

Parental career-specific behaviours and adolescent career adaptability

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Parents are a major influence on adolescents' career development. However, past studies have mostly explored general rather than career-specific parenting aspects. According to Dietrich and Kracke (2009) parental support, parental interference, and lack of parental career engagement are basic dimensions of career-specific parental behaviours. This study examined the relationship between these parental behaviours and career adaptability in a sample of high school students (N = 197; Mage = 16.79). The data were collected in a group online testing. Student career adaptability was measured with the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) and parental career-specific behaviours were measured by the scale developed by Dietrich and Kracke (2009). Parental support emerged as the most important positive predictor of career adaptability since it predicted both global career adaptability and separate dimensions. Parental interference negatively predicted career control, career confidence, and overall career adaptability but only when parents' career engagement was higher. The results point out that in understanding parental influences in students' career development it is important to consider different parenting practices and also examine separate students' career adaptability resources. Parents should be helped to recognise their career-related parenting practices and to understand the potential of these behaviours in facilitating their children's career adaptability. Special counselling interventions should be provided for students who perceive that their parents are not providing enough career-related support.



Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing research interest in understanding how family context shapes young people's career development (Ginevra et

al., 2015). Parents have been identified as a more important source of influence on children's career development than school and peers (Hartung et al., 2005; Paa & McWhirter, 2000) and highlighted as a crucial social factor during students' educational and career transitions (Mortimer et al., 2002). However, as Dietrich and Kracke (2009; 2011) pointed out, most studies in this area have explored general rather than domain-specific parenting aspects. These studies have found that secure attachment and authoritative parenting style are associated with positive outcomes in adolescents' career development (e.g., Kracke, 1997; Guay et al., 2003; O'Brien et al., 2000; Vignoli et al., 2005). These general parenting elements are hard to target by intervention programs and career counselling (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Thus, in this study, we will focus on parental career-specific behaviours and their association with adolescents' career adaptability.

It is known that the perception of other's behaviour and not the behaviour itself has a crucial formative influence (Boerchi & Tagliabue, 2018). Thus, the research in this area is mostly focused on children's *perceptions* of parental career-related practices. According to Dietrich and Kracke (2009) children can perceive their parents' career-related practices as supportive, interfering, or lacking. When parents are supportive, they encourage their children to explore vocational possibilities, they offer advice and instrumental support if needed. Parental interference refers to parents' controlling behaviours related to students' career preparations and choices. Finally, the lack of parental engagement portrays parents' disinterest or the low importance parents attach to children's career development process.

These three parenting dimensions have been linked to different career-related outcomes in adolescence. Parental career-related support has been associated with higher students' career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Guan et al., 2015) and decision-making self-efficacy

(Guan et al., 2016), higher autonomous career goal motivation (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013), and lower controlled career goal motivation (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Parental interference and lack of engagement have been associated with students' decision-making difficulties (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Furthermore, parental lack of engagement has been related to lower autonomous career goal motivation, higher controlled career goal motivation, and higher career goal stress among adolescents (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Parental interference has been associated with lower career exploration (Guan et al., 2015).

As Guan and colleagues (2015) noted, little is known about how parent career-specific behaviours are associated with students' adaptive-abilities related to their career development. In recent years, Savickas proposed the Career Construction Model of Adaptation (Savickas, 2002; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Savickas et al., 2018), which states that adaptive readiness fosters adaptability resources which further encourage adapting behaviours which lead to adaptation results. The sequence of four adaptation dimensions in the model (i.e. adaptivity – adaptability – adapting – adaptation) has been confirmed in the recent studies (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas et al., 2018; Šverko & Babarović, 2019) and meta-analyses (Rudolph et al., 2017b; Rudolph et al., 2017a). Parental career-related behaviours may be seen as an aspect of adaptivity dimension as it refers to fundamental personal potential for adaptation and therefore influences career adaptability. In a study by Guan and colleagues (2015) students' career adaptability was positively predicted by parental support, but negatively by parental interference and lack of engagement. To our knowledge, this is the only study that inspected all three facets of parental career-specific behaviours in relation to students' career adaptability. This study included Chinese university students and their parents and parents' assessments of their career-specific behaviours were utilised. Thus, our study will contribute to this area of research by including a younger sample of students from a different cultural setting and by assessing students' perceptions of their parents' behaviours.

