

Psychological and Cultural Factors Influencing Career Indecision in First-Generation Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the psychological and cultural factors that contribute to career indecision among first-generation university students.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 25 first-generation undergraduate students enrolled in public universities across Argentina. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, field of study, and academic standing. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following open, axial, and selective coding procedures. The analysis yielded four main thematic categories: internal psychological conflict, family and socio-cultural expectations, structural and informational barriers, and social comparison and belonging uncertainty.

Findings: Thematic analysis revealed that internal psychological factors such as low self-efficacy, perfectionism, emotional overwhelm, and fear of failure significantly hindered participants' ability to make confident career decisions. Cultural and familial expectations created added pressure to choose traditionally prestigious and economically secure careers, often in conflict with personal interests. Structural barriers, including inadequate career guidance and informational inequities, further complicated decision-making processes. Lastly, many students experienced intense social comparison and imposter syndrome, contributing to a sense of alienation and emotional vulnerability. These themes interact dynamically, creating a complex and layered portrait of career indecision rooted in both individual and systemic dimensions.

Conclusion: Interventions must move beyond standardized career guidance to incorporate culturally sensitive, psychologically supportive, and structurally informed approaches tailored to the unique challenges faced by this population.

Keywords: Career indecision; First-generation students; Psychological conflict; Cultural expectations.

1. Introduction

Career indecision represents a persistent challenge in the academic and psychological development of students navigating post-secondary education, particularly among first-generation college students who must confront a complex intersection of internal, cultural, and environmental factors. The phenomenon of career indecision—characterized by prolonged uncertainty, emotional distress, and difficulty making informed vocational choices—has been increasingly documented as a critical barrier to academic persistence and career satisfaction (Domingues et al., 2024; Xu & He, 2022). While all students may experience transitional uncertainty, those who are the first in their family to attend university often face amplified obstacles due to a lack of generational guidance, cultural capital, and career role models (Griffin et al., 2022; Karna et al., 2024). For such students, career indecision cannot be isolated from broader socio-psychological dynamics such as familial expectations, perceived class mobility, self-concept fragility, and institutional disconnect.

Research has highlighted the multidimensional nature of career indecision, with personal, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions interwoven into students' experiences. The Career Indecision Profile (CIP), for instance, has been developed and validated to categorize different aspects of the construct, including lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information (Domingues et al., 2024; Xu & He, 2022). These indicators have been shown to be particularly pronounced among students who contend with identity ambiguity and external pressures, such as those from low-income or culturally diverse backgrounds (Aminah, 2025; Duru, 2024). In one recent study, it was found that pessimism and avoidant coping strategies contributed significantly to career indecision, often mediated by psychological defenses developed in response to socio-academic stressors (Duru, 2024). Similarly, emotional stress and intolerance of uncertainty have been empirically linked to elevated levels of career indecision in youth populations (Youn & Jun, 2022).

Among first-generation students, internal psychological conflict is often compounded by culturally rooted values and parental expectations. In many contexts, career choice is not viewed as an individualistic journey, but as a communal investment tied to family honor, socioeconomic mobility, and collective success (Karna et al., 2024; Wang, 2023).

This shared conceptualization of career decision-making can introduce a host of cultural barriers, especially when students' aspirations diverge from traditional family narratives. The pressure to conform to secure, prestigious, or economically stable professions frequently leads students to abandon personally meaningful paths in favor of socially acceptable careers (Fajriani et al., 2024; Kusumawardani & Hidayat, 2024). A study in Indonesia, for example, found that ethnic background and perceived family obligations significantly influenced the degree of decisional difficulty among students from minority communities (Fajriani et al., 2024).

Psychological variables such as low self-efficacy, perfectionism, and emotional vulnerability also play prominent roles in shaping career indecision. Lee and colleagues have illustrated how emotional predictors such as anxiety, self-doubt, and depressive tendencies contribute to indecision by impairing students' perceived capacity to make informed and confident career choices (Lee et al., 2021, 2022). Perfectionism, in particular, has been associated with increased psychological distress and greater difficulty in career planning, especially in academic environments that prioritize performance and certainty (Tian & Hou, 2024). Among Chinese college students, perfectionist tendencies were shown to exacerbate indecision through avoidance behaviors and excessive rumination (Kim, 2023; Tian & Hou, 2024). These findings resonate with the lived experiences of first-generation students who often face imposter syndrome and struggle to internalize success in unfamiliar institutional settings (Griffin et al., 2022; Lee, 2023).

