

The Contribution of Career-Related School–Family Partnership Procedures on Parental Career-Supportive Behavior

Monique Strijk, Mariëtte Lusse, Marinka Kuijpers, and Ellen Klatter

Abstract

In today's dynamic society, education should equip students with the skills to shape their future. Parents play a crucial role in students' career development. In many countries, schools are increasingly expected to foster these processes in close collaboration with parents. While schools recognize the importance of parental involvement, little is known about how career-related school–family partnerships (SFPs) can be systematically organized to foster parental engagement. This study examined how career-related SFP procedures may contribute to parental involvement in students' career development and which conditions facilitated this process. Three foundational SFP procedures were developed to incorporate career-related components: interactive home assignments, student–parent–teacher conferences, and collective student–parent meetings. Twelve Dutch prevocational schools implemented a combination of these procedures, tailoring them to their specific contexts. Subsequently, 30 group interviews were conducted with 87 students, 29 parents, and 52 teachers. Qualitative exploratory analyses revealed that participants experienced the procedures as contributing to three interrelated stages of parental career-supportive behavior: career awareness, dialogical career involvement, and active guidance. The findings suggest that carefully designed and contextually embedded SFP procedures can empower parents as active agents in students' career development.

Key Words: family support, parental behavior, career development, career competencies, secondary education, adolescents

Introduction

The aim of education is not only to help students graduate from school, but also to equip them with the skills and capacities needed to shape their future. An essential part of this preparation is learning how to make meaningful educational and career choices by developing the capabilities people use to navigate careers (Kuijpers, 2025; Watts & Sultana, 2004). International reports emphasize that career development is a global concern; schools worldwide are expected to prepare young people for increasingly complex and uncertain labor markets, and collaboration with families is considered a vital part of this process (Martin, 2018).

The choice for an educational path significantly impacts students' career prospects. Ill-considered choices can lead to academic disengagement, switching studies, dropping out (Allen & Meng, 2010), and reduced prospects in the labor market (Gelderblom et al., 2023). In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Education views career guidance as a crucial tool to help students make informed choices and equip them with the skills needed to manage their own careers more consciously and thoughtfully. It is also believed to improve the connection between education and the labor market, thereby preventing youth unemployment (OCW, 2015, 2021).

Within the Dutch education system, students make the transition from primary to secondary education at the age of 12. At this early stage, they are separated into a prevocational track (a four-year program for students aged 12 to 16, preparing for senior vocational education) or an academic track (a five or six-year program for students aged 12 to 17/18, preparing for higher education). Students from families who encounter systemic barriers to school engagement are particularly at risk of making choices that may lead to dropout or unemployment (Gelderblom et al., 2023). These concerns are especially salient in prevocation secondary education, where students from historically underrepresented or structurally marginalized backgrounds are overrepresented. Partly in response to these persistent inequalities, Dutch schools for prevocational education are required to provide career guidance (OCW, 2016).

Students regularly discuss their career choices with their parents (Bardick et al., 2004; Gelderblom et al., 2023). Parents who are actively engaged can positively influence their children's career-related attitudes and behaviors (Ginevra et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020). Empirical studies across different

countries demonstrate that parental engagement contributes to students' career-related attitudes, aspirations, and transitions (e.g., Garcia et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2018; Parola & Marcionetti, 2022; To et al., 2022). Therefore, parental involvement is an important factor in supporting students' career development (Gelderblom et al., 2023). However, most schools focus on academic topics, paying little attention to students' career learning within school–family partnerships (SFPs; Lusse, 2013). Consequently, research on how schools can support parents in guiding their children's career development remains limited, both nationally and internationally (Barnes et al., 2020; Bryant et al., 2006; Oomen, 2018). Given the global recognition of parental influence on students' career development, it is essential to explore how schools can facilitate this involvement effectively.

In this study, urban prevocational secondary schools in the Netherlands transformed existing SFP procedures into career-related SFP procedures. The aim was to investigate which elements of these procedures stimulate parental career-supportive behavior.

Career Development

In today's constantly changing labor market (Arntz et al., 2016), future workers need to develop skills to adapt to unpredictable career changes (Field et al., 2010; Hooley & Rice, 2019; Nadya & Farozin, 2021) and construct their own career paths (Savickas et al., 2009). Traditionally, career guidance in schools aimed at matching student's characteristics with a one-time educational choice. Yet this approach does not prepare students for the continuous career decisions required in today's dynamic society. Therefore, contemporary career counseling emphasizes career self-management and encourages individuals to gain experiences and information about the labor market while exploring their individual characteristics and preferences through reflection. This approach highlights individuals' ability to actively navigate and develop their own career paths (Hirschi, 2012; Walker-Donnelly et al., 2019).

Most schools in the Netherlands adopt the career self-management approach, partly because prevocational secondary education schools are required to implement the career competence theory developed by Kuijpers et al. (2011) in their career guidance programs. Kuijpers and Scheerens (2006) outlined five career competencies essential for successful self-management. Initially designed for employees, these competencies were later adapted for prevocational secondary education and senior secondary vocational education (Kuijpers et al., 2011). The five competencies include: (1) capacity reflection (evaluating skills valued in one's career), (2) motivation

reflection (assessing values important for one's career), (3) work exploration (investigating career possibilities, including further education and fields of work), (4) career directedness (intention to take thoughtful actions to achieve ambitions), and (5) networking (building relationships to support career development).

Developing career competencies requires opportunities for reflection and meaning-making of experiences (Kuijpers et al., 2011; Kuijpers, 2025). Since students are not naturally inclined towards this type of reflection, they are in need of career dialogues, with people around them, in which they can reflect and receive guidance in making sense of their experiences (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2014; Kuijpers et al., 2011). In schools, teachers are responsible for providing this guidance to students. However, research shows that students discuss their career decisions and development at least as much with their parents as with school representatives (Bardick et al., 2004; Gelderblom et al., 2023; Tynkkynen et al., 2010).

Parent Involvement in Career Development

Research into parental career-related involvement provides insight into the role parents play in students' career development. Generally, all parents desire a good life for their children (Soresi et al., 2014; Ule et al., 2015) and want to be involved in their children's career decisions (Barnes et al., 2020). Parents influence their children's career development through career-specific behaviors and family environments. Consequently, both consciously and unconsciously, they transmit knowledge, values, and beliefs about work, shaping their child's attitudes and self-perceptions (Barnes et al., 2020; Oomen, 2018). In other words, even parents who are not actively engaged in their child's career development can still significantly influence their child's career trajectory without being aware of it.

Most studies on parental career involvement identify three forms of career-specific behaviors: support, interference, and disengagement (Bourret et al., 2023; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Parental support includes practical, informational, and emotional support (Barnes et al., 2020). Through dialogue, parents can help their children in reflecting on their interests, motives, and abilities, thereby enhancing their self-knowledge (Young et al., 2001) and fostering a greater sense of autonomy and confidence in making career decisions (Bourret et al., 2023). Furthermore, supportive parents provide opportunities for their children to navigate the world of education and work (Billett et al., 2022; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Young et al., 2001) and set ambitions to explore vocational possibilities. Based on these reflections and explorations, parents can encourage their children to take

career actions, determine next steps, and make choices aligned with their ambitions. However, it is important that the autonomy for the choices and direction of the career remains with the child (Bourret et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020).

Most research shows that parental support and autonomy are beneficial for students' career-related behavior as career self-efficacy (Ginevra et al., 2015), career adaptability (Šimunović et al., 2020), and career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). However, there may be a fine line between parental support and parental interference (Barnes et al., 2020). While parental interference may help decrease a student's uncertainty (Bourret et al., 2023), overly involved and highly controlling behavior can lead to reduced student career confidence and reduced self-directed career management (Šimunović et al., 2020). Parental disengagement is characterized by an absence of parental involvement or showing low importance regarding the child's career development (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Some parents want to be involved but lack the knowledge to effectively support their children and may therefore show no active parental support (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

The impact of parental involvement on a student's career development also depends on the child's attitude towards such involvement (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Oomen, 2018) and the quality of the parental–child relationship (Bourret et al., 2023; Wissink et al., 2006). However, regardless of the nature or extent of parental involvement in their children's careers, most studies indicate that parental influence is significant. Consequently, it is crucial to engage parents positively in their child's career education (Gelderblom et al., 2023). Understanding what parents need to effectively support their child's career development is therefore essential.

