
Parents' Involvement in Career-Related Social Support in their Children as a Predictor of Socio-Cultural Adjustment

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of parental career-related behaviours on socio-cultural adjustment among Pakistani university students, with particular attention to the mediating role of career exploration and the moderating effects of gender, socioeconomic status, and school sector. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was employed, and data were collected through structured questionnaires from 200 B.Ed. (Hons.) students selected purposively from The University of Lahore and the Institute of Education and Research, Lahore. Descriptive statistics, multiple regression, mediation, and moderation analyses were conducted. The findings showed relatively high levels of parental support, career-development processes, and socio-cultural adjustment. Parental support was the strongest positive predictor of socio-cultural adjustment ($\beta = .41, p < .001$), followed by parental modeling ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), whereas parental interference negatively predicted adjustment ($\beta = -.23, p = .001$). Together, these parental behaviours explained 45% of the variance in socio-cultural adjustment. Career exploration partially mediated the relationship between parental support and socio-cultural adjustment, as the indirect effect was statistically significant ($B = 0.13, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.07, 0.22], p < .001$), while the direct effect remained significant. Gender and socioeconomic status significantly moderated the relationship between parental support and career exploration, whereas school sector did not. The study concludes that supportive and autonomy-enhancing parental involvement can strengthen students' career exploration and socio-cultural adjustment, while excessive parental interference may hinder their adaptive development.

Keywords: Parental Career Support; Career Exploration; Socio-Cultural Adjustment; Decision Self Efficacy; Parental Modeling; Parental Interference; Pakistani University Students.

Introduction

Parental influence is an important contextual factor in students' educational development, career preparation, and transition into adulthood. Parents may support career development by providing encouragement, occupational information, practical assistance, and opportunities for independent decision-making. Supportive parenting can strengthen students' confidence in completing career-related tasks and their ability to respond constructively to educational and occupational challenges. Recent studies involving college students have shown that parenting practices and parental support are associated with career decision-making self-efficacy and career adaptability (Alexander & Harris,

2022; Hartanto & Salim, 2021).

Parental career-related behaviours are not uniformly beneficial because their effects depend on the nature of the involvement. Supportive behaviours encourage young people to identify their interests, obtain career information, and consider different alternatives, whereas interference involves pressure, excessive control, or the imposition of parental preferences. A study of adolescents found that low parental support was associated with lower career exploration, while research among university students demonstrated that parenting styles were connected with career decision-making difficulties through psychological resources such as core self-evaluation and career calling (Tian et al., 2021; Maftai et al., 2023).

Career processes may explain how parental involvement contributes to students' developmental outcomes. Career exploration involves searching for occupational information, consulting teachers or mentors, evaluating available options, and investigating educational and employment opportunities. Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to confidence in performing these tasks, while decisiveness reflects the ability to select and remain committed to a career direction. Empirical evidence indicates that family social support is positively associated with career decision-making self-efficacy and that proactive personality can partially explain the relationship between parental involvement and confidence in career decisions (Ramadhani & Suharso, 2021; Salwani & Cahyawulan, 2022).

Although parental career-related behaviour is generally studied in relation to vocational development, its influence may extend to students' socio-cultural adjustment. Socio-cultural adjustment involves the behavioural and interpersonal skills needed to function effectively within social, cultural, and institutional environments. University students must communicate with peers and staff, participate in academic and community activities, adapt to institutional expectations, and work with people from different backgrounds. Recent research has shown that social support contributes to the sociocultural adaptation of university students and that school belonging can provide an important pathway through which students adjust successfully to their educational environment (Wu et al., 2024; Adianto et al., 2023).

The relationship between parental support and student development may be especially important in Pakistan, where family relationships remain influential in educational and career decisions. Parents often provide emotional, financial, and informational resources, but their influence may become restrictive when guidance is replaced by excessive control. A recent study involving university students from several institutions in Punjab found that social support and parental autonomy support were positively associated with students' well-being, while the parent-child relationship helped explain these associations. This evidence highlights the importance of distinguishing autonomy-enhancing parental support from controlling involvement within the Pakistani context (Jameel et al., 2024; Aftab et al., 2024).