Furthermore, previous studies have found some interesting combined effects of parental career-related behaviours in predicting student career-related outcomes

(e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Guan et al., 2015). Thus, in this study, we will examine not only general associations between parental career-specific behaviours and student career adaptability but also the effects of interaction between parental behaviours on career adaptability.

Method

The participants in this study were 197 high school students (83.2% female), aged 15 to 18 ($M = 16.79$, $SD = 0.96$). Students attended first (27.9%), second (42.1%), and third grade (29.9%). In Croatia, students typically start their secondary education around the age of 15. Thus, in first grade students are around the age of 15, in second grade around the age of 16, and in third grade around the age of 17. Students came from one grammar school (33%) and two vocational secondary schools (77%). All schools were in central Croatia. In grammar schools in Croatia, students acquire general knowledge and skills that prepare them for entering higher education. Programmes of secondary vocational education provide students with professional qualifications and prepare them for the labour market. Education in grammar schools lasts for four years, while in vocational schools it usually lasts from three to five years, depending on the vocational curriculum for a particular profession.

The data were collected in a group online testing in school computer classrooms. Students completed the survey on a website that was developed for the purpose of the project. The research was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education and by the principals of the participating schools. We have obtained signed parental consent for the participating students. Students' participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Researchers visited the participating schools and informed students about the purposes of the research and about the research procedure. Students were assured that their responses were anonymous and to be used only for research purposes. They were also provided with researchers' contact information and were informed that they can withdraw at any time from the research without any consequences. Students gave their consent to participate in the study by checking the provided box on the survey's website that was placed at the beginning of the survey. The collected data were

protected and available only to the researchers. No information about the respondents was shared with the third parties as the procedure of data collection and storage was fully in line with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Students' career adaptability was measured with the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The scale measures four career adaptability resources (i. e. subscales of career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence) and consists of 24 items to which students responded on a scale from 1 (*not strong*) to 5 (*strongest*). The result can be expressed as the global indicator of career adaptability (total score for the 24 items) and as the result on each of the four subscales (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). Each subscale is measured by six items. The Cronbach's alpha was .89 for the global indicator of career adaptability, .88 for concern, .73 for control, .75 for curiosity, and .80 for confidence. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most used numerical coefficients of reliability of summated scales. It provides an estimate of the extent to which scale's items are a consistent measure of a construct they are intended to measure. Cronbach's alpha that is higher than 0.7 has been indicated to be an acceptable reliability coefficient (Nunnally, 1978).

Parental behaviours were measured by the scale developed by Dietrich and Kracke (2009). This scale

contains 15 items to which students responded on the 4-point scale (1 = *does not apply*, 4 = *fully applies*). Parental support, interference, and lack of engagement are measured by five items each. The Cronbach's alpha was .89 for support, .84 for interference, and .89 for lack of engagement. This scale has been previously used for different student samples. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) used the scale for a sample of German adolescents aged 15-18, and some items have been used for Finnish adolescents when they were at age 18 and 21 (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013). The adapted version of the scale has been also used for parents. Dietrich and Kracke (2011) assessed career-related support of mothers of German adolescents aged around 19. In the study conducted by Guan and colleagues (2015), parents (a mother or a father) assessed their career-specific behaviours when their children were attending university at age 21.

Results

The descriptive statistics and inter-correlations between variables are presented in the Table 1. Higher overall career adaptability was related with higher parental support ($r = .44; p < .001$), lower parental interference ($r = -.21; p < .05$), and lower lack of engagement ($r = -.30; p < .001$). Higher results on all adaptability dimensions were related with higher

