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Determining Factors Affecting Career Coaching and Counseling Among Undergraduates: The Mediating Role of Career Decision Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Background: Career coaching and counseling are vital tools for undergraduates to effectively identify career decisions in today's competitive labor market. However, the utilization of these services remains an area of study, as it is influenced by various career determinant factors such as institutional support, socio-cultural factors, awareness, and motivation. The main objective of this research was to analyze the mediating role of Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) in the relationship between determining factors and the utilization of career counseling services.

Methods: The explanatory research design using structural equation modeling was used. Three hundred undergraduates were taken as sample from three universities were surveyed using validated Likert-scale questionnaires. Constructs measured included institutional support, socio-cultural influences, awareness, motivation, CDSE, and service utilization.

Results: The findings revealed that the determinants of coaching and counseling, namely institutional support, socio-cultural influences, awareness, and motivation, were positively correlated with CDSE, while CDSE was strongly correlated with service utilization. The mediation analysis indicates that CDSE partially mediates the relationship between external

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determinants and service utilization, accounting for 42.56% of the variance explained using the VAF method.

Conclusion: This study concludes that enhancing CDSE significantly improves students' engagement with career counseling services. Interventions targeting institutional support, awareness campaigns, and confidence-building strategies can optimize service utilization among undergraduates.

Novelty: By focusing on CDSE as a pivotal mediator, this study offers novel insights into improving career development programs at universities to enhance proactive career behavior among students. This will bridge external factors and career counseling utilization, offering actionable recommendations for academic institutions aimed at cultivating proactive career behaviors among students.

Keywords: Career coaching and counseling, institutional support, socio-cultural support, utilization, SEM

Introduction

In today's competitive and fast-evolving labor market, undergraduates face a myriad of challenges when navigating their career paths. Despite the growing availability of career counseling services in academic institutions, many students fail to fully utilize these services, leading to uncertainty in career choices, low employability, and delayed transitions into the workforce (Azhenov et al., 2023; Milot-Lapointe & Le Corff, 2024). Career coaching and counseling are essential tools designed to equip students with the necessary skills to make informed career decisions. However, the effectiveness of these services depends not only on institutional support but also on personal psychological factors, one of the most significant being Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE).

CDSE, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks related to career decision-making, has been recognized as a key psychological factor that influences career-related behaviors (Taylor & Betz, 1983). It plays a pivotal role in determining whether students will actively seek and utilize career services offered by their universities (Lent et al., 1994). The relationship between CDSE and career counseling usage, however, remains underexplored, particularly in the context of undergraduate students. Despite the significant investment by universities in career coaching and counseling services, a gap exists between the availability of these resources and their actual utilization. Many students are unaware of the counseling services or are hesitant to use them due to psychological barriers such as low self-efficacy in career decision-making workforce (Azhenov et al., 2023; Milot-Lapointe & Le Corff, 2024) . This research aims to bridge this gap by examining the factors that influence the use of career coaching and counseling among undergraduates, with a particular focus on the mediating role of CDSE.

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Research Objective

The objective of the research was to analyze the mediating role of CDSE in the relationship between determining factors (e.g., institutional support, socio-cultural influences, awareness, and motivation) and the utilization of career counseling services.

Review of Literature

Career Coaching and Counseling in Higher Education

Career counseling services in higher education aim to support students in making informed decisions about their careers through guidance on job searches, resume writing, interview techniques, and career assessments (Niles et al., 2013). These services help students build the necessary skills and confidence to make well-informed career choices workforce (Azhenov et al., 2023; Milot-Lapointe & Le Corff, 2024).. However, despite the availability of these resources, many students fail to engage with them. Factors such as lack of awareness, limited accessibility, and skepticism regarding their efficacy contribute to low engagement with career services(Watts & Sultana, 2004).

Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE)

Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) is a concept grounded in Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory(Lent et al., 1994). CDSE refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to engage in tasks associated with career decision-making, including gathering information, evaluating options, and making decisions. Higher levels of CDSE are associated with proactive career behaviors, such as increased engagement with career counseling services(Betz & Hackett, 2006). Moreover, students with higher CDSE levels are more resilient and persistent when faced with career-related challenges(Gushue et al., 2006).

