

Family Influences on High School Students' Career Choices: A Literature Review

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Abstract:

This study conducts a systematic literature review to systematize and critically analyze theoretical models and key concepts related to family influences on high school students' career choices. Motivated by persistent limitations in career guidance practices and the fragmented nature of research on family-related factors, a systematic literature review methodology was employed to synthesize reputable academic publications from 1996 onward. The review focused on eight key internal factors: personality, interests, ability perception, vocational values, self-awareness, self-efficacy, career goals, and life and learning experiences. The analysis confirmed the central and determining role of these factors in vocational identity and decision-making. Key findings highlight that the alignment between internal traits and occupational demands is critical for job satisfaction and commitment. Specifically, self-awareness acts as the crucial meta-factor regulating accurate self-assessment, while self-efficacy and career goals serve as powerful motivators for proactive exploration and persistence. This research contributes an integrated theoretical framework clarifying the complex interplay of these factors. The findings imply that career guidance must prioritize self-awareness development and self-efficacy enhancement, coupled with real-world experiences. This framework provides a solid scientific foundation for future empirical studies and the design of more effective intervention programs for high school students.

Keywords: Family influence, career choice, high school students, parental expectations, family support.

1. INTRODUCTION

Career is widely regarded as a central component of both individual growth and societal development, as it not only provides economic security but also offers individuals opportunities to realize their values, capacities, and life goals, thereby contributing to overall life satisfaction (Super, 1957, 1990). At the high school level, career choice constitutes a crucial developmental decision with far-reaching implications for students' learning motivation, skill acquisition, and long-term career pathways (Creed et al., 2007; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2006). Making appropriate career decisions during this stage supports students' personal development while

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simultaneously contributing to the improvement of human resource quality and the promotion of sustainable socio-economic progress (Super, 1990; Watson & McMahon, 2005). Accordingly, career guidance in high school education is increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental and indispensable educational responsibility.

The primary goal of career guidance is to support students in making informed and appropriate career choices. However, empirical evidence suggests that many high school students remain uncertain, anxious, or passive in the career decision-making process, often resulting in inappropriate choices, wasted educational resources, and subsequent difficulties in career development (Lent et al., 2002; Lent & Brown, 2019). Scholars have attributed this situation to multiple factors, including limitations in guidance resources, insufficient professional competence of career counselors, and the complex interplay of contextual influences shaping students' decisions. These challenges underscore the necessity of systematically examining the factors that influence high school students' career choices in order to improve the effectiveness of career guidance practices.

Career choice is widely acknowledged as a multifaceted process shaped by the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental contexts. Among environmental factors, the family occupies a particularly influential position in adolescents' career development. Families shape students' career choices through various mechanisms, including parental expectations, socio-economic status, educational background, occupational models, emotional support, and value transmission. Major career development theories, such as social cognitive career theory, life-span developmental theory, and career construction theory, consistently emphasize the family as a critical contextual system that influences career aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and decision-making processes during adolescence. Given that high school students are still strongly embedded within the family environment, family influences often play a decisive role in shaping both the direction and quality of their career choices.

Despite the growing body of empirical research addressing factors influencing career choice, studies focusing on family influences remain fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped. Existing research often prioritizes individual psychological variables or broader social contexts, while systematic syntheses of family-related concepts, mechanisms, and theoretical models in the context of high school students are still limited. This fragmentation constrains the development of coherent theoretical frameworks and weakens the empirical and practical foundations of family-oriented career guidance interventions.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review and synthesize the literature on family influences on high school students' career choices. By organizing key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings, the review seeks to clarify the mechanisms through which family factors shape career decision-making and to propose an integrated theoretical framework. The findings are expected to provide a solid scientific foundation for future research and for the design of more effective, family-informed career guidance practices at the high school level.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to examine family influences on high school students' career choices. This method ensures transparency, objectivity, and replicability in the processes of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing academic literature (O'Brien & McGuckin, 2016; Višić, 2022). Rather than collecting empirical data, the study aims to systematically organize and critically analyze theoretical perspectives and research findings related to family-related factors that shape career decision-making among high school students.

