses were conducted to evaluate Emotional Intelligence as a predictor of overall Career Decision Self-Efficacy and its individual domains. Results are presented in Table 3. Emotional Intelligence significantly predicted overall CDSE, accounting for 28% of the variance ($R^2 = .28$, $\beta = .53$, $p < .001$). Emotional Intelligence also significantly predicted each CDSE domain, with explained variance ranging from 22% to 28% ($R^2 = .22-.28$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that emotional intelligence contributes meaningfully to students' confidence in performing career decision-making tasks.

Table 3 Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Overall CDSE and CDSE Domains from Emotional Intelligence ($N = 312$)

Outcome Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	R^2
Overall CDSE	0.67	0.06	.53	11.01	< .001	.28
Self-Appraisal	0.34	0.04	.49	9.36	< .001	.24
Occupational Information	0.38	0.04	.50	9.67	< .001	.25
Goal Selection	0.36	0.04	.48	9.21	< .001	.23
Planning	0.35	0.04	.47	9.01	< .001	.22
Problem-Solving	0.39	0.04	.53	11.00	< .001	.28

Note. CDSE = Career Decision Self-Efficacy.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results showed that Emotional Intelligence was significantly related to Career Decision Self-Efficacy among Pakistani university students. Emotional intelligence demonstrated moderate positive associations with overall CDSE and its key domains. Furthermore, emotional intelligence emerged as a statistically significant predictor of overall CDSE and each domain, indicating that emotionally competent students were more confident in self-appraisal, occupational information seeking, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving during career decision-making.

Discussion

The present study examined Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a predictor of Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) and its core domains among Pakistani university students. The findings supported the proposed hypotheses, indicating that emotional intelligence was significantly and positively associated with overall CDSE as well as domain-specific career decision-making confidence, including self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving. Regression findings further demonstrated that emotional intelligence significantly predicted overall career decision self-efficacy and each domain, suggesting that emotionally competent students tend to report greater confidence in handling career-related decision tasks.

These results are consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which highlights self-efficacy as a key mechanism in career development processes and emphasizes the contribution of personal resources in shaping career behaviors (Lent et al., 2023; Lent & Brown, 2024). Although SCCT traditionally emphasizes cognitive and environmental influences, the present findings suggest that emotional competencies may represent an additional personal input that is meaningfully linked with career decision confidence. Students with higher emotional intelligence may be better able to regulate stress and emotional responses while facing uncertainty, which may support more confident engagement in career exploration and decision-making activities (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2021; Zeidner et al., 2022).

The positive relationships between emotional intelligence and CDSE domains indicate that emotional competence may contribute across multiple components of career decision-making. Emotional intelligence may support self-appraisal by promoting reflective awareness of one's strengths and limitations, and it may facilitate occupational information seeking by helping students tolerate uncertainty and remain engaged during exploration. Similarly, emotionally intelligent students may show stronger confidence in goal selection and planning due to greater emotional control and persistence in goal-directed behavior. The association with problem-solving further reflects the relevance of emotional regulation in responding to barriers and making adaptive decisions when challenges arise (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Zeidner et al., 2022).

The findings also hold particular relevance in the Pakistani university context, where career decision-making is often influenced by sociocultural expectations, family involvement, and limited institutional career guidance opportunities (Savickas & Guichard, 2023; Touseef et al., 2025). In such settings, emotional intelligence may serve as a valuable psychological resource that helps students manage decision-related pressure and sustain confidence in navigating career pathways. Therefore, strengthening emotional competencies may support more effective career decision-making among students in higher education.

Implications

The findings suggest that emotional intelligence may be an important target for university-based career counseling and student development programs. Institutions may consider incorporating emotional skills training into career guidance initiatives to enhance students' confidence in key career decision tasks such as planning, goal selection, and problem-solving. Career counselors and educators may also integrate strategies focused on emotional awareness, emotion regulation, and adaptive coping to support students in managing uncertainty and improving career preparedness.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the results should be understood as predictive relationships rather than cause-and-effect conclusions. Second, convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to all Pakistani university students. Third, self-report measures may introduce response biases. Future research may use longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how emotional intelligence contributes to career decision self-efficacy over time and whether emotional intelligence interventions can improve career decision confidence. Additionally, future studies may include contextual predictors such as parental influence, institutional career support, and mental health indicators to strengthen cultural understanding of career decision-making in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study provides evidence that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of career decision self-efficacy and its domains among Pakistani university students. The findings highlight emotional competence as a meaningful psychological factor associated with greater confidence in career decision-making tasks. Integrating emotional intelligence development into higher education and career counseling programs may strengthen students' career planning and decision-making capacity in the Pakistani context.

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