Institutional Support and Awareness

Institutional support, including the availability of trained counselors, awareness campaigns, and the integration of career services into academic programs, has a significant impact on the utilization of career counseling services. Research indicates that students who are more aware of available services are more likely to seek them out(Gati & Levin, 2014). The integration of career counseling into curriculum and co-curricular activities increases students' engagement, as shown by Arıkan and Bal (2023) who found that students in universities with strong career service infrastructures were more likely to use them.

This encompasses the resources, programs, and services universities provide to assist students in career decision-making. It include:

- Career guidance offices
- Counseling services
- Resume workshops
- Career fairs
- Internship opportunities

Socio-Cultural Influences

Cultural norms, family expectations, and societal values play an important role in shaping students' attitudes toward career counseling and students from families that emphasize career

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guidance are more likely to seek counseling(Fouad & Kantamneni, 2008). Parental support can influence college students' career adaptability indirectly through the mediating role of proactive personality(Hartanto & Salim, 2021). Peer influence, along with family support, also shapes the decision to seek career guidance. It encompases as family, community.

Technological Access and Motivation

Technology-assisted career counselling offers several advantages, including expanded reach of services, constant access, immediate response, enhanced information gathering, and effective use of audio-visual tools, while also facing challenges such as self-limited thinking, lack of awareness, limited internet access, digital illiteracy, information quality concerns, confidentiality issues, and difficulties in handling urgent client needs (Zainudin et al., 2020). Advancements in technology have transformed the delivery of career services. However, disparities in digital access and motivation can affect the utilization of these services. Motivated students, driven by internal or external factors, are more likely to take advantage of available resources (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas, 1997).

The Mediating Role of CDSE

CDSE serves as a mediator in the relationship between external factors like institutional support, socio-cultural influences and the actual use of career counseling services. When students have high levels of CDSE, they are more likely to perceive career services as valuable and act on the available support. Betz and Hackett (2006) suggest that interventions designed to boost CDSE can enhance the effectiveness of career counseling services by increasing students' confidence and initiative.

CDSE refers to a person's confidence in their ability to successfully perform tasks related to career decision-making. This includes four core skills:

- Self-Appraisal: Accurately assessing personal strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values.
- Goal Selection: Identifying realistic, desirable career goals that align with one's abilities and circumstances.
- Planning: Developing clear, actionable steps to achieve those career goals.
- Problem-Solving: Effectively overcoming obstacles and making adjustments when career plans are disrupted. When students believe they can handle these tasks, they are more likely to actively seek career counseling and engage in opportunities like internships or workshops.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) which emphasizes how self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals shape career-related behaviors. Central to this is Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), which mediates the relationship between external supports and students' career counseling engagement Betz and Hackett (2006). Prior research by Gushue et al. (2006) and Ha (2023) confirms that social support and resilience enhance CDSE, promoting career adaptability. To broaden this view, Career Construction Theory Savickas, 1997 highlights career adaptability and identity

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development as essential in navigating changing job markets. It emphasizes competencies such as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence in career management. Studies like Zainudin et al., (2020) have shown how institutional resources and digital access affect students' engagement with career services. Finally, Self-Determination Theory Ryan and Deci (2000) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both of which drive students' proactive career behaviors. Fouad and Kantamneni (2008) and Hartanto and Salim (2021)demonstrate that socio-cultural expectations and motivation levels critically influence students' use of career counseling. Together, these theories form a multidimensional framework explaining how CDSE mediates the effect of institutional, motivational, and socio-cultural factors on career counseling utilization.

Research Framework

The research framework for this study proposes that career counseling utilization is influenced by counseling and coaching determinants: institutional support, socio-cultural influences, awareness, and motivation, and internal factors such as Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE). CDSE is hypothesized to act as a mediator in the relationship between external factors and the likelihood of utilizing career counseling services.