The literature search strategy was designed to retrieve high-quality academic publications from major scholarly databases, including ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and ERIC. Search terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND/OR) to maximize coverage and relevance. The key search terms encompassed three main components: career-related constructs ("career choice", "vocational choice", "career decision-making"), the target population ("high school students", "adolescents"), and family-related influences ("family influence", "parental influence", "parental expectations", "family background", "socio-economic status", "parental support", "family values").

The screening process was conducted in two stages: an initial review of titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they explicitly examined family-related factors and their relationship to career choice or career decision-making among high school students. Studies focusing exclusively on individual psychological variables or non-family environmental factors were excluded. Eligible document types included theoretical papers, empirical research articles, systematic or narrative reviews, and seminal works by original theorists in the field of career development. The review was limited to publications in English, with a temporal scope from 1996 to the present in order to capture both foundational and contemporary theoretical contributions.

The data analyzed in this review consisted of conceptual and theoretical elements rather than statistical outcomes. Specifically, the analysis focused on extracting and synthesizing key concepts, definitions, theoretical models, and proposed mechanisms through which family factors influence career choice. The analytical procedure involved four main steps: extraction of core information (author(s), theoretical framework, key family-related constructs, and proposed mechanisms of influence); classification and coding of family influences into major thematic categories; comparative and integrative analysis of theoretical models to identify commonalities, differences, and developmental trends; theoretical synthesis to construct an integrated conceptual framework clarifying the role and interaction of family influences in high school students' career decision-making.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Parental Expectations and Career Guidance

Parental expectations and career guidance constitute one of the earliest and most profound influences on high school students' career choice processes. In contexts where students have limited self-understanding, insufficient information about the labor market, and little life experience, parents often assume a central guiding role in major life decisions, particularly

those related to future careers (Zhou et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022). Parents not only provide guidance but also tend to articulate specific expectations regarding the occupations their children should pursue, typically favoring careers perceived as stable, financially rewarding, or socially prestigious (Hou & Leung, 2011; Pham, 2011).

Parental expectations and guidance influence high school students' career choices through three primary mechanisms. First, they contribute to shaping students' vocational value systems by emphasizing criteria frequently highlighted by parents, such as job stability, high income, or social contribution (Leuty & Hansen, 2011). Second, parental influence affects students' occupational perceptions, as parents serve as important information sources and shape how students understand different careers by introducing occupations with which they are familiar, sharing personal experiences, or providing guidance based on information they believe to be accurate, even when such information may not fully align with current labor market realities (Nguyen et al., 2024). Third, parental expectations may directly shape the decision-making process itself through intervention in students' choices, such as subject selection, university recommendations, or even the imposition of specific career paths, thereby exerting a decisive influence on students' final decisions, particularly when students lack confidence or rely heavily on parental approval (Angelini et al., 2025).

From a positive perspective, parental expectations and career guidance can serve as a motivational force that encourages students to engage more actively in learning, set clear goals, and develop a sense of responsibility for their future. Students who receive early parental guidance often demonstrate stronger abilities in academic planning and career exploration (Nota et al., 2007; Turner & Lapan, 2002). Moreover, alignment between students and parents regarding career direction has been shown to enhance psychological stability and students' perceptions of emotional support (Leal-Muñiz & Constantine, 2005).

However, when parental expectations and guidance are misaligned with students' abilities, personality traits, or interests, they may lead to a range of negative outcomes. Students may experience internal conflict, indecision, or make career choices that do not reflect their own aspirations, resulting in weak commitment or even premature withdrawal from educational pathways (Gati et al., 1996). Additionally, excessive parental pressure or coercive career expectations may expose students to heightened psychological stress, diminished self-confidence, and reduced academic motivation (Lee et al., 2022). In some cases, students may experience depressive symptoms or develop oppositional reactions, such as rejecting family guidance altogether, which can give rise to prolonged family conflict (Charara et al., 2024).

