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INTERCONNECTION OF FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE SELECTION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Abstract: *Choosing a high school or future profession is important and is most often the first big decision in every student's life. The occupation is well chosen if it is in accordance with students' abilities, affinities, labor market requirements, and the family circumstances in which the student lives. This decision affects the overall future life of the student, defines them and directs them to a certain path. This paper presents the results of the research on the interconnection between socioeconomic conditions of the family, the values that are encouraged in the family and students' opinions on the factors influencing the choice of occupation and choice of high school. The research was conducted on a sample of 163 students from the first to the third grade of a three-year vocational school. The research results show that 63.73% of parents enrolled in three-year vocational school have completed secondary school, and 21.57% of them have completed primary school. A total of 66.67% of parents are employed, and 60.74% of students live with both parents. The results of the research show that students in most cases wanted to enroll in a three-year vocational school.*

Keywords: *choice of occupation, family, socioeconomic status, vocational education*

INTRODUCTION

A child's education and choice of future occupation are greatly influenced by family circumstances that are influenced by a large number of factors (Gregurović & Kuti, 2009; Burušić et al. 2010; Šimić Šašić et al., 2011; Ivanović & Raijić-Stojanović, 2012). Socioeconomic circumstances, i.e., The socioeconomic status of the family is one of the main factors of this influence. Furthermore, the socioeconomic, human and cultural capital of a family has an important impact on the educational path of the child. The decision on the future profession is also influenced by parents, with their upbringing style, their lifestyle and family values that are encouraged. Due to the pronounced changes that have occurred in the last few decades in the economy and society, conditioned by the development of technology and new scientific knowledge, new jobs are emerging and thus the need for new educational programmes. Parents, with their attitude toward progress and development, also influence students' decisions on the choice of education and the choice of future profession. Traditional views and uninformed and short-sighted parents can make it difficult for students to choose education for new occupations.

Socioeconomic status is defined based on the current financial income of the family, the level of adult education, the status associated with certain occupations (Brown et al., 1996) and the employment status of parents. The socioeconomic status of the family influences the choice of

occupation through specific factors (amount of money available to the family, transportation possibilities, education price) as well as through the values and expectations of each individual, a member of a particular socioeconomic group (Ivanović & Raijić-Stojanović, 2012). The socioeconomic status of a family defines not only the material condition of the family but also the attitudes, expectations and values of family members.

The social, economic, human and cultural capital of a family, each in its own way, affects the education of the individual. The social capital of a family consists of intangible social resources that arise from social relations and use them to facilitate action and achieve all goals (Coleman, 1990; Rogošić, 2015), including educational ones. The economic capital of a family refers to material family wealth. Human capital, determined by the level of education of parents and other family members, refers to the knowledge, skill and competencies of family members (Coleman, 1988). Cultural capital consists of specific knowledge, habits and preferences, educational qualifications of family members that guarantee certain cultural competencies and the possession of tangible cultural property such as books, paintings or other art objects (Puzić et al., 2017).

The language codes that a child acquires growing up in a particular family influence the child's education and choice of occupation. They are a useful and/or aggravating element in a child's education. The fluency of family members, the richness of conversational vocabulary, the method of communication, the approach and engagement in communication, attention, patience and effort invested in answering children's questions and, of course, the general knowledge and information of interlocutors affect the language of the family. This impact is deeper than the mere development of fluency and the richness of vocabulary in a child. It has an impact on the development of abstract thinking, motivating the child for contemplation, curiosity and drawing their own conclusions. The language code can be considered a kind of cultural capital that children adopt in the family, which helps them to readily respond to the demands of education. Children of working-class parents use the so-called limited language code, which makes it difficult for them to assimilate into the academic environment because the dominant, i.e., elaborate language code is used there. Middle-class children simply progress faster in the education system because the previously adopted code facilitates that progress. Children who have adopted a dominant code, or which society has determined to be dominant, have an advantage in the education system (Bernstein, 1973).

