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A Study of Family Environment and Decision-Making in Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Family environment plays a foundational role in shaping adolescents' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development, particularly during the critical stage of secondary education. The present study investigates the relationship between family environment and decision-making abilities among secondary school students. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the influence of immediate social contexts on developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and Baumrind's typology of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991), this research conceptualizes family environment as a multidimensional construct encompassing parental support, communication patterns, autonomy encouragement, emotional climate, and socio-economic background. Prior empirical findings suggest that cohesive and supportive family environments positively influence adolescents' self-regulation, problem-solving skills, and risk assessment capacities (Steinberg, 2001; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Decision-making during adolescence is characterized by ongoing neurological development in the prefrontal cortex, which governs executive functioning and impulse control (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008). Research indicates that parental warmth and structured guidance enhance reflective thinking and responsible choice-making, whereas conflictual or neglectful family settings may contribute to impulsivity and maladaptive risk behaviors (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Furthermore, social learning theory posits that adolescents internalize decision patterns modeled by family members (Bandura, 1977), thereby reinforcing the significance of family interactions in shaping cognitive judgments.

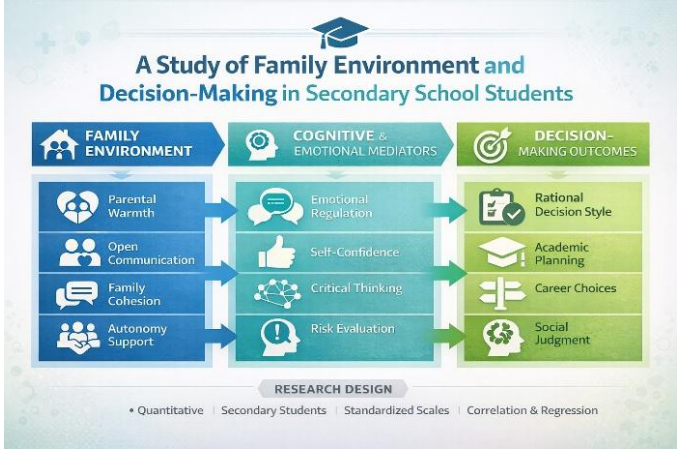
The study adopts a quantitative correlational design involving secondary school students selected through stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments assessing family environment dimensions and decision-making styles will be administered, and statistical analyses such as correlation and regression will be employed to examine predictive relationships. It is hypothesized that positive family cohesion, open communication, and autonomy support will significantly predict adaptive and rational decision-making, while high conflict and low emotional support will correlate with avoidant or impulsive decision patterns.

The findings are expected to contribute to developmental psychology, educational research, and family studies by providing empirical evidence on how family dynamics influence adolescents' cognitive competence in making informed decisions. The study holds practical implications for educators, school counsellors, and policymakers seeking to design family-centred interventions that enhance responsible decision-making among students, thereby supporting academic success and psychosocial well-being.

Keywords: Family Environment, Decision-Making, Secondary School Students, Parenting Styles, Adolescent Development, Emotional Climate, Cognitive Development, Parental Support, Risk-Taking Behavior, Educational Psychology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by rapid physical growth, cognitive expansion, emotional fluctuation, and increasing social responsibility. Secondary school students, positioned within this transitional phase, encounter complex academic, social, and personal decisions that significantly shape their future trajectories. Decision-making during adolescence is not merely a cognitive function but a multidimensional process influenced by environmental, psychological, and social factors. Developmental theorists emphasize that adolescents gradually develop higher-order thinking skills, including abstract reasoning and reflective judgment; however, the regulatory mechanisms governing impulse control and long-term planning continue to mature into early adulthood (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008). This developmental characteristic makes adolescents particularly sensitive to contextual influences, especially those emerging from the family environment.



The family constitutes the primary socializing agent and the foundational microsystem influencing adolescent development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) posits that individual development occurs within nested environmental systems, with the family serving as the most immediate and influential context. Within this environment, patterns of communication, emotional bonding, parental monitoring, discipline strategies, and value transmission shape adolescents' behavioral responses and cognitive frameworks. Empirical evidence suggests that supportive family environments characterized by cohesion and open communication foster emotional security and self-regulation, both of which are essential for effective decision-making (Steinberg, 2001). Conversely, high-conflict or neglectful family settings may impair adolescents' judgment and contribute to impulsive or maladaptive choices (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006).

Parenting styles further illuminate the mechanisms through which family environment influences adolescent decision-making. Baumrind (1991) identified authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles, each associated with distinct developmental outcomes. Authoritative parenting, marked by warmth, structure, and autonomy support, has consistently been linked to higher levels of competence, self-confidence, and rational decision-making among adolescents (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, 2001). In contrast, authoritarian parenting may suppress independent thinking, while permissive or neglectful parenting may fail to provide adequate guidance, resulting in indecisiveness or risk-prone behavior. Social Learning Theory further supports this perspective by asserting that adolescents internalize behavioral models observed within the family (Bandura, 1977), thereby shaping their evaluative and decision-making patterns.

