

**PARENTAL CAREER SUPPORT AS A CORRELATE OF CAREER  
DECISION MAKING AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS IN MURANGA  
COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The ability to decide on a career is an important decision made by students while at secondary school level, the choice determining future engagement in the world of work. Studies in Kenya have identified fewer secondary school students selecting viable career options in science and technology, with many choosing careers that are saturated or not in the job market. Parents have been found to be influential in students career choices and subsequently many related factors have been explored, such as parental participation, profession, social status, and level of education. However, there is inadequate documented information on studies done in Muranga County on specific parental support aspects as proposed by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The study therefore aimed to investigate the relationships among parental career support and students' career decision making among students in public secondary schools. A correlational research design was used to establish the relationship among the variables. Form three students in public secondary schools in Murang'a County, formed the target population. Cochran's sample size formula was utilized to compute the sample size of 498 students. Purposive sampling and proportionate stratified random sampling determined 11 schools which included boys, girls and mixed schools. Random sampling was used to select the participants. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire comprising of the Career Related Parent Support Scale (CRPSS), and the Career Decision Scale (CDS). Data gathered was coded and analyzed using SPSS. Pearson's correlation coefficient, Analysis of variance and multiple regression analyzed the inferential data. The findings established significant positive correlations

among the parent career support factors, Instrumental assistance ( $r(488)=0.29, p<0.01$ ) Career modeling ( $r(488)=0.10, p<0.05$ ), Verbal encouragement ( $r(488)=0.72, p<.01$ ), Emotional support ( $r(488)=0.34, p<.01$ ), with career decision making. The study recommended provision of the parental support factors in guiding students' occupational choices.

**Key words:** parental support factors, students' career decision making.

## **INTRODUCTION**

During adolescent years, identity development in the career domain fosters self-realization and decision about careers based on interest, abilities, talent, and personality (Koçak et al., 2021). According to Zhang et al., (2020) career development during adolescence is influenced by different factors including confidence in deciding on a career, peers, assistance in job explorations from the parent, and experiences enlightening on careers. The global increase in wrong career choices among students has generated concerns (Qudsyi et al., 2020) and institutions of higher learning continue to produce graduates with skills termed incompatible in the world of work (Turner et al., 2019). The students who perform excellently in mathematics and science degrees are perceived to access diverse employment options (Mwarari et al., 2020). The secondary school level provides students with a platform to make career choices that determine knowledge and skill in the pursuance of a career path in the future. Currently students' choice of subject areas while in Kenyan secondary schools determines their capability to pursue certain career paths. It is therefore of great interest that students make informed career decisions enabling productive employment required for economic development in Kenya.

According to Garcia et al., (2017) in the United States, secondary students encounter difficulties in making appropriate career choices. As observed by Kazi & Akhlag, (2017), Pakistan likewise faces a dire situation as the majority of students struggle with wrong career choices. Further, the study enlightens that half of them end up in the wrong career options despite following their path of interest. According to Khainga & Mbithi, (2018) report, most Kenyan students prefer subjects leading to career paths that are related to social sciences. Otieno (2017) concurred with Khainga & Mbithi, (2018) report, by noting a sharp decline in KCSE performances particularly in science between 2015 and 2016. In addition, Otieno (2017) points out that students exemplifying lower science efficacy are often discouraged from selecting subjects such as biology and physics. Consequently, the decline in mathematics and science performance has fueled the increase in the number of youths with inadequate qualifications for recruitment into various science-based professions (NCPD, 2017).

Student career decisions can be influenced positively by both teachers and parents. In the United Kingdom, a study revealed that 54% of students had wielded parent pressure on career choices. Further, 69% were studying in universities proposed by the parent, guardian, or role model. According to GTI Media (2019), students appreciate parental advice regarding career choices. Familial factors such as family values in countries such as Asia significantly influence student career decisions and occupational choices. The caste system as observed by Munshi, (2017) in India, influences students to take low-paying careers often reserved for the unskilled population in the world of work. Further, in Africa, educated parents are seen to participate more in their children's career decisions at the secondary and university level. Although, uneducated parents may show knowledge gaps and experience in the world of work, a few endeavor to influence their children's choices. Undue influence from parents has led to university students in Kenya being dissatisfied with the career courses they pursue (Koech et al., 2016). It was noted that in Murang'a County students who fail to succeed in education seek employment in coffee and tea plantations. According to NCPD (2017), lack of school fees forces many students between 10 and 14 years to dropping out, particularly in low socioeconomic households.