3.2. Emotional and Material Support from the Family

Emotional and material support from the family constitutes a key factor in enabling high school students to develop the necessary conditions and psychological readiness to explore, choose, and pursue appropriate career pathways. Such support encompasses encouragement, active listening, and parental involvement in career-related decision-making, as well as the provision of financial resources that allow students to access career information, develop relevant skills, and prepare for post-secondary transitions (Nota et al., 2007; Turner & Lapan, 2002). Adequate and timely parental support helps students feel recognized and valued, reduces the pressure to

make a “perfect” career choice at an early stage, and fosters greater flexibility in career thinking. As a result, students are less driven by social pressure and more inclined to pursue careers aligned with their interests and aspirations, thereby experiencing lower levels of anxiety and higher career-related motivation (Bandura et al., 2001; Leal-Muñiz & Constantine, 2005). When students perceive consistent support and trust from their families, they tend to demonstrate greater confidence in exploring their interests, abilities, and career options.

Empirical evidence indicates that students whose parents facilitate access to career information, soft skills training, or career orientation programs are more likely to make well-informed and suitable career choices (Falco & Steen, 2018). Families with stronger financial capacity often invest in extracurricular activities, career camps, or experiential learning opportunities, which play a crucial role in helping students develop more concrete and realistic understandings of different occupations. Furthermore, during preparation for entrance examinations or vocational training, financial support provides students with access to additional learning resources, such as tutoring, exam preparation courses, learning materials, or specialized equipment, thereby enabling them to pursue preferred fields of study without being constrained by material limitations (Nguyen et al., 2024). These forms of support contribute to a more stable psychological state, greater agency, and increased proactivity in students’ career decision-making.

Conversely, when emotional support from parents is insufficient, students may experience feelings of isolation in the career guidance process. Parental indifference, limited engagement, or overly controlling approaches that replace active listening can contribute to heightened anxiety, uncertainty, and a tendency toward passive career decision-making (Chen et al., 2021). In a similar vein, constrained family financial resources can limit students’ access to comprehensive career information, career guidance activities, and opportunities for advanced skill development. Under such conditions, students may base their career choices primarily on intuition, peer influence, or prevailing social trends rather than on informed and personalized considerations (Mohammed et al., 2021). Furthermore, certain inappropriate forms of support, including excessive material provision without encouragement of individual effort, may foster dependency and weaken students’ autonomy in the career decision-making process.

3.3. Parental Intervention and Control

The degree of parental intervention or control in children’s career choice processes is a common factor that exerts a substantial influence on high school students. Unlike supportive career guidance, excessive parental imposition, overcontrol, or decision-making on behalf of children may negatively affect students’ intrinsic motivation, emotional well-being, and sense of autonomy in shaping their future career paths (Angelini et al., 2025). In societies characterized by strong family orientation or patriarchal values, such as Vietnam, China, and South Korea, parental involvement in children’s career decisions tends to be higher than average (Hou & Leung, 2011; Lee et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). Parental control over career choices may stem from protective intentions, social expectations, or beliefs that adolescents lack sufficient maturity to make informed decisions. However, when such intervention exceeds appropriate limits and is not grounded in students’ needs, abilities, or interests, it may produce adverse short- and long-term consequences for both career development and psychological

well-being.

It is important to acknowledge that, in certain contexts, an appropriate level of parental intervention may be beneficial, particularly when students lack clear direction, exhibit limited maturity, or are vulnerable to misleading information. Constructive intervention, such as providing accurate information, introducing suitable career options, or highlighting potential occupational risks, can help students avoid impulsive or unrealistic career choices (Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Leal-Muñiz & Constantine, 2005). Moreover, for students with a high degree of dependency, moderate and well-justified parental control may contribute to a sense of security during the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, a substantial body of research indicates that excessive parental control has clearly negative effects on students' psychological functioning and career-related behaviors. First, it diminishes students' autonomy in career decision-making when parents make choices on their behalf or restrict the range of options students are allowed to consider, thereby limiting their capacity for self-direction and the development of independent career thinking (Charara et al., 2024). Second, it intensifies internal conflict and career-related anxiety when students' career aspirations diverge from parental expectations, placing them in a state of tension between personal desires and perceived obligations. This conflict may result in indecision or the abandonment of personal interests (Gati & Saka, 2001), as well as increased risks of academic burnout, prolonged anxiety, and reduced academic performance (Angelini et al., 2025). Third, excessive parental control undermines the development of career identity, as students lack sufficient opportunities for exploration and experiential learning, leading to uncertainty, weak commitment, and instability in future career paths (Hirschi, 2012). Students who do not actively participate in making their own career decisions are more likely to demonstrate low levels of commitment, which may further impair their career adaptability, particularly in rapidly changing labor market contexts (Chen et al., 2021).