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Study Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Overall career adaptability	3.92	0.43									
2. Career concern	4.02	0.64	.76***								
3. Career control	3.89	0.58	.75***	.33***							
4. Career curiosity	3.93	0.53	.76***	.53***	.39***						
5. Career confidence	3.85	0.53	.78***	.41***	.58***	.45***					
6. Parental support	3.88	0.79	.44***	.43***	.29***	.29***	.32***				
7. Parental interference	2.28	0.90	-.21**	-.14	-.30***	-.09	-.10	-.14			
8. Parental lack of engagement	1.63	0.70	-.30***	-.25***	-.22**	-.21**	-.22**	-.56***	.34***		
9. Student grade	-	-	.17*	.13	.17*	.06	.14*	-.03	-.06	-.01	
10. Student gender ^a	-	-	-.02	.04	-.11	.01	.01	.17*	-.05	-.16*	-.04

a 1 = male; 2 = female

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

parental support (r s ranged from .29 to .43) and lower lack of engagement (r s ranged from -.21 to -.30). Higher parental interference was related with lower career control ($r = -.30; p < .001$).

We ran five multiple regressions to test the relationship between parental behaviours, their interactions, and student career adaptability. In order to minimize problems with multicollinearity, parental variables were centred (Aiken & West, 1991). The results of these analyses showed which parental behaviours have a significant contribution in explaining inter-individual differences in student career adaptability, while also taking into account the effects of student gender and grade. We also examined if an effect of a specific parental career-related behaviour on student career adaptability depends on the level of some other parental career-related behaviour. This was done by inspecting the significance of interaction terms in the regression models. Table 2 presents the results of these analyses for predicting the overall career adaptability and for predicting each adaptability dimension.

The independent variables (i.e. student gender and grade, parental behaviours, and interactions between parental behaviours) explained around 25% of the career adaptability variance (i.e. differences in student career adaptability). Students attending higher grades ($\beta = .17; p = .007$) and students who perceived more parental career-specific support ($\beta = .45; p < .001$) reported higher adaptability. There was a significant interaction Parent interference (PI) \times Lack of engagement (LE) ($\beta = .18; p = .035$). We investigated this interaction by plotting it at points 1 SD below and above the mean of the parent support and lack of engagement and simple effect analysis was conducted (Cohen et al., 2003). Results showed (Figure 1) that when parents were highly engaged (i.e. lack of parental career engagement was 1 SD below the mean), parental interference was negatively related to adaptability ($b = -0.13; SE = .05; t = -2.78; p = .006$) and when parents showed lower engagement (i.e. lack of parental career engagement was 1 SD above the mean), this relationship was insignificant ($b = 0.02; SE = .05; t = 0.40; p = .689$).

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Regression Predicting the Student Career Adaptability

Predictors	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall career adaptability							
Student grade	.10	.04	.17	.007			
Student gender	-.12	.07	-.10	.109			
Parent support (PS)	.25	.04	.45	<.001			
Parent interference (PI)	-.06	.03	-.12	.088			
Lack of engagement (LE)	-.06	.05	-.10	.263			
PS \times PI	.07	.04	.14	.088			
PS \times LE	-.04	.03	-.09	.280			
PI \times LE	.11	.05	.18	.035	.245	8.91	<.001
Career concern							
Student grade	.11	.05	.14	.036			
Student gender	-.05	.11	-.03	.630			
Parent support (PS)	.37	.07	.45	<.001			
Parent interference (PI)	-.03	.05	-.05	.491			
Lack of engagement (LE)	-.03	.08	-.03	.708			
PS \times PI	.12	.07	.15	.071			
PS \times LE	-.06	.05	-.10	.228			
PI \times LE	.07	.08	.08	.350	.193	6.81	<.001