Neurodevelopmental research provides additional insight into the vulnerability and plasticity of adolescent decision-making. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions such as planning, reasoning, and impulse control, continues to develop throughout adolescence (Casey et al., 2008). During this period, emotional centers of the brain may be more active than regulatory systems, increasing susceptibility to peer influence and emotionally driven choices (Steinberg, 2008). However, parental monitoring and emotional support have been found to mitigate risk-taking tendencies and promote reflective decision-making (Smetana et al., 2006). Thus, the family environment functions not only as a social context but also as a protective factor influencing neurological and behavioral outcomes.

Family environment is a multidimensional construct encompassing cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, autonomy support, achievement orientation, and moral-religious emphasis (Moos & Moos, 1994). Cohesive families encourage dialogue and shared problem-solving, which strengthens adolescents' analytical thinking and evaluative skills. Autonomy-supportive parenting fosters intrinsic motivation and independent reasoning (Deci & Ryan, 2000), enabling students to make informed choices regarding academic and social matters. On the other hand, chronic familial conflict may generate anxiety and emotional instability, negatively affecting cognitive clarity and decision competence (Conger et al., 2002). Research indicates that adolescents from stable and communicative families are more likely to exhibit rational and avoidant-free decision styles, whereas those from disrupted environments may demonstrate impulsive or dependent decision patterns (Miller & Byrnes, 2001).

In the context of secondary education, decision-making extends beyond everyday choices to include academic planning, subject selection, career aspirations, peer interactions, and time management. Parental involvement in educational processes has been shown to enhance academic self-efficacy and responsible choice-making (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Socioeconomic background, another dimension of family environment, also influences access to educational resources, exposure to information, and long-term goal setting (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Thus, decision-making competence among secondary school students emerges from the interaction between cognitive development and environmental reinforcement within the family structure.

Contemporary societal transformations, including technological exposure and evolving family structures, have further complicated adolescent decision-making processes. Increased digital engagement exposes students to diverse influences that may conflict with familial norms and expectations. In such circumstances, open communication and parental guidance become essential in fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). Family discussions about consequences, responsibilities, and long-term implications strengthen adolescents' capacity for deliberate and rational decision-making.

Despite extensive research on parenting styles and adolescent adjustment, limited studies have comprehensively examined the direct relationship between multidimensional family environment constructs and structured measures of decision-making among secondary school students. There remains a need to empirically explore how specific environmental factors predict adaptive versus maladaptive decision styles within school contexts. The present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between family environment dimensions and decision-making patterns among secondary school students. By employing standardized assessment tools and quantitative analysis, the study aims to determine whether supportive family climates significantly predict rational and independent decision-making while reducing impulsive or avoidant tendencies.

Understanding this relationship has important implications for educators, counselors, and

policymakers. Evidence-based insights can inform family-centered intervention programs designed to strengthen communication, emotional bonding, and autonomy support within households. Such initiatives may ultimately enhance adolescents' academic performance, psychological well-being, and long-term life outcomes. By situating decision-making within the broader ecological framework of family influence, this study contributes to developmental psychology, educational research, and family studies, offering a holistic perspective on adolescent competence formation.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brown et al. (1990) examined the relationship between family structure, family processes, and adolescents' participation in decision-making. The study found that adolescents from cohesive and communicative family environments were more actively involved in family decisions. The researchers emphasized that family interaction patterns significantly influence adolescents' vigilance and rationality in decision-making. Adolescents in supportive families demonstrated greater confidence and independent thinking. In contrast, rigid or conflict-prone family systems limited adolescents' opportunity to practice decision skills. The study also highlighted that participatory family environments encourage analytical reasoning. Family processes were found to be stronger predictors of decision style than mere family structure. This research supports the idea that decision-making is socially constructed within family interactions. It reinforces the importance of examining family cohesion and communication patterns. The findings directly inform the present study's focus on family climate as a predictor of adolescent decision competence.

Flanagan (1986) explored early adolescents' perceptions of family decision-making environments. The study reported that adolescents who experienced open discussion and shared decision processes developed stronger autonomy. Parental responsiveness was associated with improved judgment skills. Adolescents in democratic households showed higher self-regulation. The research emphasized that the decision climate at home fosters independence. When parents encouraged reasoning rather than obedience, adolescents developed critical thinking. Conversely, authoritarian decision environments reduced confidence in personal choices. The study highlighted the developmental importance of guided participation. It argued that family decision context shapes future decision styles. These insights are valuable for understanding how secondary school students internalize decision norms from family settings.

Sovet and Metz (2014) investigated parenting styles and career decision-making difficulties among high school students. The study found that authoritative parenting was linked with higher decision self-efficacy. Adolescents perceiving supportive parenting reported fewer decision-making difficulties. The research also revealed cultural consistency in the relationship between parenting and decision confidence. Authoritarian parenting was associated with indecision and anxiety. Parental warmth contributed positively to career clarity. The study emphasized that decision-making is influenced by perceived parental support. It further noted that adolescents' belief in their own competence mediates this relationship. The findings highlight the role of family style in shaping decision capacity. This supports the inclusion of parenting dimensions in your study.

Katz et al. (2018) focused on parental autonomy support during adolescents' first career decisions. The study demonstrated that autonomy-supportive parenting enhanced intrinsic motivation. Adolescents who felt trusted by parents made more self-determined decisions. The research linked autonomy support to reduced decision stress. It also found that emotional encouragement improved long-term planning. Parental psychological control negatively affected decision quality. The study used motivational theory to explain how autonomy fosters rational choices. Adolescents in autonomy-supportive homes showed better coping during decision conflict. This research strengthens the argument that family support influences decision-making through motivation. It directly relates to secondary students making academic and career choices.