According to Lent Brown and Hackett (1994) parents positive dialogue with their children on career interests and choices reduced indecision in career options. Discouraging verbalization was likely to result in decreased career decision self-efficacy. Comparably parents providing opportunities that enabled exploration of career related activities such as field trips, industrial attachment and enhancing related skills would enable easier decisions into occupational pathways. Exposure to successful, professional individuals that students could emulate would equally inspire the choice of career. In addition, the emotional status of an individual impacts on the cognitive functions hence provision of love, warmth, and acceptance, inspire confidence and reduce hesitancy in decision making. Given that there is a scarcity of literature on these four aspects of parental support in Muranga County, how each of these factors relates to students' ability to make decision is the focus of this study.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The study was guided by the following objective

- I. To establish the relationship between parental career support and students' career decision making.

### **HYPOTHESIS**

The null hypothesis was tested

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between parental career support and students' career decision making.

The following supplementary hypotheses were formulated based on the four levels of parental career support:

H<sub>01.1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between instrumental assistance and students' career decision making.

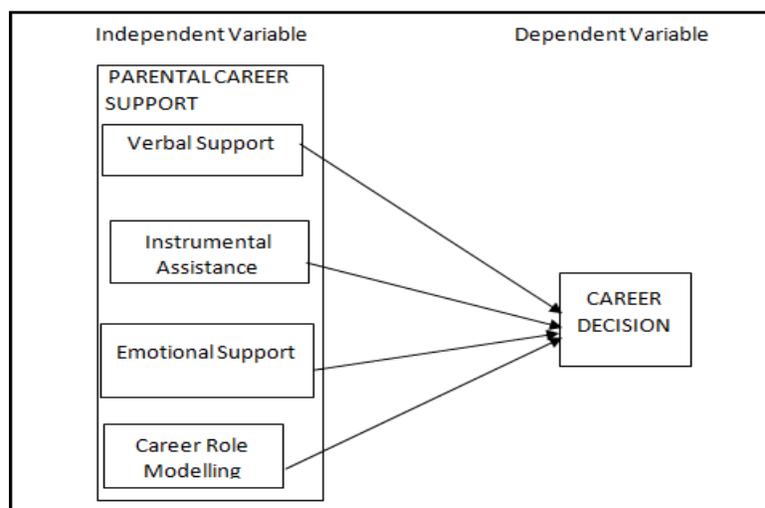
H<sub>01.2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between career modelling and students' career decision making.

H<sub>01.3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between verbal encouragement and students' career decision making.

H<sub>01.4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between emotional support and students' career decision making.

### The Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 demonstrates career decision-making as the criterion variable and parental career support as predictor variables. The study identified four levels of parental support including emotional support, verbal encouragement, instrumental assistance, and role modeling. The researcher hypothesized parental support factors correlate with career decision-making.



**Figure 1.1. A conceptual framework signifying the association between study variables.**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a correlational research design to determine the relationship among the parental support factors with career decision making. According to Kothari and Garg (2018), a correlational design is suitable as it is not possible to manipulate the parental support factors which were based on students' experiences and perceptions. The design also allowed for the determination of probable relations among the variables. The design was appropriate as it enabled measurement of the strength and direction of relationships among the different facets of parents' support with decision making.

### **Study Population**

The targeted population comprised 26671, form three students in 305 public secondary schools in Murang'a County, in the year 2019. The schools were categorized into boy's schools, girl's schools, and mixed schools. The third-year secondary school students, having made choices of their subjects at the end of the previous year, were suited for participation in the study as they had premeditated opinions of their career choices. The choice of subjects determined their inclination towards careers in the realms of sciences or humanities. Subsequent academic attainment at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations (KCSE), determines the choice of career courses at college and university levels.

