



Research Article

Do Parents Push the Button? Parental Influence on IT Career Choices of Sri Lankan University Students

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Abstract

Parental influence is a powerful force shaping career choices of young individuals, especially in emerging fields with limited understanding. This influence is particularly crucial for careers in newly emerged industries like Information Technology (IT) and Information Systems (IS). In contexts where parental influence is traditionally strong, understanding how parents shape their children's interest in these fields becomes even more important. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Sri Lankan's parents influence their children's career choices in the IS field. We employed a quantitative approach, surveying 247 IS students at a Sri Lankan state university using a self-administered questionnaire that measured six key parental influence attributes. The findings suggest that three attributes: 'perceived parental career concerns on welfare and prestige', 'perceived transmission of parental views and values regarding career', and 'perceived parental encouragement to self-direction in career choice', have a significant impact on students' career selection in IS sector. The study further assessed the influence of parents' demographic variables on students' career choices. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers, emphasizing the need for tailored guidance to enhance students' understanding of IS career opportunities.

Keywords: Career choices, information systems, parental influence

Introduction

Information Systems and technology have shown exponential growth in the last decade and they cover a whole range of digital career paths that diverge into interesting and profitable specializations (Vaish, 2017). An information system, declared simply, is a collection of

infrastructure, software, hardware, and qualified employees arranged to support coordination, planning, control, and decision-making (Wickramasingh, Cooray, Somathilake, & Dissanayake, 2018). Information technology has resulted in the development of one of the world's largest industries (Council, 1988). Employment

in services involving computer systems has increased significantly throughout the last 20 years. Businesses started to invest in information systems between 1990 and 2001. Then employment in information systems and technology-related services increased by 232,300 jobs or 18 percent (Csorny, 2013). According to Csorny (2013), there will be a significant increase in employment and output in this industry over the next ten years, with an average annual growth rate of 6.1 percent between 2010 and 2020.

For a career in the IS industry, these employers should possess expertise in packaged software, hardware principles, operating systems, leadership, entrepreneurial and risk-taking qualities, a high cumulative college GPA, and job experience. Business Information System undergraduates can gain these skills from universities. Approximately 22,000 graduates are created annually by the 15 state institutions and three campuses that currently include Sri Lanka's higher education sector (National Education Commission of Sri Lanka, 2009). At present, there are 19 Information system and technology-related degree programs attached to the above universities and from that degree program, there are two degree programs in the Selected University of Sri Lanka named Bachelor of Information and Communication Technology (General) attached to the Faculty of Technology and Bachelor of Science (Special) in Information Systems attached to the Faculty of Business Management (National Education Commission of Sri Lanka, 2009).

Information technology (IS) specialists conduct research, schedule, create, test, develop, advise, and enhance hardware, software, and associated concepts for information technology systems and applications. Employment in this business increased by one-third between 2005 and 2015, and growth of roughly 10% is expected after that. A person's entire future is impacted by the decision they make regarding their employment however, many information and communication technology graduates from higher education are unaware of the various career paths and opportunities in the field (Greyling, Calitz, & Cullen, 2011). Therefore, without proper guidance, these children may end up not fulfilling their goals in life. Career choice influences a variety of aspects, including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role models, social support, and resources available (Kerka, 2000).

Parents always want their children to have a successful and satisfying career with promising growth. Parents play an important role in the career aspirations and career selection of young adults and adolescents (Taylor, Harris, & Taylor, 2004). Sinkombo (2016) States that numerous factors influence the career choices of students, and researchers state that parents are the first and best people to know their children and children also accord their parents and know that they are the best people to depend on as they offer them positive support, encouragements through the use of those positive experiences once passed through personally. Despite the acknowledged significance of parental influence, particularly in the unique context of Sri Lanka, the specific impact of parents on selecting a career in Information Systems and Technology remains largely uncharted. This study endeavors to bridge this knowledge gap by delving into the nuanced realm of parental influences on selecting a career in Information Systems among undergraduates. By unpacking the intricacies of parent-child dynamics in the realm of career decision-making, this research aims to shed light on a critical yet understudied aspect of the career trajectory of Information and Communication Technology students in Sri Lanka.

Objectives

- Identify the specific parental attributes that influence undergraduates' decisions to pursue a career in Information Systems.
- Examine the relative strength of these parental attributes in influencing undergraduates' career choices in IS.