Research Methodology

This study adopts an explanatory research design to investigate how Institutional Support, Socio-Cultural Influences, Awareness, and Motivation influence the Utilization of Career Counseling Services through the mediating role of Career Decision Self-Efficacy. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test hypothesized causal pathways, enabling simultaneous analysis of direct and indirect effects among variables. A sample of 300 management students from three universities was selected using stratified random sampling. Management students were chosen due to their career-focused curriculum and frequent engagement with career counseling services. The population was systematically divided into four distinct strata based on students' academic year: first, second, third, and fourth year. This stratification was essential to capture a balanced representation of students at different stages of their career development and decision-making processes.To maintain equal representation and sampling fairness, a fixed and balanced sample size was allocated within each stratum. Specifically, 75 students were selected from each academic year, making up exactly one-quarter (25%) of the total 300-sample size. This deliberate allocation ensured balanced participation across different stages of academic progression and career decision-making maturity, allowing for meaningful comparisons between year groups.The actual selection process utilized official enrollment records obtained from university registrars. Within each stratum, students were randomly selected using a computer-generated list of random numbers, which ensured that each student had an equal and unbiased chance of selection. This systematic approach helped prevent selection bias and improved the generalizability of the findings. Data were collected manually by visiting affiliated colleges of the three universities. Structured questionnaires were distributed and completed under researcher supervision to ensure accuracy and minimize non-response bias. The questionnaire included validated 5-point Likert scales

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measuring. The constructs were measured using validated scales adapted from prior studies: Institutional Support was adapted from Gati and Levin (2014), Socio-Cultural Influences from Fouad and Kantamneni (2008), Awareness from Whiston et al. (2017), Motivation from Ryan and Deci (2000), Career Decision Self-Efficacy from Betz and Luzzo (1996), and Utilization of Career Counseling Services from Hughes and Karp (2004). The analysis was conducted in R-Studio using the SEMinR package for SEM.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the consistency of results obtained from repeated measurements using a specific scale or characteristic (Malhotra, 2006). It highlights the stability of outcomes derived from data collection and analysis methods. Reliability is particularly crucial in Likert-type questionnaires that test multiple variables within a theoretical framework (Saunders et al., 2009). Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to measure reliability, as it evaluates the internal consistency of items within a questionnaire (Pallant, 2007). The alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with values above 0.7 indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Validity, on the other hand, is assessed through convergent and discriminant validity for reflective measurement models (Hair et al., 2011). Convergent validity is determined by examining the average variance extracted (AVE), where an AVE value of 0.50 or higher suggests that the latent variable explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Discriminant validity can be tested using two metrics: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings (Hair et al., 2011). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) a latent variable should share more variance with its own indicators than with other latent variables in the model. Statistically, this means that the AVE for a latent construct should exceed its highest squared correlation with any other latent construct. Cross-loadings provide another measure of discriminant validity, requiring that an indicator's loading on its assigned latent variable be greater than its loadings on all other constructs (Hair et al., 2011).

Results and Discussion

Results

The correlation was performed with the determinants and to measure relationship among the determinants of counseling and coaching, career decision self-efficacy, and utilization of career counseling services.

Table 1: Correlation mattrix

Correlation Matrix			
Latents	Determinants	CDSE	Utilization
Determinants	1		
CDSE	0.542***	1	
Utilization	0.568***	0.623***	1

The correlation matrix illustrates the relationships among three latent variables: Determinants, Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), and Utilization of Career Counseling Services. A moderate positive correlation exists between Determinants and CDSE ($r = .542$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of determinants, such as institutional support, socio-cultural

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influences, awareness, and motivation, are associated with greater self-efficacy in career decision-making. Similarly, Determinants are moderately correlated with Utilization ($r = .568$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who perceive stronger determinants are more likely to utilize career counseling services. CDSE shows a strong positive correlation with Utilization ($r = .623$, $p < .001$), implying that students with greater confidence in their ability to make career decisions are more likely to engage with career counseling services. These results demonstrate significant positive relationships among the variables and suggest that CDSE plays a critical mediating role in influencing the utilization of career counseling services, supporting the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 2: HTMT Test of Validiy

Latents	Latents					
	ISupport	SCulture	Awareness	Motivation	CDSE	Utilization
ISupport						
SCulture	0.668					
Awareness	0.478	0.562				
Motivation	0.499	0.443	0.463			
CDSE	0.454	0.436	0.392	0.623		
Utilization	0.426	0.461	0.409	0.624	0.739	