Institutional limitations also contribute to the persistence of career indecision. Insufficient access to high-quality career counseling services, lack of individualized guidance, and unclear information channels frequently prevent first-generation students from navigating the educational landscape effectively (Domingues et al., 2024; Emman & Hussain, 2025). In many university contexts, students are expected to self-navigate complex bureaucracies and career planning frameworks, an expectation that disproportionately disadvantages those who lack inherited knowledge or professional role models (Dwatra & Adri, 2023; You & Kim, 2024). Studies have shown that when career services are overly generalized or inadequately integrated into academic support systems, they fail to address the unique psychological and contextual needs of marginalized students (Ajmi et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023). Furthermore, the digital divide—a persistent issue for students from rural or

underserved backgrounds—further restricts access to timely and comprehensive career information, exacerbating uncertainty and delay in decision-making (Kusumawardani & Hidayat, 2024; Li et al., 2024).

Social comparison and the internalization of peer success also significantly influence the career experiences of first-generation students. Peer environments, especially in competitive academic institutions, can reinforce feelings of inadequacy or alienation, which in turn intensify indecision (Son & Lee, 2022; Youn & Jun, 2022). As documented by Lee et al., emotional instability caused by social comparison and institutional disconnection may result in withdrawal or disengagement from the career exploration process altogether (Lee et al., 2022). In addition, the absence of visible, relatable role models within academic and professional domains often leaves students with limited frameworks for success, resulting in increased reliance on trial-and-error approaches and prolonged decision timelines (Latukeyu & Pollard, 2022). These psychosocial processes can create a cyclical effect, where indecision begets further stress, and stress reinforces indecision.

While the existing literature has made significant strides in identifying broad predictors of career indecision, there remains a critical gap in understanding the intersection of psychological and cultural factors specific to first-generation students, particularly in under-researched regional contexts. Most models of career indecision are rooted in Euro-American theoretical frameworks that may not fully capture the embedded sociocultural narratives of collectivism, sacrifice, or identity conflict that shape vocational pathways in non-Western populations (Park & Choi, 2023; Zhu et al., 2021). For instance, Maree's work on career construction counseling emphasizes the importance of culturally embedded narratives and longitudinal support in addressing career indecision among Black South African students (Maree, 2025), suggesting that interventions must be tailored to the unique cultural and psychological landscapes of target groups.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the psychological and cultural dimensions of career indecision in a group of first-generation university students in Argentina

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach to examine the psychological and

cultural factors that contribute to career indecision among first-generation university students. The qualitative method was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and contextual challenges influencing their career choices. The study involved 25 participants, all of whom were first-generation undergraduate students enrolled in public universities across Argentina. Participants were purposefully sampled to ensure diversity in gender, field of study, and academic year, while maintaining the criterion of being the first in their families to attend higher education. Recruitment was conducted through student support offices and academic advising centers, and informed consent was obtained from all individuals prior to participation.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. An interview guide was developed based on a review of the literature and expert input, covering key domains such as personal values, family expectations, self-efficacy, perceived barriers, cultural identity, and social comparison. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached—that is, the point at which no new themes or insights were emerging from subsequent interviews, which occurred after 25 interviews.

2.3. Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis facilitated by NVivo software. The analytical process involved multiple stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for patterns and themes, reviewing and refining themes, and final interpretation. Open coding was used in the initial phase to capture a wide range of participant experiences, followed by axial coding to identify relationships among categories, and finally selective coding to integrate the themes into a coherent framework. Two researchers independently coded the transcripts to enhance credibility and reduce bias, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to ensure the trustworthiness

of findings, and member checks were conducted with a subset of participants to validate the interpretations.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 25 first-generation university students from various public universities across Argentina. Of the participants, 16 identified as female (64%) and 9 as male (36%), with ages ranging from 18 to 27 years ($M = 21.8$, $SD = 2.4$). Regarding academic standing, 7 participants (28%) were in their first year of study, 10 (40%)

were in their second or third year, and 8 (32%) were in their final year or enrolled in postgraduate bridging programs. Fields of study varied and included social sciences ($n = 9$; 36%), humanities ($n = 6$; 24%), natural sciences ($n = 5$; 20%), and applied disciplines such as law, engineering, or business ($n = 5$; 20%). All participants self-identified as first-generation students, meaning neither parent had completed tertiary education. Most came from low- to lower-middle-income households ($n = 19$; 76%) and reported being the first in their immediate family to attend university.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Open Codes Related to Career Indecision in First-Generation Students