Predictors	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	Adjusted R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Career control							
Student grade	.13	.05	.16	.012			
Student gender	-.27	.10	-.17	.010			
Parent support (PS)	.23	.06	.30	<.001			
Parent interference (PI)	-.17	.05	-.26	<.001			
Lack of engagement (LE)	-.05	.07	-.05	.544			
PS \times PI	.05	.06	.07	.402			
PS \times LE	-.01	.05	-.02	.787			
PI \times LE	.16	.07	.19	.027	.194	6.86	<.001
Career curiosity							
Student grade	.04	.05	.06	.401			
Student gender	-.07	.10	-.05	.470			
Parent support (PS)	.19	.06	.29	.002			
Parent interference (PI)	-.01	.04	-.02	.845			
Lack of engagement (LE)	-.07	.07	-.10	.321			
PS \times PI	.05	.06	.08	.388			
PS \times LE	-.04	.05	-.09	.338			
PI \times LE	.03	.07	.04	.649	.063	2.65	.009
Career confidence							
Student grade	.11	.05	.16	.022			
Student gender	-.08	.10	-.06	.383			
Parent support (PS)	.22	.06	.33	<.001			
Parent interference (PI)	-.01	.04	-.02	.747			
Lack of engagement (LE)	-.09	.07	-.12	.183			
PS \times PI	.08	.06	.12	.174			
PS \times LE	-.03	.04	-.06	.525			
PI \times LE	.17	.07	.23	.011	.130	4.65	<.001

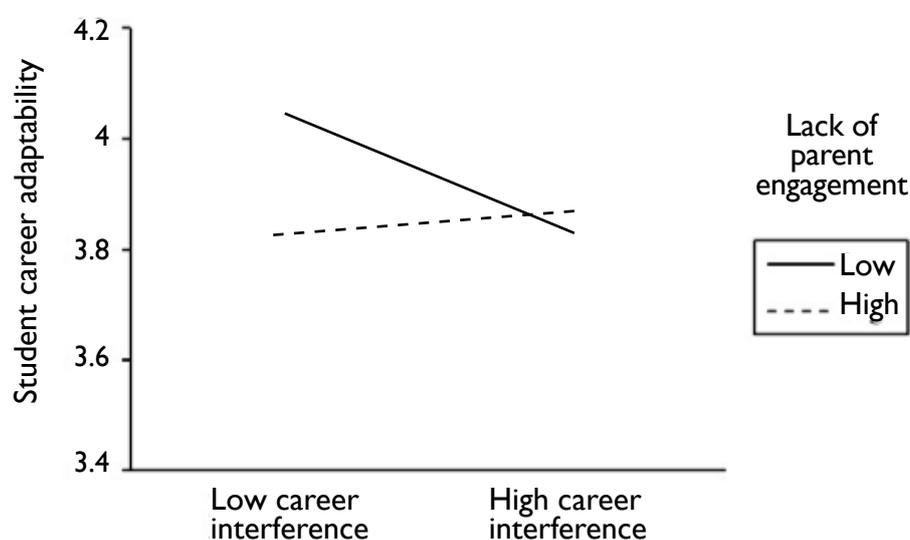


Figure 1.
The interaction effects of parental interference and lack of engagement on student career adaptability.

The independent variables explained around 19% of the career concern variance. Higher student grade ($\beta = .14$; $p = .036$) and higher parental support ($\beta = .45$; $p < .001$) predicted higher result on this dimension. None of the combined effects of parental behaviours were significant.

The model explained around 19% of the career control variance. Students attending higher grades ($\beta = .16; p = .012$) reported higher control. Boys reported higher control than girls ($\beta = -.17; p = .010$). Higher parental support ($\beta = .30; p < .001$) and lower parental interference predicted higher student control ($\beta = -.26; p < .001$). The PI \times LE interaction was also significant ($\beta = .19; p = .027$). As shown in Figure 2, when parents were highly engaged (i.e. lack of parental career engagement was 1 SD below the mean), parental interference was negatively related to adaptability ($b = -0.27; SE = .06; t = -4.31; p < .001$) and when parents showed lower engagement (i.e. lack of parental career engagement was 1 SD above the mean), this relationship was insignificant ($b = -0.06; SE = .07; t = -0.82; p = .419$).

