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INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS ON
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICES IN BANTEAY
MEANCHEY, CAMBODIA

Kol Sovanvatthana¹, Lim Kim Eav^{2*}, , Chea Leanghuor^{2, b}, , Hang Makara²

¹ Deputy Director of Academic Affairs, Build Bright University, Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia
Email: sovanvatthana@gmail.com

² Faculty of Business Administration, Build Bright University, Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia
Email: kimeavlim@gmail.com^a, lhlovesp@gmail.com^b

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This study seeks to investigate the influence of parents on university students' career choices in the province of Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia. Cambodian parental cultures often provide valuable guidance and support, significantly shaping their children's decisions. Their influence helps students make informed choices that align with their parents' perspectives and interests, influencing both their university majors and future careers. In this particular scenario, parental influence on university students' career choices is generally acknowledged. However, uncertainties may exist regarding the influence and the specific experiences students have had with their parents. In an effort to accomplish the objectives of this research study, the multifaceted direct influences, personal experiences, and financial support contributing to the nature of parental influence on children are investigated. The goal is to uncover new findings in the digital age that may differ from previous studies. The researchers optimistically hope that these new insights and useful resources will be beneficial tools for future studies.

Keywords:

Career Choice, Parents' Influence, University Student, Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia Higher Education

Introduction

Career choice is a pivotal decision shaping an individual's life trajectory. A myriad of factors, including personal aspirations, societal expectations, and economic considerations, influence this decision. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children's career trajectories,

remarkably during the formative college years. The parents' influence serves as the powerful compass, guiding students through the complex landscape of career choices. Successful parents often inspire their own children to pursue similar paths, while those who encounter challenges may encourage a more exploratory approach (Jungen, 2008; Effiom & Petters, 2019).

Beyond inspiration, parental support is essential. Emotional encouragement and financial backing empower students to confidently explore various career choices. Active involvement in career planning provides invaluable insights and practical advice, leveraging parents' professional experiences. Moreover, a strong parent-child relationship fosters a supportive environment that can significantly influence a student's career success (Oomen, 2016). Parental influence on student career paths is undeniably crucial for university students, providing encouragement, guidance, and often, financial support. However, it's essential to recognize that well-intentioned parents can sometimes inadvertently place undue pressure on their children to pursue career paths aligned with their own expectations or societal norms (Tillman, 2015; Jungen, 2008). This obviously can lead to significant stress and conflict for students grappling with their own aspirations. To foster a healthy parent-child relationship and support students' personal and professional growth, parents should aim to balance providing guidance with granting their children the freedom to explore their passions and talents. In addition to providing emotional support, parents may also assist their children in developing professional networks with open and honest communication. Career chances can be greatly improved by using personal and professional networks to create a space for open dialogue about their child's career goals, aspirations, and concerns (Song et al., 2022; Gustina et al., 2024). Plus, parents have the opportunity to offer their children extremely valuable tools for success in the future by actively developing their professional networks. Likewise, the parent-child relationship plays a multifaceted role in shaping a student's career paths. By serving as positive role models, offering unwavering support, managing expectations effectively, facilitating networking opportunities, and prioritizing open communication, parents can equip their children with the tools they need to thrive in the complex job market. A collaborative and supportive partnership between parents and students is essential for fostering the next generation of successful professionals (Valentine, 2023).

Cambodia, like many developing countries, is undergoing rapid socio-economic transformations. These changes are undoubtedly reflected in the educational landscape and career choices of young people (Worldbank, 2024; MOP, 2022). In terms of the education system changes in Cambodia, the government has worked to improve the country's education system slowly but surely. In 2014, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport introduced a plan called the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014–2018. This plan aimed to improve the overall education system by reforming the curriculum, training teachers, and developing new infrastructure (MoEYS, 2014). Consequently, due to the improvement of the education system, university students now dramatically have the opportunities and ability to make their own informed career choices, unfettered by parental influence.