Career-Related School–Family Partnership

Schools can play a significant role in helping parents fulfill their supportive role at home (Barnes et al., 2020; Whiston & Keller, 2004), reducing parental disengagement and interference and encouraging equitable career-related dialogue between students and parents. This can be achieved by incorporating career-oriented components into the more academic-focused SFPs that many schools already have (Barnes et al., 2020; Lusse, van Schooten, et al., 2019).

Schools can make their SFPs more career-focused by, first, offering information about the career guidance program, employment opportunities, and the student's decision-making process (Gelderblom et al., 2023; Hodge et al., 2022; Oomen, 2018). Second, schools can provide practical tools and

tips, enabling them to facilitate dialogue at home (Klaassen et al., 2011; Kuijpers et al., 2018; Lusse, 2013). Schools need to consider that parents in disadvantaged positions may experience barriers in guiding their children's career development, similar to the challenges they often face in supporting their children's academic success (Desforges, 2003; Forster & Van de Werfhorst, 2020; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Ule et al., 2015). Third, schools and parents can cooperate by aligning their support for the student based on a shared sense of responsibility (Epstein, 2018a; Liu et al., 2020; Oostdam & Hooze, 2013). However, little is known about which procedures schools can actually use to implement this partnership. Teachers indicate that they have difficulty supporting parents in their role related to their child's career development and suggest educators need support to develop or improve career-related partnerships (Barnes et al., 2020; Lusse, 2013).

The Current Study

In order to support teachers in developing their career-related SFPs, for this study, three basic SFP procedures were developed, implemented, and tested. In preparation for developing the procedures, a guide was created based on literature and previous research. With the guidance and support of process facilitators, the participating schools integrated career guidance activities into regular contact moments with parents, particularly through work sessions. This resulted in the three complementary basic procedures for shaping career-related SFP: Career-Related Interactive Home Assignments, Career-Related Individual Student–Parent–Teacher Conferences, and Career-Related Collective Student–Parent Meetings. Each participating school tailored these procedures to their own practices (see Appendix A). To ensure proper implementation, teachers received training in conducting career-oriented dialogues and in involving parents in career guidance.

The Career-Related Interactive Home Assignments are based on the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) approach (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2003). Students were given interactive home assignments designed to stimulate parent–student career dialogues and reflection at home. Schools created three types of assignments: (a) assignments aimed at helping students explore their capacities and motives, such as discussing situations when students or their parents felt proud of the students; (b) assignments focused on work exploration, such as discussing tasks, responsibilities, and working conditions of several professions, choosing companies to visit, or exploring work together through online videos; and (c) assignments focused on networking, for example,

finding internships through networking. Many assignments were connected to each other. For example, students and parents received information about employment opportunities and were supported in engaging in a dialogue at home through tasks in the assignment. The outcome of the home assignments was almost always elaborated upon in subsequent career-related SFP procedures (student–parent–teacher conferences or collective student–parent meetings). As a result, the output of the home assignments served as input for parents and schools to align their follow-up actions.

The Career-Related Individual Student–Parent–Teacher Conferences are based on the alternative parent–teacher conferences developed by Lusse (2013; Lusse, Notten, et al., 2019; Lusse, van Schooten, et al., 2019). These conferences inform parents about their child’s career development and serve to coordinate the next steps in the student’s career path. Schools created tailored guidelines for individual student–parent–teacher conferences. Depending on the school, input for these conversations included results from the career-related interactive home assignments, assignments completed during career lessons, or students’ school results in relation to their career perspectives. During the conferences, the students presented their career development process over the past period, reflecting on their development, and outlining their intended career development actions. This allowed parents to stay informed about their child’s career development. Subsequently, the parent, teacher, and student discussed the student’s career development and, from a shared responsibility stance, align future support of the student by both teacher and parent.

The Career-Related Collective Student–Parent Meetings are based on the alternative collective parent meetings developed by Lusse (2013; Lusse, Notten, et al., 2019; Lusse, van Schooten, et al., 2019). Unlike the individual student–parent–teacher conferences, which involve one student together with their parent(s) and teacher, these collective meetings bring together all students and their parents from a particular grade level. During these meetings, students and parents are informed in an interactive way or given tools to continue the conversation and support at home. Schools created tailored formats for collective student–parent meetings where students and parents engaged in career-related activities and conversations to gather information or discuss the students’ competencies. Depending on the school, students completed preliminary work for these meetings during career lessons or through home assignments. Some meetings involved students presenting their experiences from company visits to groups of students and their parents, followed by discussions about what appealed to them and how their skills and values matched the companies and the associated

training options. At other schools, during these meetings, parents and students participated in diverse activities that provided a better understanding of the various training opportunities.

This current study on parental career-related support involved a qualitative exploration aimed at gaining insight into how these procedures can successfully contribute to parental career-related support, as perceived by students, parents, and teachers. The central research questions guiding this study were:

- RQ1 How do students, parents, and teachers perceive the influence of career-related SFP procedures on aspects of parental career-related support?
- RQ2 What conditions, related to career-related SFP procedures, contribute to parental career-related support, according to students, parents, and teachers?

Method

Participants

In a nationwide project aimed at preventing youth unemployment in the Netherlands, efforts were made to enhance the career behavior of students from structurally marginalized backgrounds by involving their parents through schools serving these populations. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment invited prevocational secondary education schools serving structurally marginalized student populations in five urban areas to participate in the research initiative. Twelve schools, spread over five cities, accepted the invitation and participated in the entire project. The participating schools had a student population diverse in cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic positions. Process facilitators were appointed to guide schools in reforming and initiating the procedures. After the implementation, each school organized at least three separate group interviews consisting of up to six teachers, six parents, and seven students, respectively. The school contact persons recruited the participating students and parents, resulting in a purposive convenience sample of students and parents who had participated in the project. A total of 30 group interviews were conducted across the 12 schools, involving 87 students, 29 parents, and 52 school staff members (see Table 1). The process facilitators facilitated the group interviews.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

		Students (<i>n</i> = 87)	Parents (<i>n</i> =29)	Teachers (<i>n</i> = 52)	Full sample (<i>N</i> =168)
		<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Gender</i>					
	Female	47	21	34	102
	Male	40	8	18	66
<i>Migrant Background</i>					
	Yes	70	19	9	98
	No	17	10	43	70
<i>Academic Year</i>					
	1	8			
	2	47			
	3	30			
	4	2			

Procedure of the Group Interviews

In the group interviews, students, parents, and teachers were asked about their experiences with the procedures they participated in and the outcomes of those procedures. During the sessions, the three procedures from the school project were visually represented on a board. Because of the diversity of the respondents in terms of academic level and literacy, visual support and pictograms were used as much as possible to stimulate the narratives. The discussions, which lasted from one hour (with students and parents) to one and a half hours (with teachers), were moderated by external process facilitators who had previously guided the schools during the project implementation. The interview procedure consisted of three rounds.

Round One

To gather as many diverse opinions as possible, the session began by asking individual participants to indicate with stickers how they valued each procedure (green thumbs up = good, yellow thumbs to the side = moderate, red thumbs down = bad, or cross = did not participate). Next, participants shared their stories, which was followed by a group discussion with the process facilitators asking probing questions (e.g., “What led you to indicate the activities with a red, yellow, or green sticker? Could you explain this further? To what extent do others recognize this?”) and stimulating conversation.

Round Two

In the second round, participants were asked to write on sticky notes what they thought the overall set of procedures had yielded. If participants preferred not to write, the process facilitator transcribed their input on sticky notes. Then, the participants shared their stories, followed by a group discussion with the process facilitators again asking probing questions and encouraging conversation.

Round Three

In order to focus on the ultimate objectives of the project, the third round addressed the intended aims of the project. The process facilitator presented these aims in the form of two propositions: (1) “At school: school, student, and parents work together on career orientation and guidance”; and (2) “At home/outside school: student and parents engage in dialogue and activities together [centering on the student’s career development].” Participants were asked to name which objective they recognize in the implementation, followed by a group discussion wherein the process facilitators asked probing questions (e.g., “Can you give an example that illustrates how school, student, and parents worked together?” and “How did these activities contribute to achieving the objectives?”) and stimulated conversation. During the conclusion of the interview, there was room for participants to mention matters that had not yet been discussed.