Literature Review

A person's career is defined as the steps and progress they take over time particularly those related to their professional life. Furthermore, it clarifies that a career is more than simply a single position; it is frequently made up of the jobs held, titles obtained, and work completed over an extended period of time. In the past, there was limited available information on career guidance for looking to search for job details. But now, career guidance is known as vocational guidance (Whiteley, 1984) with technology development increased. Some university students choose their careers with their prestigious career-related programs and from resources available in other friends' families (Sinkombo, 2016).

Several factors influence the decision to select and persist with a career or choose different jobs, organizations, or careers. These can be internal

or external (Lane, 2018). Similar to the way a profession's choice is influenced by a multitude of factors. Career decisions are impacted by a variety of elements, including childhood fantasies, culture, gender, interests, life roles, personality type, previous work experience, skills, abilities, and talents. Individuals' different backgrounds, learning experiences, educational conditions, and individual cognitive learning are some other factors that influence an individual's career decision-making behavior (Ghuangpeng, 2011).

Most of the research considered parents as the most important influence on students' career decisions, as compared to other people like teachers, lecturers, peers, and others (Ferry, 2006). Most parents have been active in the decision-making process for their children and they become their children's decision makers (Sullivan, Gillam, & Monagle, 2015). Parents are really worried about their children growing up and always hope their children create their future with a successful career. Some social factors play into the process of parents' influence on children's career choices.

Egbo (2017) investigated secondary school students in Enugu state and they identified parents' socioeconomic status and occupational background had a significant influence on students' career. After reviewing relevant literature, researcher identified some other factors that influence students' career choices as family background, level of parental education, school, peers, personality, geographic location, and parenting style (Csorny, 2013; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Olaosebikan & Olusakin, 2014). According to Eccles (1993), there is a significant impact of parental education variables on their own beliefs and behaviors and consequently lead to positive career outcome for adolescents indirectly. Kolawole et al (2020) researched to find out what influences parents' employment decisions have on Nigerian students. The study's findings demonstrated a favorable and significant association between teenage students' profession choice and their parents' occupation and level of education. Parental support has the greatest influence on a person's career choice, according to Wang and Liu (2010), who also mentioned several important factors, including gender, parental income, educational attainment, parental concerns about welfare and prestige, parental barriers to career choice, and parents' work experience.

'Perceived parental support' is a critical aspect influencing career choices among

undergraduates. Young people who perceive strong support from their parents are likely to exhibit a higher level of confidence in their chosen career path (Super, 1980). Wang et al (2023) mentioned that positive parental support has been associated with a higher level of career self-efficacy and confidence, contributing to more informed and satisfying career decisions. It should be further noticed that parental influences can be either supportive or hindering adolescents' career behavior (Lent et al., 1998). The absence of parental support in children's career selection process can be identified as a hindering factor that forms a parental barrier on the subject. On the contrary, an increase in parental support may decrease perceptions of barriers to children's career selection process (Ali et al., 2005). Moreover, adolescents who believe their parents and family are supportive and have high expectations of their career success tend to have greater career accomplishments than others (Whiston and Keller, 2004). Rush (2002) also asserts that a supportive family environment leads adolescents to have successful career aspirations. The literature has discussed not only the parental supports and barriers but also other parental influences such as parental involvement, parental encouragement, parental expectation, parental role modeling, and parenting practice.

Further, parental involvement also plays a pivotal role in the career decisions of children. Hirschi (2011) suggested that the degree of parental involvement positively correlated with career searching and overall career development. Parental involvement includes the acts of parent-child discussions, monitoring educational support strategies (McNeal, 1999), giving career advice and acting as vocational advisors, and providing social capital, such as passing on the knowledge of opportunities and career potentials to their children (Sorensen, 2007). Parental involvement further can be further explained through indicators such as role modeling, expectations, and encouragement (Ferry et al., 2000). Their study further emphasizes the importance of parents' verbal suggestions and domain-specific encouragement in developing their children's both academic and career development. Parental encouragement in terms of giving directions and communicating continuously is a vital factor in the career development of adolescents (Young et al., 1991). Perceived parental encouragement for independence in career choices is crucial for fostering autonomy and self-direction in their

children. They promote independence and empower their children to explore diverse career options, fostering a sense of personal responsibility and decision-making regarding their career choices.

A study investigated the impact of ‘perceived parental barriers’ on career choices which are potential constraints faced by undergraduates. Here, traditional expectations of limiting career options are considered as barriers and it effected to career guidance and decision-making (Wang & Liu, 2010). Further, parental expectations are integral components of perceived concerns about welfare and prestige and they significantly impact children’s career choices. Children often internalize their parents’ values and parental career concerns can influence the perceived attractiveness of specific professions (Wang & Liu, 2010). Parents aspiring for prestigious or financially stable careers may inadvertently guide their children toward similar paths. These

concerns shape the socio-economic and status-related factors that influence career decisions.