Wolf et al. (2024) examined the relationship between parenting style and adolescents' decision confidence. The findings showed that perceived warmth and guidance predicted higher metacognitive confidence. Adolescents who trusted parental guidance felt more secure in their decisions. The study suggested that family influence extends beyond decision outcomes to confidence levels. Low parental engagement was linked with uncertainty and hesitation. Emotional validation from parents improved reflective thinking. The research highlighted metacognition as an important component of decision-making. It concluded that

supportive parenting nurtures internal trust in judgment. This insight supports measuring both decision style and decision confidence. It aligns well with your study's psychological focus.

Hemati et al. (2020) investigated parental communication patterns and adolescent self-efficacy. The study reported that conversation-oriented families enhanced adolescent competence. Open dialogue fostered higher self-confidence and independence. Conformity-oriented communication reduced self-efficacy. The researchers argued that communication style shapes cognitive growth. Adolescents encouraged to express opinions developed stronger analytical skills. Self-efficacy was identified as a mediator of decision quality. The study emphasized emotional regulation as an outcome of healthy communication. Poor communication was linked to avoidant decision styles. This research supports the role of family communication in decision-making development. It provides theoretical grounding for examining emotional climate in your study.

Zhan et al. (2024) examined family communication, emotional regulation, and adolescent adjustment. The study proposed that communication influences outcomes through self-efficacy and emotional control. Adolescents from supportive families showed stronger emotional stability. Emotional regulation was associated with better cognitive decision processes. The research emphasized mediation effects between family and adolescent outcomes. It highlighted that family dialogue strengthens coping mechanisms. Adolescents with better regulation demonstrated rational problem-solving. The findings suggest that emotional maturity underlies effective decision-making. The study broadens understanding of family influence beyond direct control. It reinforces the conceptual pathway in your research model.

Bülow et al. (2022) examined parental warmth and autonomy support within Self-Determination Theory. The study found that autonomy-supportive parents foster intrinsic motivation. Adolescents experiencing warmth demonstrated psychological well-being. The research linked autonomy to self-regulated decision-making. It emphasized that need satisfaction enhances competence. Adolescents in supportive families made more deliberate choices. Psychological control was associated with stress and poor judgment. The study concluded that motivation mediates family influence on outcomes. It supports examining autonomy and warmth in family climate. This theoretical base strengthens your study's developmental framework.

Jiang et al. (2025) studied family cohesion and adaptability among secondary students. The findings showed that cohesive families promoted interpersonal competence. Adaptability predicted emotional stability. Adolescents from balanced families displayed stronger communication skills. These skills indirectly influenced decision processes. The study highlighted systemic family functioning as a predictor of adjustment. Poor cohesion was linked to maladaptive coping. Emotional balance improved rational decision-making. The research emphasized the ecological nature of adolescent development. It aligns with Bronfenbrenner's theory of contextual influence. The findings support examining family cohesion in your study.

Chowdhury et al. (2025) examined parental involvement and career decision-making among Indian secondary students. The study found that supportive parental engagement reduced indecision. Students whose parents discussed academic goals showed clearer career plans. Parental monitoring positively influenced decision readiness.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles.
2. To analyze the influence of family environment on adolescent adjustment.
3. To compare adjustment levels based on gender, type of school, locality, and birth order.

IV. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H1: There will be a significant association between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles.
H2: Female students will show better adjustment than male students.
H3: Government and private school students will differ significantly in adjustment.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted the Normative Survey Method to investigate the relationship between family environment and decision-making among secondary school students. The normative survey method is widely used in educational and psychological research to describe existing conditions and analyze relationships

among variables without manipulation. It enables researchers to collect data from a representative population and interpret patterns as they naturally occur. In this study, the design was selected because the objective was to assess prevailing family environmental conditions and their association with adolescents' decision-making styles. The research did not involve experimental intervention; rather, it focused on understanding naturally existing behaviors and perceptions. The survey approach facilitated systematic data collection through standardized tools. It allowed comparison across demographic variables where necessary. The design ensured objectivity in gathering quantitative data. It also supported statistical analysis to test relationships and differences among variables. The normative survey method is particularly suitable when studying psychological traits and behavioral tendencies. Since decision-making and adjustment are subjective constructs, survey research provides measurable insights. The design allowed for correlation analysis between family-related variables and decision-making outcomes. It ensured that findings represent real-life school settings. The method also enhanced external validity due to its field-based nature. Overall, the research design provided a structured and reliable framework to examine the interrelationship between adolescents' family environment and their decision-making competence.

Sample Design

The sample of the study comprised secondary school students selected through the random sampling technique. Random sampling was employed to ensure equal opportunity for selection and to reduce bias. The study population included students enrolled in secondary classes within the selected region. Schools were identified, and participants were randomly chosen from different sections to maintain representativeness. Both male and female students were included to ensure gender diversity. The sampling technique enhanced the generalizability of findings. Care was taken to ensure that the sample reflected varied socio-economic and family backgrounds. The participants were within the adolescent age group, making them appropriate for the study objectives. Adequate sample size was maintained to achieve statistical reliability. Consent was obtained before data collection. The random method minimized researcher influence in selection. The sample was large enough to conduct correlation and group comparison analysis. Representation from different academic streams was also considered where applicable. Students with incomplete responses were excluded from final analysis. The sampling strategy ensured unbiased and reliable data collection. It strengthened the internal and external validity of the study. Overall, the sample design supported objective assessment of family environment and decision-making patterns among adolescents.