During the group interview, process facilitators wrote participants’ explanations and the outcomes of the discussions on sticky notes, which were then attached to the board (see process guide in Appendix B). Because of the potential bias due to the social nature of the setting, some participants may speak more easily or extensively than others, potentially shaping group dynamics or perceived norms (Clark et al., 2021). We sought to mitigate this by allowing all participants to express their opinions individually by first using pictograms (round 1) or sticky notes (round 2), before engaging in a group discussion based on these inputs. During the discussions, facilitators actively encouraged balanced participation to ensure that all voices were heard.

Data Analysis

The process facilitators transcribed the reactions and summaries of the discussions noted on the sticky notes. The data were analyzed using the standard procedure for qualitative data (Clark et al., 2021). Given the theoretically based goals of the procedures, a hybrid approach combining deductive and inductive coding and thematic analysis was employed.

To begin, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by thoroughly reading and rereading the transcripts. Next, a code manual was developed to address the first research question, where theoretic concepts were translated into predefined codes. This initial manual included four overarching code categories (themes) for parental career-related support: (1) presence, (2) dialogical involvement, (3) support on career reflection, and (4) support on career action.

A preliminary round of coding was conducted using these predefined codes to identify relevant segments and to assess the compatibility of the code manual with the raw data. Simultaneously, each segment was coded as to whether it was a response to the overall project or a specific procedure, and whether it originated from a parent, student, or teacher. During this phase, additional fragments emerged that could not be classified under the existing themes. This led to the identification of an additional category, awareness. When defining the code awareness, it became evident that the preexisting overarching code category presence was more appropriately considered a subcomponent rather than a distinct category. Consequently, awareness replaced presence as the overarching code category.

Subsequently, the researchers performed a second round of coding using ATLAS-ti (Frieze, 2019). All researchers independently coded data from different group interviews, after which the coded segments were compared and discrepancies were discussed. In the third round of analyses, the main researcher re-coded all relevant fragments using open coding to capture the full range of aspects within the identified themes. With the research group, these codes were summarized and grouped (axial coding), resulting in 11 codes.

In the fourth step, the 11 codes were organized into main themes. The two codes support on career reflection (focusing on reflecting on strengths and ambitions) and support on career action (combining reflection and action related to career choices) were merged into the theme guidance. This resulted in three overarching themes: awareness (parents' recognition and understanding of their child's career development and role in it, as well as their presence in career-related school activities), dialogical involvement (parents' engagement in purposeful conversations with their children about careers and related matters, involving an exchange of information, experiences, or views), and guidance (parents' assistance in fostering self-awareness, exploring opportunities, taking action, and making career decisions).

In order to analyze fragments related to how the interventions contributed to parental career-supportive behaviors (RQ2), the researchers

conducted additional open coding. Through axial coding, 10 final codes were identified and grouped under three categories: (1) conditions for content, (2) conditions for practical execution, and (3) conditions for embedding. All themes and codes are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Themes and Codes Reflecting Perceived Influence of Career-Related SFP Procedures on Parental Support

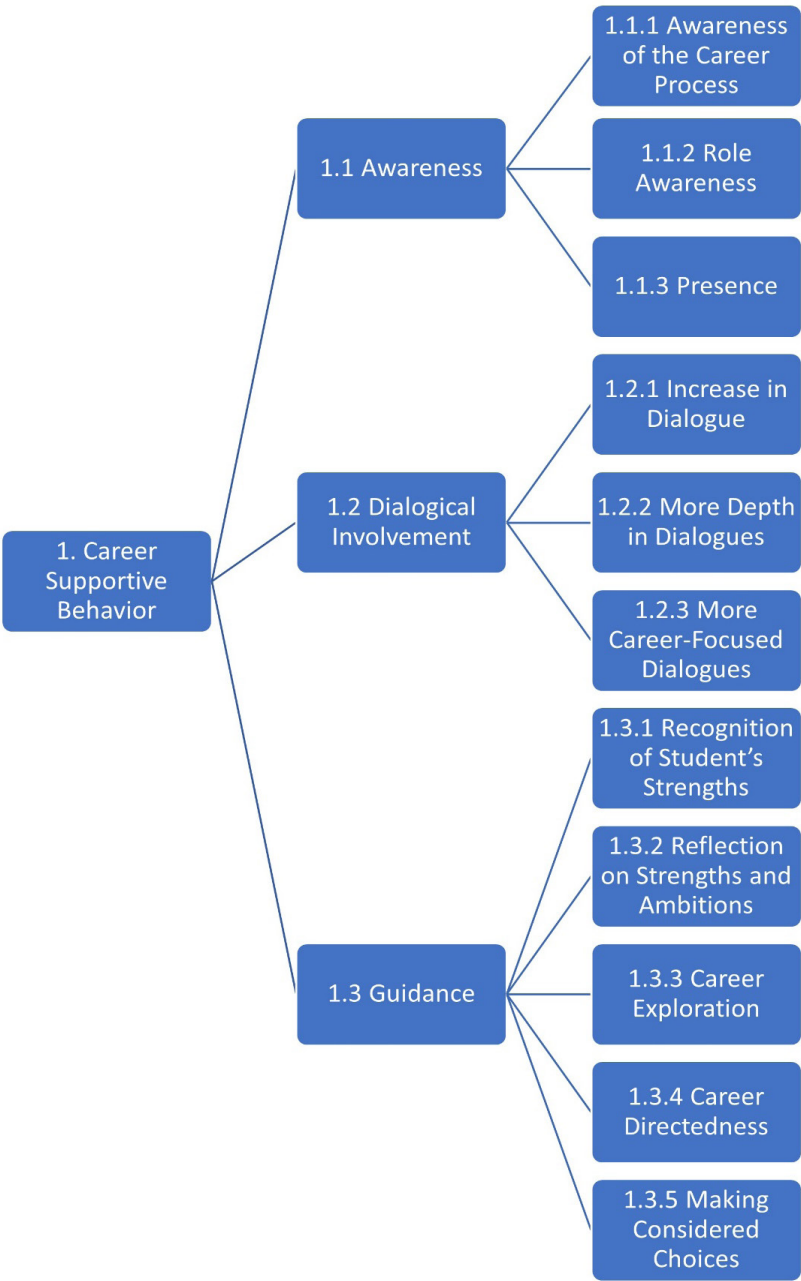
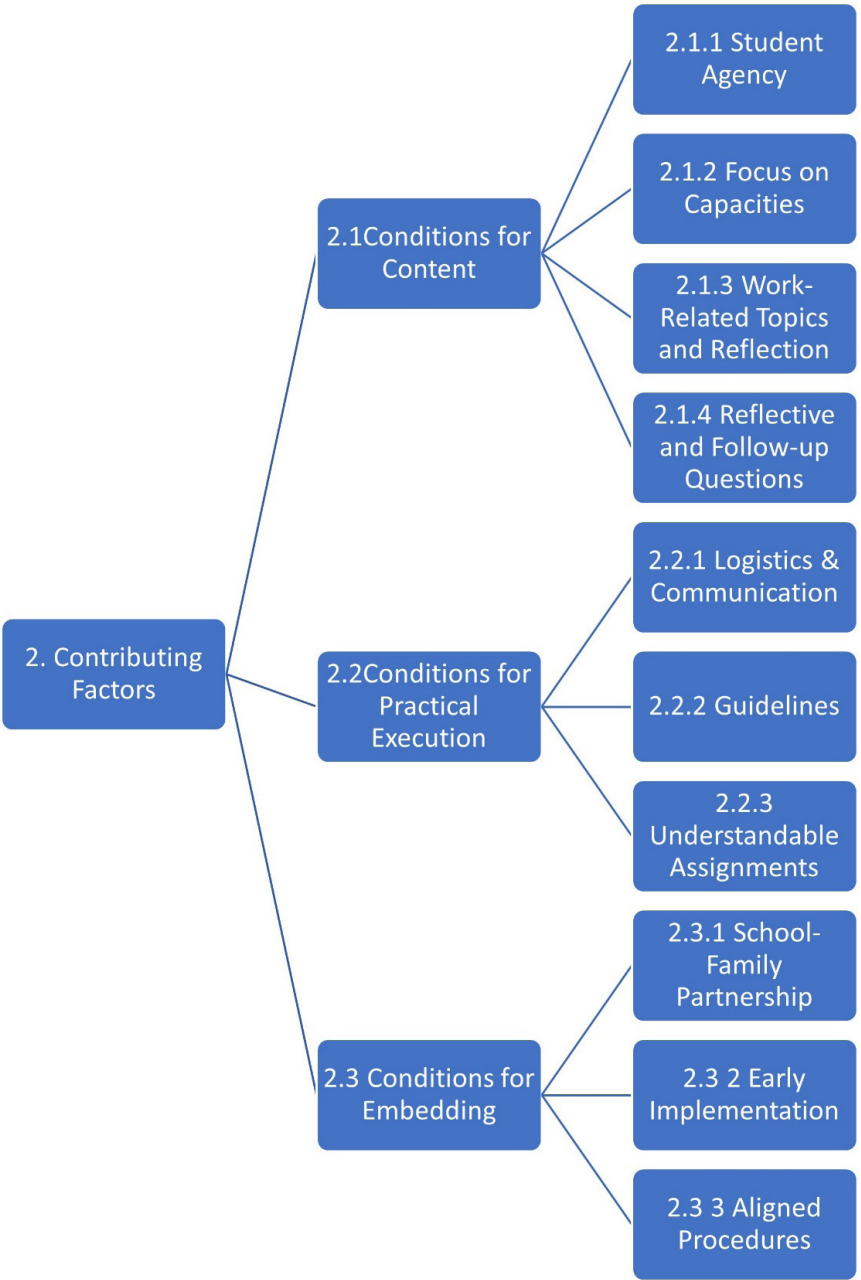


