

# *The Influence and Mechanism of Parental Parenting Styles on University Students' Career Exploration: A Review*

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**Abstract.** In recent years, graduate employment issues have drawn considerable attention, with graduates exhibiting concentrated career choice tendencies and a lack of proactive exploration of alternative career paths, making it difficult to formulate career plans suited to their individual characteristics. This paper reviews literature from the past five years to examine the impact of parental parenting styles on university students' career exploration and its underlying mechanisms, aiming to provide scientific and targeted references for optimising employment guidance in higher education institutions and improving parenting approaches within families. Research indicates that authoritative parenting, through emotional support and rational guidance, significantly enhances self-efficacy in career decision-making and psychological capital, thereby promoting depth of career exploration and clarity of planning. Authoritarian parenting, however, presents complexities: excessive interference may lead to disengagement from exploration goals and diminished autonomy, though negative impacts may be mitigated in specific cultural contexts or when parental and child objectives align. Permissive parenting, lacking normative guidance, leads to ambiguous exploration directions and insufficient persistence in exploratory behaviour; neglectful parenting, due to the absence of resources and emotional support, inhibits both the willingness and capacity for exploration. The underlying mechanisms primarily involve three pathways. First, the mediating role of career decision self-efficacy; second, the interactive effect between psychological capital and family SES; third, the negative chain reaction of disengagement from exploration goals.

**Keywords:** parenting styles, career exploration behaviour, career decision self-efficacy, university students, psychological capital

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Research background**

In recent years, graduate employment issues have drawn significant attention, with phenomena such as "delayed employment" and "graduation-equivalent unemployment" becoming prominent. Local governments have continuously introduced policies to assist graduates in overcoming employment challenges. However, at the individual level, many graduates' career choices remain concentrated on

"public sector employment" or further education pathways, lacking proactive exploration of alternative career routes and struggling to develop career plans aligned with their personal characteristics.

Career exploration constitutes a pivotal stage in individual development, particularly for university students. It not only influences personal career decisions but also impacts long-term career planning and development. Currently, career exploration among university students manifests in two specific aspects: In terms of exploration direction, most individuals exhibit insufficient exploration and fragmented cognition [1]; some engage in blind exploration, wasting energy [2]. Regarding planning clarity, a minority possess well-defined plans with clear pathways [3]; while others lack any planning and face an uncertain future [3]. These specific manifestations profoundly reflect significant disparities in individual exploration abilities among university students, with such differences largely stemming from the formative influence of family environments during early developmental stages. Parental upbringing, as the core mechanism of early familial shaping, profoundly moulds university students' career cognition and exploration abilities, exerting enduring influence [4-6].

## 1.2. Research objectives and significance

This study primarily addresses the influence of parental upbringing on university students' career exploration. It reviews relevant domestic and international research from the past five years, examines the impact of different parenting styles on students' career exploration, and summarises the underlying mechanisms. This provides scientific and targeted reference for university career guidance services and optimising family parenting approaches.

## 2. Core conceptual definitions

### 2.1. Parental parenting styles

Parenting styles denote the integrated patterns of parental attitudes, behavioural responses, and emotional environments manifested during childrearing [7]. Their core characteristics are defined by two dimensions: "demandingness" and "responsiveness" [8]. The former reflects the degree to which parents expect their children to conform to behavioural norms and achieve, while the latter indicates their sensitivity to and responsiveness towards their children's needs. Theoretical development saw Baumrind [9, 10] propose three typical styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Maccoby [8] subsequently expanded this framework into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, establishing the current mainstream research paradigm.

### 2.2. Career exploration

Career exploration denotes the process whereby individuals, during the early stages of their career, actively investigate both self-awareness and the external environment to clarify career objectives and formulate plans. This encompasses reflection on personal interests, values, abilities, and personality traits, alongside consideration of societal demands, occupational opportunities, and future challenges [11, 12]. Effective exploration assists university students in clarifying their developmental direction, enhancing career self-efficacy, achieving professional accomplishments, and thereby realising self-worth. Research indicates that individual characteristics (such as personality and self-awareness) and external environments (such as family support and employment pressures) play pivotal roles in career exploration [13].

### 3. The influence of parental parenting styles on university students' career exploration

#### 3.1. Authoritative parenting style

The core characteristic of the authoritative parenting style lies in balancing demands with responsiveness, emphasising two-way communication and fostering autonomy while maintaining principles on key issues. This approach helps children develop sound self-discipline and a sense of responsibility, whilst simultaneously stimulating their initiative in exploration [9].

The dual approach of "rational guidance coupled with emotional support" exhibited by parents in authoritative parenting significantly promotes children's career exploration and development. Consequently, authoritative parenting is widely recognised as a crucial familial factor in fostering career exploration among university students. Research indicates that [14], an open and supportive parenting style helps shape flexible thinking patterns in children. This enables individuals to integrate resources more effectively when confronted with complex career information, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of their exploration. Regarding psychological efficacy, Alexander and Harris [15] note that authoritative parenting positively correlates with university students' career decision self-efficacy. As a key form of psychological capital [16], self-efficacy significantly drives exploratory behaviours such as information gathering, goal planning, and option selection. Empirical findings by Wang et al. [17] reveal that occupation-specific parental support not only intensifies students' exploratory actions but also elevates their career meaningfulness and adaptability. In summary, authoritative parenting promotes university students' career exploration through multiple pathways.

#### 3.2. Authoritarian parenting style

Authoritarian parenting is characterised by high demands and low responsiveness, emphasising discipline and obedience. This approach is typically viewed as undermining children's self-efficacy and exploratory motivation [9]. However, recent research reveals the complexity of authoritarian parenting's effects.