3.4. Parents' Occupations, Educational Attainment, and Career Role Modeling

Parents not only serve as sources of guidance and support but also represent the earliest and most immediate role models for their children in terms of occupational experiences, educational attainment, and everyday work-related behaviors. These role models function as a psychological reference point through which students form judgments about which occupations are perceived as "good", "worthwhile", or "desirable" (Nguyen et al., 2024). According to Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, individuals tend to learn through observation. Within the family context, parents are the most frequently observed figures, and thus their occupations, work attitudes, successes, and failures exert a significant influence on students' occupational perceptions and career expectations (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2016). This influence may operate directly, when students aspire to follow their parents' occupations, or indirectly, through the internalization of career-related values, expectations, and motivations shaped by everyday family experiences (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2016; Paa & McWhirter, 2000).

Given this level of influence, parents who serve as positive career role models can strongly inspire their children to emulate their career paths or pursue related occupations. Students

whose parents work as doctors, teachers, engineers, or in other professional roles often develop early interest in these fields, particularly when they receive encouragement or have opportunities to observe their parents' work environments firsthand (Watson & McMahon, 2005). Moreover, parents with higher levels of educational attainment tend to be more effective in identifying and nurturing their children's career potential. Such parents are more likely to provide informed guidance, encourage development aligned with individual abilities rather than imposing preferences, and actively support their children in accessing information about academic programs, planning career pathways, and making strategic educational investments (Nota et al., 2007). In addition, parents with higher education levels and stable occupations often emphasize values such as knowledge, independence, and social achievement, which are transmitted to children through everyday interactions and family practices (Leuty & Hansen, 2011).

Conversely, when parents serve as negative career role models by expressing dissatisfaction, work-related fatigue, or experiencing repeated occupational failure, students may develop unfavorable perceptions of those occupations or even lose confidence in the possibility of career success more broadly (Blustein, 2004). Furthermore, when parents impose their own occupations on their children, based on the belief that these careers are inherently superior, without considering the child's abilities, personality, or interests, conflicts in career choice are likely to emerge (Gati et al., 1996). Another limiting factor concerns the lack of occupational diversity within the family context. When parents are exposed to only a narrow range of traditional occupations and do not encourage exploration of emerging or alternative career fields, students' career options may become overly restricted, increasing the risk of overlooking occupations that are better aligned with their individual strengths and aspirations.

3.5. Family Cultural Traditions and Vocational Values

Family cultural traditions and vocational value systems constitute foundational factors that shape how individuals perceive and evaluate career options. In many Eastern societies, such as Vietnam, where the family occupies a central role in social life, traditional cultural norms continue to exert a strong influence on young people's career choices. Enduring beliefs such as "teaching is a noble profession," "being a doctor means serving society," or "civil service offers stability" are not only embedded in parental thinking but are also transmitted through family socialization practices and everyday interactions, thereby directly shaping students' career decisions (Blustein, 2004). These beliefs influence high school students' career choices through several interrelated mechanisms.

First, family traditions contribute to the formation of individual vocational value systems. The family is the earliest context in which concepts such as occupational prestige, moral suitability, and social usefulness are introduced and reinforced. These values are continuously transmitted through parental discourse, behaviors, and expectations, shaping students' internal criteria for evaluating careers (Leuty & Hansen, 2011).