Figure 2. Themes and Codes Reflecting Conditions Related to Career-Related SFP Procedures That Contribute to Parental Career-Related Support



Results

This section consists of two parts. First, we present the findings related to the first research question, which explores how students, parents, and teachers perceive the influence of career-related SFP procedures on different aspects of parental career-related support. Second, we present the findings related to the second research question by identifying the conditions related to these procedures that, according to the participants, contribute to strengthening parental career-related support.

In the presentation of the findings, the term “participants” serves as an umbrella term for the respondents involved in this study. This may refer to students, parents, and/or teachers, depending on the context. Where relevant, the specific group is mentioned explicitly. “Mentor” refers to a teacher with a specific guidance role for a group of students. Quotations are referenced using a coding system that specifies the school (e.g., S1), the respondent group (P = parent, S = student, T = teacher), and, where applicable, the interview number (e.g., I1, I2). For example, S1-P refers to the parent group interview at School 1, while S2-S-I3 refers to the third student group interview at School 2.

Contribution of Project Participation to Parental Career-Related Support

The entire project consisted of an aligned combination of home assignment(s) and one or two other procedures for each school. For an overview of the procedures each school performed, see Appendix A. Regarding the contribution of the project with the combination of procedures, we found that it enhanced *parental awareness, dialogical involvement, and support*. Across all respondent groups, examples of these three types of support were mentioned. Below, we first discuss the overall influence of the project on parental career-related support, followed by the specific contributions of each of the three career-related SFP procedures. Interview excerpts are used to illustrate and substantiate the findings. For clarity, the numbering of headings reflects the coding structure depicted in Figure 1: main themes (e.g., 1), subthemes (e.g., 1.1), and sub-subthemes (e.g., 1.1.1).

Awareness (1.1)

In the group interview data, we distinguished three ways in which parents showed increased awareness by participating in the project. *Awareness of the students’ career process (1.1.1)*: participants reported parents gained more insight into the relevance of their child’s career process, choices, and the timing of decision-making as a result of the project. For instance,

a parent mentioned, “We already talked about it, but not so seriously. I thought ‘that will come later.’ I did not know he already had to choose for the next two years. You have to choose well, otherwise it’s a waste” (S2-P). *Role awareness* (1.1.2): participants noted parents came to have more understanding of their role in supporting their child’s career development process. A parent shared, “It is now clear to me that as a parent, I should support my child in his pursuit of his future” (S12-P). *Presence* (1.1.3): participants mentioned increased presence and attentiveness of parents in school activities regarding their child’s career development process. For example, a parent remarked, “If parental involvement is encouraged, you come to school more often” (S3-P).

Dialogical Involvement (1.2)

We found three aspects that showed parents to be more engaged in two-way conversations with their children about careers and career related matters. *Increase in dialogue* (1.2.1): participants reported that the project stimulated the parents’ dialogical involvement. In group interviews with students (S5-S, S6-S), parents (S8-P), and teachers (S1-T, S3-T, S8-T, S11-T), an increase in dialogue was noted compared to previous years. In some cases, however, the increase appears to be limited. For example, a student shared, “We never talk about it [at home]. Now, once. That’s good, but still not enough” (S9-S). *More depth in dialogues* (1.2.2): participants mentioned improvement in the quality and content of the conversations between parents and children. For instance, a parent mentioned, “Otherwise, you would have the conversation more broadly. Now you go deeper” (S7-P). *More career-focused dialogues* (1.2.3): a shift in the content of conversations was observed toward career development. A student mentioned the difference in dialogue at home: “Normally, it’s [conversations at home with parents] about your grades and ‘have you studied?’” (S3-S).

Guidance (1.3)

Five aspects were distinguished in the way parents support their children’s career management. *Recognition of student’s strengths* (1.3.1): participants mentioned that, through the project, parents identified, acknowledged, and gave credit for their child’s strengths, skills, and ambitions. For instance, a parent described learning about the child through the project: “The assignments are fun, and you get to know your child better” (S6-P-I2). *Reflection on strengths and ambitions* (1.3.2): examples were given that showed that the project helped parents to stimulate student’s self-examination and help their child to gain clarity about what matches their abilities, motivations, and interest. For example, a student shared,

“My mother had different points than I did, like that I’m independent. I liked that she saw different strengths” (S7-S-I2). *Career exploration* (1.3.3): participants mentioned that parents encouraged their children to actively explore career opportunities. For instance, one parent explained, “We explored many things together at home, watching videos and searching for information [online]” (S4-P). *Career directedness* (1.3.4): participants noted that parents assisted their children in understanding what is needed to achieve their career ambitions and in planning the necessary steps. One parent mentioned, “I can explain to my child and encourage him to research things. He wants to do aircraft maintenance. I told him he needs to read a lot to further develop his language skills, so he can pursue that education” (S10-P). *Making considered choices* (1.3.5): participants noted parents guided their children in making well-informed and thoughtful career decisions, while respecting their autonomy. For instance, a parent told how she supported her child in making considered choices:

It’s great that it could be done this way. Not just “choose something and go with it,” but it was prepared. Making choices is difficult. It’s your child; you need to think along, support him. Give advice. Ultimately, he makes his own choices. (S6-P-I1)

Interactive Homework Assignments

In the project, all schools used one or more career-related interactive home assignments that focused on reflection, work exploration, or networking, or a combination of these themes (see Appendix A). Each participating school tailored these procedures to their own practices.

Awareness (1.1)

According to the participants, homework assignments could lead to increased parental awareness about the career process of their child (1.1.1) and helped parents think about and become more cognizant of important career development issues and their role in the process (1.1.2). Parents and teachers, as well as students, made remarks about it in the group interviews. For instance, a parent observed that a home assignment highlighted the significance of recognizing a child’s strengths (S3-P). A teacher remarked, “Parents are being made to think. It is a wake-up call” (S3-T). Another teacher noticed that it prompted some parents to consider costs, travel time, and the quality of educational institutions in their child’s choice for further education (S3-T). A student noted that a homework assignment focused on exploring educational profiles prompted his father to become more aware of his child’s career process: “I did the homework assignment; this made my father think about it” (S5-S).

Dialogical Involvement (1.2)

In the group interviews, participants in parent, student, and teacher groups indicated that the home assignments led to an increase in parental (career) dialogical involvement at home (1.2.1) and that, in addition to stimulating conversations, the home assignments also led to more in-depth discussions (1.2.2), and dialogues that were more career-focused (1.2.3).

Parents, teachers, and students noted that these types of conversations were not typical for many families. Parents reported: “Very nice because you wouldn’t normally do something like this. Now we really took the time for it” (S4-P); and “A real deep conversation usually doesn’t happen at home” (S8-P). Also, students talked about how rare these conversations are for them at home (S11-S); a student mentioned, “I had never talked about this before” (S7-S-II). There were also some students, particularly those with a clear idea of their career path, who viewed the assignments about orienting on the choice for an occupational direction as unnecessary. For example, a student noted, “I already know what I’m going to do, so it’s not needed” (S5-S). In these cases, assignments that focus on the choice for further education did not lead to a dialogue between student and parent.

