

Influence of Parental Perception on Students' Willingness to Pursue Vocational Careers: A Synthesis of Literature

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ABSTRACT

This position paper examines the influence of parental perception on students' willingness to pursue vocational careers, drawing on a synthesis of current literature from African and Asian contexts. Findings consistently demonstrate that parents' beliefs, expectations, cultural values, and understanding of vocational pathways significantly shape students' career decisions. In many societies, vocational education is perceived as inferior to academic professions, contributing to stigma, low enrolment, and reduced student confidence in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Misconceptions about income potential, global relevance of skilled trades, and employment opportunities further reinforce negative parental attitudes. Conversely, studies show that when parents are informed about the economic and developmental benefits of vocational careers, they become strong advocates for their children's participation. The paper argues that school counsellors play a central role in reshaping parental perceptions and supporting evidence-based career guidance. A gap remains in the literature regarding structured parent-focused interventions and culturally responsive counselling models that can realign parental beliefs with contemporary labour market realities. The paper concludes with suggestions for policy, school counselling practice, and parental engagement strategies aimed at improving students' willingness to pursue vocational careers.

Keywords: parental influence, parental perception, pursue, vocational careers, willingness.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, vocational education has gained prominence as a vital component of national development strategies, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Vocational careers provide practical skills and hands-on experience that can lead to self-employment, reduce unemployment, and contribute to economic growth (Okoye & Okwelle, 2017). Despite these benefits, many Nigerian students remain reluctant to pursue vocational careers, largely due to prevailing societal and familial perceptions. Parental perception plays a critical role in shaping the career choices of young people. In the Nigerian context, many parents often view vocational education as a secondary or inferior option compared to university education, which is typically

associated with higher social status and better economic prospects (Aina & Adebayo, 2016). This perception can significantly influence students' willingness to consider vocational pathways, especially in urban centers like Port Harcourt, where exposure to white-collar job aspirations is widespread. Port Harcourt Metropolis, being a major economic hub in Nigeria's South-South region, provides a unique context for studying the dynamics between parental attitudes and youth career aspirations. The city hosts a diverse population with varying socio-economic backgrounds, which may further shape parental influence in nuanced ways. Research suggests that students' attitudes towards vocational education are often a reflection of their parents' beliefs, values, and expectations (Okoro & Atakpa, 2017; Nnaji & Okwudishu, 2020).

Given the high youth unemployment rate and the increasing demand for skilled labor in Nigeria, it becomes crucial to understand the underlying factors that affect students' willingness to pursue vocational careers. This study aims to examine how parental perceptions influence students' career decisions within the Port Harcourt Metropolis. It seeks to uncover whether parental support or discouragement significantly correlates with students' choices and what implications this holds for vocational education policy and advocacy. In the face of rising youth unemployment and skill mismatches in the labor market, vocational and technical education has emerged as a key driver for sustainable development in Nigeria. According to the National Policy on Education, vocational education is designed to equip individuals with practical skills, competencies, and entrepreneurial capabilities necessary for self-reliance and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2016). However, despite government efforts and policy advocacy, vocational education remains grossly under-enrolled and undervalued, especially among secondary school students in urban areas such as Port Harcourt Metropolis. A growing body of research highlights the critical influence of parents on students' career decisions (Okwelle & Allagoa, 2018). In many Nigerian households, parents serve as primary career advisors and often exert considerable influence over their children's educational and occupational pathways. This influence is particularly strong in collectivist societies where family expectations and social status play a dominant role in life choices (Aina & Adebayo, 2016). As such, students' attitudes towards vocational education are frequently a reflection of parental beliefs, whether supportive or dismissive.