Despite increasing attention to parental support and career development, limited research has directly examined whether career-specific parental behaviours predict socio-cultural adjustment among Pakistani university students. The present study therefore examines the effects of parental support, parental modeling, and parental interference on socio-cultural adjustment among B.Ed. (Hons.) students. It also investigates career exploration as a mechanism connecting parental support with socio-cultural adjustment and evaluates whether gender, socioeconomic status, and school sector influence the relationship between parental support and career exploration.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Validate and adapt measures of parental career-related behaviors and socio-cultural adjustment for Pakistani university students

2. Examine the direct effects of parental career-related support and interference on socio-cultural adjustment
3. Investigate the mediating roles of career exploration, decision self-efficacy, and decisiveness in explaining the relationship between parental involvement and socio-cultural adjustment.
4. Explore whether gender, socioeconomic status, and educational sector moderate these relationships.

Research Questions

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does parental career-related social support predict students' socio-cultural adjustment?
2. Which dimensions of parental career involvement, including support, information provision, modeling, and interference, are most strongly associated with socio-cultural adjustment?
3. Do career exploration, decision self-efficacy, and decisiveness mediate the relationship between parental career support and socio-cultural adjustment?
4. Do gender, socioeconomic status, and educational sector influence the strength of these relationships among Pakistani university students?

Literature Review

Parental career-related support refers to behaviours through which parents assist students in understanding their interests, evaluating career options, and preparing for educational and occupational transitions. Such behaviours may include emotional encouragement, information sharing, practical assistance, and respect for students' independent choices. Parental modeling may also influence career development because students observe their parents' work values, occupational attitudes, problem-solving approaches, and professional conduct. Research indicates that supportive parenting and positive family processes can contribute to stronger career adaptability and greater confidence in career decision-making (Hartanto & Salim, 2021; Alexander & Harris, 2022).

The consequences of parental involvement depend on whether it promotes autonomy or restricts it. Supportive parents enable students to gather information and take responsibility for their decisions, whereas interfering parents may pressure students to follow preferred careers or criticise choices that differ from family expectations. Such controlling behaviours may make it more difficult for students to develop independent career identities and manage uncertainty. Research among Chinese college students found that parenting styles were related to career decision-making difficulties through personal psychological resources, while research on parental psychological control similarly connected controlling involvement with career indecision and career decision-making self-efficacy (Tian et al., 2021; Afzaal et al., 2024).

Career exploration is a central process in career development because it allows students to obtain information about themselves and their occupational environments. Activities such as attending career workshops, discussing options with mentors, searching for internships, and comparing career alternatives can improve students' understanding of future opportunities. Parental encouragement may provide the emotional security and practical resources needed to engage in these activities. Evidence has shown that students reporting greater parental support also demonstrate stronger career exploration, particularly when positive personal characteristics complement supportive family environments (Maftai et al., 2023; Amin et al., 2024).

Career decision-making self-efficacy represents confidence in assessing personal abilities, gathering occupational information, setting goals, and selecting suitable career options. Decisiveness concerns the ability to make choices without unnecessary delay and remain committed once a choice has been made. Research involving final-year university students found a significant positive relationship

between family career support and career decision-making self-efficacy. Other evidence indicates that social support may reduce career decision-making difficulties through psychological capital and career decision-making confidence (Salwani & Cahyawulan, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024).

Socio-cultural adjustment refers to students' capacity to meet the interpersonal and behavioural demands of their social and institutional environment. In university settings, this includes developing peer relationships, participating in academic and community activities, following institutional expectations, interacting with faculty and administrative staff, and contributing to collaborative work. Social support can facilitate adjustment by increasing students' sense of security, belonging, and access to assistance. Research among college students found that social support and school belonging played important roles in sociocultural adaptation, while parental involvement was also associated with successful academic adjustment among undergraduate students (Wu et al., 2024; Lubis et al., 2022).

Career exploration may serve as a pathway between parental support and socio-cultural adjustment. Students who explore career opportunities must interact with teachers, mentors, employers, institutions, and peers, thereby developing communication skills, confidence, institutional knowledge, and social participation. Career exploration may therefore produce benefits that extend beyond occupational decision-making. Although existing studies have not extensively tested this specific pathway, evidence that parental support promotes exploration and that social participation supports adaptation provides a reasonable basis for examining career exploration as a mediator. This proposed connection is an inference drawn from the existing evidence. (Maftei et al., 2023; Rusata et al., 2026).