### **Sampling procedure and sample size**

The schools were grouped according to the school type which consisted of 33 girls' secondary schools, 26 boy's schools, and 249 coeducational schools. Form three students were purposively selected for the study sample. The total population of each stratum was expressed as a percentage of the total population (26671) of students in the county. The boys' schools accounted for 17%, girls' schools 19% and mixed schools 64%. (Girls 32% and Boys 32%). The proportionate stratified formula was used to identify the sample size (498) which was proportionally allocated to each school type. Hence, boys' schools comprised 82 students, girls' schools had 96 students, and mixed schools, 161 boys, and 159 girls were involved. Random sampling was used to identify 2 boys' schools out of the 17 schools, and 2 girls' schools among 31 and 7 mixed schools.

## **STUDY INSTRUMENTS**

### **Career Related Parent Support Scale**

The Career-related parent support scale (CRPSS) was used to determine parents' provision of emotional support (ES), verbal encouragement (VE), career modeling (CM), and instrumental assistance (IA)(Turner et al., 2003). The scale comprises 27 items, and each of the subscales was measured on a scale that ranged from (1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*). Items 1-7 measured IA, items 8-14 measured CM, items 15-21 measured VE, and items 21-27 measured ES. Scores on subscales IA, CM, and VE range from 7 to 35, while the subscale ES scores range from 6-to 30. Higher tallies indicated improved parental career support while low totals indicated lesser parents' support for careers. The scale available on the open access was suited for this survey. Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from .65 to .85. were found by Ogutu et al., (2017). The current study values ranged from .52 to .77.

### **Career Decision Making Scale**

The career decision scale (CDS) measured the students' decision-making status(Osipow et al, 1976). The scale was procured from developers, PAR in Florida, USA, providing the rights for use in the study. Questions 1 and 2 measured students' certainty in making a career decision. Questions 3-18 made the indecision subscale. Likert scale responses ranged from 1 to 4 (*not at all like me, only slightly like me, very much like me, exactly like me*). Question 19 an open-ended question on the original scale allowed for the inclusion of additional details. However, due to inadequate responses from the participants, question 19 was removed from the study questionnaire. Higher scores on the certainty scale indicated students' greater certainty in making a career choice. Likewise higher scores on the indecision scale showed students' inability to make a career decision. The instrument has successfully assessed students in Busia Kenya(Ogutu et al., 2017).The current study reliability was estimated by the Cronbach alpha coefficient as 0.70 which was above the threshold of 0.50 and above.

### **Scoring of the instruments**

Students' career decision-making was operationalized by analyzing the participants' scores on the career decision scale. Each item in the scale had scores ranging from 1 to 4 and each participant responded to a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all like me* to 4 = *exactly like me*. The scale consisted of items 1 and 2 measuring certainty and items 3-18 which measured students' indecision. High indecision scores indicate uncertainty regarding career choice. High certainty scores indicate certainty of students' choice of career. For purposes of hypothesis testing in this study, the indecision scale was reversed to reflect decidedness and combined with the certainty scale. The total score of the career decision scale was then used to measure career decision-making.

### **Reliability of the Scale**

The scales had been used in studies done in a different context from the present study hence internal reliability of the items in the study instruments was determined using Cronbach's coefficient alpha formula. All the items within parental career support and 18 items of the career decision-making variables were retained because their Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.5. The overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.673 was established.

**Table 1. Reliability Results for students Questionnaire**

<b>Sub Scale</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>No of Items</b>
Parental Career Support	Instrumental assistance (IA)	0.678	7
	Career modeling (CM)	0.772	7
	Verbal encouragement (VE)	0.515	7
	Emotional support (ES)	0.716	6
Career Decision Making		0.683	27

### **Validity of the scales**

The study instruments had been adapted from research carried out in a different context, hence an assessment of the instrument items, assisted and validated by the researcher's supervisors ascertained the content validity. Recommendations proposed were implemented in the study questionnaire. Further, analysis of the responses to items in the pilot study determined the clarity of the questionnaire scales. The pilot study provided data that affirmed the content validity, as well as insights on the time required to complete the questionnaire.