In the context of Port Harcourt—a city marked by industrial activity, urbanization, and exposure to elite professions—parental aspirations tend to lean towards white-collar careers that are perceived to offer greater prestige and financial stability. This cultural orientation often leads to a devaluation of vocational careers, which are mistakenly viewed as careers for the academically weak or socio-economically disadvantaged (Okoro & Atakpa, 2017). Consequently, students may internalize these perceptions, leading to a lack of interest or outright rejection of vocational career paths. Moreover, the media and societal narratives further reinforce negative stereotypes surrounding vocational training, portraying it as less lucrative and less desirable compared to university education (Nnaji & Okwudishu, 2020). This phenomenon creates a feedback loop in which vocational education is not only underutilized but also under-supported by key influencers in students' lives, especially their parent

Position Statement

Parental perception plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic and career trajectories of young people. In many societies, especially within African cultural settings such as Nigeria, parents are often regarded as the primary decision-makers in their children's lives. This

influence is particularly significant when it comes to career choices, where parental approval or disapproval can either encourage or discourage a child from pursuing specific fields, including vocational careers. This position paper argues that parental perception plays a decisive role in shaping students' willingness to pursue vocational careers, and that negative or misinformed parental attitudes constitute a major barrier to the growth of vocational and technical education. Evidence from contemporary literature shows that many parents, especially in developing countries still perceive vocational careers as inferior, low-status, or suitable only for academically weak students. These perceptions significantly discourage students from exploring vocational pathways, even when such careers align with their interests, talents, and labour market realities. The paper takes the position that repositioning vocational education requires deliberate efforts to address parental mindsets, increase awareness of its economic value, and promote the dignity of skilled labour. Schools, counsellors, and policymakers must collaborate to educate parents on the relevance of vocational careers in national development, job creation, and global competitiveness. Therefore, this study maintains that positive parental perception is a critical determinant of students' vocational career choices, and that strengthening parental understanding and support is essential for expanding vocational enrolment and producing a skilled workforce.

METHODOLOGY

This position paper adopted a qualitative synthesis of literature (qualitative systematic review) to examine how parental perceptions influence students' willingness to pursue vocational careers. A literature synthesis design was used to gather, evaluate, and integrate research findings from multiple scholarly sources. This approach is suitable for identifying patterns, themes, and contradictions across studies and for developing an evidence-based position on the phenomenon under investigation. Relevant publications were sourced from: Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, SpringerLink, ResearchGate, Academic policy documents and governmental reports. Keywords used for the search included: "parental perception," "vocational careers," "career choice," "TVET," "parental influence," "students' willingness," "education pathways," and "career development." Inclusion criteria for the paper included: Research focusing on secondary school or tertiary-bound students, Studies examining parental influence, perception, or attitude toward vocational careers, Peer-reviewed articles, theses, and credible reports. Studies outside educational contexts, Articles lacking methodological clarity and non-academic commentaries or opinion pieces were excluded in the syntheses. Procedure for Synthesis includes, Identification: Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, Eligible full-text articles were downloaded and reviewed, Findings were organised into thematic categories describing patterns of parental influence. Integration: Themes were synthesized to form a consolidated understanding of how parental perceptions shape students' willingness toward vocational careers. Ethically, the paper used only publicly available literature, therefore no ethical risk were present, all sources were duly acknowledged.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE (THEMATIC REVIEW)

Parental Perception as a Determinant of Career Choice

Multiple studies indicate that parental values, beliefs, and expectations strongly shape children's career aspirations. Parents who perceive vocational careers as inferior, manual, or low-paying discourage their children from choosing them—even when the child possesses talent or interest in hands-on skills. Studies consistently show that students with parents who value vocational paths are **more willing to pursue vocational and technical careers.**

Parental perception plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' career decisions, especially in relation to vocational and technical education. Research across different cultural contexts consistently suggests that both positive encouragement and negative judgments from parents deeply affect students' willingness to pursue vocational pathways.