Guidance (1.3)

In all group interviews, it was mentioned that the home assignments stimulated home dialogues in which parents helped and supported their children to reflect on their strengths (1.3.2), sometimes in relation to the occupational sector. In the interviews with parents, it was explicitly mentioned several times that the home assignments led to reflection on strengths. For example, a parent stated, “It makes the child think. He considers what suits him, also discussing it with his brothers” (S7-P). Another parent noted, “We had a real conversation at home about her strengths. We discussed all the qualities on the assignment. We didn’t agree on some. Sometimes she started thinking differently about herself because of my perception of her” (S4-P). Students mentioned how assignments contributed to reflection that, in turn, contributed to the development of their self-image (S11-S) and made them start to think about their strengths and which occupational sector suits them (S5-S).

Participants also indicated that the home assignments can help parents to support their children in exploring the world of work (1.3.3). For instance, students and parents shared in the interviews how they explored jobs and professions at home together (S10-S, S10-P). A parent said, “We also discussed the professions; I explained what is needed for a specific job” (S10-P). Teachers noted that professions often appeared abstract to

parents. The teachers found the homework assignments beneficial for increasing the knowledge of parents about professions (S3-T). Regarding career directedness (1.3.4), a parent mentioned how the at-home dialogues led to support on student engagement in the career development process: “We started a conversation because of the assignment and discovered that my son has a different vision for his future. Now I encourage him to pursue his own path” (S4-P).

Individual Student–Parent–Teacher Conferences

Eight of the 12 schools implemented the career-related individual student–parent–teacher conferences. All schools used predeveloped guidelines to facilitate the career dialogue during the conferences.

Awareness (1.1)

The results indicate that the individual student–parent–teacher conferences can also promote parental awareness of their child’s career process (1.1.1). A parent mentioned, for example, that the decisions they faced were new to them. Joining the individual student–parent–teacher conference was particularly useful because it taught them what to expect for their child (S8-P).

Participants indicated that the conferences can stimulate parental involvement, in that parents were more present and actively listening (1.1.3). Reflecting on a conference where students presented their strengths and motives regarding their choice of an occupational direction, a teacher reflected, “For the first time, I really thought that parents were involved in the child’s choices, that they understood it” (S8-T). A student noted about her parent during a conference in which she presented: “It was the first time that she listened attentively” (S8-S). Another student described a conference explaining dreams and aspirations for the future, noting that it was the first time the parent truly listened (S6-S).

Dialogical Involvement (1.2)

According to the participants from all groups, the conversations during the conferences were more of a three-way conversation than before (1.2.1). As a student stated, “Now we talk with all three of us; otherwise, my mother just talks to the mentor” (S8-S). A parent similarly noted, “He [the teacher] gave us time. It was a pleasant conversation about subject choice. My son struggles with math, so it’s better if he doesn’t choose economics. The three of us figured it out together” (S6-P-I1). Teachers noticed a difference in the nature of the conversations now that the conferences are more career-focused (1.2.3). A teacher described how the discussion which

typically centered on grades now included considerations about future careers (S11-T). Another teacher noted, “The student had more to say about the choice of occupational direction and subjects. This increased interaction between parents and the student” (S2-T).

Guidance (1.3)

In a group interview with teachers, students’ presentations about their strengths and motivations were emphasized as a way for parents to better recognize and acknowledge their child’s strengths, skills, and ambitions (S9-T). Students indicated that the conferences drew increased attention to their strengths, which often resulted in expressions of pride (S8-S, S9-S) and compliments from parents (S5-S, S10-S, S7-S-I1, S7-S-I2) (1.3.1). By explicitly seeing and acknowledging their child’s abilities, parents can help their child in their capacity for reflection (1.3.2). One teacher, for example, described how a conference in which students presented mood boards initiated conversations between parents and children about strengths and aspirations, thereby encouraging parents to think along with their child (S7-T). In addition to strengths, career-related themes were also discussed during the conferences.

Collective Student–Parent Meetings

Nine of the 12 schools implemented the career-related collective student–parent meetings. Each used predeveloped guides in their implementations.

Awareness (1.1)

Participants indicated that, compared to traditional meetings, the career-related meetings fostered greater parent attendance (1.1.3) and awareness of students’ career development processes (1.1.1). Both parents and teachers noted an increase in attendance (S6-P-I1, S12-T). Parents, students, and teachers reported that the meetings helped increase parental awareness of students’ career trajectories and experiences. Parents described gaining a clearer understanding of occupational pathways and the experiences their children had at school and during internships. One parent stated, “I have gained a better understanding of the occupational directions” (S2-P), while another reflected, “You become more aware of how the child experiences things at school and during their internship” (S12-P). Teachers also observed that the meetings lowered barriers for parents to engage with staff, noting an increase in parental outreach and questions (S12-T).

Dialogical Involvement (1.2)

The meetings were also reported to increase career-related conversations between parents and students, as well as among parents themselves (1.2.1). In group interviews, students described having conversations with their parents about careers and professions (1.2.3). One student noted, “Parents joined the conversations; they offered tips” (S3-S). Another student reported, “A dialogue emerged between parents about professions” (S3-S).

Teachers also observed an increase in interaction between parents and students during the meetings (S2-T, S12-T). One teacher commented, “For the first time, interaction occurred between parents and students” (S11-T), while another remarked, “Remarkable that the conversation started naturally. Activity was happening everywhere; mentors didn’t need to prompt it” (S6-T).

Guidance (1.3)

During the collective meetings, parents provided feedback on students’ presentations regarding their strengths or chosen occupational directions. Compliment cards were used to enable parents to recognize students’ qualities (1.3.1) and to support reflection on their strengths and ambitions. In addition, parents shared ideas about the career paths students envisioned for themselves, drawing on their own professional experiences to support career exploration (1.3.3). One teacher noted, “Parents’ experiences were shared. These are more realistic than those of the teachers” (S3-T). One teacher further remarked, “Parents also shared their thoughts with other students; sometimes they warned students about certain aspects of a particular profession” (S3-T).

Contributing Factors to the Deployment of the Procedures

Addressing the second research question, the interviews showed that the extent to which the interventions contributed to parental involvement depended on the way in which the interventions are deployed. Ten factors that influence the deployment of the procedures could be distinguished, which can be categorized as *conditions for content*, *practical execution*, and *embedding*.

Conditions for Content (2.1)

Respondents mentioned specific content elements that can enhance parental career-related support. These included designing procedures that position students as active agents in their own career development process (*student agency*, 2.1.1), emphasizing students’ strengths (*focus on capacities*, 2.1.2), integrating assignments that encourage work exploration

(*work-related topics and reflection*, 2.1.3), and incorporating questions that stimulate the quality of parent–child interactions (*reflective and follow-up questions*, 2.1.4).

Promote Student Presence and Include Agency Possibilities (2.1.1).

Promoting student agency during conferences and meetings was regularly mentioned as a way to strengthen parental career involvement. Participants observed that parental attendance increased when students were positioned as active contributors, particularly when they were expected to present. As one teacher reflected: “There was a high attendance rate, approximately 120 parents and students, that is 85%, including parents who never come to school. This is due to presentations by students to parents and the emphasis from school that students must be present” (S12-T). Furthermore, encouraging students to take the lead in individual student–parent–teacher conferences by allowing students to provide input during these conferences was shown to increase parental engagement, attentively listening, and understanding of the students’ career process compared to when a teacher led the discussion. Teachers mentioned: “The parents are activated by the presentation” (S3-T); and “On the mood board you can see the professions of their [students’] future, and during the conference it becomes clear to the parents what the student is working on and thinking about” (S7-T). A student remarked, “I enjoyed telling about my future. My father liked that too” (S7-S-I3). A teacher described physically positioning the student during a conference to enhance their role: “It worked well to have the student sit in my chair. This allowed them to take a leading role” (S8-T).

Giving students a leading role also seemed to stimulate their involvement in their own career development process. A teacher discussed a conference where a student presented their learning process in the context of career development: “It forces students and parents into different roles. Students become responsible for their own learning process” (S8-T). This, in turn, can lead students to involve their parents more actively, thus increasing parental involvement. As parents remarked, “If the school starts having discussions where the student takes more control, the student will seek support at home. They will then discuss with their parents why they are struggling with a particular subject” (S11-P).