### **Data collection procedures**

Since the study was to take place for a specific period, the researcher sought assistance from two research assistants after seeking authorization from school administrators. The actual number of participants was recruited through random sampling. The researcher placed the desired number of ticked papers, among others unticked, in a box. The students in Form 3 class were requested to

pick from the box. Within the mixed schools, the numbers of participants were divided equally, and girls chose from a separate box from the boys. The intent of the study and the way to fill out the questionnaire was clarified. The participants were invited to fill out the informed consent form under the guidance of the researcher. After administration of the questionnaire participants were to respond within 40 minutes, after which they were due for collection.

## RESULTS

### Parental Career Support and Career Decision Making

Parental career support is composed of four subscales namely, verbal encouragement, instrumental assistance, parental career role modeling, and emotional support. Both Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression analysis were used to test the correlations and the predictive levels of the domains of parental career support. The first step involved testing the relationships between the four types of support accorded by parents and decisions made by students, using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Bivariate correlation tested for linearity and the results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Relationship between students' career decision, instrumental assistance (IA), career modeling (CM), verbal encouragement (VE) and emotional support (ES)**

Domain of Parental Career Support	Students Career Decision
Instrumental assistance (IA)	0.29**
Career modeling (CM)	0.10*
Verbal encouragement (VE)	0.72**
Emotional support (ES)	0.34**
Parental Career Support	0.53**

Note. N= 498, \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 reveals that individually, the four domains of parental career support had a significant positive linear relationship with students' career decisions. Instrumental assistance was significantly correlated ( $r = .029$ ;  $p = .000$ ) to career decision-making, hence the first

supplementary hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that instrumental assistance had a significant relationship with career decision-making.

The results also indicated that career modeling was significantly and positively related to career decision-making ( $r = .10$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, the second supplementary hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that career modeling had a significant relationship with career decision-making.

The relationship between verbal encouragement and the students' career decisions were found to be positively significant ( $r = .72$ ;  $p = .000$ ) and hence the third supplementary hypothesis was rejected.

Similarly, emotional support provided by the parents was indicated to be positively significant ( $r = .34$ ;  $p = .000$ ) to the students' career decisions. The fourth supplementary hypothesis was rejected.

The results also revealed that parental career support (for the four domains collectively) had a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.53$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) on students' career decisions. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between parental career support and students' career decision-making was accepted.

Since all the domains are positive and significant, the results imply that an increase in parents' offer of career modeling, emotional support, verbal encouragement, and instrumental assistance would enhance the students' ability to make decisions on careers. Among the four dimensions of parents' support for students' career decisions, verbal encouragement had the highest correlation, followed by emotional support, instrumental assistance, and the least correlation was career modeling ( $r = 0.72, 0.32, 0.29, 0.10$ ) respectively.

The study also sought to determine the predictive weight of each of the predictors on the independent variable. The beta coefficients were examined, and the findings are presented in table 3.

**Table 3. Beta coefficients for students’ career decisions, instrumental assistance (IA), career modeling (CM), verbal encouragement (VE), and emotional support (ES)**

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.92	.10		18.55	.00
Instrumental Assistance	.04	.02	.06	1.71	.09
Career Modelling	.03	.02	.06	1.76	.08
Verbal Encouragement	.46	.02	.75	18.96	.00
Emotional Support	-.05	.02	-.10	-2.56	.011

Note. N=482

Results presented in table 3 showed that Instrumental Assistance ( $\beta = .04, p = .09$ ) and Career Modelling ( $\beta = .03, p = .08$ ) were statistically insignificant positively predictors of student career decisions. Verbal Encouragement ( $\beta = .46, p = .00$ ) was found to predict student career decision positively and significantly. However emotional support ( $\beta = -0.05, p = .00$ ) even though it was statistically significant, it was found to negatively predict student career decision.

**DISCUSSION**

The results showed a significant positive relationship between parental career support and students' career decision-making. The findings imply that an increase in parental support in terms of careers improves student career decision-making. The results also agree with the study carried out by Garriott et al., (2017) which informed that emotional support, instrumental assistance, career modeling, and verbal encouragement were essential determinants contributing to career decision making. The results also revealed that verbal encouragement and emotional support played a significant role in student career decisions. According to Peace (2017), parents play a very big role in the students’ career decision making.