One major theme centers on **parental support and modeling**. Studies indicate that when parents provide career-specific support through verbal encouragement, emotional backing, hands-on modeling, and instrumental help, students tend to form stronger vocational interests and clearer career plans (Zhang et al., 2022; see Q. Zhang, 2024). For instance, Chinese vocational college students who receive higher levels of such support report heightened career exploration, adaptability, and a stronger sense of meaning in life (career-specific parental support) (MDPI, 2024). This aligns with Social Cognitive Career Theory, which posits that contextual variables like parental support influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., as cited in the literature). However, parental perception is not uniformly positive: **criticism and negative evaluation** by parents can undermine career confidence. Research has documented that parental criticism, excessive control, or unrealistic expectations generate anxiety, fear of failure, and reduced autonomy among youth (Meszaros et al., as cited in an MDPI study; see also Filippello et al., 2015). In such cases, adolescents may internalize negative messages, limiting their willingness to explore unconventional or less prestigious vocational careers (Teevan & McGhee, 1972; as discussed in parental criticism research) (MDPI, 2024).

Societal Prestige and Cultural Bias Against Vocational Careers

In many African and Asian contexts, vocational education is culturally perceived as a “last resort” or an inferior alternative to prestigious academic careers such as medicine, law, or engineering. Parents often internalize these societal beliefs and transmit them to their children during career socialization, shaping their educational aspirations. Several studies indicate that this negative cultural framing contributes to widespread **stigma around vocational schools, shame associated with manual or technical work**, and persistently **low enrolment in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) programmes** despite increasing labour-market demand for skilled workers (Boateng, Ackon, & Nyarko, 2024; Umar et al., 2023). Research from Ghana confirms that many parents view vocational pathways as appropriate only for academically weak students, which discourages learners from considering technical fields even when they possess relevant interests or abilities (Boateng et al., 2024). Similar findings in Nigeria show that parental perception, shaped by cultural prestige and social expectations, remains a major determinant of whether students willingly pursue vocational careers (Umar et al., 2023). This cultural devaluation of vocational education reinforces longstanding stereotypes and continues to hinder the development of a skilled workforce across the region.

Lack of Awareness and Misconceptions About Vocational Opportunities

Parents often lack accurate knowledge of, Income potential in vocational fields, Global demand for skilled trades, Self-employment opportunities, Technical innovation and industry growth. Because they assume vocational careers lead to low-income jobs, they dissuade their children from exploring them. Conversely, where parents understand the economic benefits of vocational skills, they actively encourage their children's participation. A significant barrier to students' willingness to pursue vocational careers is **parents' lack of awareness and misconceptions** about the opportunities these careers provide. Many parents are uninformed

about the **income potential in vocational fields**, the **global demand for skilled trades, self-employment prospects**, and the rapid **technical innovation and industry growth** occurring in vocational sectors (Boateng, Ackon, & Nyarko, 2024; Umar et al., 2023). Consequently, they often assume that vocational careers lead to low-income, low-prestige jobs, and as a result, discourage their children from exploring these pathways. This misconception is particularly prevalent in contexts where academic education is culturally valorized over practical or technical skills (Adams, Intsiful, & Zagoon-Sayeed, 2024). Conversely, studies show that when parents have accurate knowledge of the economic benefits and employment opportunities associated with vocational careers, they are more likely to actively encourage their children to participate in vocational and technical education programs (Zhang, 2024). These findings underscore the critical need for parental education and awareness programs that highlight the economic and professional potential of vocational careers, which can increase students' confidence and willingness to pursue technical and skilled occupations.

Socioeconomic Background and Educational Level of Parents

Several studies report that, Parents with higher educational backgrounds tend to encourage professional careers, Lower-income or less-educated parents may support vocational options, but often from a place of financial necessity rather than genuine career guidance while Middle-class families often resist vocational careers due to aspirations for social mobility through white-collar jobs. These variations influence students' willingness to pursue vocational education. In Nigeria, parental educational status and socioeconomic conditions strongly influence whether children are steered toward or away from vocational studies, because many parents still consider academic careers (medicine, law, engineering) more prestigious (Umar, Abubakar, Abdulkadir, Kobi, & Moses, 2023). Similarly, in Ghana, Boateng, Ackon, and Nyarko (2024) found that negative parental perceptions about TVET (technical and vocational education and training), such as associating it with low prestige or low academic ability are major discouraging factors, even though many students nevertheless enroll due to personal interest or the desire for practical skills. Cultural and societal perceptions contribute heavily to how parents view vocational careers. In many contexts, vocational education is stigmatized as "second best," which is reinforced by parents who internalize and transmit these societal biases (Boateng et al., 2024; also reported in Nigerian parental-learner factors study) (International Journal of Research & Innovation in Social Science, 2025). This societal stigma can limit students' willingness to choose vocational paths, as parents may fear that their children will be seen as less academically capable.