With their parenting style, parents contribute to the way their child chooses to continue their education. Whether it will be blind listening to parents' instructions, spontaneous and hasty decisions, joint consideration of all real circumstances or without any parental influence, depends on the style of parenting. The authoritarian style of upbringing is manifested in the demanding behavior of parents, which strictly defines rules and boundaries that highly value discipline and conform to their values and do not show much love and warmth. The characteristics of the permissive parenting style are manifested by a lack of rules and boundaries in upbringing and poor control, although warm and accepting. The authoritative style of upbringing (or democratic) is a combination of authoritarian and permissive styles. Parental behavior is responsible, boundaries are set, but with a lot of warmth and understanding. Indifferent parents are disinterested and unconcerned; they set few restrictions but also provide little attention, interest and emotional support (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2002).

The concept of lifestyle is determined by spending free time, meeting needs, economic consumption and the characteristic interpersonal and social relationships that an individual establishes and interacts with (Kuzmanović, 1988; Luković & Čizmić, 2012). Living in a family, a child notices the lifestyle of their parents. Through their lifestyle, parents influence the lifestyle of their child and thus the child's education and professional intentions (Huurre et al., 2006).

Solidarity, fidelity, love, forgiveness, truthfulness, respect for life, and trust, i.e., values that are nurtured in the family and encouraged in the child, affect the family environment and the child's education. If some virtues are more encouraged and valued in a particular family, it gives us insight into the parenting style that is very important in the child's educational achievements and thus has a great influence on the choice of high school education (Janković et al., 2004).

The family circumstances of the student, socioeconomic status, social-cultural, human and social capital of the family, language codes that the student adopts in the family, family lifestyle and parenting style and values nurtured in the family are factors influencing a child's education. The socioeconomic status of the family, i.e., Parents' education level and their work status and professional intentions of the students are interrelated. The selection of students' educational paths is

based on an assessment of the costs and benefits of education and the likelihood of student success during education (Boudon, 1974; Šabić et al., 2020). Families of lower socioeconomic status are thus at a disadvantage because the cost of education is a greater burden for them (Hatcher, 1998).

The educational status of parents and their help in performing school tasks influence the educational decisions of students. Parents with higher education levels are more likely to help their children with educational challenges than parents with lower education levels (Huurre et al., 2006). Furthermore, the educational status of parents is related to their material status, which provides the student with material conditions for achieving better success in school. The benefits that students from a higher level of parental education have in many ways affect their educational success (Dubow et al., 2009).

The role of the socioeconomic status of the family in children's educational intentions is relatively often the subject of research interest in different countries (Šabić et al., 2020). The research demonstrates that there is a link between parents' level of education and their employment status and children's enrollment in grammar school, four-year or three-year vocational schools. Grammar school and four-year vocational school provide the continuation of schooling, while this is very difficult for students of three-year vocational schools. A higher level of education, as a rule, also insures a higher socioeconomic status of an individual.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Numerous studies (Burušić et al. 2010; Gregurović & Kuti, 2009; Ibeljić et al. 2020; Ivanović & Rajić-Stojanović, 2012) examine the influence of various factors of family circumstances and educational success of students and high school choices. This chapter will provide an overview of similar research conducted to date.

The results of the research show the importance of parental influence on the choice of students' careers and that parents' expectations and their attitude toward vocational education are crucial for the selection of future education and students' careers (Ivanović & Rajić-Stojanović, 2012). The research encompassed 14,393 eighth grade primary school students as participants from all over the Republic of Croatia during three school years. The connection between parents' level of education and their work status, including the professional intentions and wishes of students, was investigated. The results of the research show that the majority of students whose parents have qualifications in the field of higher education choose high school programmes. Additionally, it is evident that children of employed parents in most cases choose four-year vocational schools or grammar schools, and students whose parents are unemployed in most cases are undecided and choose four-year or three-year vocational schools.