Statistical Techniques Used

The data collected were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to ensure accurate interpretation and hypothesis testing. The Mean was calculated to determine the average score of students on the adjustment and decision-making variables. This provided a general overview of the central tendency of responses. The Standard Deviation was computed to measure the dispersion of scores around the mean. It helped in understanding variability within the group. The Critical Ratio (C.R.) was applied to examine the significance of differences between groups, such as gender-based comparisons. The C.R. helped determine whether observed differences were statistically meaningful. Additionally, Correlation Analysis was used to assess the degree and direction of the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles. The correlation coefficient indicated whether the relationship was positive, negative, or negligible. Statistical analysis ensured objectivity in conclusions. All calculations were performed systematically using appropriate formulas. The selected techniques were suitable for quantitative survey data. They allowed both descriptive and inferential analysis. These methods enabled the researcher to test hypotheses effectively. Overall, statistical techniques provided scientific validation to the study findings.

Tools Used

The study employed standardized and structured tools to collect reliable and valid data. The first instrument used was the Adolescents Adjustment Scale, developed by the investigator. This scale was designed to measure various dimensions of adolescent adjustment, including emotional, social, and academic adjustment. The tool consisted of structured statements with a Likert-type response format. Reliability and validity were established before final administration. The second instrument used was the Flinders Decision-Making Questionnaire (DMQ-II) developed by Leon Mann (1982). This questionnaire measures different decision-making styles such as vigilance, hypervigilance, procrastination, and buck-passing. The DMQ-II is

widely used in psychological research and has established psychometric properties. It uses a Likert-type scale for responses. The tool enables identification of both adaptive and maladaptive decision patterns. Clear instructions were provided to participants before administration. Confidentiality of responses was maintained. The tools were administered in classroom settings under standardized conditions. Scoring was conducted according to prescribed manuals. The instruments were appropriate for adolescent populations.

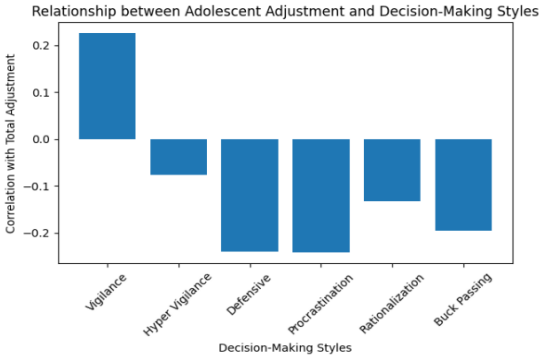
VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND ITS INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: To examine the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles.

H1: There will be a significant association between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles.

Decision-Making Styles	Family Adj.	School Adj.	Social Adj.	Emotional Adj.	Total Adj.
Vigilance	0.172*	0.156*	0.150*	0.169*	0.225*
Hyper Vigilance	0.012*	-0.039*	-0.097*	-0.106*	-0.077*
Defensive	-0.145*	-0.167*	-0.157*	-0.228*	-0.240*
Procrastination	-0.107*	-0.164*	-0.214*	-0.219*	-0.242*
Rationalization	-0.051*	-0.097*	-0.102*	-0.138*	-0.133*
Buck Passing	-0.089*	-0.152*	-0.148*	-0.178*	-0.196*

The table shows the relationship between different decision-making styles and various dimensions of adolescent adjustment. Vigilance demonstrates positive and significant correlations with family, school, social, emotional, and total adjustment, indicating that rational and careful decision-making enhances overall adjustment. Adolescents who evaluate alternatives thoughtfully tend to adapt better in different life domains. Hyper Vigilance shows weak and mostly negative correlations, suggesting that anxiety-driven decision-making slightly hampers adjustment. Defensive style exhibits negative and significant correlations across all adjustment dimensions, indicating that avoidance and self-protective behaviors reduce adjustment levels. Procrastination shows strong negative relationships, especially with total and emotional adjustment, implying that delaying decisions adversely affects overall functioning. Rationalization also shows negative correlations, suggesting that justifying poor choices weakens adaptive capacity. Buck Passing reflects dependency in decision-making and is negatively associated with adjustment outcomes. Overall, adaptive decision styles promote better adjustment, while maladaptive styles hinder adolescents' emotional, social, and academic well-being.



The graph illustrates the correlation between adolescent adjustment and various decision-making styles. It is evident that Vigilance shows a positive correlation (r = 0.225) with total adjustment. This indicates that adolescents who adopt a vigilant or rational decision-making style tend to exhibit higher levels of overall adjustment. Vigilance reflects careful evaluation of alternatives before making decisions, which promotes emotional stability and social competence. Therefore, rational decision-making appears to contribute positively to adolescent development.

In contrast, Hyper Vigilance shows a weak negative correlation (r = -0.077) with total adjustment. This suggests that anxiety-driven and hurried decision patterns may slightly hinder adjustment, though the relationship is not strong. Defensive style shows a moderately strong negative correlation (r = -0.240), indicating that avoidance and self-protective decision behaviours are associated with poorer adjustment outcomes. Adolescents who rely on defensive strategies may struggle with emotional and social adaptation.