The transfer of parents’ values and career perspectives plays a central role in shaping the values and attitudes of individuals toward work and career choices. Children often internalize their parents’ beliefs, work ethics, and perspectives on success (Brown & Lent, 2004). This transfer influences career preferences, work-related values, and the alignment of individual aspirations with familial expectations.

Methodology And Instrumentation

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework for the study includes six parental influence attributes adopted from Wong and Liu (2010) and presented in Figure 1.

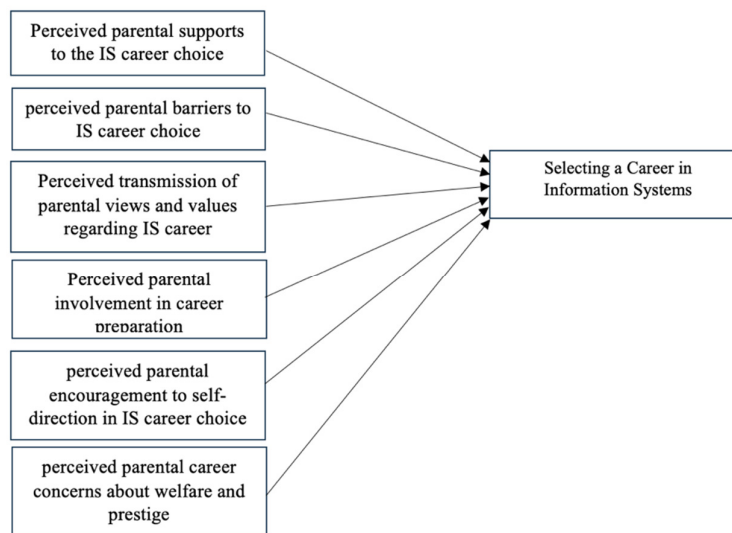


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Design

The participants of this study were Information Systems undergraduates of the selected University of Sri Lanka, which offers a Bachelor’s Degree in Information Systems. The quantitative method served as the methodology for assisting the researchers in analyzing the solution to the research problem. The primary surveys were conducted to obtain the needed data from the respondents collected physically and the first part of the questionnaire included eight demographic variables of the students: gender, year of study, parents’ monthly income, father’s education, mother’s education, and parents’

Information systems work experience. The second part of the questionnaire was created using previous scholars (Wong & Liu, 2010) to measure ‘Perceived parental support’ (PP Support), ‘perceived parental barriers to IS career choice’ (PP Barriers), ‘Perceived transmission of parental views and values regarding IS career’ (PP Transmission and Values), ‘Perceived parental involvement in career preparation’ (PP Involvement), ‘perceived parental encouragement to self-direction in IS career choice’ (PP Encouragement), and ‘perceived parental career concerns about welfare and prestige’ (PP Career concerns). A

five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree is used for the measurement. The primary data were analyzed using descriptive reliability analysis, and multiple regression using SPSS software.

Results and Discussion

Demographic profile of respondents

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered among undergraduates out of which 247 were returned resulting in the 82.33% response rate which is considered highly adequate.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N= 247)	Respondents (%)
Gender	Male	91	36.8
	Female	156	63.2
Year of Study	1 st Year	71	28.7
	2 nd Year	59	23.9
	3 rd Year	52	21.1
	4 th Year	65	26.3
Parents' monthly income	Below Rs. 50,000	160	64.8
	Rs. 50,000 - Rs. 100,000	72	29.1
	Rs. 100,000 - Rs. 500,000	15	6.1
	Above Rs. 500,000	0	0
Father's Education	GCE O/L	159	64.4
	GEC A/L	67	27.1
	Degree or above	21	8.5
Mother's Education	GCE O/L	131	53.0
	GEC A/L	83	33.6
	Degree or above	33	13.4
Parents work in IS Industry?	Yes	6	2.4
	No	241	97.6

Source: Primary Data, 2023

As a result of Table 1, out of 247 participants in this study, 36.8% of them are males and 63.2% of them are female respondents. And same as 28.7% from the first year, 23.9% from the second year, 21.1% from the third year, and 26.3% from the fourth year. The majority of the participants of this study had a monthly income between fifty thousand rupees and one hundred thousand rupees. Data also indicated that most

respondents' fathers' education level (64.4%) is GCE O/L and mothers' education is also GCE A/L (53.0%). Only 6 parents out of 247 students details have work experience in Information Systems and the other 97.6% of parents are not work-related with Information Systems.