Despite the fact that previous studies have also explored the influence of parents on career decisions in different cultural and economic contexts, there remains a notable dearth of studies specifically examining Cambodia, particularly in the western province of Banteay Meanchey that shares an international border with Thailand. By understanding the dynamics between parental expectations and students' career aspirations in this specific context, this research seeks to contribute to the broader body of knowledge on career development and to inform

educational policies and interventions aimed at supporting young people in making informed career choices and parental influence on university students in this region.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design to better understand the influence of parents on university students' career choices as well as the students' perspectives and experiences with the parents. The study adopted a mixed-methods design, a widely used approach for researchers studying complex problems. This methodology provides a broader perspective by integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Research findings gain credibility when researchers employ multiple methods to arrive at consistent results from various viewpoints. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence through this multifaceted approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). To conduct a comprehensive investigation into the influence of parents on university students' career choices in Banteay Meanchey, the research employed both open-ended questionnaires and surveys to gather in-depth data from university students' perspectives and also the reactions. Besides, the non-random sampling technique, a common method in research to select participants based on personal judgment rather than chance (Berndt, 2020; Suresh, 2000), this approach allowed researchers to target university students from particular bachelor's and master's degree programs as the sample to collect data.

Data Collection and Study Area

The research took place at Build Bright University in Banteay Meanchey province. Banteay Meanchey is a northwestern Cambodian province located about 359 kilometers from the capital city. Banteay Meanchey covers 6,678 square kilometers and borders Oddar Meanchey Province, Siem Reap Province, Battambang Province, and Thailand. The city of Serei Saophoan is the capital of Banteay Meanchey and a significant administrative and economic hub in the region (Intocambodia, 2024).

The sample size for this research was determined using the Yamane formula (1967), a widely used method for calculating sample sizes in surveys. This formula provides a practical approach to balancing precision with feasibility, given the constraints of surveying a large population. Specifically, the formula for calculating sample size for a given population to provide a statistically reliable estimate was as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n is the sample size,

N is the population size, and

e is the level of precision (or sampling error).

Therefore:

$$n = \frac{1300}{1 + 1300(0.10^2)} = \frac{1300}{14} = 92.86 \approx 93$$

In this case, a sample size of 93 university students from Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia, is sufficient to estimate the population of 1,300 with a 10% margin of error and a 90% confidence level. Based on the mixed-methods research design, a quantitative phase of the mixed-methods study can initially be conducted using Google Forms. This platform allowed for surveys with multiple question types that can be administered to respondents to collect data on their demographic information and preferences related to the factors influencing parents towards career choice. In the qualitative phase, the researchers selected 20 participants from the entire population of 93 to participate in semi-structured focus-group interviews. The interviews were designed to get rich data that would help the researchers understand more conclusively and achieve the research goals. According to Knott et al. (2022), qualitative data gained by conducting semi-open interviews provides a more in-depth and detailed understanding of a topic. This is because they allow for open-ended discussions and exploration of specific points, whereas quantitative data gained by conducting surveys provides a broader overview by collecting data from a larger number of participants through standardized questions. Therefore, based on the said data collection tools, the intended research design can be defined.

Data Analysis

In the process of data analysis, researchers analyzed the collected data using both quantitative and qualitative methods. For quantitative analysis, Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the collected data from the surveys, organize, and use descriptive statistics to summarize the data in a clear and understandable way. The descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were presented to understand the demographic information and survey responses. Likewise, the data was subjected to a thematic analysis for qualitative analysis to understand more regarding the perspectives of the participants from their interview responses. The thematic analysis used to analyze the open-ended responses from the questionnaire (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Eav, 2024). The data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis to examine the interview data and identify recurring patterns, ideas, and concepts. Subsequently, the data was coded and categorized to gain a deeper understanding of specific questions. The analysis focused on identifying common themes and exploring the participants' direct influences, personal perspectives, experiences, and financial support as expressed in the open-ended questionnaires. To enhance comprehension, each qualitative data was contextualized with explanations, discussions, and literature reviews.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative Findings

The findings of the demographic information of the participants, as well as their perspectives and personal experiences in terms of parental involvement in career choices, including parental influence, career advice and guidance, financial support, emotional support, decision-making, etc. found in the survey responses to questions, are shown in **Tables 1 & 2** below, along with the description.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants (n =93)