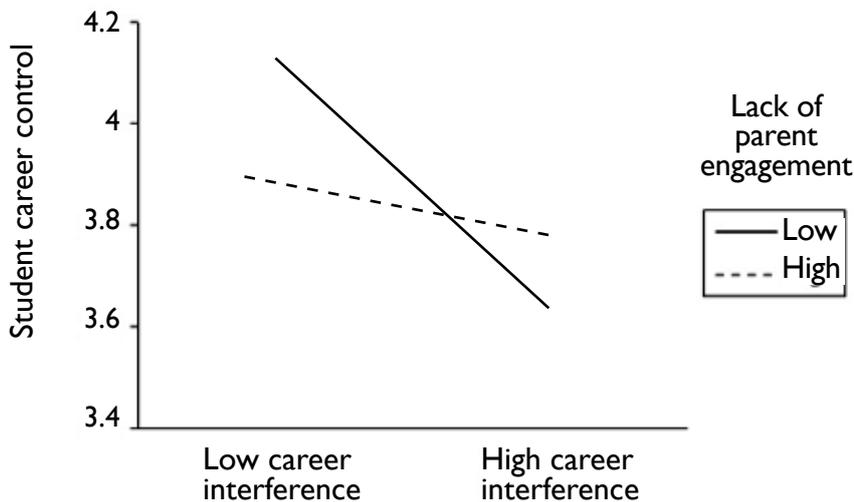


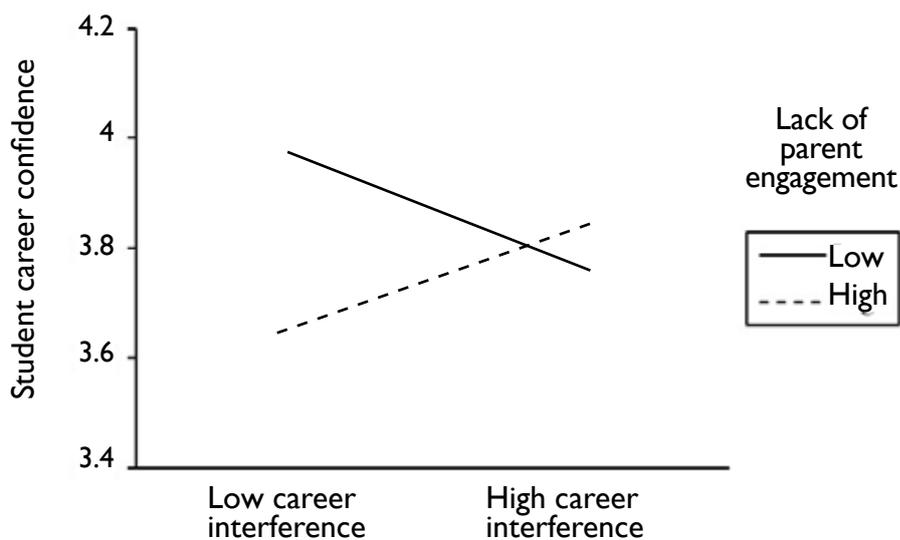
Figure 2.
The interaction effects of parental interference and lack of engagement on student career control.

Around 6% of the variance in the student career curiosity was explained by the independent variables. Parental support was the only significant positive predictor of this dimension ($\beta = .29; p = .002$).

The independent variables explained around 13% of career confidence variance. Older students ($\beta = .16; p =$

$.022$) and students who perceived more parental career-specific support ($\beta = .33; p < .001$) reported higher confidence. There was again a significant PI \times LE interaction ($\beta = .23; p = .011$). As shown on Figure 3, parental interference was not significantly related with student confidence on a higher level of parental lack of engagement ($b = 0.11; SE = .06; t = 1.64; p = .103$) but it was negatively related to student confidence when parental engagement was higher ($b = -0.12; SE = .06; t = -2.09; p = .038$).

Figure 3.
The interaction effects of parental interference and lack of engagement on student career confidence.



Discussion

In this study, parental career-related support emerged as the most important positive predictor of students' career adaptability since it predicted both global career adaptability and separate dimensions. Other parental behaviours were mostly insignificant predictors of career adaptability. Parental career-related support was previously found to be a significant positive predictor of several other aspects of adolescents' career development such career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Guan et al., 2015), decision-making self-efficacy (Guan et al., 2016), and autonomous career goal motivation (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Our results are partially in line with the previous study by Guan and colleagues (2015) who found that parental support was a significant positive predictor of all adaptability dimensions except control.