Influence of Parental Expectations and Career Aspirations

Parents commonly impose career expectations on children. High expectations for high-status careers discourage vocational pursuit. Students fearing parental disappointment, conflict, or rejection choose academic careers, even when misaligned with their strengths. Parental expectations strongly shape students' educational and career aspirations, and these expectations often operate as a powerful force steering children toward or away from vocational career paths. Research has shown that parents frequently impose career preferences on their children based on their own aspirations, social class, or perceived prestige of certain occupations (Umar et al., 2023). High expectations for white-collar careers, such as medicine, engineering, or law, tend to discourage students from considering vocational or technical options, even when these align better with their interests or abilities (Adams, Intsiful, & Zagoon-Sayeed, 2024). As a result, many adolescents experience conflict, guilt, or fear of

disappointing their parents if they pursue non-traditional or hands-on careers. This pressure creates a psychological burden that often leads students to conform to parental expectations, prioritizing parental approval over personal strengths or career identity development (Boateng, Ackon, & Nyarko, 2024). Studies further indicate that when parental expectations are rigid or unrealistic, students' willingness to explore vocational pathways declines significantly, as they associate these careers with lower social mobility and reduced family approval (Umar et al., 2023). Therefore, parental expectations function as a critical determinant of students' vocational career intentions.

Role of School Counsellors in Mediating Parental Influence

The literature also emphasizes the crucial role of school counsellors in reshaping parental attitudes and supporting students through informed career decision-making. School counsellors serve as intermediaries who help correct misconceptions, provide accurate information about vocational education, and advocate for students' strengths and interests (Liang, Zeng, & Zhang, 2023). Evidence suggests that counsellor-led activities, such as career talks, workshops, open days, and counselling conferences are effective in educating parents about the economic relevance, employability prospects, and societal value of vocational careers (Adams et al., 2024). Through such engagements, parents become more aware of labour market demands and begin to appreciate the legitimacy of vocational pathways. This shift in perception enhances parental support and increases students' confidence in choosing vocational careers (Boateng et al., 2024). Furthermore, counsellors play a key role in strengthening students' career self-efficacy by validating their interests, reducing anxiety linked to parental pressure, and promoting autonomy in career choice (Zhang, 2024). As mediators, counsellors thus contribute significantly to reducing vocational stigma and fostering more supportive home environments for students exploring technical and vocational routes.

Other important dimensions involves **parent-child congruence and self-efficacy**. Research from Europe shows that adolescents' perception of parental support, their self-efficacy, and alignment (or congruence) between their own career interests and their parents' expectations profoundly influence their career planning. For instance, in a study of middle school students, higher perceived congruence with parents' career expectations corresponded with greater self-efficacy and more certainty in career decisions (Springer, 2024). When parents are perceived to be supportive but not overly controlling, students show better adaptability and motivation in career exploration (Liang et al., 2023, as cited).

In addition, **parental attitudes toward teaching professions** provide insight into how perception works more broadly. In a study on parental encouragement of students to pursue teaching careers, it was found that parents with a teaching background or positive experiences in education were more likely to encourage their children into teaching, which highlights how prior parental career experience influences support (MDPI, 2023).