The HTMT coefficients were observed to be below the threshold of 0.85, thereby indicating the construct validity (Clark and Watson, 1995; Lee et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2018). Consequently, the dataset exhibits discriminant validity.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

Latents	Fornell-Larcker Criteria					
	Institutional Support	Social & Culture	Awareness	Motivation	CDSE	Utilization
Institutional Support	0.758					
Social & Culture	0.502	0.755				
Awareness	0.365	0.427	0.784			
Motivation	0.391	0.342	0.345	0.797		
CDSE	0.35	0.337	0.317	0.527	0.81	
Utilization	0.348	0.377	0.342	0.545	0.623	0.802

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was performed to measure discriminant validity where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was displayed along the diagonal. In contrast, the off-diagonal entries explain the correlations among the constructs. The findings show that each construct is valid to its criterion. The result shows the square root of AVE for Institutional Support (0.758) is higher than its correlations with other constructs, such as Social & Culture (0.502), Awareness (0.365), Motivation (0.391), CDSE

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(0.350), and Utilization (0.348). Likely, Social & Culture exhibits a square root of AVE of 0.755, which is greater than its correlations with other constructs, including Awareness (0.427) and Motivation (0.342). This trend is consistently observed across all constructs, including Awareness (0.784), Motivation (0.797), CDSE (0.810), and Utilization (0.802). These results suggest that each construct maintains uniqueness from the others within the model, thereby confirming discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4: Cross Loadings

Cross Loadings						
Items	Latents					
	Institutional Support	Social & Culture	Awareness	Motivation	CDSE	Utilization
IS1	**0.729**	0.324	0.221	0.271	0.304	0.256
IS2	**0.813**	0.337	0.236	0.332	0.304	0.286
IS3	**0.764**	0.488	0.365	0.297	0.225	0.296
IS4	**0.722**	0.389	0.302	0.281	0.214	0.207
SC1	0.312	**0.670**	0.238	0.144	0.200	0.197
SC2	0.445	**0.865**	0.322	0.289	0.302	0.330
SC3	0.421	**0.831**	0.350	0.295	0.287	0.337
SC4	0.316	**0.625**	0.383	0.282	0.209	0.245
AW1	0.297	0.382	**0.763**	0.219	0.237	0.255
AW2	0.295	0.316	**0.812**	0.238	0.317	0.298
AW3	0.252	0.347	**0.787**	0.324	0.209	0.252
AW4	0.299	0.302	**0.773**	0.317	0.211	0.259
MT1	0.314	0.271	0.375	**0.710**	0.308	0.358
MT2	0.371	0.410	0.475	**0.648**	0.321	0.312
MT3	0.326	0.224	0.203	**0.836**	0.456	0.454
MT4	0.288	0.264	0.209	**0.892**	0.484	0.486
MT5	0.302	0.256	0.230	**0.873**	0.490	0.523
CDSE1	0.328	0.279	0.233	0.315	**0.563**	0.351
CDSE2	0.269	0.261	0.266	0.455	**0.860**	0.546
CDSE3	0.284	0.265	0.285	0.455	**0.920**	0.581
CDSE4	0.277	0.299	0.244	0.467	**0.851**	0.513
UCC1	0.220	0.232	0.230	0.434	0.553	**0.647**
UCC2	0.362	0.339	0.328	0.470	0.512	**0.817**
UCC3	0.249	0.308	0.251	0.418	0.518	**0.872**
UCC4	0.283	0.302	0.249	0.412	0.434	**0.834**
UCC5	0.270	0.320	0.299	0.434	0.455	**0.821**

Cross-loadings were examined to assess discriminant validity, ensuring that each item strongly relates to its intended construct. The cross-loadings, of each item's loading on its respective latent construct is higher than its loadings on other constructs. This pattern is consistent across

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all constructs Institutional Support, Social & Culture, Awareness, Motivation, CDSE, and Utilization. These results confirm that items are appropriately aligned with their intended constructs, supporting discriminant validity. By ensuring that cross-loadings are minimal and each item loads highest on its designated construct, the measurement model demonstrates that the constructs are distinct and reliable for further analysis (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5: Reliability