Focus on Capacities (2.1.2). Implementing a focus on capacities in assignments appears to enhance parental support for career reflection. Encouraging parental recognition for students’ strengths helps students to reflect on their capacities. In various procedures, parents and students were asked to identify the student’s strengths. For example, homework assignments instructed parents and students to select strengths (qualities) from

a list they believed suited the student. They were then asked to link these strengths to potential careers. In individual conferences, after a student presentation of a project, parents were asked to identify which strengths they recognized in their child (S11). During collective meetings where students presented their reflections on their choice for occupational direction, parents were given compliment cards to share with their child, containing messages like, “I think you’re a go-getter” or “I think you’re creative” (S4). Students noted that these assignments increased parental recognition of their strengths. A student remarked, “It was nice to see what my parents think my qualities are” (S2-S), while another shared, “The teacher mentioned my positive attributes, but hearing it from my mother is nicer” (S7-S-I1).

Participants emphasized the importance of focusing on positive attributes and providing compliments. This was particularly meaningful for students who indicated that recognition of strengths was not common in their family context. A parent remarked, “We never talk about qualities at home; we take them for granted” (S8-P), and a teacher observed, “At home, students are not always spoken to positively, and few compliments are given” (S6-T). Another student noted, “My mother pointed out what I am good at. Now I know what she thinks my strengths are, which I didn’t know before” (S10-S).

Although most respondents appreciated these capacity-based assignments, not all students found them useful. A student stated, “I don’t find it interesting to know what my parents think about my qualities. They are my qualities” (S3-S). Some students felt these conversations were redundant, as they already routinely discussed their strengths at home (S8-S). Others reported that such discussions could lead to conflicts. A student described, “My parents should not argue with me about my qualities. It led to raised voices, which was unpleasant” (S3-S).

Incorporate Work-Related Topics and Connect to Reflection Outcomes (2.1.3). Participants highlighted that including work-related themes and career paths in the curriculum encouraged students and their parents to explore career options more actively, leading to better-informed decisions (S3-S). Integrating work exploration into the program fostered more career-oriented conversations between teachers, students, and parents. A teacher remarked, “The new structure provides guidance for further education because students start thinking about professions and the education required for them. This results in different kinds of conversations with students and parents” (S7-T).

Career exploration activities, such as presentations about different educational paths linked to specific occupational fields, were seen as instrumental in helping students clarify what suits them best (S2-S, S2-P, S4-S). Assignments that prompted families to discuss work-related topics, such as researching occupational fields by watching videos, and to link these to strengths, enabled students to better relate their personal strengths to potential careers. Students appreciated these assignments, with one commenting, “You can see which professions fit” (S6-S).

Participants noted that translating personal strengths into specific professions could be challenging and not necessarily desirable. A teacher expressed, “The leap from qualities to professions is too large” (S3-T). A parent also expressed concerns about the work-related assignments, commenting, “It’s drastic; they are too young for a conversation about professions, better to talk about a direction” (S3-P). These findings suggest that focusing on broader aspects—such as work activities, environments, or sectors related to students’ interests—may be more effective than discussing specific professions.

Include Reflective and Follow Up Questions (2.1.4). All procedures included assignments, such as making a mood board about your internship and explaining it during an individual student–parent–teacher conference (S7), an experiential assignment during a collective student–parent meeting (S10), or watching a video and answering questions during a home assignment (S5). These assignments appeared to facilitate interaction about career development between parents and their children when explicit and follow-up questions were asked about work exploration, career reflection, and career decision-making. These included, for instance, reflective questions about the internship experiences and follow-up questions about the choice of the next internship during a conference, questions about the strengths that emerged during the execution of an assignment in relation to the choice for occupational direction during the meeting, and questions about what activities and strengths are needed for the profession in the chosen video during the homework assignment. In particular, the questions and conversations as a result of the home assignment were mentioned in the group interviews. For example, a parent observed, “The depth questions help you discover if he is really thinking about it” (S11-P). One parent noted that the home assignment prompted them to engage in deeper conversations with the child, particularly by asking “why” questions, which were not typically part of their dialogue (S11-P). Another parent highlighted how the assignment encouraged her to ask follow up questions, which the child found challenging (S11-P). Although explicit

questions often were appreciated, it was also indicated that not all parents wanted to answer questions about the family's network, because they were perceived as too personal (S7-T).

Conditions for Practical Execution (2.2)

Discussions in the group interviews highlighted the importance of execution quality for the success of the procedures. Key factors included designing assignments that ensure clear organization and communication regarding the procedures (*logistics and communication*, 2.2.1), providing instructional support for teachers to facilitate effective implementation (*guidelines*, 2.2.2), and making them accessible and appropriate for both parents and students, considering their language proficiency and comprehension levels (*understandable assignments*, 2.2.3).

Attention to Logistics and Communication (2.2.1). The contribution of the procedures depends on their proper execution. Participants identified several logistical and communication issues that could hinder the positive impact of the procedures. For instance, the distribution of home assignments did not go smoothly everywhere. A teacher commented, "In one class, the home assignment had to be made on the day of the collective meeting, because the mentor had forgotten to spread the assignments" (S2-T). In addition, some parents were not informed in advance about the purpose of the home assignments (S3-P). Others did not receive the assignments (S8-P) because students were tasked with bringing them home but some lost or misplaced them (S7-T). When the assignments were sent via email, not all parents read them (S3-S). Logistical shortcomings and insufficient communication hinder the effectiveness of the procedures, highlighting the need for clear organization and timely information for both teachers and parents.

Provide Guidelines (2.2.2). Guidelines for executing individual student-parent-teacher conferences and collective student-parent meetings can improve the quality of these procedures so they may better contribute to clarifying stereotypical expectations and stimulating parental career awareness and in-depth conversations between parents and students. Guidelines were developed to help teachers facilitate productive conversations among students, parents, and teachers. These guidelines included specific questions and points of focus to ensure balanced participation from all parties. For example, teachers were guided to discuss the choice for occupational direction based on the answers that were given in the home assignment. They were then to ask in-depth questions of both the student and the parents about why the indicated direction suits the student with a view to their

strengths. Teachers noted that having structured questions and key discussion points helped them to guide conversations effectively. A teacher remarked, “You force parents and students to think about the future and choice for occupational direction” (S8-T). Another highlighted the benefit of reversing roles by allowing parents to ask questions first after the student presentation, noting, “It was positive to let parents ask questions first” (S8-T). A teacher emphasized the “back-up” function of the guide: “The conversation can’t die out; you can fall back on the guide” (S3-T).

For collective student–parent meetings, scenarios were designed with detailed instructions for interactive activities. These guidelines addressed critical aspects of the career decision-making process that some parents may not have previously considered, for instance, by discussing statements such as “parents determine the choices of their children.”

Clearer guidelines proved to be beneficial for guiding student presentations. During meetings where students presented, some students struggled to produce a presentation that met expectations (S4-P), which forced parents to give unfounded compliments. As a teacher stated, “One group of students did not deliver quality, which led to forced, meaningless compliments” (S3-T).

Use Understandable Language, Visualization, and Feasible Assignments (2.2.3). Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that assignments were well-aligned with both the language proficiency and the academic level of parents and students. This was especially critical for homework assignments, as language barriers were frequently cited as an issue. Participants reported that some parents had limited proficiency in Dutch, which made it harder to execute the assignment with their child effectively (S5-T). As a result, some students completed the assignment without their parents (S7-T). The language used in assignments was also sometimes too advanced for students, making comprehension difficult (S5-T, S7-T). A parent shared, “I asked my [step]son if he had certain qualities. He didn’t know all the talents, like creativity. I had to explain those words to him” (S10-P).

In addition to language barriers, teachers highlighted the need for assignments to match the academic level of students and their parents. According to them, not all homework assignments or activities during meetings were appropriately tailored to these levels (S5-T, S7-T, S11-T). A teacher noted, “I explained and distributed the home assignment in class, but the questions are sometimes too difficult” (S7-T). A student remarked about a home assignment, “My mother doesn’t understand it” (S10-S). Another student commented that an argument occurred at home due to the unclear inten-

tion of the assignment (S3-S). To improve accessibility, a teacher suggested simplifying home assignments by incorporating visual aids: “Make the home assignments easier by visualizing them” (S7-T). This is consistent with what one teacher suggested, namely that visualization can make professions understandable for parents: “Parents sometimes have no idea of certain professions, and when they see the picture, it comes to life” (S7-T).