The current study's findings show that verbal encouragement positively correlated with students' career decision-making. The finding infers that as parents provide verbal encouragement,

students' capacity to make career decisions correspondingly increases. The findings are consistent with Peace (2017) study among university students, where verbal communication on student career was the most significant predictor of student decisions. In support, university students in Kenya expressed discontent with the courses they were undertaking, citing parental guidance (Koech et al., 2016). The majority were in education courses, whereas had preferred engineering. Another study by Njagi & Mwanja, (2017) found that negative verbal engagements with parents encouraged truancy in students and an aversion to education.

Instrumental assistance in the current study was positively and significantly correlated to student career decisions. The finding indicates that student exposure to skills and activities in line with their career choices impacts their ability to decide on a career. A study by Tan et al., (2020) comments that students' perception of support is parents' participation in academic affairs, expression of expectations, and provision of learning materials. Njagi and Mwanja, (2017) study in Embu County enlightens the need for parental involvement in their children's education by providing school fees and study resources. Further, the study identifies support in extra curriculum activities such as school trips, games, and other school-organized activities.

It emerged from the study findings that emotional support was significantly correlated to students' career decision-making. The results further showed that emotional support was second to verbal support and related to career decision-making. The implications are that parents' emotional support is necessary to enhance students' career decisions. Further exploration of emotional support in this study revealed that the emotional support provided was a negative predictor of students' decision-making. These findings are inconsistent with the findings of (Mao et al., 2017) among Taiwanese students, where parents' emotional support was the only positive predictor of student confidence in making career decisions. El-Hassan and Ghalayini, (2020) found out that close friendships with parents enabled students' decidedness on career options.

While investigating the role of positive and negative emotions on career indecisiveness, Farnia et al. (2018) found that negative emotions determined university student career indecisiveness. On the other hand, positive emotions reduced indecision, while negative emotions resulted in pessimistic views toward career decision-making. Positive emotions influenced open and receptive personalities and decisiveness among students. Okwulehie (2018) findings established that parents influenced students' choice of career by creating feelings of guilt, often during the career selection process. Further, guilt hinders students' ability to make decisions on their preferred careers.

The current study results indicated that career modeling had a statistically positive correlation with students' career decision-making. Improved provision of role models stimulated greater certainty of career choices. It is apparent from the findings that career modeling had the lowest correlation with students' decisions on their career choices. The implications are that the role models provided to the students had the least impression on students' decisions in comparison to verbal engagement, instrumental assistance, and emotional support. Endorsing the findings, Julie et al., (2019) cite the need for professional role models among nursing students in South Africa. According to Njagi & Mwanja, (2017) students in Embu expressed the necessity for model parents portraying integrity, to emulate.

In conclusion, the study indicated that students' ability to make career decisions has a significant relationship with all individual factors of parental career support. Among the four parental support factors related to career decision-making, verbal encouragement had the highest correlational value, seconded by emotional support, instrumental assistance, and career modeling, respectively. The results indicate the amount of each type of support that parents provide. Although, greater emphasis is laid on verbal encouragement with less instrumental support and role modeling. This study observes that emotional support negatively predicts student career decision-making. Farnia et al., (2018) found that parental warmth consisting of consolation, love, care, and security expressed in deeds and verbally was the most significant factor in changing adolescent behaviors. Likewise greater infusion of emotional support by parents in Muranga county would enhance students' career decisions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. Parents and teachers should note the types of parental support that needed to be enhanced to promote students' decisiveness in making career choices. Career role modeling was ranked far below verbal encouragement, instrumental assistance, and emotional assistance.
- ii. Science self-efficacy has been found to increase students ability to decide on science subjects and hence the researcher recommends more emphasis on the development of science self-efficacy in schools by educators.
- iii. Parents' verbal communication and instrumental assistance were particularly effective in increasing the students' science self-efficacy, hence a focal point for secondary school administrators intending to enhance students' decisions in science subjects.

- iv. The Ministry of Education, School administrators, and teachers can develop programs that significantly involve parents in the process of career development.

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