Demographic Variables	Value	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	41	44.1
	Female	52	55.9
Age	Under 18	14	15.1
	18-24	75	80.6
	25-34	4	4.3
	Above 35	0	0.0
Educational Background	Associate's Degree	20	21.5
	Bachelor's Degree	72	77.4
	Master's Degree	1	1.1
	Other	0	0.0
Current Occupation	Student	64	68.8
	Employed	13	14
	Unemployed	5	5.4
	Civil Servant	2	2.2
	Monk	6	6.5
	Other	3	3.2
Marital Status	Single	92	98.9
	Married	1	1.1
	Divorced	0	0.0
	Widow/Widower	0	0.0
Place of Residence	Serei Saophoan	37	39.8
	Poi Pet	31	33.3
	Other	25	26.9
Parents' Educational Background	University	13	14.1
	Under Grade 12	23	25
	Under Grade 9	31	33.7
	Other	26	27.2

The study involved 93 participants recruited from Build Bright University in Banteay Meanchey province. Based on the findings in the demographic information (**Table 1**), the data revealed a higher proportion of female participants, constituting 55.9% of the total sample, while males made up 44.1%. The majority of participants (80.6%) fall within the 18-24 age

range, suggesting a relatively young population. Notably, none of the participants older than 35 were recruited. The age range of secondary participants included individuals under 18 years old, comprising 15.1% of the total participants. According to the educational background variable among the participants demonstrated, most participants (77.4%) were pursuing a bachelor's degree, followed by 21.5% with an associate's degree. Only a small percentage (1.1%) were pursuing a master's degree. Apart from that, the most common occupation among participants was "student," comprising 68.8% of the sample. A smaller percentage (14%) were employed, while 5.4% were unemployed. Additionally, 2.2% were civil servants, 6.5% were monks, and 3.2% fell into the "other" category. Regarding marital status, the vast majority (98.9%) of participants are single. Only 1.1% are married. Besides, Serei Saophoan city of Banteay Meanchey province is the most common place of residence, with 39.8% of participants residing there. Poi Pet and other locations account for 33.3% and 26.9% of participants, respectively. In the context of parental education, the majority (33.7%) had an educational level under grade 9. A smaller percentage (25%) completed under grade 12, while 14.1% had a university-level education. The remaining 27.2% had other educational backgrounds.

Table 2: Survey Responses to Questions Towards Participants' Perspectives and Personal Experiences in Terms of Parental Involvement in Career Choices ($n=93$)

Survey Questions	Response (Percentage)	
1. How often do your parents discuss career choices with you?	Always	7.5
	Often	14
	Sometimes	64.5
	Never	14
2. In university, who typically chooses your major?	Yourself	90.2
	Your parents	6.5
	Follow your friend	0.0
	Other	3.3
3. How much influence do/did your parents have on your career choices?	Not at all	19.4
	Slightly	18.3
	Moderately	52.7
	Significantly	9.7
	Extremely	0.0
4. How supportive are/were your parents regarding your career choices?	Not supportive at all	1.1
	Moderately supportive	45.2
	Very supportive	44.1
5. How valuable is/was the career advice and guidance provided by your parents?	Extremely supportive	9.7
	Not valuable	1.1
	Moderately valuable	23.9

	Very valuable	42.4
	Extremely valuable	32.6
6. Do/did you consider your parents as role models for your career choice?	Not at all	7.5
	Moderately	37.6
	Significantly	37.6
	Extremely	17.2
7. How much do/did your parents' financial support influence your career choice?	Not at all	4.3
	Moderately	72
	Extremely	23.7
8. Did your parents' careers influence your career choice?	Not at all	22.6
	Slightly	20.4
	Moderately	39.8
	Significantly	10.8
	Extremely	6.5
9. How important do you believe your parents' opinions are in your career decision-making process?	Very important	23.7
	Important	50.5
	Somewhat important	25.8
	Not important	0.0
10. How well do your parents understand your career interests and goals?	Very well	24.7
	Well	44.1
	Somewhat	28
	Not at all	3.2
11. In what ways do your parents provide support in your career decisions?	Providing Information about different careers	28
	Connecting with professionals in the field	11.8
	Financial Support	19.4
	Emotional Support	24.7
	Other	16.1
12. How confident do you feel in making career decisions independently of your parents?	Very Confident	25.8
	Confident	48.4
	Somewhat Confident	24.7
	Not Confident	1.1