Presentation-based assignments, such as mood board presenting during individual student–parent–teacher conferences, were seen as challenging. A teacher observed: “For second-year students, even for students in the middle-management vocational program, it’s hard to talk about the mood board. Some don’t dare or can’t do it” (S7-T).

Conditions for Imbedding (2.3)

The final contribution theme relates to the embedding of the procedures. During group discussions, emphasis was placed on building upon existing contact and collaboration between schools and families (*school–family partnership*, 2.3.1), initiating the procedures early in the student’s education and academic year (*early implementation*, 2.3.2), and ensuring a logical progression between different career development procedures (*aligned procedures*, 2.3.3).

Invest in a School–Family Partnership (2.3.1). Participants highlighted the importance of a strong foundation in family–school partnership for implementing the career-related procedures. At some schools, general SFP was not yet sufficiently integrated, making it less likely that parents would engage fully (S6-T). Establishing better contact with more parents was identified as important step (S9-T, S11-T, S12-T). It was also noted that parents require time to adjust to their expected role in these processes (S5-T) and to become comfortable with their involvement (S1-T, S6-T, S8-T).

Early implementation (2.3.2). Participants highlighted that early implementation can enhance the contribution of career development procedures on parental career involvement. For example, it was noted that, as part of the project, contact was established with parents at the start of the academic year. This early engagement helped parents understand their role in their child’s career development and why their involvement was important at an early stage (S4-T). Participants also indicated that parents intervened more than usual in their child’s career discussions. This is because parents were involved earlier in the career decisions that have to be made later. A teacher remarked, “I noticed that the conversation at home about the choice of occupational direction is being held and also that it is being held earlier. Not just when the students have to make a choice” (S10-T).

Early implementation is also important because it aligns with career self-management, introducing students and parents to career competencies from the start of education rather than focusing narrowly on immediate choices. This framing helps align activities with students' career processes and prevents them from being perceived as solely choice-oriented. It may also reduce resistance among students who have already made decisions. Several second- and third-year students indicated that the procedures did not match their situation, as they had already chosen their educational path (S5-S, S1-S). As one student explained, "I didn't talk about it. I already know what I want to be" (S3-S).

Align Procedures (2.3.3). Implementing a combination of aligned procedures throughout the school period seems to positively impact the contribution on parental career involvement. A parent described this combination of procedures as a joint effort to guide the students toward a suitable career choice:

Someone came to explain, and it was a good explanation. We practiced at home with the sheets, then the children met with the teacher, and finally, there was a meeting with the parents. Only then did we make the decision. I found it a very pleasant way. I was happy that it went this way. We could figure out what it was about. The child says something, the parent says something, the mentor says something. More opinions are good for the decision. (S6-P-I2)

Another parent highlighted the difference between these procedures and how it was done previously: "Earlier, you only received a sheet to tick off the occupational direction choice. Now, more steps have been taken in the process" (S7-P).

Students also acknowledged the impact of these combined procedures on their career decisions. One student remarked:

I learned about a profession I want to pursue in the future. Through the exercises and assignments, I am now certain about what I want to become. The combination of all the information and assignments made this clear to me. (S10-S)

Teachers mentioned the importance of aligning the procedures by discussing the activities in advance and afterwards, linking them to the next procedure (S1-T, S7-T).

Conclusion and Discussion

The present findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how career-related SFP procedures may foster parental career-supportive behavior in the development of students' career competencies. Drawing on qualitative data from group interview discussions with parents, students, and teachers, this study identifies specific aspects of parental support that participants reported as having changed during engagement with career-related interactive homework assignments, individual student-parent-teacher conferences, and collective meetings. These reported changes can be understood along three interrelated stages: increased career awareness, dialogical involvement, and active career guidance.

Career-related SFP procedures appeared to increase parents' awareness of the career development process of their child and their own potential role in supporting it. This awareness was described as an important initial stage in fostering parental involvement. Furthermore, participants noted more frequent and higher quality career-related conversations between parents and children. These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of parental awareness and communication in adolescents' career development (e.g., Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Barnes et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). In addition, participants described how the procedures activated parents' career guidance behaviors, enabling them to guide their children's career reflection and exploration. In some cases, parents were said to have helped clarify goals and guided thoughtful decision-making. Together, these stages from awareness to active guidance suggest a shift from more passive forms of involvement to more intentional, developmentally attuned support.

All three procedures were perceived by participants as enhancing parental awareness. In addition, increases in dialogical involvement and career guidance were attributed to each procedure, although through distinct pathways. Interactive homework assignments were described as fostering private, in-depth career dialogues at home, allowing parents to guide students' reflection, exploration, and goal-directed thinking. Individual conferences were described as facilitating structured, triadic dialogues in which parents and teachers jointly guided students in reflecting on their strengths and exploring possible career directions. Collective meetings were appreciated for enabling group exchanges among parents, students, and teachers and for broadened occupational perspectives through the sharing of parental work experiences. They were also particularly valued for reaching parents who might otherwise have been characterized as dis-

engaged (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). In several cases, participants noted the increased presence of parents who had previously been less involved in school-related activities, suggesting that the procedures may have contributed to the inclusion of previously disengaged families.

Importantly, participants did not typically distinguish the contribution of individual procedures to the overarching aim of guiding students to make well-informed and thoughtful career decisions. Rather they tended to view the project as a whole as contributing to this goal. From their perspective, the combined impact of the procedures may be more meaningful in fostering parental support on well considered choice-making than the contribution of any single component.

Beyond the three stages of behavioral change described above, the analyses also suggested that three overarching conditions influenced the extent to which career-related SFP procedures were experienced as supportive: conditions related to content, practical execution, and embedding. First, content-related conditions concerned the quality and focus of the activities. Assignments that encouraged students and parents to identify and discuss personal strengths were described as stimulating reflection resonating with theoretical models emphasizing appreciative dialogue as a driver of career confidence and perceived control (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012). Elements foregrounding student agency, such as student-led presentations, were also seen as facilitating parental engagement. These findings support earlier models that highlight student initiative within SFPs as a catalyst for meaningful parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Oomen, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024).

Second, conditions related to practical execution were frequently mentioned. Participants emphasized the importance of clear communication, timely distribution of materials, and the accessibility of activities for diverse families. Practical barriers, such as language or literacy challenges, were described as undermining parents' ability to engage meaningfully. These aspects reflect the need for implementation approaches that are sensitive to the linguistic and educational backgrounds of families (Araque et al., 2017; Lusse, Notten, et al., 2019; van der Pluijm et al., 2019).

Third, systemic embedding in the school context was described as a vital enabler. Participants noted the importance of aligning the procedures with existing parent–school interactions, ensuring early implementation within students' educational trajectories, and maintaining coherence between procedures over time. Particularly for families who are less likely to engage in voluntary activities, a whole-school approach that ensures broad, equitable access was seen as essential for fostering sustained parental involvement (Oomen, 2021).

While the procedures were generally experienced as supportive, their perceived relevance varied depending on students' prior orientation toward career choices. Homework assignments on further education seemed less meaningful for students with predefined goals. This may reflect the interventions' focus on fostering career-related attitudes and competencies as an exploratory learning process rather than producing a specific career choice. Such an emphasis can lead some students to prematurely curtail reflection and exploration (Kuijpers, 2019), a phenomenon known as foreclosure (Marcia, 1966). Alternatively, the outcome-oriented design of certain assignments may not resonate with students who have already made career decisions. These underscore the importance of tailoring procedures to students' developmental needs.

Contributions to Theory

This study contributes to a process-oriented understanding of parental career-supportive behavior by identifying three interrelated stages—awareness, dialogical involvement, and active guidance—that may evolve as parents engage with SFP procedures. While prior research has delineated types of parental career-related behavior (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), the present study offers a more nuanced model of how such behaviors may be activated and strengthened within the context of career-related interventions.

Furthermore, the study extends prior work on intervention-based approaches to parental career involvement (Barnes et al., 2020; Oomen, 2021; Piesch et al., 2019), as well as broader practical models of academic involvement (Epstein, 2018b; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lusse, van Schooten, et al., 2019), by identifying procedural elements that participants perceived as enhancing support. The findings also underscore the importance of contextual differentiation; for example, collective meetings were seen as particularly effective for engaging parents who are typically less involved in school-related activities.