Second, family cultural traditions establish behavioral norms related to career continuity within the family. Families with long-standing occupational traditions, such as teaching, law enforcement, or military service, often implicitly or explicitly encourage children to follow

ancestral career paths. Such expectations can create normative pressures that make it difficult for students to consider career options beyond established family traditions (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Third, traditional family values influence how students assess and compare different occupations. Rather than relying solely on personal interests and abilities, students may evaluate careers based on the extent to which they are socially respected or deemed acceptable by the family, thereby integrating collective cultural judgments into individual decision-making processes (Kracke, 2002; Zhou et al., 2023).

Positive family cultural traditions and vocational values can facilitate early career motivation, foster a sense of social responsibility, and inspire intergenerational continuity. Families with strong occupational traditions often expose students to professional environments from an early age, enabling them to develop concrete understandings of specific careers and to orient their choices toward occupations aligned with family values or parental professions (Blustein, 2004; Kracke, 2002; Watson & McMahon, 2005). In contrast, students from more open and flexible family environments tend to base career decisions more strongly on personal interests and self-awareness. Moreover, positive vocational values such as respect for work, commitment, honesty, and responsibility, when cultivated within the family from an early age, contribute to the development of sound professional ethics and healthy work attitudes as students approach career decision-making (Perry et al., 2010).

However, when family cultural traditions are rigid or restrictive, they may constrain students' career choices, particularly in rapidly changing social and labor market contexts. Being bound to a predetermined "family profession" or pressured to pursue socially prestigious occupations that do not align with personal abilities or interests can lead to diminished academic motivation, weak commitment to chosen careers, and potential failure in subsequent educational and occupational pathways (Gati et al., 1996). Furthermore, vocational stereotypes transmitted through family culture, such as devaluing manual labor, rejecting creative professions, or underestimating emerging fields such as technology and digital media, may prevent students from accessing career opportunities that are better aligned with contemporary labor market demands (Chen et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has successfully achieved its objective of synthesizing and critically analyzing key concepts, mechanisms, and theoretical perspectives concerning family influences on high school students' career choices. The findings consistently highlight the family as a central and multifaceted contextual system that shapes students' career decision-making processes through a combination of parental expectations, emotional and material support, levels of intervention or control, parental occupations and educational attainment, and family cultural traditions and vocational values. Rather than operating as isolated factors, these family-related influences interact dynamically to shape students' career aspirations, value systems, self-perceptions, and decision-making behaviors.

From a theoretical perspective, this review addresses the fragmentation of existing research on family influences by integrating diverse theoretical viewpoints into a coherent conceptual

framework. The synthesis clarifies how different dimensions of family influence operate through distinct yet interconnected mechanisms. For example, parental expectations and cultural values contribute to the formation of students' vocational value systems, while emotional support and role modeling enhance confidence, motivation, and career exploration. Conversely, excessive parental control or rigid family traditions may undermine autonomy, increase career-related anxiety, and hinder the development of a stable career identity. By situating these mechanisms within established career development theories, the review advances a more nuanced understanding of the family's role in adolescents' career development.

The findings also carry important practical implications for career guidance at the high school level. Career guidance programs should move beyond an exclusive focus on individual traits or labor market information and adopt a more family-informed approach. Specifically, schools and counselors should consider strategies that engage parents in constructive ways, promote open communication between students and families, and help parents provide appropriate levels of guidance and support without imposing rigid expectations. Interventions should also aim to raise parents' awareness of how their values, behaviors, and control practices influence students' autonomy and career commitment. Such approaches are particularly relevant in cultural contexts where family involvement in career decision-making is strong.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to limitations inherent in literature-based research. The review cannot empirically determine the relative strength of each family-related factor or fully capture the complex interactions between family influences and other contextual variables, such as school environments, peer groups, or labor market conditions. Accordingly, future research should build on the integrated framework proposed in this review by conducting empirical studies that quantitatively examine the differential effects of specific family influences on career decision-making outcomes among high school students. Further research is also needed to design and evaluate family-oriented career guidance interventions, thereby strengthening the empirical and practical foundations for supporting adolescents' career development in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

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