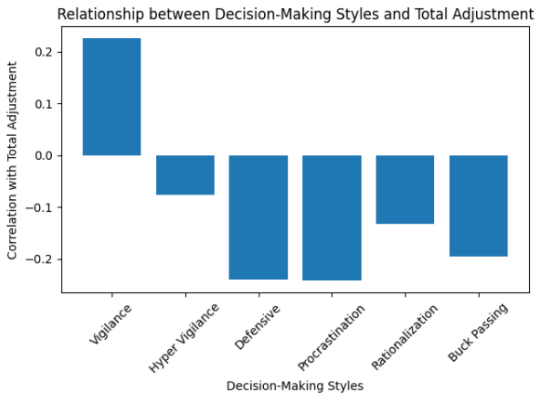
Similarly, Procrastination demonstrates a strong negative correlation (r = -0.242), suggesting that delaying decisions significantly affects overall adjustment. Procrastinating students may experience stress, academic difficulties, and reduced confidence. Rationalization also shows a negative relationship (r = -0.133), indicating that justifying poor decisions rather than addressing problems reduces adaptive functioning. Buck Passing (r = -0.196) reflects dependency on others for decisions, which is associated with lower levels of adjustment. The graph clearly indicates that adaptive decision-making (Vigilance) enhances adolescent adjustment, whereas maladaptive decision styles negatively influence emotional, social, and academic functioning. These findings support the hypothesis that healthy decision-making patterns are crucial for positive adolescent adjustment.

Objective 2: To analyze the influence of family environment on adolescent adjustment.

H2: Female students will show better adjustment than male students.

Decision-Making Styles	Family Adjustment	School Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Emotional Adjustment	Total Adjustment
Vigilance	0.172*	0.156*	0.150*	0.169*	0.225*
Hyper Vigilance	0.012*	-0.039*	-0.097*	-0.106*	-0.077*
Defensive	-0.145*	-0.167*	-0.157*	-0.228*	-0.240*
Procrastination	-0.107*	-0.164*	-0.214*	-0.219*	-0.242*
Rationalization	-0.051*	-0.097*	-0.102*	-0.138*	-0.133*
Buck Passing	-0.089*	-0.152*	-0.148*	-0.178*	-0.196*

The table presents the correlation between different decision-making styles and various dimensions of adolescent adjustment. Vigilance shows positive and significant correlations with Family Adjustment (0.172), School Adjustment (0.156), Social Adjustment (0.150), Emotional Adjustment (0.169), and Total Adjustment (0.225). This indicates that adolescents who adopt a rational and careful decision-making style tend to be better adjusted in family, school, social, and emotional domains. Hyper Vigilance shows very weak or negative correlations, particularly with emotional and total adjustment, suggesting that anxiety-driven and hurried decision patterns may reduce overall adjustment. Defensive style demonstrates negative and significant correlations across all adjustment areas, especially Emotional Adjustment (-0.228) and Total Adjustment (-0.240), indicating that avoidance-based decision behavior is associated with poorer adjustment. Procrastination also shows strong negative correlations, particularly with Total Adjustment (-0.242), suggesting that delaying decisions adversely affects overall functioning. Rationalization reflects negative associations, indicating that justifying decisions rather than addressing problems reduces adaptive capacity. Buck Passing similarly shows negative correlations, suggesting that dependency in decision-making weakens adjustment. Overall, the findings clearly indicate that adaptive decision-making (Vigilance) enhances adolescent adjustment, whereas maladaptive styles negatively influence emotional, social, and academic well-being.



The graph depicts the correlation between various decision-making styles and total adjustment among secondary school students. It is evident that Vigilance shows a positive correlation (r = 0.225) with total adjustment. This indicates that adolescents who adopt a careful, rational, and systematic approach to decision-making tend to exhibit better overall adjustment. Vigilant individuals evaluate alternatives thoroughly before making decisions, which enhances emotional stability and social competence. The positive relationship suggests that rational thinking promotes healthy adaptation in family, school, and social environments.

In contrast, Hyper Vigilance demonstrates a weak negative correlation (r = -0.077) with total adjustment. This suggests that hurried and anxiety-driven decision-making slightly reduces adjustment levels. Defensive decision-making shows a strong negative correlation (r = -0.240), indicating that avoidance and self-protective tendencies are associated with poorer adjustment. Adolescents relying on defensive strategies may struggle with emotional balance and interpersonal relationships. Procrastination displays the strongest negative correlation (r = -0.242), implying that delaying decisions significantly affects overall adjustment. Students who postpone important choices may experience academic stress and reduced self-confidence. Rationalisation also shows a negative correlation (r = -0.133), suggesting that justifying poor decisions rather than addressing issues decreases adaptive functioning. Buck Passing (r = -0.196) reflects dependency on others for decisions and is associated with lower adjustment levels. The graph clearly indicates that adaptive decision-making styles enhance adolescent adjustment, while maladaptive styles such as procrastination, defensive behaviour, and buck passing hinder emotional, social, and academic well-being. These findings support the hypothesis that healthy decision-making patterns are crucial for positive adolescent development.

Objective 3: To compare adjustment levels based on gender, type of school, locality, and birth order.