Reliability Statistics and Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Reliability Statistics and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Value	N of Items	Mean (N=247)	Std. Deviation (N=247)
Selecting a Career in Information Systems	0.934	5	3.969	4.491
PP support	0.901	7	3.891	6.214
PP involvement	0.886	4	4.019	3.749
PP Encouragement	0.921	3	4.267	2.787
PP barriers	0.736	3	3.642	2.860

PP Career Concerns	0.908	3	4.198	2.835
PP Transmission and Values	0.765	2	3.840	1.954
Source (s): Field Data, 2023				

Descriptive statistics were used to explain the prevailing situation of the variables. According to the mean values for the Career choice, PP support, PP involvement, PP encouragement, PP barriers, PP career concerns, and PP Transmission and Values were 3.969, 3.891, 4.019, 4.267, 3.642, 4.198 and 3.840 respectively and they were in acceptable agreement level of the respondents. Here, the reliability analysis demonstrates that all the variables ranged from 0.736 to 0.934, indicating that the variables are considered highly reliable.

Selecting a career in Information Systems based on the parents’ work in the same field

Selecting a career was further analyzed through different parametric tests to obtain comprehensive data. An Independent sample T-

test was used to illustrate how the mean selecting career of respondents varies based on their parents’ work field. According to table 3, the sig value of levene’s test was 0.000. It indicated that the variance in the selection career between students whose parents work in the IS industry and those who not work in the IS industry was equal. According to the t-test, the mean value of career selection in the IS industry based on their parents working in the same industry is 2.133 and it is less than the mean value of parents not working in the same industry. The gap was also statistically significant as the sig value of the test was 0.000. It indicates that there was a statistically significant mean difference between the influence of parents working in the same industry and parents working in another industry on students’ career choices.

Table 3: Independent sample T-test for parents’ work industry

Levene’s Test	Sig.	0.000	T- Test sig Value		0.000
	Parents work in IS Industry	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Selecting a Career in IS	Yes	6	2.133	1.773	0.724
	No	241	4.015	0.821	0.052

Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Career Choice	PP Support	PP Involvement	PP Encouragement	PP barriers	PP Career Concerns	PP Transmission and Values
Career Choice	1						
PP Support	0.700**	1					
PP Involvement	0.742**	0.779**	1				
PP Encouragement	0.762**	0.691**	0.819**	1			
PP barriers	0.567**	0.548**	0.549**	0.536**	1		
PP Career Concerns	0.763**	0.719**	0.754**	0.770**	0.543**	1	
PP Transmission and Values	0.754**	0.713**	0.684**	0.673**	0.618**	0.687**	1

N=247, *P<0.05, **P<0.01

Table 4 represents correlation coefficients between various factors related to career choice, PP support, PP involvement, PP encouragement, PP barriers, PP Career Concern, and PP

Transmission and Values. The values in the table represent the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the respective pairs of variables.

There is a strong positive correlation between career choice and PP support (0.700), PP involvement (0.742), PP encouragement (0.762), PP Career Concern (0.763), and PP transmission and Values (0.754). There is a moderate positive correlation between career choice and PP Barriers (0.567). Therefore, the positive

correlations imply that higher levels of support, involvement, encouragement, and transmission of values are associated with a more decisive career choice, whereas barriers are positively correlated but to a lesser extent.

Regression Analysis

Table 5: Regression Analysis

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.251	0.158		1.589	0.113
	PP support	0.047	0.061	0.047	0.771	0.441
	PP involvement	0.097	0.067	0.101	1.440	0.151
	PP Encouragement	0.228	0.063	0.235	3.587	0.001
	PP barriers	0.041	0.042	0.043	0.968	0.334
	PP Career Concerns	0.230	0.057	0.242	4.013	0.001
	PP Transmission and Values	0.275	0.051	0.300	5.370	0.001
	R	0.850				
	R²	0.723				
	Adjusted R²	0.716				
	Std. Error of the Estimate	0.479				

The regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between various factors related to parental influence and their impact on career choices. The model includes several independent variables, each representing a different aspect of PP support and involvement in career decisions.

'Perceived parental supports to the IS career choice' The coefficient for perceived parental support is 0.047, with a standard error of 0.061. However, this coefficient is not statistically significant ($p=0.441$), suggesting that there is no substantial evidence to conclude that perceived parental support has a significant impact on career choices.