Category (Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Internal Psychological Conflict	Low Self-Efficacy	Fear of failure, Negative self-perception, Avoidance of responsibility, Impostor syndrome
	Fear of Making the Wrong Decision	Paralysis in decision-making, Overthinking, Future regret, Fear of wasting time
	Identity Confusion	Unclear goals, Conflicting interests, Unstable self-image
	Emotional Overwhelm	Anxiety about future, Stress in planning, Feeling lost
	Self-Criticism and Doubt	Inner judgment, Lack of confidence, Comparing self to peers
2. Family and Socio-Cultural Expectations	Perfectionism	High expectations, Need for certainty, All-or-nothing thinking
	Parental Pressure and Expectations	Pressure to succeed, Family pride, "First to succeed", Fear of disappointing parents
	Cultural Notions of Success	Prioritizing stable jobs, Avoiding "risky" careers, Status-driven goals
	Sacrificial Mentality	Guilt for investing in self, Feeling indebted to family, "Owe them success"
	Lack of Family Understanding of Career Paths	Misunderstood fields, Limited career vocabulary, "Just be a doctor or lawyer"
	Intergenerational Value Conflict	Clash between traditional and modern values, Gendered expectations, Tension over autonomy
3. Structural and Informational Barriers	Socioeconomic Mobility Pressure	"Breaking the cycle", Upward mobility burden, Success equals survival
	Role Model Deficit	No professional mentors, Limited exposure to diverse paths, Few examples to follow
	Limited Career Guidance	Unavailable advisors, Lack of tailored support, One-size-fits-all orientation
	Poor Access to Resources	Limited internships, Lack of test prep, No access to professional networks
	Confusing Higher Education Systems	Bureaucracy, Overwhelming choices, Unclear application process
4. Social Comparison and Belonging Uncertainty	Institutional Neglect	Stereotyping by staff, Not feeling seen, Inadequate support programs
	Digital Divide	Poor access to information tech, Reliance on outdated sources, Difficulty with platforms
	Feeling "Different" from Peers	Not fitting in, Avoiding discussions, Feeling "behind"
	Academic Inferiority Complex	"They know more," Avoiding participation, Low GPA shame
	Peer Pressure to Decide	Everyone seems decided, Pressure to "have a plan," Fear of being left behind
	Implicit Class-Based Shame	Shame over background, Avoiding personal disclosures, Clothing/status comparisons
	Campus Imposter Syndrome	Feeling like a fraud, "Not meant to be here," Avoiding high-status spaces

Category 1: Internal Psychological Conflict

Low Self-Efficacy was a recurring theme among participants who expressed significant doubt in their abilities to succeed in a chosen career path. Many described a

persistent inner voice questioning their competence. One student shared, "*I keep thinking I'm not smart enough to be in this program, let alone choose a career in it.*" The lack of

confidence often led to passivity and indecision, as students avoided making commitments due to fear of failure.

Fear of Making the Wrong Decision emerged as a paralytic concern for many interviewees. Students described being overwhelmed by the long-term consequences of career choices, often leading to decision paralysis. A participant stated, *"I'm afraid that ten years from now, I'll look back and regret everything. That fear stops me from moving forward."* The need for certainty contributed to cycles of overthinking and avoidance.