The effects of parental support may vary across demographic groups. Gender may influence career expectations, available opportunities, and the ways students interpret parental guidance. Socioeconomic status may affect access to technology, professional networks, counselling, transportation, internships, and other career-development resources. Research involving university students has identified differences in career decision-making self-efficacy according to gender and socioeconomic background, while evidence among education students suggests that family socioeconomic status can influence student engagement through parental autonomy support (Qiu & Ye, 2023; Cahyawulan & Fazny, 2022).

Overall, recent literature demonstrates that supportive family involvement can strengthen career exploration, adaptability, decision-making confidence, and student adjustment, while excessive parental control may contribute to career difficulties. However, the direct relationship between parental career-related behaviours and socio-cultural adjustment remains insufficiently examined, particularly in Pakistani higher education. The present study addresses this gap by testing the predictive effects of parental support, modeling, and interference, the mediating role of career exploration, and the moderating effects of gender, socioeconomic status, and school sector. The reported analysis tests career exploration as the mediator, while decision self-efficacy and decisiveness are treated as related career-process variables.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Research Population

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationship between parental career-related social support, career processes, and students' socio-cultural adjustment. The quantitative approach was selected because the study aimed to measure relationships among variables, test predictive effects, and examine the mediating and moderating mechanisms within the proposed research model.

Specifically, the study investigated the direct effects of parental career-related behaviors (support, modeling, and interference) on students' socio-cultural adjustment. In addition, the mediating roles

of career exploration, decision self-efficacy, and decisiveness were examined, while gender, socioeconomic status, and school sector were considered potential moderating variables. This design enabled the researcher to statistically evaluate the hypothesized relationships among study constructs. The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed. Hons.) programs at The University of Lahore and the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The study targeted students in the 7th and 8th semesters because they had completed substantial academic coursework, professional preparation, and university experiences, making them appropriate participants for examining career-related behaviors and socio-cultural adjustment.

Sampling Technique and Research Sample

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. This technique was considered appropriate because participants were required to meet specific criteria related to their academic level and exposure to career development experiences. Students from advanced semesters were selected because they were expected to have greater awareness of career decision-making processes and university adjustment demands.

The quantitative sample consisted of 200 B.Ed. (Hons.) students from The University of Lahore and the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Lahore. The sample included male and female students representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and educational experiences. The sample size was considered adequate for examining predictive relationships, mediation effects, and moderation effects using multivariate statistical techniques.

Research Instrument Development

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of three major sections:

Parental Career-Related Behaviors Questionnaire (PCB): The PCB questionnaire was used to measure students' perceptions of parental career-related behaviors, including parental support, parental modeling, and parental interference. The instrument assessed the extent to which parents provide encouragement, career information, occupational guidance, and influence during career development.

Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS): The SCAS was used to measure students' socio-cultural adjustment. The scale assessed students' ability to adapt to social and institutional environments, including interpersonal communication, peer interaction, community participation, and adjustment to cultural expectations.

Demographic Information: A demographic section was included to collect information regarding participants' gender, socioeconomic status, parental education, and school sector. These variables were examined as potential moderating factors in the proposed model.

Validity and Reliability

The research instruments were adapted for the Pakistani educational context through a systematic validation process. Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in educational psychology and career development. The instruments were reviewed to ensure linguistic clarity, cultural relevance, and appropriateness for Pakistani university students.

A pilot study was conducted before the main data collection to identify potential issues related to item clarity and questionnaire administration. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha for each subscale to ensure reliability thresholds ($\geq .75-.85$) were met. Construct validity was examined through factor analysis to confirm the underlying structure of the measurement instruments.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was collected from students enrolled in B.Ed. (Hons.) programs at The University of Lahore and the Institute of Education and Research, Lahore. After obtaining institutional permission, questionnaires were administered during scheduled academic sessions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and requested to provide informed consent before participation. Completed questionnaires were carefully reviewed, coded, and entered into statistical software for analysis. The researcher ensured data accuracy by checking for missing responses, inconsistent patterns, and potential data entry errors.