Reliability				
Latents	alpha	rhoC	AVE	rhoA
Institutional Support	0.754	0.843	0.574	0.761
Social & Culture	0.744	0.839	0.570	0.781
Awareness	0.792	0.864	0.614	0.802
Motivation	0.855	0.896	0.636	0.883
CDSE	0.814	0.881	0.657	0.843
Utilization	0.858	0.899	0.643	0.857

The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). The Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency among the items within each construct. Additionally, the AVE values for all constructs were greater than 0.5, and the CR values surpassed the threshold of 0.7, meeting established standards for reliability. Furthermore, the CR values were higher than the AVE values across all constructs, satisfying both criteria for convergent validity as outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Thus, the constructs demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Table 6:R-Square

R-Square		
Statistics	CDSE	Utilization
R^2	0.294	0.463
AdjR^2	0.291	0.460
Determinants	0.542	0.326
CDSE		0.446

The R-square value for CDSE and Utilization, illustrating the proportion of variance explained by their predictors. For CDSE, the R-square value is 0.294, meaning that 29.4% of its variance is accounted for by the determinants of the counseling and coaching for the number of predictors in the model. Further, the utilization has an R-square of 0.463, indicating that 46.3% of its variance is explained by its predictors. Additionally, determinants of counseling and coaching contribute significantly to both constructs, with a value of 0.542 for CDSE and 0.326 for Utilization, while CDSE itself contributes 0.446 to Utilization. These findings highlight the explanatory power of the model and confirm the strength of relationships between constructs, supporting its validity and reliability for further research (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

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Table 7: F-Square

F-Square			
Statistics	Determinants	CDSE	Utilization
Determinants		0.416	0.130
CDSE			0.263
Utilization			

The F-square values, measure the effect size of predictors in the structural model. In the model, the F-square values explain the extent to which a predictor as a determinant of counseling and coaching, contributes to explaining the variance of a dependent variable. The F-square value of 0.416 for CDSE suggests that determinants have a significant impact on explaining its variance, while the value of 0.130 for Utilization indicates that determinants have a relatively smaller effect on this construct. Similarly, CDSE has an F-square value of 0.263 for Utilization, indicating a moderate effect size. The model explains the relative importance of predictors in influencing the dependent variables, supporting the robustness of the model for evaluating relationships between constructs (Cohen, 2013).

Table 8: Bootstrapped Total Path

Total Path Model								
LVs			Original Est.	Bootstrap Mean	Bootstrap SD	T Stat.	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
Determinants	->	CDSE	0.542	0.553	0.055	9.778	0.435	0.653
Determinants	->	Utilization	0.568	0.577	0.038	14.759	0.501	0.652
CDSE	->	Utilization	0.446	0.443	0.077	5.784	0.294	0.591

The total path model outlines the relationships between the latent variables Determinants, CDSE, and Utilization by examining path coefficients, bootstrap estimates, and confidence intervals. The path from Determinants of counseling and coaching to CDSE has a coefficient of 0.542, with a t-statistic of 9.778, indicating a strong and statistically significant relationship (95% CI: 0.435–0.653). Similarly, the path from Determinants of counseling and coaching to Utilization shows a coefficient of 0.568 and a t-statistic of 14.759, confirming its significance (95% CI: 0.501–0.652). Futher there is the moderately significant effect of CDSE on Utilization with a coefficient of 0.446 and t-statistic of 5.784 (95% CI: 0.294–0.591). Further the path analysis was show in the figure.