Identity Confusion was marked by an unclear sense of direction and difficulty articulating personal interests. Several participants noted conflicting identities—academic, cultural, and personal—which hindered their career clarity. As one interviewee put it, *"Some days I want to work in education, other days it's psychology. I don't know who I really am or what I want."*

Emotional Overwhelm was frequently reported, with students experiencing anxiety and mental fatigue related to their futures. Participants described intense stress when trying to plan their careers while juggling family expectations and academic demands. One student said, *"Just thinking about the future makes me panic. I shut down whenever someone asks about my plans."*

Self-Criticism and Doubt were prominent, especially in students who compared themselves negatively to peers. They expressed internalized narratives of inadequacy. A participant reflected, *"Others seem to have it all figured out. I feel like I'm always behind, like I don't deserve to be here."* These self-perceptions inhibited confidence in decision-making.

Perfectionism added another layer of complexity, as students set unrealistically high expectations for themselves. The fear of making a suboptimal choice prevented many from exploring career options freely. One participant explained, *"I feel like if I don't choose the perfect path now, I'll ruin everything. So, I keep waiting for some kind of sign."*

Category 2: Family and Socio-Cultural Expectations

Parental Pressure and Expectations were cited as a major factor influencing students' indecision. Many felt obligated to pursue careers that would bring pride or financial security to their families. As one student expressed, *"My parents worked so hard to get me here. I can't choose something they see as risky or useless."*

Cultural Notions of Success influenced the career ideals students internalized. Traditional definitions of success—such as becoming a lawyer, engineer, or doctor—were seen

as safer and more honorable. One participant said, *"In my family, if you're not a doctor or engineer, they think you're wasting your time."*

Sacrificial Mentality reflected feelings of guilt about prioritizing personal passions over family expectations. Students often felt they owed their families a practical or lucrative career choice. *"Sometimes I think choosing what I love is selfish. My parents didn't have that luxury, so who am I to take it?"* said one student.

Lack of Family Understanding of Career Paths was noted in families unfamiliar with higher education or modern career trajectories. Students often had to explain or justify their interests in non-traditional fields. One participant shared, *"When I told them I'm interested in social work, they said, 'Why not just be a lawyer? What is social work even?'"*

Intergenerational Value Conflict was reported by participants who struggled to balance traditional family norms with their individual goals. This tension was particularly evident around gender roles and autonomy. One female student said, *"My family thinks a girl should stay close to home and find something stable. But I want to travel and explore."*

Socioeconomic Mobility Pressure was expressed through a burden to "break the cycle" of poverty or low status. Success was equated with survival and upward mobility, not personal satisfaction. *"They see me as the family's ticket out,"* said one student, *"so I can't afford to mess it up."*

Role Model Deficit was commonly discussed, with many students noting they had no family or community examples of navigating professional careers. One said, *"No one I know has been through college. I don't even know what a career path is supposed to look like."*

Category 3: Structural and Informational Barriers

Limited Career Guidance was a widespread concern, as many participants reported inadequate or impersonal counseling. They felt institutional resources were not tailored to the unique needs of first-generation students. One student remarked, *"The advisor told me to Google it. That's not guidance."*

Poor Access to Resources such as internships, preparatory courses, or job shadowing experiences limited students' ability to make informed choices. Many came from underfunded schools and lacked support networks. *"My friends from private schools already did internships. I didn't even know that was an option,"* one participant explained.

Confusing Higher Education Systems made career planning even more difficult. Students described feeling lost

in a maze of bureaucratic procedures, unfamiliar terminology, and overwhelming choices. One student shared, *“There are hundreds of programs and majors. I don’t know what half of them even mean.”*

Institutional Neglect was reported by participants who felt invisible within university systems. They encountered stereotypical assumptions or a lack of proactive support. *“No one really checks on us. It’s like we’re expected to sink or swim,”* said one student.

Digital Divide affected students from rural or lower-income areas, who struggled with technology access and digital literacy. This limited their ability to research careers or navigate university systems. One participant said, *“I didn’t grow up with a laptop. Online platforms confuse me, but everyone assumes you already know this stuff.”*

Category 4: Social Comparison and Belonging Uncertainty

Feeling “Different” from Peers was a salient experience for many, especially in elite academic spaces. Students felt isolated or reluctant to engage in peer conversations about careers. One noted, *“I stay quiet when they talk about their internships or plans. I feel like an outsider.”*

Academic Inferiority Complex emerged from constant comparisons to peers who appeared more prepared, articulate, or knowledgeable. This led to shame and avoidance. *“They use words I don’t know. It makes me feel like I’m not smart enough,”* said one participant.