The research conducted by Gregurović and Kuti (2009) is based on the OECD – PISA international survey conducted in the Republic of Croatia in 2006 on a sample of 5,209 fifteen-year-old high school students. The conclusion of the research is that socioeconomic status is an important factor in the educational achievements of the respondents. The data obtained by the PISA survey confirmed that socioeconomic status in the Republic of Croatia directly or indirectly affects the course of students' education and is related to the possibilities of choosing a secondary school and continuing their education.

Students' educational success may also depend on the socioeconomic conditions in which students live, i.e., students living in lower-income families have lower educational attainment than students living in higher-income families (Ibeljić et al., 2020). The aim of the research was to determine whether there is a connection between the choice of high school, i.e., professional intentions of students, parents' education level and work status and differences in the professional intentions of students and parents' expectations about choosing a high school. The study involved 324 students in the eighth grade and the same number of their parents. Considering parents' work status, out of a total of 324 parents, 38.88% are employed, 37.96% are occasionally employed and 23.15% are unemployed. Regarding the education of parents, 23.45% of them have completed primary school or less, 37.96% have completed secondary school and 38.58% have a university degree. The results of the research showed that there is no statistically significant difference between parents' expectations about high school choice and students' professional intentions. There is a statistically significant correlation between parents' level of qualifications and parents' work and

students' professional intentions.

Baranović et al. (2013) emphasize that mathematical competencies are increasingly important in the life of an individual and that these competencies are a selective filter for access to elite occupations and privileged positions in society. Furthermore, they state that in the Republic of Croatia, students from families of higher socioeconomic status achieve better results in mathematics on average and enroll in grammar school more often than students from families of lower socioeconomic status (Braš Roth et al., 2007). The aim of the research was to examine the relationship between the gender, socioeconomic and sociocultural status of students' families and their success in mathematics and high school practice. The research was conducted on a sample of 693 eighth-grade primary school students in the Zagreb area in 2010. The results have shown that the higher the level of parents' education, the higher the student's success in mathematics. Furthermore, the results have demonstrated the connection between mathematics grade and the choice of high school with regard to the possession of classical and professional literature. Students who do not possess classical and professional literature at home earn a lower grade in mathematics and choose schools with smaller numbers of mathematics classes. The choice of high school was also influenced by owning a study desk, access to the Internet and mother's working status (not father's), and students living in such conditions were more likely to enroll in grammar schools than vocational schools with less mathematics (Baranović et al., 2013).

The review of the research shows the importance of family circumstances and parental influence on student achievement and career choice, i.e., on the overall education and the future life of students.

METHODOLOGY

Research on the factors influencing the choice of high school was conducted in 2020 in a secondary vocational school among students of three-year vocational occupations between the ages of 14 and 18 who live in the wider area of the city of Osijek. The aim of the research was to determine, from the perspective of students enrolled in a three-year vocational school, which factors influence their choice of secondary education. The emphasis is on researching family socioeconomic circumstances, values that are promoted within the family, and additional factors that influence students when choosing a high school. The following research questions arise from the stated goals and tasks of the research:

1. *Do the parents of three-year vocational school students have completed primary or/and secondary education?*
2. *Are the parents of three-year vocational school students more unemployed compared to the unemployment rate in Osijek-Baranja County?*
3. *Do students enroll in a three-year vocational school because their choice of high school education is narrowed?*

WORKING METHODS

Research participants

The research sample comprised 163 students from the first to the third grade of an Osijek vocational school who are studying in three-year vocational programmes.

Measuring instrument and the method of conducting research

The research instrument is a survey constructed for the purposes of this research, which consists of three parts. In the first part, students' opinions are sought, the extent of the circumstances influencing their choice of high school. Students assess how much these statements have influenced their choice of high school. In the second part, students evaluate how important in their opinion some of these values are in their family. In the third part of the survey, students gave an answer about the structure of the family, parents' education level and employment status. The reliability of the survey expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient on this sample is $\alpha = 0,79$.