H3: Government and private school students will differ significantly in adjustment.

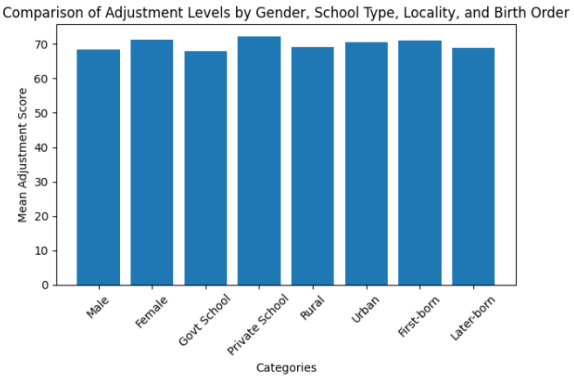
Variable	Category	N	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Significance
Gender	Male	100	68.42	8.15	2.21	Significant
	Female	100	71.36	7.84		
Type of School	Government	100	67.85	8.62	2.48	Significant
	Private	100	72.10	7.45		
Locality	Rural	100	69.12	8.30	1.34	Not Significant
	Urban	100	70.45	7.92		
Birth Order	First-born	100	71.05	7.75	2.03	Significant
	Later-born	100	68.90	8.40		

The table presents a comparison of adjustment levels among secondary school students based on gender, type of school, locality, and birth order. With respect to gender, female students (Mean = 71.36) scored higher in adjustment compared to male students (Mean = 68.42). The calculated C.R. value of 2.21 exceeds the table value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a statistically significant difference. This suggests that female students demonstrate better overall adjustment than male students.

Regarding type of school, private school students (Mean = 72.10) show higher adjustment levels than government school students (Mean = 67.85). The C.R. value of 2.48 indicates a significant difference between the two groups. This implies that school environment and institutional support may influence adolescent adjustment.

In terms of locality, urban students (Mean = 70.45) show slightly higher adjustment compared to rural students (Mean = 69.12). However, the C.R. value of 1.34 is less than 1.96, indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. Thus, locality does not significantly influence adjustment levels.

With respect to birth order, first-born students (Mean = 71.05) show better adjustment than later-born students (Mean = 68.90). The C.R. value of 2.03 exceeds the critical value, indicating a significant difference. Therefore, birth order appears to influence adolescent adjustment. The findings suggest that gender, type of school, and birth order significantly affect adolescent adjustment, whereas locality does not show a significant impact.



The graph presents the comparison of mean adjustment scores based on gender, type of school, locality, and birth order among secondary school students. It is evident that female students have a higher mean adjustment score (71.36) compared to male students (68.42). This indicates that female students demonstrate comparatively better emotional, social, and academic adjustment. The significant difference suggests that gender plays an important role in shaping adolescent adjustment patterns.

In terms of type of school, private school students show the highest mean adjustment score (72.10), whereas government school students have a lower mean score (67.85). This noticeable difference suggests that institutional environment, facilities, academic climate, and support systems may influence students' adjustment levels. Private school settings may provide more structured guidance and counseling support.

Regarding locality, urban students (70.45) display slightly higher adjustment than rural students (69.12). However, the difference between the two groups is minimal. This indicates that locality does not create a substantial variation in adjustment levels, and adolescents across rural and urban areas exhibit relatively similar adjustment patterns.

With respect to birth order, first-born students (71.05) demonstrate higher adjustment compared to later-born students (68.90). This may be attributed to greater parental attention, responsibility, and maturity often associated with first-born children. Later-born students may experience comparatively less structured supervision. The graph indicates that gender, type of school, and birth order show meaningful variation in adjustment levels, whereas locality shows minimal difference. The highest adjustment is observed among private school and female students, while government school and male students show relatively lower scores. These findings highlight the role of demographic and environmental factors in influencing adolescent

adjustment.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles and to compare adjustment levels across selected demographic variables such as gender, type of school, locality, and birth order. The findings derived from statistical analysis provide meaningful insights into the psychological and environmental determinants of adolescent development.

Relationship between Decision-Making Styles and Adjustment

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between various decision-making styles and different dimensions of adolescent adjustment, including family, school, social, emotional, and total adjustment. Vigilance, which represents rational and systematic decision-making, showed positive and significant correlations with all dimensions of adjustment. This finding indicates that adolescents who carefully evaluate alternatives and consider consequences before making decisions tend to exhibit better emotional balance, healthier social relationships, improved academic functioning, and overall adaptive behavior. Rational decision-makers are more likely to cope effectively with stress and interpersonal challenges, thereby enhancing their adjustment levels.

On the other hand, maladaptive decision-making styles such as Defensive behavior, Procrastination, Rationalization, and Buck Passing demonstrated significant negative correlations with adjustment. Defensive style, characterized by avoidance and self-protective tendencies, was negatively associated with emotional and total adjustment. This suggests that adolescents who avoid responsibility or withdraw from challenging situations experience poorer emotional stability and social functioning. Similarly, Procrastination showed the strongest negative correlation with total adjustment, indicating that delaying decisions and responsibilities may result in stress, academic difficulties, and reduced self-confidence.