On the other hand, the authors also found parental interference to be a negative predictor of the same adaptability dimensions, while lack of engagement negatively predicted overall adaptability. However, the mentioned study only included Chinese students at the university level, and in measuring parental career-specific behaviours only parents' assessments of their behaviours were utilised. The different results could also be explained by cultural differences that can affect parental influences in the career paths of young people. A few decades ago, Croatian society was oriented towards collectivism but nowadays there is a significant shift towards individualism (Podrug et al., 2014). On the other hand, China is characterized as a highly collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 2001). Autonomy and individuation from parents are emphasized in the individualistic cultures, while in collectivistic cultures there is an emphasize on respect to family traditions and norms (Hardin et al., 2001). Accordingly, Chinese parents place a high value on parental control (Kagitcibasi, 1994). It may be that in China the negative parental career-specific practices have a more salient role in adolescents' career development than in Croatia, given the stronger collectivistic orientation in China which puts more emphasize on external social pressure.

We also found that parental interference negatively predicted overall career adaptability, career control, and career confidence but only when parents showed higher levels of career engagement. The same effect was previously found in predicting student career

exploration (Guan et al., 2015). Our results suggest that when parents are engaged in their children's career development but at the same time show highly controlling behaviours they can inhibit students in being confident about their career aspirations and they can prevent students' self-initiated and agentic career-related behaviour. This result portrays a dynamic and complex process through which parental career-specific behaviours may shape student career development. The relationship between parental behaviours, their interactions and student career adaptability was not the same across all four adaptability resources (i.e. concern, control, curiosity, confidence). Thus, our study also points out that in understanding parental influences in students' career development it is important to consider different parenting practices and also examine separate students' career adaptability resources.

Even though these results are not central to the research questions of our study, we will also comment on the found grade and gender differences in student career adaptability. In our study, older students had higher scores on all the subscales of career adaptability except on career curiosity. Past studies (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2015; Skorikov, 2007; Stringer et al., 2011) also found that older adolescents had higher career adaptability. This can be explained by the fact that with time students are exposed to more career-related tasks and have to become more focus on their career choices. In Croatia, the tipping point of the career exploration for adolescents is around the age of 18 when they approach the end of their secondary education (Babarović & Šverko, 2016). Concerning gender differences in career adaptability, past research mostly suggested that these differences are not significant (e.g. Cheung & Jin, 2016; Hirschi, 2009; Zacher, 2014). Our results also point out to that conclusion since gender differences were found only on one out of the four adaptability dimensions and there was no gender difference in the overall student career adaptability.

Limitations and implication for practice

In this study, we have not examined mutual influences between parents and students that have been questioned in previous research (Dietrich & Salmela-

Aro, 2013). From our cross-sectional data, we cannot conclude that parental career-specific behaviours lead to changes in student career adaptability. It may be that the relationship also operates in the opposite direction, such as that higher parental support is a reaction to higher student initial career adaptability. For example, students who show higher levels of career curiosity may seek more parental career-related support in form of career advice and information. To explore the direction and strength of these parent-adolescent relationships, future studies should employ longitudinal designs and involve parents directly. Furthermore, in order to better understand the relationship between parental behaviours and career adaptability, other student career-related variables should be taken into account, such as career exploration that has been found to have a possible mediating role in explaining this relationship (Guan et al., 2015). We have not examined students' perceptions of their respective parents (for students who have both parents present in their lives). This should be considered since fathers and mothers can have different influences on their children's career choices (Lee & Mun, 2011). Lastly, future research should employ bigger samples that are better gender-balanced in order to achieve stronger generalisability and power.

There are several practical implications of this study. First, parents should be helped to understand their career-related parenting practices in the period of their children's secondary education. Parents should be helped to recognise that it is crucial that their children perceive their career-related behaviours as supportive in order to successfully promote their psychological resources in the process of their career development. Schools can assist parents in supporting their children's career development using a range of approaches including information-centred approaches, family learning interventions, and family therapy or counselling options (Oomen, 2016). Parents should also be aware that high levels of interference in combination with high levels of engagement can have a negative effect on student career adaptability. Furthermore, the identification of students who perceive that their parents are not providing enough career-related support could be important for teachers and counsellors who can focus on providing special counselling interventions for these students.



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