In addition, the study builds on earlier work emphasizing the role of teachers in fostering students' career competencies (Kuijpers, 2011; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2014) by highlighting that parents may also play a meaningful role in this process. Participants' accounts indicate that SFP procedures engaged parents in supporting students' development in areas such as reflection, career exploration, and self-directed planning. These findings suggest the potential for more integrated models of support in which both teachers and parents contribute to students' career learning.

Implications for Practice

To translate the findings into practical steps for schools, we frame the implications within the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (Deming, 1982/2018), a widely used approach for continuous improvement in education and organizational development. While the three-stage framework of awareness, dialogue, and guidance specifies the content dimensions that can inform the design of career-related SFP procedures, Plan-Do-Check-Act provides a process for implementing and sustaining them in practice. In the planning phase (“Plan”), schools should develop interventions that address each stage and anticipate variability in parental engagement based on familial context and experience. Importantly, schools should focus on fostering career competencies rather than prematurely emphasizing decision-making. Supporting students in engaging with a variety of experiences and helping them make sense of these through guided reflective dialogue is essential (Kuijpers et al., 2011; Kuijpers, 2025). Involving parents in this process requires connecting procedures to existing parent–school interactions, initiating them early in students’ educational trajectories, and aligning activities with the developmental aims of the curriculum. Content should promote student agency, highlight students’ capacities, incorporate work-related themes linked to reflection, and include targeted prompts and follow-up questions to deepen dialogue.

Implementation (“Do”) should be tailored to diverse parental contexts. Procedures must be accessible in both content and form, addressing language, literacy, and educational diversity. Clear internal coordination, timely distribution of materials, and consistent communication with parents are essential to ensure that procedures reach families as intended. Combining procedures can support different parent profiles and enhance the overall impact of career-related involvement.

Evaluation (“Check”) should include participant feedback to ensure that procedures remain responsive and relevant. This study illustrates how such input can reveal strengths and guide targeted improvements. Finally, action on evaluation outcomes (“Act”) enables schools to gradually develop and sustain more coherent approaches to parental involvement in career learning.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is based on qualitative data collected at a single point in time. While the findings suggest that awareness, dialogue, and guidance may be interrelated and

potentially follow a developmental pattern, the design limits conclusions about progression, causality, or long-term sustainability.

Second, group interview dynamics may have shaped participants' responses. Social desirability dynamics could have led to emphasis on positive experiences or suppression of critical perspectives. These dynamics, inherent to group interview methodologies, may have influenced the data collected (Clark et al., 2021).

Third, participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which may have resulted in a sample composed of relatively engaged parents, students, and teachers. As a result, perspectives from families and teachers less inclined to participate in school-based activities may be underrepresented, further limiting the transferability of the findings.

In light of these limitations, future research could build on the current study in several ways:

1. Research is needed to assess whether the changes described by participants, such as increased awareness, dialogue, or guidance, are sustained over time and how they relate to long-term student outcomes.
2. The three stage model of parental support merits further examination. Quantitative studies could investigate which support stages are most predictive of student's career development indicators such as self-efficacy, adaptability, or decision-making confidence (Ginevra et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2015; Šimunović, 2024).
3. Some students reported discomfort during reflective exercises with their parents, particularly when discussing personal strengths. This raises the need to explore how relational and emotional dynamics shape the effectiveness of career conversations within families (e.g., Bourret et al., 2023; Soresi et al., 2014).
4. Finally, while the sample was diverse, future studies should explicitly examine how cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors affect parental engagement and perceived outcomes, to inform more tailored and equitable intervention strategies (e.g., Bakker et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2021; Mason & Rock, 2025; OECD, 2024).

To conclude, this study suggests that career-related SFP procedures, when carefully designed and embedded in diverse school contexts, can support parents as active agents in students' career development. By identifying stages of parental support and illustrating how different procedures may contribute to these stages, this research offers both theoretical insights and actionable guidance for more inclusive and effective career education.

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Monique Strijk is senior lecturer in social studies at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. As a PhD candidate, she researches the parental role in their children’s career development in prevocational secondary education (VMBO) in the Netherlands. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Monique Strijk at m.b.strijk@hr.nl

Marinka Kuijpers is professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Open University and professor of career transitions of Saxion University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Her research topics are career development and guidance of students in vocational education and professionalizing teachers from a career development perspective.

Mariëtte Lusse is professor of school–family partnerships at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. She also heads the research group Parents in Urban Context.

Ellen Klatter is professor at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. Her topics of research are continuing learning pathways in vocational education and study success in higher education.

Appendix A. Overview of Participating Schools

School	Participat- ing Classes	Respon- dents	Career-Related Procedures:		
			Interactive home assignments	Individual student–par- ent–teacher conferences	Collective student–parent meetings
1	2 classes, year 3	School staff* (3) Parents (0) Students (6)	Networking for profes- sions i.r.t.** internship selection		Reflection on internship
2	5 classes, year 2	School staff* (7) Parents (4) Students (7)	Strengths and work explo- ration i.r.t. choice for occupational direction	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	Choice for occupational direction
3	4 classes, year 3	School staff* (5) Parents (2) Students (6)	Professions and strengths i.r.t. elective subject		Reflection on strengths Strengths and work explora- tion i.r.t. choice for further edu- cation
4	1 class, year 2	School staff* (1) Parents (2) Students (5)	Professions i.r.t. strengths		Choice for occupational directions
5	2 classes, year 2	School staff* (4) Parents (4) Students (6)	Strengths and professions i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	
6	4 classes, year 2	School staff* (5) Parents (2 + 1) Students (7)	Reflection on strengths	Strengths i.r.t. choice for elective subjects	Strengths i.r.t. choice for elec- tive subject

7	3 classes year 1 6 classes year 2	School staff* (6) Parents (4) Students (15)	Strengths i.r.t. professions	Reflection on last intern- ship Strengths i.r.t choice next internship	
	8 classes year 3		Networking for profes- sions i.r.t. internship	Learning goals for in- ternship Reflection on internship i.r.t. choice for further education	
8	2 classes, year 2	School staff* (3) Parents (2) Students (7)	Reflection on strengths	Strengths and motives i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	Choice for occupational direction
9	1 class, year 1 1 class, year 2	School staff* (5) Parents (3) Students (4)	Strengths and work explo- ration i.r.t. profession parents	Strengths and motives i.r.t. career directedness	
10	5 classes, year 2	School staff* (4) Parents (2) Students (7)	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupational direction Work explo- ration and networking i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	Choice for occupational direction Internship i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion Choice for occupational direction	Choice for occupational direction
11	4 classes, year 3	School staff* (5) Parents (1) Students (5)	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupational direction Professions i.r.t. work ex- ploration	Strengths i.r.t. occupa- tional direc- tion	Choice for occupational direction

12	3 classes, year 3	School staff* (4) Parents (2) Students (9)	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupational direction	Strengths i.r.t. choice for occupa- tional direc- tion	Choice for occupational direction
	3 classes, year 4		Strengths i.r.t. internship	Strengths i.r.t. choice for further education	Strengths and motives i.r.t. future work Choice for fur- ther education

*School staff = teachers, career counselors, management

** i.r.t. = in relation to

Appendix B. Group Interview Procedure

Name of school
Date
Participants
Information about group process
Pictures of the whiteboards with sticky notes

- Introduction by process facilitator
- First part about the question: what procedures did you participate in, and what did you think of them?

[The procedures carried out by the school in the project are written on the whiteboard.]

- Participants rate each intervention with its corresponding pictogram (green for good, yellow for moderate, red for bad, cross for did not participate). Process facilitators ask questions, facilitate discussion, and write responses to sticky notes that are stuck on the board.
- Second part about the question: what was the result?
- Process facilitators ask questions, facilitate discussion, and write responses to sticky notes that are stuck on the board.
- Third part about the question: have the goals been achieved?

[The goals set by the school in the project are written on the whiteboard.]

- Participants rate each goal with its corresponding pictogram (green for yes, yellow for a little, red for no, cross for no answer). Process facilitators ask questions, facilitate discussion, and write responses to sticky notes that are stuck on the board.
- Wrap-up
- Process facilitator asks for comments and additions that have not yet been made and write responses to sticky notes that are stuck on the board.