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine the proposed relationships among variables. Correlation analysis was used to determine associations among parental career-related support, career processes, and socio-cultural adjustment. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of parental career-related behaviors on socio-cultural adjustment. Mediation analysis was performed to determine whether career exploration, decision self-efficacy, and decisiveness explained the relationship between parental career-related support and socio-cultural adjustment. Moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether gender, socioeconomic status, and school sector influenced the strength of relationships among the study variables.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their voluntary participation rights, and confidentiality procedures. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were assured that their personal information would remain confidential and that collected data would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. The study followed institutional ethical guidelines regarding participant privacy, data protection, and responsible research practices.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables and Subscales

<i>Variable/subscale</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parental Career-Related Behaviors		
Parental support	3.75	0.88
Parental modeling	3.61	0.89
Parental interference	3.00	1.11
Career Processes		
Career exploration	3.63	0.92
Decision self-efficacy	3.65	0.91
Decisiveness	3.62	0.90
Socio-Cultural Adjustment Factors		
Interpersonal communication and peer integration	3.71	0.88
Community participation and institutional engagement	3.68	0.89
Cultural norms and behavioural adaptation	3.75	0.86
Academic/staff interaction	3.71	0.88
Group work and collaborative contributions	3.78	0.85

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the major study variables and their subscales. Among the parental career-related behaviours, parental support recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.88$), followed by parental modeling ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.89$). Parental interference had the lowest mean score ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.11$). These findings indicate that students generally perceived their parents as supportive and as positive career role models, while controlling or interfering behaviours were comparatively less common.

For the career-process variables, decision self-efficacy showed the highest mean score ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.91$), followed by career exploration ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.92$) and decisiveness ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.90$). This suggests that the students demonstrated moderate-to-high confidence in making career decisions, actively explored career opportunities, and showed a reasonable level of decisiveness regarding their future careers.

The socio-cultural adjustment subscales also showed relatively high mean scores. Group work and collaborative contributions recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.85$), followed by cultural norms and behavioural adaptation ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.86$). Interpersonal communication and peer integration and academic/staff interaction both had a mean score of 3.71, while community participation and institutional engagement had the lowest mean within this category ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.89$). Overall, the results indicate that the participants experienced strong parental support, demonstrated positive career-development processes, and showed a generally high level of socio-cultural adjustment.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Predicting Socio-Cultural Adjustment from Parental Career-Related Behaviours

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.45	0.35	-	4.14	0
Parental Support	0.38	0.07	.41***	5.43	0
Parental Modeling	0.29	0.08	.32***	3.76	0
Parental Interference	-0.21	0.06	-.23**	-3.5	0.001

Table 2 presents the hierarchical multiple regression results predicting socio-cultural adjustment from parental career-related behaviors. Parental support ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) and parental modeling ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) each significantly and positively predicted socio-cultural adjustment after controlling for the other predictors. In contrast, parental interference ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .001$) significantly and negatively predicted socio-cultural adjustment. Together, these three predictors explained 45% of the variance in socio-cultural adjustment ($R^2 = .45$), which constitutes a substantial effect size in educational research contexts. These findings supported the hypothesized relationships that supportive and modeling parental behaviors enhance students' socio-cultural adjustment, whereas controlling or interfering behaviors undermine it.

Table 3
Effect of Career Exploration in the Relationship Between Parental Support and Socio-Cultural Adjustment

Effect/Path	B	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p
Parental Support → Career Exploration	0.40	0.07	0.27	0.53	< .001
Career Exploration → Socio-Cultural Adjustment	0.32	0.08	0.16	0.48	< .001

Indirect Effect through Career Exploration	0.13	0.04	0.07	0.22	< .001
Direct Effect: Parental Support → Socio-Cultural Adjustment	0.25	0.07	0.12	0.38	.001

Table 3 summarizes the mediation analysis examining whether career processes mediated the relationship between parental support and socio-cultural adjustment. Parental support significantly predicted career exploration ($B = 0.40, p < .001$), and career exploration significantly predicted socio-cultural adjustment ($B = 0.32, p < .001$). The bootstrapped indirect effect of parental support on socio-cultural adjustment through career exploration was significant ($B = 0.13, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.07, 0.22], p < .001$), indicating that part of the effect of parental support operated through enhancing students' career exploration. The direct effect of parental support on socio-cultural adjustment remained significant ($B = 0.25, p = .001$), suggesting partial mediation. These results supported the proposed theoretical model that career processes serve as critical pathways linking parental involvement to socio-cultural adjustment outcomes.