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Figure 1: Bootspath Model

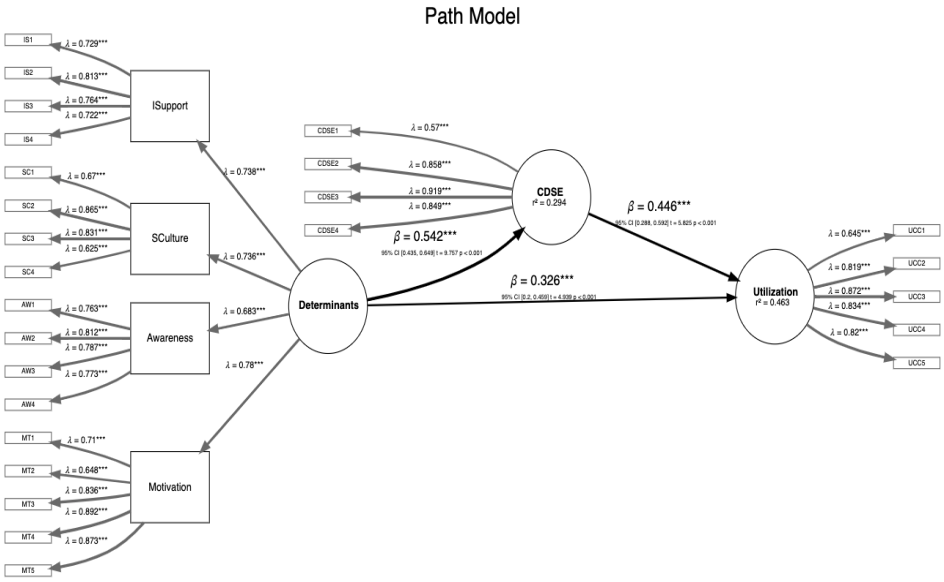

Table 9: Mediation Analysis

Mediation Assessment					
Paths	Coefficient	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effects					
Determinants → CDSE (a)	0.542	0.055	9.778	< .001	[0.435, 0.653]
CDSE → Utilization (b)	0.446	0.077	5.784	< .001	[0.294, 0.591]
Determinants → Utilization (c')	0.326	0.067	4.877	< .001	[0.197, 0.458]
Calculated Effects					
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.242	—	—	—	—
Total Effect (c)	0.568	0.038	14.759	< .001	[0.494, 0.643]
Mediation Assessment					
VAF (Indirect Effect/Total Effect)	42.56%	—	—	—	—
Mediation Type	**Partial**	—	—	—	—

Note. VAF = Variance Accounted For. Partial mediation is indicated when 20% ≤ VAF ≤ 80%. Values were calculated based on bootstrapped estimates (n = 5000)

The mediation analysis reveals a partial mediating effect of Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) in the relationship between Determinants and Utilization. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) is calculated as 42.56%, indicating that 42.56% of the total effect of Determinants on Utilization is explained through the indirect pathway via CDSE. Since the VAF falls within the range of 20% to 80%, the mediation is classified as partial, following established guidelines (Hair Jr et al., 2023).

Discussion

This research signifies the determining factors of counseling and coaching particularly Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), in mediating the influence of external determinants—such as

institutional support, cultural norms, personal motivation, and awareness—on the use of career counseling services among undergraduates. The findings demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between these variables, with CDSE emerging as a vital conduit through which these external elements exert their influence on students' engagement with career resources. The partial mediation effect, accounting for over 42% of the variance in counseling utilization, reflects the extent to which students' confidence in making career-related decisions shapes their behavior. These results align with the tenets of Social Cognitive Career Theory, affirming that students who perceive themselves as capable decision-makers are more inclined to act upon the support and resources provided by their institutions (Betz & Hackett, 2006). Supporting literature further elaborates on this dynamic; for example, resilience has been shown to enhance CDSE and, in turn, amplify the effects of social support on career readiness (Ha, 2023). Similarly, CDSE and social support together have been found to strengthen the link between career motivation and leadership tendencies in academic environments (Oh et al., 2024). These insights echo in studies where a sense of vocational purpose, when paired with high CDSE, leads to clearer and more decisive career planning (Kang & Park, 2022). Recent studies have corroborated these results, highlighting that CDSE significantly enhances employability and career adaptability by encouraging students to explore career opportunities and align their academic achievements with practical experiences.

Conclusion

From the research, it can be concluded that enhancing Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) acts as a catalyst to deliberate and empower more on career decision-making among undergraduates. The results of this study validate the theoretical assumption that CDSE not only mediates the relationship between external determinants and counseling service utilization but also significantly boosts students' engagement with institutional career resources. This holistic approach, blending structural support with counseling and coaching empowerment, lays a strong foundation for helping students to identify complex career pathways with confidence and clarity.

Authors Contribution

Conceptualization, framework, formal writing: A.P; Data analysis and review: T.R

Conflics of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest

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