The survey results (**Table 2**) revealed that the majority of respondents (64.5%) reported that their parents sometimes discussed career choices with them, an equal 14% reported either often or never discussed, and only 7.5% reported always having such discussions. Following that, most Cambodian students (90.2%) ultimately made their own major choices in university, while only 6.5% surprisingly made by their parents. Cambodian students today are more independent and self-reliant than in the past. Their decisions about their education are being made by them, reflecting a broader societal shift towards individualism. Parental influence also played a significant role in their career paths. As a result, many respondents reported that their parents had a moderate (52.7%) and slightly (18.3%) influence on their career choices. This suggested that parental guidance continues to be a powerful cultural force in Cambodia. Furthermore, a large portion of respondents rated their parents' support for their career choices positively, with 45.2% moderately supportive and 44.1% very supportive. Parental support and appreciation are highly prized in many cultures. Parents typically have a major influence on how their children live, as well as can develop a strong sense of duty to promote their achievement in life.

The survey also highlighted the value of parental advice and guidance, with 42.4% of respondents finding it very valuable, and an extremely valuable 32.6%. On top of that, one of the most influential role models in a child's life is their parents. Children's beliefs and behaviors are often shaped by their parents' actions, values, and morals. Unexpectedly, survey question 6 revealed that 37.6% of respondents answered "moderately" or "significantly," while 17.2% chose "extremely." Financial support from parents had heavily influenced career choices, with 72% of Cambodian university students reporting moderate influence and 23.7% reporting extreme influence. It seemed that financial support from parents was one of the key factors for most Cambodian university students, even those over 18 years old.

The next survey results revealed insights into how parents' careers influenced their children's choices. A majority of respondents (39.8%) indicated that their parents' careers had had a moderate influence on their own career decisions. This was followed by "slightly" (20.4%), "significantly" (10.8%), "extremely" (6.5%), and "not at all" (22.6%). The results obtained that children's career had been greatly influenced by the experiences and examples provided by their parents. Interestingly, 50.5% of respondents found parental opinions to have been important in career decision-making, with 25.8% finding them somewhat important and 23.7% finding them very important. This concluded that parents remained important in influencing their children's career goals and in guiding them to make decisions by offering assistance and encouragement. To allow respondents to delve further into their experiences, survey question 10 offered more details about how parents generally had a good understanding of their children's career interests and goals. This was evidenced by the high percentage of respondents (44.1%) who rated their parents' understanding as "well," followed by "somewhat" (28%) and "very well" (24.7%). Generally, parents who actually spend more time involved in their children's affairs tend to have a better understanding of their interests and goals due to the encouragement of open and honest communication, which allows children to appreciate each other's points of view.

Considering parental support, respondents were most likely to have reported providing information about different careers (28%), followed by emotional support (24.7%), financial support (19.4%), connecting with professionals in the field (11.8%), and other ways of support (16.1%). In a similar vein, the final survey question revealed the positive trend, with nearly

half of respondents (48.4%) expressing confidence in making career decisions independently from parents. Of those, 25.8% felt very confident, 24.7% felt somewhat confident, while only 1.1% reported feeling not confident. Although parental influence was often significant in various factors, the study suggested that individuals can confidently still make informed career decisions without relying heavily on parental input or guidance.

Qualitative Findings

This study focuses on the influence of parents on university students' career choices, specifically exploring their direct influences, personal perspectives, experiences, and financial support. Through open-ended questionnaires, the researchers aim to gain a deeper understanding of participants viewpoints. Particularly in terms of qualitative findings, the study designed three major themes to discuss in detail: the influence of parents on university students' career choices; the experience with parental influence on university students' career choices; and the financial support for university students' education fees and career. The discussed questions are as follows:

- 1). Describe the influence of your parents on your career choices.
- 2). Describe your experience with parental influence on your career choices.
- 3). Do your parents financially support your university education fees and career by covering the costs?