'Perceived parental involvement in career preparation' The coefficient for the involvement of parents in career is 0.097, with a standard error of 0.067. The p-value is 0.151, indicating this variable is also not statistically significant. Therefore, the data do not provide enough

evidence to suggest a significant impact of perceived parental involvement on career choices.

'Perceived parental encouragement to self-direction in IS career choice' The coefficient for Perceived encouragement from parents for independence in career choice is 0.228, with a standard error of 0.063. This variable is statistically significant ($p=0.001$), suggesting that higher perceived parental encouragement to self-direction is associated with a significant positive impact on career choices.

'Perceived parental barriers to IS career choice' The coefficient for perceived parental barriers to career choice is 0.041, with a standard error of 0.042. This variable is not statistically significant ($p=0.334$), indicating that perceived parental barriers do not significantly influence career choices in this model.

'Perceived parental career concerns about welfare and prestige' The coefficient for Concerns about Prestige and Welfare in Parents' careers is 0.230, with a standard error of 0.057. This variable is statistically significant ($p=0.001$), suggesting that higher perceived concerns from parents about welfare and prestige are associated with a significant positive impact on career choices.

'Perceived transmission of parental views and values regarding IS career' The coefficient for Perceived transfer of parents' values and career perspectives is 0.275, with a standard error of 0.051. This variable is highly statistically significant ($p=0.001$), indicating there is a strong positive impact of the Perceived transmission of parental values and views on Career choices.

According to Table 3, the R square value of the model was 0.723. It demonstrates that 72.3% of the variance in career choices is explained by the independent variables in the model.

Discussion of the result

The demographics profile provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the study participants. The gender distribution reveals that 36.8% are males and 63.2% are females. This reflects a trend observed that gender dynamics were found to impact career preferences (Cortés, Pan, Pilosoph, Reuben, & Zafar, 2023). The distribution across academic years also shows variation, with the highest presentation from the fourth year (26.3%). This suggests that the stage of education may play a role in shaping career preferences. The income distribution among participants indicates that the majority fall within the monthly income range of fifty thousand to one hundred thousand rupees.

Regarding parental education levels, GCE O/L and GCE A/L prevailed for fathers and mothers, respectively. The limited work experience in Information systems among parents (6 out of 247) contrasts with the majority of respondents' lack of parental involvement in information systems careers. This finding underscores the potential influence of parental exposure and experience in shaping career choices.

'Perceived parental supports to the IS career choice': This study found that perceived parental support and involvement in career decisions were not statistically significant in influencing career choices in Information Systems. This is consistent with the findings of Wong and Liu (2010) who noted that while parents play a crucial role in shaping career choices, the

perceived level of support may not always directly impact career decisions. Ozlem (2019) investigated the impact of career interventions on decision-making, emphasizing the role of perceived support. Our results align with Ozlem (2019) and the researcher concluded that these factors may not be the primary drivers in certain contexts.

"Perceived parental encouragement to self-direction in IS career choice": Here, this indicates a significant positive impact of Perceived encouragement from parents for independence on career choices. These results align with Liu's (2010) findings and the researcher highlighted the importance of parental encouragement in fostering self-directed decision-making in career choices.

'Perceived parental career concerns about welfare and prestige': In this study, perceived parental barriers to career choice were not significant, and perceived parental career concerns about welfare and prestige were significantly associated with career choices. These results contrast with Liu's (2010) findings, where barriers were found to have a more direct impact on career decisions. The variation in results might be attributed to differences in cultural contexts and the specific industries under consideration. Ntari and Deliwe (2023) mentioned that career concerns about welfare and prestige impacted career decisions.

'Perceived transmission of parental views and values regarding IS career': This study reveals a strong positive relationship between the Perceived transfer of parents' values and career perspectives and career choices. These findings resonate with Liu (2010) who mentioned the significant influence of parental values on shaping career preferences in their fields.

Conclusion

In summary, perceived parental encouragement to self-direction and Perceived transfer of parents' values and career perspectives significantly impact career choices. However, other factors like perceived parental support perceived parental involvement, and perceived parental barriers to career choice do not demonstrate a significant influence in this analysis. While certain aspects of perceived parental support and involvement may not emerge as significant predictors in this context, the enduring influence of parental encouragement, values, and concerns aligns with the previous studies. These results provide valuable insights for educators, career

counselors, and policymakers aiming to support students in making informed and fulfilling career choices. Future research should delve deeper into the cultural and contextual nuances influencing parental influence on career choices, and explore potential variations across different demographic subgroups.

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