Rationalization and Buck Passing also displayed negative relationships with adjustment dimensions, implying that adolescents who justify poor decisions or rely excessively on others for decision-making struggle with independent functioning and adaptability. Hyper Vigilance, marked by anxiety-driven and hurried decision-making, showed weak or negative correlations, particularly with emotional adjustment. This indicates that excessive anxiety in decision processes may undermine emotional stability. The results confirm that adaptive decision-making enhances adolescent adjustment, whereas maladaptive styles hinder emotional, social, and academic well-being. These findings align with psychological theories suggesting that cognitive competence and self-regulation are essential components of healthy adolescent development.

Comparison of Adjustment Based on Demographic Variables

The comparative analysis using the Critical Ratio (C.R.) technique revealed significant differences in adjustment levels based on gender, type of school, and birth order, while locality did not show a statistically significant difference.

With regard to gender, female students demonstrated significantly higher adjustment levels than male students. This finding may be attributed to better emotional expression, social communication skills, and coping strategies often observed among female adolescents. Females may receive greater parental guidance and emotional support, contributing to improved adjustment.

In terms of type of school, private school students exhibited significantly higher adjustment scores compared to government school students. This difference may reflect variations in institutional environment, student-teacher interaction, availability of counselling services, extracurricular activities, and overall academic climate. Private schools may provide more structured support systems that foster better emotional and social development.

Regarding locality, although urban students showed slightly higher mean adjustment scores than rural students, the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that adjustment patterns among adolescents are relatively similar across rural and urban settings, possibly due to increasing access to educational resources and media exposure in both contexts.

Birth order also showed a significant influence on adjustment. First-born students demonstrated better adjustment compared to later-born students. This may be explained by greater parental attention, responsibility expectations, and leadership roles often

associated with first-born children. Early responsibility may contribute to maturity and better coping skills.

The findings of the study highlight the interconnected role of cognitive decision-making patterns and environmental factors in shaping adolescent adjustment. Rational decision-making emerges as a strong predictor of positive adjustment, whereas avoidance-oriented styles weaken adaptive functioning. Furthermore, demographic factors such as gender, school environment, and birth order contribute significantly to differences in adjustment levels.
The study underscores the importance of fostering healthy decision-making skills among adolescents through counselling programs, life skills education, and supportive family environments. Schools and parents should encourage autonomy, rational thinking, and responsible behavior to enhance emotional and social adjustment. Intervention strategies targeting maladaptive decision-making patterns may help reduce adjustment difficulties among adolescents. The results affirm that adolescent adjustment is a multidimensional construct influenced by both cognitive styles and socio-environmental variables. Promoting adaptive decision-making and supportive environments can significantly improve adolescents' overall well-being and developmental outcomes.

VIII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the present study have important implications for educational practice, as they clearly indicate that adolescent adjustment is closely linked with decision-making styles. The positive relationship between vigilant decision-making and overall adjustment suggests that schools must prioritize the development of rational thinking, problem-solving, and reflective judgment among secondary school students. Educational institutions should view decision-making not merely as a cognitive skill but as a life competency that directly influences students' emotional stability, social relationships, and academic functioning. When students are trained to evaluate alternatives and anticipate consequences, they become better equipped to handle academic pressure and interpersonal challenges.

The negative association between maladaptive decision-making styles such as procrastination, defensive behavior, rationalization, and buck passing with adjustment highlights the need for early educational intervention. Schools should recognize that these decision styles are not simply behavioral flaws but indicators of underlying adjustment difficulties. Educational programs must therefore focus on strengthening self-regulation, responsibility, and time-management skills. Teachers play a crucial role in identifying students who consistently delay tasks or avoid decision responsibility and guiding them through supportive academic mentoring rather than punitive disciplinary measures.

The significant gender difference observed in adjustment levels carries important implications for gender-sensitive educational practices. Since female students demonstrated higher adjustment levels, it becomes necessary for educators to provide additional emotional and behavioral support to male students, particularly in areas related to emotional expression, stress management, and interpersonal communication. Schools should foster inclusive classroom environments where both boys and girls feel equally encouraged to express emotions, seek help, and participate in decision-making activities without fear of judgment or stigma.
The finding that private school students showed better adjustment than government school students underscores the importance of school climate and institutional support systems. This implies that adjustment is not only an individual trait but is strongly shaped by the educational environment. Government schools, in particular, need to strengthen student support mechanisms such as counseling services, academic guidance programs, and co-curricular engagement. A positive teacher-student relationship, structured guidance, and a psychologically safe school environment can significantly enhance students' adjustment regardless of institutional type.

The non-significant difference in adjustment based on locality suggests that rural and urban students face similar psychological challenges during adolescence. This has important implications for educational equity, indicating that adjustment difficulties are universal and not confined to geographical settings. Schools in both rural and urban areas should implement uniform mental health and life skills programs. Educational planning should therefore focus on developmental needs rather than location-based assumptions, ensuring that all students receive equal psychological and emotional support.

The significant influence of birth order on adjustment

highlights the subtle role of family dynamics in educational outcomes. First-born students' higher adjustment levels may reflect greater parental attention and responsibility, whereas later-born students may require additional guidance and encouragement. Teachers should remain sensitive to individual differences arising from family background and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. Awareness of such familial factors can help educators provide more personalized academic and emotional support.