The Influence Of Parents On University Students' Career Choices

People in modern society dedicate a significant portion of their lives to their jobs, which emphasizes the important role that career choices have in shaping an individual's quality of life (Valentine, 2023). Also, the closer the bond between children and their parents, the more likely they are to ask for advice on career choices. This shows how important emotional support is in helping people make decisions about their careers (Onoshakpokaiye, 2022). Based on the first major theme, a number of participants underscored the positive influence of their parents on their career choices, the positive impact of parents in shaping their career paths. They emphasized parental guidance, support, and the congruence of career choices with their academic pursuits. Several participants shared that their parents advised them to obtain a university degree, specifically in business administration. Similarly, a participant mentioned that their parents significantly influenced their career choice. The participant's academic strengths were also well-matched by their parents' professions, affording a clear path to follow. Adolescents are encouraged by their parents to explore vocational interests and abilities, as well as various occupational options. This parental involvement is positively correlated with their children's academic achievement. Additionally, parents facilitate their children's reflection on career choices (Kumar, 2016). Added to that, parental support positively correlates with students' career decision-making self-efficacy. This suggested that families significantly contribute to shaping children's interests, values, and perceptions about various professions, ultimately guiding them toward successful careers (Koçak et al., 2021).

Minimal influence. A middle-aged student from Master's class elaborated on my parents' strong desire for me to follow a traditional career path, choosing my college major and preparing a business after I graduated; this made me feel stressed and pressured during my youth. Their unwavering guidance felt like a heavy weight on my shoulders as I struggled to reconcile their expectations with my own aspirations. Despite their well-intentioned advice, I found myself increasingly resistant to their suggestions. I felt a growing sense of dissatisfaction

with the career paths they proposed, believing that they were limiting and unlikely to lead to personal fulfillment. This internal conflict ultimately led me to choose a different direction, one that aligned more closely with my own interests and values. He added, I felt pressured by my parents to choose my own career. So, I chose a different path that better reflected my interests and values. According to Clutter, C. (2010), parents may want their children to have successful careers, but sometimes this can put stress on the children. When parents push their children to follow a specific career path, it can stop the children from exploring other careers that might be better for them. Plus, overparenting can also lead to career indecision among college students. The stress of high parental expectations can make it difficult for students to choose a career path that aligns with their personal desires. This pressure can interfere with their decision-making process and self-confidence, leading to anxiety and uncertainty about their future (Wang, 2023).

No Influence. Some participants from the bachelor's class shared the perspective that their careers were chosen independently by them, without any influence from their parents' careers. One of them reported that my parents have given me the freedom to pursue a career and college major aligned with my personal interests. It shown that parental influence was insignificant or absent in their career decision-making process. Interestingly, the increase in making choices based on their own personal interests instead of relying solely on their parents' guidance. It emphasizes their growing desire for independence in deciding their future paths. While they may start out relying on their parents, this dependence gradually decreases as students become more confident in pursuing their own preferences and goals (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2027). Young people living in individualistic societies, as stated by Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018), typically tend to choose careers based on their own interests rather than what their parents want them to do. This suggests that these young people value personal freedom and self-direction when it comes to their future careers.

The Experience With Parental Influence On University Students' Career Choices

The second theme focuses on experience with parental influence on university students' career choices, both positive and negative experiences. Positive Experiences. A number of participants shared some of their positive experiences. Without hesitation, one participant from accounting major pointed out that my parents served as exemplary role models, guiding me both academically and professionally. I had countless positive experiences under their influence. Regardless of my interest in pursuing a university degree being opposed to their own careers, my parents remained very supportive of me. In the same way, another participant added that the positive experiences, advice, and encouragement I have received from my parents have been extremely beneficial to me. Their wisdom and experience have been invaluable assets for me in achieving what I wanted to accomplish. In the opinion of Dorot and Davidovitch (2023), children often form their own ideas about work based on their parents' experiences. Parents' values and beliefs about work can significantly impact their children's career goals. If a child perceives their parents' jobs positively, they are more likely to have a positive outlook on their own future careers. Also, the chance of attending college was significantly higher for children whose parents supported their further education than for those whose parents did not. This suggests the important role of parental advice in supporting children in making choices throughout their lives (Sinkombo, 2016).