Finally, reference-group dynamics also matter. In Germany, for example, parents, friends, and classmates serve as reference groups whose expectations influence vocational trajectories. Normative expectations from parents and peers correlate with higher VET (vocational education training) completion rates. Moreover, social comparison (e.g., comparing oneself to more ambitious classmates) can affect students' choices and persistence in training (SpringerOpen, 2024)

Factors Shaping Parental Perception

From the reviewed literature it can be seen that Parental perception of vocational careers is shaped by various interrelated factors that influence their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations regarding their children's career paths (Eze & Okorafor, 2012). In Nigeria these factors are deeply rooted in cultural, economic, educational, and societal influences (Nwogu & Nwanoruo, 2011, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Understanding these factors is crucial in addressing misconceptions and encouraging a more positive outlook toward vocational careers (UNESCO, 2018). Addressing misconceptions and improving awareness through policy interventions, media representation, and community engagement can help shift these perceptions (Oviawe, Uwameiye, & Uddin, 2017). By demonstrating the value and potential of vocational careers, parents can be encouraged to support their children's diverse career aspirations (World Bank, 2019).

Effects on Students' Willingness to Pursue Vocational Careers

Improving parental perception of vocational careers requires a combination of awareness, education, policy changes, and industry partnerships (Eze & Okorafor, 2012). By addressing misconceptions, showcasing success stories, and ensuring vocational education is high-quality and rewarding, parents will be more open to encouraging their children to pursue these careers (Oviawe, Uwameiye, & Uddin, 2017). Changing this perception will ultimately create a more skilled, self-reliant, and economically vibrant society (UNESCO, 2018). Parental disapproval of vocational careers leads to reluctance among students to enroll in technical institutions, thereby limiting the development of essential skills needed for national growth (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Parental perceptions significantly influence students' willingness to pursue vocational careers. Here are key arguments supported by scholarly research:

Students' perceptions of their parents' expectations play a crucial role in their career decisions. Research indicates that perceived parental expectations significantly affect career choices, often more than socioeconomic status. For instance, Whiston (2004) found that students' perceptions of parental expectations had a stronger influence on their occupational expectations, which in turn affected their career choices.

Parental attitudes towards certain professions can be influenced by cultural beliefs and perceptions of social status. These attitudes, in turn, affect their children's career aspirations. Studies have shown that parents' work experiences and hardships can influence children's achievement orientations and work values, thereby affecting their occupational destinations. For example, Mortimer et al. (2014) found that parental economic hardship impacted children's achievement orientations, which influenced their career choices.

Parents serve as primary sources of career-related support and guidance. Their involvement can significantly impact their children's career exploration and decision-making processes. Boerchi and Tagliabue (2018) developed the Support, Interference, and Lack of Engagement (SIL) Scale to assess students' perceptions of parental career-related behaviors. Their study highlighted the importance of parental support in students' career development. Parental influence extends to the psychological aspects of career choice, affecting factors such as self-esteem and motivation. Ladd (2000) examined the relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on their college and career choices and their emotional independence

from parents. The study found that perceived parental influence was inversely related to emotional independence, suggesting that strong parental influence can impact students' career decisions.

Parental support can facilitate access to vocational training opportunities. When parents value vocational careers, they are more likely to encourage their children to pursue relevant training programs. Conversely, a lack of parental support can hinder students' willingness to engage in vocational training. For instance, a study found that parents' influence and guidance in career choice and vocational development provide students with support and encouragement to explore various options, including vocational careers.

Parents play a crucial role in their children's educational decisions, including the choice between academic and vocational tracks. Their perceptions can influence whether students opt for vocational education or more traditional academic routes. This influence underscores the need for parents to be well-informed about the benefits and opportunities associated with vocational careers.

Understanding the impact of parental perceptions on students' career choices highlights the importance of targeted policy initiatives and educational outreach programs. Efforts to educate parents about the value and potential of vocational careers can lead to more supportive environments for students considering these paths, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and diverse workforce.

In summary, parental perceptions play a pivotal role in shaping students' willingness to pursue vocational careers, affecting their aspirations, access to information, self-confidence, and educational choices. Addressing these perceptions through informed dialogue and resources is essential for fostering a supportive environment for vocational education.