Table 4
Moderating Effects of Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and School Sector on the Relationship Between Parental Support and Career Exploration

<i>Moderator</i>	<i>Interaction Effect (B)</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Gender</i>	0.18	0.07	2.57	.011	<i>Stronger effect for male students</i>
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>	0.22	0.09	2.44	.016	<i>Stronger effect for students with higher SES</i>
<i>School Sector</i>	0.15	0.08	1.94	.054	<i>Not statistically significant</i>

Table 4 presents the moderation analysis results testing whether gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and school sector moderated the relationship between parental support and career exploration. The interaction term for gender was significant ($B=0.18, p=.011$), indicating that the positive effect of parental support on career exploration was stronger for male students compared to female students. Similarly, the interaction term for SES was significant ($B=0.22, p=.016$), showing that students from higher SES backgrounds benefitted more from parental support in terms of career exploration than their lower SES counterparts. The interaction for school sector approached significance ($B=0.15, p=.054$), suggesting a possible trend toward stronger effects of parental support among students from private-sector institutions. These moderation findings underscored that the relationship between parental support and career processes was not uniform across subgroups but varied by contextual and demographic factors, which aligns with the ecological and social cognitive perspectives underlying the study.

Results

The quantitative analysis was based on responses from 200 B.Ed. (Hons.) students. Descriptive statistics indicated that parental support had the highest mean among the parental career-related behaviours ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.88$), followed by parental modeling ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.89$), while parental interference had the lowest mean ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.11$). Among the career-process variables, decision self-efficacy recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.65, SD = 0.91$), followed by career exploration ($M = 3.63, SD = 0.92$) and decisiveness ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.90$). For socio-cultural adjustment, group work and collaborative contributions had the highest mean ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.85$), whereas community participation and institutional engagement had the lowest mean ($M = 3.68, SD$

= 0.89). Overall, the findings indicated relatively high parental support, positive career-development processes, and favourable socio-cultural adjustment among the students.

The multiple regression analysis showed that parental support was the strongest positive predictor of socio-cultural adjustment, $B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = .41$, $t = 5.43$, $p < .001$. Parental modeling also significantly and positively predicted socio-cultural adjustment, $B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = .32$, $t = 3.76$, $p < .001$. In contrast, parental interference significantly and negatively predicted socio-cultural adjustment, $B = -0.21$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = -.23$, $t = -3.50$, $p = .001$. Together, the three parental career-related behaviours explained 45% of the variance in socio-cultural adjustment, $R^2 = .45$. These results suggest that supportive and modeling parental behaviours were associated with better adjustment, whereas greater parental interference was associated with poorer adjustment.

The mediation analysis revealed that parental support significantly predicted career exploration, $B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.53], $p < .001$, and career exploration significantly predicted socio-cultural adjustment, $B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.48], $p < .001$. The indirect effect of parental support on socio-cultural adjustment through career exploration was statistically significant, $B = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.22], $p < .001$. The direct effect also remained significant, $B = 0.25$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.38], $p = .001$, indicating partial mediation. Thus, parental support was associated with socio-cultural adjustment both directly and indirectly through greater career exploration.

The moderation analysis showed that gender significantly moderated the relationship between parental support and career exploration, $B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 2.57$, $p = .011$, with a stronger positive relationship observed among male students. Socioeconomic status also significantly moderated this relationship, $B = 0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 2.44$, $p = .016$, indicating a stronger effect among students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the moderating effect of school sector was not statistically significant, $B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 1.94$, $p = .054$. Therefore, gender and socioeconomic status significantly influenced the strength of the relationship between parental support and career exploration, whereas school sector did not.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the students generally experienced supportive parental career-related behaviours, positive career-development processes, and favourable socio-cultural adjustment. Parental support was reported more strongly than parental interference, while decision self-efficacy, career exploration, and decisiveness showed similar moderate-to-high levels. The relatively high scores across the socio-cultural adjustment dimensions suggest that the students were generally able to communicate with others, participate in institutional activities, follow cultural expectations, interact with academic staff, and contribute to collaborative work. This pattern supports recent evidence that family and social support can strengthen students' career engagement and broader adjustment within educational environments (Razgulin et al., 2023; Kayani et al., 2022).