Negative Experiences. When asked regarding the experience with parental influence on career choices, a freshman participant abruptly emphasized that, reflecting on my personal experience, I recall a challenging time when my parents' expectations clashed with my career choice. This disagreement deeply affected me and roughly caused me to doubt my choices. Another echoed, I frequently found myself at odds with my parents over my career choice. I was extremely passionate about starting my own business, their unwavering desire for me to become a teacher of English instead. In this particular case, the career path of the children can potentially be significantly influenced by their parents. Even so, parents may put pressure on their children to choose a stable career journey to prevent disappointment or failure. When parents have strict expectations for their children's careers, it can negatively impact society. Children who are forced into careers their parents choose often struggle to succeed. This mismatch can lead to problems like dropping out of school and mental health issues among young people who feel pressured to live up to their parents' expectations (Effiom & Petters, 2019). Moreover, college students who aspire to professional careers may encounter difficulties when their parental expectations don't match their chosen paths. This mismatch can have detrimental effects on their emotional development and academic achievements (Pradeep, 2018). The level of parental expectations can influence how much academic stress affects a person's emotional self-control. If parents have high expectations, the negative impact of stress on emotional self-control might be reduced (Zheng et al., 2023).

The Financial Support For University Students' Education Fees And Career

According to a previous study, many students from low-income backgrounds have difficulty affording their education, emphasizing the importance of parental financial support for higher education. Such students face significant challenges when their parents cannot provide sufficient support. This situation puts extra strain on students who are financially dependent on their parents and have no alternative sources of funding (Hun, 2024). Many students rely on part-time or full-time jobs to pay for their education, as only a small number receive significant financial support from their families. This self-reliance can create stress as they navigate both academic and work commitments (Haney, 2015). Beyond that, the burden of financial obligations can significantly affect students' academic progress and persistence in higher education. Students who depend on their own income to cover their educational expenses are often unable to succeed academically due to their busy lives (OECD, 2023). In terms of the current investigation, the majority of university students financed their education through their own earnings, which covered school fees, housing, and daily living costs. Only a small percentage of participants among the rest received full financial support from their parents. Most of students' financial burden for education was funded by their own pockets, even if some also benefited from grants, scholarships, or student loans. Notably, one participant claimed that I received financial support from my parents for my education and career-related expenses. However, the support wasn't sufficient to fully cover my living costs, and I needed to earn an extra 20% to support my lifestyle.

Conclusions

This study investigates the multifaceted relationship that exists between parental influence and career choices made by university students in Banteay Meanchey province, Cambodia. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the current study offers valuable insights into the multifaceted ways in which parents shape their children's career paths. As findings and discussions above reveal, quantitative findings demonstrate that most of university students increasingly make independent decisions regarding their majors, parental influence

remains a significant factor in career choices. Parents often provide guidance, emotional support, and financial support, playing a pivotal role in shaping their children's aspirations. However, the study also highlights instances where parental expectations can create pressure and conflict, leading to negative experiences for students. Additionally, qualitative findings further underscore the complexities of parental influence. Although some students express gratitude for parental guidance, others recount feeling pressured or limited by their parents' expectations. The significant financial challenges faced by university students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, struggle to cover the costs of their education. While parental support can be helpful, many students rely heavily on their own income to pay for their education, housing, and other expenses. This can be stressful and negatively impact their academic performance. In short, this study focuses on how relationships between parents and children are evolving in the context of career choices, emphasizing the value of open communication, respect, and support. Through understanding the diverse perspectives and experiences of university students, educators, and parents, researchers aim to more effectively improve the creation of supportive environments that enable young people to make knowledgeable choices regarding their careers.

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