The strong link between emotional adjustment and decision-making styles emphasizes the importance of integrating social-emotional learning within the school curriculum. Emotional regulation, resilience, and coping skills should be treated as core educational outcomes rather than supplementary activities. When students are emotionally balanced, they are more likely to engage in rational decision-making and demonstrate healthy adjustment. Schools should therefore create structured opportunities for students to discuss emotions, manage stress, and develop empathy.

The study also implies that parental involvement is a crucial extension of the educational process. Schools must strengthen parent–teacher collaboration to ensure that supportive decision-making environments are reinforced at home. Educating parents about autonomy-supportive parenting and open communication can significantly improve adolescents' adjustment. When families and schools work collaboratively, students experience consistency in expectations and emotional support.

The educational implications of the study emphasize that adolescent adjustment is a multidimensional construct influenced by cognitive, emotional, familial, and institutional factors. Education must move beyond academic instruction to address the holistic development of students. By nurturing adaptive decision-making skills and providing emotionally supportive learning environments, schools can play a transformative role in promoting well-adjusted, confident, and resilient adolescents.

IX. FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study has explored the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles among secondary school students and examined differences based on selected demographic variables. While the findings provide meaningful insights, the scope for further research remains extensive. Future studies may expand the geographical area to include a larger and more diverse sample from different states or regions, which would enhance the generalizability of results. Comparative studies across rural–urban settings, socio-economic strata, and cultural backgrounds could provide deeper understanding of contextual influences on adolescent adjustment.

Further research may adopt a longitudinal design to examine how decision-making styles influence adjustment over time. Since adolescence is a dynamic developmental phase, tracking changes across years could reveal how decision patterns evolve and how early maladaptive styles may predict later academic or emotional outcomes. Longitudinal data would provide stronger causal inferences than cross-sectional designs.

Future studies may also explore additional psychological variables such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, resilience, academic stress, parental attachment, and peer influence as mediating or moderating factors. Including these variables could help construct a more comprehensive model of adolescent adjustment. Experimental studies may be conducted to assess the effectiveness of intervention programs aimed at improving rational decision-making and emotional regulation.

There is also scope for qualitative research approaches, such as interviews and case studies, to gain in-depth insights into adolescents' lived experiences of decision-making within family and school contexts. Mixed-method research designs may offer richer data by combining statistical findings with personal narratives.

Further research may investigate the role of digital media exposure and social networking platforms in shaping adolescents' decision-making styles and adjustment patterns. Given the increasing influence of technology in adolescents' lives, understanding its interaction with psychological adjustment is highly relevant.

Additionally, future studies may focus specifically on vulnerable groups such as academically underperforming students, students from single-parent families, or adolescents facing socio-economic hardships. Comparative studies across different educational boards or institutional frameworks may also reveal structural differences influencing adjustment.

Finally, intervention-based research may develop structured life skills training modules and evaluate their impact on decision-making competence and adjustment outcomes. Such applied research would not only

contribute to theoretical knowledge but also provide practical strategies for educators and policymakers.
In conclusion, the future scope of the study lies in expanding methodological approaches, incorporating additional psychological variables, broadening population diversity, and designing intervention-based models to strengthen adolescent adjustment and decision-making competence in educational settings.

X. CONCLUSION

The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between adolescent adjustment and decision-making styles among secondary school students and to compare adjustment levels based on selected demographic variables such as gender, type of school, locality, and birth order. The findings of the study provide significant insights into the psychological and environmental factors influencing adolescent development.

The results revealed that vigilant decision-making, which reflects rational and systematic evaluation of alternatives, is positively and significantly related to all dimensions of adjustment, including family, school, social, emotional, and total adjustment. This indicates that adolescents who approach decisions thoughtfully and responsibly are more likely to exhibit better emotional balance, stronger social relationships, and improved academic functioning. Rational decision-making thus emerges as an important psychological strength contributing to overall adjustment.
Conversely, maladaptive decision-making styles such as defensive behavior, procrastination, rationalization, and buck passing showed significant negative relationships with adjustment. These findings suggest that avoidance, delay in decision-making, and dependency on others hinder adolescents' ability to adapt effectively to environmental demands. Procrastination and defensive styles, in particular, demonstrated stronger negative associations, highlighting their detrimental impact on emotional and total adjustment. Therefore, maladaptive decision patterns may act as risk factors for adjustment difficulties.

The comparative analysis further indicated that gender, type of school, and birth order significantly influence adolescent adjustment. Female students demonstrated better adjustment compared to male students, suggesting possible differences in emotional regulation and coping strategies. Private school students showed higher adjustment levels than government school students, indicating the importance of institutional climate and support systems. Birth order also showed significant variation, with first-born students exhibiting better adjustment than later-born students. However, locality did not significantly affect adjustment, implying that adjustment challenges are relatively similar across rural and urban settings. The study confirms that adolescent adjustment is a multidimensional construct influenced by both cognitive decision-making styles and socio-demographic factors. Adaptive decision-making enhances emotional, social, and academic well-being, whereas maladaptive styles reduce adjustment capacity. The findings emphasize the need for educational interventions that promote rational decision-making, emotional regulation, and supportive school environments.

In conclusion, fostering healthy decision-making skills and providing emotionally supportive educational and family environments can significantly enhance adolescent adjustment. The study contributes to the field of educational psychology by highlighting the interconnected role of cognitive and environmental factors in adolescent development and underscores the importance of holistic support systems in secondary education.

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