Peer Pressure to Decide came from the perception that everyone else had already chosen a path. This external pressure created stress and a sense of falling behind. One student confessed, *“Everyone has a five-year plan. I can’t even decide on a major.”*

Implicit Class-Based Shame was another subtheme, with students hiding their socioeconomic background due to embarrassment. This manifested in avoiding certain social spaces or discussions. One said, *“I don’t talk about where I’m from. I wear neutral clothes to not stand out.”*

Campus Imposter Syndrome reinforced feelings of not belonging in university settings. Participants described themselves as “frauds” or “lucky exceptions.” As one expressed, *“Sometimes I think they made a mistake letting me in. I don’t feel like I belong here.”*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a multidimensional understanding of how psychological and cultural dynamics contribute to career indecision among first-generation

university students in Argentina. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, four central themes were identified: internal psychological conflict, family and socio-cultural expectations, structural and informational barriers, and social comparison with belonging uncertainty. Each of these themes underscores the complexity of career indecision as a phenomenon that cannot be isolated from the social and psychological conditions in which it is embedded. These findings corroborate and extend existing research by showing how career indecision is shaped not only by individual deficits in decision-making ability or information access, but also by the cultural meanings and emotional burdens that surround vocational choices in underrepresented student populations.

The first theme, internal psychological conflict, was characterized by pervasive experiences of self-doubt, low self-efficacy, fear of failure, perfectionism, and emotional overwhelm. Students described being paralyzed by the prospect of making irreversible choices and were often caught in cycles of overthinking and avoidance. These findings align with the work of (Tian & Hou, 2024), who reported that perfectionism and psychological distress are significant predictors of career indecision among Chinese college students. Similarly, (Kim, 2023) emphasized that emotional insecurity and maladaptive coping strategies contribute to career decision-making difficulties. Among our participants, the presence of impostor syndrome, identity confusion, and chronic self-criticism reflected a fragile self-concept often compounded by the absence of affirming feedback from institutional or familial sources. This is consistent with the findings of (Griffin et al., 2022), who highlighted the role of internalized academic inadequacy in graduate students’ agency and career uncertainty. Emotional barriers such as anxiety and stress were not simply co-occurring factors but were foundational to how students interpreted and engaged with the process of career exploration.

The second theme revolved around family and socio-cultural expectations, where participants felt significant pressure to conform to externally imposed ideals of success. This included familial expectations to choose prestigious or economically secure careers, cultural narratives that valorized sacrifice over self-fulfillment, and a lack of understanding from family members unfamiliar with academic pathways. These findings echo the work of (Karna et al., 2024), who demonstrated that parental pressure and low self-efficacy were strong predictors of career indecision. In many cases, participants felt emotionally torn between

their own interests and the desire to fulfill intergenerational hopes. This aligns with (Fajriani et al., 2024), who found that ethnic and cultural identity significantly influenced career decision-making difficulties in Indonesian students. The internal conflict between autonomy and obligation often manifested as guilt, with students describing their career decisions as “not just mine” or “a repayment for my family’s sacrifice.” These accounts mirror the sociocultural weight described by (Wang, 2023), who found that overparenting and expectations to achieve socio-economic mobility were key barriers to autonomous career choice. The emotional toll of disappointing one’s family, particularly when career interests did not align with traditional professions, created a psychological constraint that deepened indecision.

The third theme, structural and informational barriers, reflected the institutional shortcomings and inequities that compounded students' difficulties. Participants cited a lack of tailored career guidance, inaccessible or confusing higher education systems, limited opportunities for internships or mentorship, and a digital divide that hindered access to career planning resources. These barriers are consistent with (Emman & Hussain, 2025), who highlighted the inadequate state of career counseling services in Pakistani universities and its correlation with youth career indecision. The bureaucratic complexity of university systems left many first-generation students feeling isolated, directionless, and disempowered, a finding also observed by (Ajmi et al., 2024) in their study of medical students. Moreover, participants’ reliance on outdated or incomplete sources of information mirrored the observations of (Li et al., 2024), who identified informational asymmetries as key challenges in the career decision-making processes of international students in China. Institutional neglect, where students were treated as passive recipients rather than active agents in their career journeys, contributed to their disconnection and passivity. These findings are consistent with (Lee et al., 2023), who emphasized how systemic disorientation, especially among first-year students, limits career clarity and prolongs decision-making.