IDENTIFIED GAP IN LITERATURE

Despite substantial research on parental influence on career choice, the synthesis identified the following gaps:

1. Limited empirical studies focusing specifically on how parental perception shapes students' willingness for vocational careers. Most existing studies examine general career choice, not willingness or readiness for vocational pathways.
2. Lack of African-based studies using current labour market demands to examine parental misconceptions. The mismatch between parental beliefs and modern economic realities remains under-researched.
3. Few studies investigate intervention strategies (e.g., counselling programs) that can reshape parental perception. Most studies describe the problem but do not test solutions.
4. Limited exploration of the role of school counsellors in reducing vocational stigma among parents.
5. Insufficient research on how digital-era vocational careers (coding, creative digital arts, renewable energy technology, etc.) are perceived by parents.

These gaps justify further research on targeted parental reorientation strategies that can enhance students' willingness to pursue vocational careers.

IMPLICATIONS

Students often align their career aspirations with their parents' expectations. When parents hold favorable views toward vocational education, their children are more likely to consider and pursue these paths. Conversely, if parents perceive vocational careers as less prestigious or desirable, students may be discouraged from exploring these options, even if they align with their interests and skills. Parental awareness of vocational education opportunities directly affects students' access to these pathways. A study revealed that a significant number of parents are unaware of the range of careers accessible through apprenticeships, limiting their ability to guide their children effectively. For example, 87% of surveyed parents did not realize that apprenticeships could lead to careers as paralegals, veterinary nurses, or aerospace engineers. Parental beliefs and attitudes can shape a student's self-efficacy and motivation toward certain career paths. Positive reinforcement and support from parents regarding vocational careers can enhance a student's confidence and interest in these fields. Conversely, lack of parental engagement or negative perceptions can diminish a student's motivation to pursue vocational training.

CONCLUSION

The synthesis of literature clearly demonstrates that parental perception is a powerful determinant of students' willingness to pursue vocational careers. Across diverse cultural contexts, negative attitudes and misconceptions about vocational education significantly hinder students' interest and confidence in pursuing technical and skilled trades. Parents often encourage academic pathways due to cultural expectations, prestige considerations, and limited awareness of the economic value of vocational careers. However, evidence also shows that when parents possess accurate information about labour market demands, income prospects, and the innovative potential of vocational fields, they are more likely to support their children's exploration of TVET programmes. This indicates that parental perception is not fixed but shaped by knowledge, exposure, and societal messaging.

The review further highlights the pivotal role of school counsellors in mediating parental influence through career education, workshops, counselling conferences, and community engagement. Despite these insights, limited research has focused on structured, culturally sensitive parent-guidance interventions that directly address misconceptions and promote informed decision-making. Addressing this gap is essential for improving vocational career uptake and ensuring that students make choices aligned with their strengths, interests, and emerging global employment opportunities.

Suggestions

Based on the reviewed literature and the identified gaps, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. **Parental Awareness Campaigns should be strengthen by the** Ministries of Education, schools, and TVET boards should organize regular sensitization programmes highlighting the relevance, income potential, and global demand for skilled trades, Media campaigns should counter the stigma associated with vocational careers.
2. **Integrate Parent-Focused Career Guidance in Schools** , School counsellors should design workshops, open days, and counselling conferences specifically for parents to correct misconceptions about vocational pathways. Counselling units should collaborate with industry experts to showcase real-world vocational success stories.

3. **Review National Education Policies to Elevate the Status of TVET**, Government should prioritize TVET in national development plans, increase funding, and promote vocational education as equal in value to academic pathways. Policies should mandate career education sessions for parents and students at all levels.
4. **Develop Culturally Responsive Counselling Models**, Counsellors should adapt career guidance approaches that consider cultural beliefs, parental expectations, and societal norms that shape career choices. More research should explore counselling strategies that effectively reshape deeply rooted socio-cultural biases.
5. **Enhance School-Industry Partnerships**, Schools should collaborate with industries to provide internships, exhibitions, and career fairs that showcase vocational career opportunities. Parents should be invited to such events to witness the professional and financial viability of vocational careers.
6. **Expand Research on Parent-Child Career Dynamics**, Researchers should explore evidence-based interventions tailored to changing parental perceptions in African and Asian contexts. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how parental attitudes evolve over time with increased information.

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