The regression findings showed that parental support was the strongest positive predictor of socio-cultural adjustment, followed by parental modeling, whereas parental interference negatively predicted adjustment. These results suggest that encouragement, career information, respect for students' choices, and positive occupational examples may provide psychological and social resources that help students function effectively in university settings. In contrast, pressure and excessive control may restrict autonomy and make it more difficult for students to develop confidence and adaptive skills. Similar research has found that supportive parental career behaviours contribute to positive career and adaptation outcomes, while interference is associated with greater career decision-making difficulties (Parola & Marcionetti, 2022; Li et al., 2022).

Career exploration partially mediated the relationship between parental support and socio-cultural adjustment. This finding indicates that parental support may improve adjustment partly by

encouraging students to search for career information, attend career-related activities, communicate with teachers and mentors, and explore employment opportunities. Such activities may expose students to new people, institutions, and social expectations, thereby strengthening both career knowledge and their ability to adjust to the university environment. However, the significant direct effect suggests that career exploration does not explain the entire relationship; parental support may also influence adjustment through emotional security, confidence, access to resources, and other psychological processes (Gamboa et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2025).

The moderation results further showed that the relationship between parental support and career exploration was stronger for male students and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The gender finding is consistent with evidence that parental career support may have different effects across male and female students, depending on cultural expectations, opportunities, and the way parental guidance is communicated. The stronger relationship among higher-SES students may reflect greater access to career information, technology, professional networks, workshops, and internship opportunities. School sector, however, was not a statistically significant moderator, suggesting that the effect of parental support may depend more on family and personal resources than on whether students attend a public- or private-sector institution (Zhang et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Salim et al., 2024).

The findings have practical implications for parents, universities, and career counsellors. Parents should be encouraged to provide emotional reassurance, relevant career information, occupational examples, and opportunities for exploration while avoiding excessive pressure or the imposition of preferred career choices. Universities may strengthen career guidance by arranging mentoring sessions, career workshops, employer interactions, internships, and family-oriented career-awareness programmes. Additional support may be especially important for female students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who may have fewer opportunities to translate parental encouragement into active career exploration. Recent studies similarly emphasize that autonomy-supportive parenting and coordinated support from parents and teachers can strengthen career confidence, adaptability, and educational engagement (Jiang et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). These findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The cross-sectional and correlational design does not establish causal relationships, while purposive sampling from two institutions in Lahore limits the generalizability of the results to other programmes, universities, and regions of Pakistan. The study also relied on students' self-reports, which may be influenced by response bias and personal perceptions of parental behaviour. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include students from diverse disciplines and provinces, and obtain information from both students and parents. Although decision self-efficacy and decisiveness were measured descriptively, the reported mediation analysis tested career exploration only; therefore, their mediating roles should not be claimed without separate indirect-effect analyses (Li et al., 2022; Salim et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between parental career-related behaviours, career processes, and socio-cultural adjustment among Pakistani university students. The findings showed that parental support and parental modeling positively predicted socio-cultural adjustment, whereas parental interference had a negative effect. Together, these parental behaviours explained a substantial proportion of the variation in students' adjustment. Career exploration partially mediated the relationship between parental support and socio-cultural adjustment, indicating that supportive parents may strengthen students' adjustment both directly and by encouraging them to explore career options, seek information, and engage with educational and professional opportunities.

The study also found that gender and socioeconomic status influenced the strength of the relationship between parental support and career exploration, while school sector did not have a statistically significant moderating effect. These results highlight the importance of supportive, autonomy-enhancing parental involvement in students' career and social development. Parents, universities, and career counsellors should work together to provide guidance, mentoring, career information, and exploration opportunities, particularly for students from less advantaged backgrounds. However, because the study used a cross-sectional design and purposive sampling from two institutions, the findings should be generalized cautiously. Future research should use longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and separate mediation models to examine the roles of decision self-efficacy and decisiveness more fully.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are made based on findings of this research:

1. Universities should provide structured career guidance and targeted mentoring, especially for female students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. Parents should encourage students' career exploration while avoiding excessive pressure or interference.

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