The final theme, social comparison and belonging uncertainty, captured the emotional dimensions of being a “first” in a predominantly middle-class or elite academic environment. Many participants reported feeling alienated from their peers, inferior in terms of preparedness, and excluded from informal knowledge networks. This emotional terrain aligns with the work of (Youn & Jun, 2022), who examined how intolerance of uncertainty and dysfunctional career thoughts mediate indecision. Social

comparison often intensified feelings of inadequacy and reinforced the belief that others had clearer, more achievable career goals. Participants’ references to impostor syndrome and identity fragmentation are supported by (Lee et al., 2022), who noted that emotional stress and perceived barriers often deter students from engaging fully in career planning. Additionally, the absence of visible role models and relatable success stories—what (Latukefu & Pollard, 2022) refers to as “career invisibility”—further isolated participants and deprived them of aspirational direction. This gap in social capital has been shown to significantly affect vocational outcomes, particularly in fields where networking and informal knowledge are essential (Galhena & Kumanayake, 2022).

These themes collectively underscore that career indecision among first-generation students is not merely a developmental or informational challenge, but a deeply contextual and psychosocial phenomenon. The interplay of emotional vulnerability, cultural obligation, structural exclusion, and social dislocation creates a uniquely precarious decision-making landscape. This finding supports the argument by (Maree, 2025), who advocates for longitudinal, narrative-based career interventions that consider life context and personal meaning-making. Similarly, the role of emotionally associated predictors, as outlined by (Lee et al., 2021), reinforces the need for holistic models that bridge psychological resilience with vocational clarity. Our findings also align with (Zhu et al., 2021), who found that psychological health and coping strategies were significant predictors of career indecision among medical students in China.

Furthermore, this study adds to the emerging understanding that career indecision must be approached from an integrative perspective that incorporates both individual agency and systemic constraints. As (Park & Choi, 2023) emphasizes, career counseling interventions must now include skill-building around planned happenstance and uncertainty tolerance—qualities especially relevant to students navigating shifting economic and institutional conditions. Similarly, the meta-analysis by (You & Kim, 2024) confirms that career stress is mediated by a wide array of personal and contextual variables, including perceived barriers, academic burnout, and lack of social belonging. Taken together, the present study affirms the growing consensus that effective career development interventions for marginalized populations must move beyond standardized guidance models and toward context-sensitive, emotionally attuned approaches.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied exclusively on qualitative interviews with 25 participants from Argentine public universities, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or other cultural contexts. While theoretical saturation was reached, the absence of quantitative data precludes statistical validation of thematic prevalence. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias or retrospective distortion. Another limitation is that participants may not represent the full diversity of first-generation student experiences, particularly those from rural or Indigenous communities whose career challenges may be uniquely situated within their sociocultural environments.

Future research could benefit from employing mixed-methods designs to triangulate the qualitative findings with quantitative measures of psychological distress, parental pressure, and institutional satisfaction. Longitudinal studies would also be instrumental in tracing the evolution of career decision-making over time and identifying turning points or intervention opportunities. Comparative studies across different national or regional contexts could further illuminate how sociopolitical systems and educational structures influence the nature and severity of career indecision. In addition, future research should explore the experiences of other underrepresented groups, such as migrant, disabled, or LGBTQ+ first-generation students, to build a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectional factors involved.

Based on the findings, career counseling services in universities should be redesigned to address both the emotional and cultural dimensions of career indecision. Culturally responsive guidance programs that engage families and communities, offer mentorship from first-generation graduates, and create safe spaces for identity exploration could enhance support. Training for academic advisors should include sensitivity to socioeconomic and psychological struggles unique to first-generation students. Furthermore, career development curricula should emphasize resilience, self-efficacy, and narrative identity construction, helping students integrate personal meaning with professional planning. Universities should also invest in proactive outreach and digital literacy programs to close informational and technological gaps that disproportionately hinder underrepresented students.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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