On the one hand, some studies continue to support the notion of negative effects. Wen et al. [18] found that high-control, high-involvement overparenting leads to "disengagement from exploratory goals" among students, where individuals reduce their investment in career exploration and shift this responsibility onto overparenting parents. Concurrently, Wang [19] noted that overparenting deprives adolescents of autonomy in their development. Such intervention not only suppresses their self-direction but also conveys a dangerous signal of environmental uncontrollability, undermining their confidence in problem-solving. This subsequently leads to avoidance of career exploration and diminished efficacy in career decision-making. Conversely, Wang's research [19] indicates that parental alignment with university students' career aspirations can mitigate the adverse effects of overparenting. In a sample from certain religious institutions in the United States, authoritarian parenting styles showed a positive correlation with career decision-making self-efficacy. Within cultures or value systems emphasising obedience and discipline, such approaches may foster a sense of responsibility, thereby promoting career exploration [15].

#### 3.3. Permissive parenting style

The defining characteristics of the permissive parenting style are high responsiveness and low demands, with parents exhibiting excessive leniency and a tendency to adopt a non-punitive attitude

towards their children's behaviour. While this approach appears to foster an environment of free growth, the absence of clear behavioural norms and a sense of responsibility may ultimately hinder individual development [9]. Gamboa et al. [20] note that parental absence of necessary behavioural guidance may result in children lacking perseverance in exploration. Alexander and Harris [15] found no significant association between permissive parenting and university students' career decision-making self-efficacy. Given that career exploration behaviour relies heavily on self-motivation and goal orientation, while permissive parenting lacks guidance and structure, this approach may lead students to abandon exploration due to a lack of direction.

### **3.4. Neglectful parenting style**

Neglectful parenting is characterised by low demands and low responsiveness, where parents neither provide support nor establish norms, resulting in children lacking stable external support during development [8]. Research by Zhou et al. [21] indicates that low-involvement parents significantly inhibit the continuity of their children's career development, resulting in inadequate exploration capabilities and ambiguous goal setting. Similarly, studies by Chen et al. [22] demonstrate that when parents fail to provide effective support due to limited capacity or lack of subjective willingness, children's motivation for career exploration diminishes.

## **4. Mechanisms of parental influence on university students' career exploration**

### **4.1. Career decision self-efficacy**

Career decision self-efficacy denotes an individual's belief and self-assessment regarding their capacity to accomplish career exploration and decision-related tasks. Parental styles frequently influence university students' career exploration by affecting their career decision self-efficacy [15]. Cheung [23] further substantiated that specific parental behaviours in career guidance (such as encouragement and informational support) can enhance children's career decision self-efficacy, thereby indirectly promoting their career exploration behaviour. Research by Liu Limin and Zhang Dajun [5] similarly supports this mechanism, demonstrating that positive parenting behaviours (such as encouragement and praise) bolster university students' career decision self-efficacy, motivating them to pursue higher levels of career exploration.

### **4.2. Psychological capital and family socioeconomic status (SES)**

Psychological capital encompasses positive psychological resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, serving as a crucial intrinsic motivator for university students' career exploration [16]. Research indicates that authoritative parental support and positive feedback can help children accumulate psychological capital and enhance the persistence of their career exploration [24]. Individuals possessing high levels of psychological capital demonstrate greater confidence and proactivity in career exploration activities. When encountering difficulties during exploration, they are also capable of making positive attributions and promptly adjusting strategies [16]. Concurrently, family socioeconomic status (SES) represents a significant external condition influencing career exploration. Research by Huang Youchu and Shao Junyan [25] indicates that family economic circumstances influence the resources and opportunities available to children [17], subsequently affecting career exploration indirectly through psychological capital and career self-efficacy [16]. Thus, parental upbringing and SES intertwine to jointly shape university students' exploratory motivation and psychological capital.

### 4.3. Goal disengagement and frustrated autonomy

Beyond positive influences, parental upbringing may also undermine university students' career exploration through negative pathways. Wen et al. [18] found that overcontrolling or overinvolved parenting leads to "disengagement from exploration goals" during career discovery, causing individuals to reduce both the depth and breadth of their exploration. Wang [19] similarly demonstrated that overparenting diminishes students' autonomy, willpower, and sense of self-worth. Thus, authoritarian parenting often undermines children's autonomy, diminishes self-efficacy, and impedes career exploration.

### 5. Conclusion and outlook

In recent years, heightened concerns over graduate employment have spurred increased research into parental parenting styles' impact on university students' career exploration behaviours. Overall, authoritative parenting consistently exerts the most stable positive influence, fostering exploration by enhancing students' career decision-making self-efficacy and psychological capital. In contrast, permissive and neglectful parenting styles, lacking essential support and guidance, leave individuals both incapable and unwilling to engage in sustained exploration, thereby hindering their career development. The outcomes of authoritarian parenting styles are more complex: excessive interference typically diminishes autonomy or triggers goal disengagement, thereby inhibiting exploration. However, this effect is mitigated under specific circumstances. Thus, parenting styles do not directly influence career exploration but are mediated by various factors.

Based on these findings, to effectively enhance university students' career exploration, a three-tiered approach is recommended: families should adopt an authoritative parenting style, emphasising emotional support and rational guidance; higher education institutions should further refine career guidance and psychological support systems while broadening practical pathways; and students must strengthen self-awareness and proactive exploration, actively utilising external resources for career discovery.

Although existing research has made some progress, this paper's review and analysis of relevant literature reveals that certain research gaps remain in this field. For instance, within studies examining the relationship between family parenting styles and career exploration, the impact of neglectful and permissive parenting styles on individual career exploration behaviours and outcomes still lacks sufficient empirical research support. Future research should therefore focus on and delve deeper into this direction.

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