In the first part, which seeks students' opinions on the influence of certain factors on their choice of high school, eight statements were given that students rated with numbers from 1 to 5

(where numbers stand for 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = partially disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = partially agree, 5 = fully agree). In the second part, students used numbers from 1 to 5 (where numbers stand for 1 = not important at all, 2 = somewhat unimportant, 3 = neither important nor unimportant, 4 = somewhat important, 5 = very important) to assess how much the following values are important in their family: love, family, friendship, success, education, respect, obedience, creativity, individuality, and leisure. In the third part, students were asked about the structure of the family, parents' education level and their employment status.

Results and interpretation of results

Descriptive statistics were used in the data processing. Table 1 shows students' self-assessment of how true the statements made regarding the reason for choosing high school were true in their case. N denotes the sample size, M the mean, and SD the standard deviation.

Table 1

Students' self-assessment of the factors that influenced their choice of high school

Statement	M	SD
I wanted to enrol in this very high school.	4.16	1.09
My friends enrolled in this school, so did I.	1.41	0.97
My parents wanted me to enrol in this school.	1.83	1.26
I can finish school quickly and get a job quickly.	3.36	1.36
I had bad grades in primary school so I could not choose.	1.89	1.18
I will receive a scholarship during my schooling.	1.99	1.43
I can start earning money already during schooling.	3.15	1.49
I want to finish school as soon as possible and become independent.	3.61	1.36

Among the surveyed students, the statement that they wanted to enroll in this school was rated with the highest grade (M=4.16, SD=1.09). The surveyed students agreed the least with the statement that they enrolled in this school because their friends also enrolled in it (M=1.41, SD=0.97). On average, the participant rated the following statements higher: they can finish school quickly and get a job quickly, they can start earning money already during schooling; they want to finish school as soon as possible and become independent; but the values of the standard deviations in these statements indicate a scattered response. For this research, it is also interesting to know what students think if they enrolled in a three-year vocational school because their parents wanted it. On average, students disagree with this statement (M = 1.83, SD = 1.26). The number of students who completely disagree with this statement is 103. Additionally, the assessment of the statement is interesting: I had bad grades in primary school so I could not choose. On average, students disagree with this statement (M = 1.89, SD = 1.18), and 93 students completely disagree. The obtained results are significant, especially in the part of the response to the allegations related to the influence of parents on students' decision to choose a high school and students' inability to choose due to poor performance in primary school. Certainly, the assessment of the statement that the students truly wanted to enrol in that school is also significant.

In the second part students assessed how much love, family, friendship success, education, respect, obedience, creativity, individuality and free time are valued in their family. Table 2 shows the assessment of students as to what extent, in their opinion, certain values are important in their family.

Table 2*Students' opinions on the importance of certain values in their families*

Values	M	SD
love	4.48	0.86
family	4.63	0.86
friendship	4.49	0.85
success	4.23	0.90
education	4.22	0.90
respect	4.66	0.70
obedience	4.51	0.77
creativity	3.98	1.06
individuality	4.04	1.00
free time	4.38	0.92

From Table 2, it can be seen how students feel that all of these values are generally important or very important in their families. Although the differences in the estimates of the above values are not statistically significant, the answers of the surveyed students show that, in their opinion, *respect* (M = 4.66, SD = 0.70) and *family* (M = 4.63, SD = 0.86) are most valued and that *obedience* is immediately in third place (M = 4.51, SD = 0.77). The least importance in the families of the surveyed students was given to creativity (M = 3.98, SD = 1.06), followed by individuality, education and success. Finally, students were asked about the structure of the family, parents' education level and their employment status.

Table 3*Results of the student survey on family structure*

Family structure	%
both parents	60.74%
only the mother	24.54%
only the father	6.75%
other	7.76%

Table 3 shows the family structure according to which 60.74% live of students with both parents, 24.54% only with the mother, 6.75% only with the father, and the remaining students answered the question of who they live with: with grandparents, in the orphanage, with mom and stepfather, with grandmother.

Table 4*Results of the student survey on parents' education level and employment status*

Level of education of parents	Elementary School	Secondary School	Higher Education
Father	19.61%	68.63%	7.84%
Mother	23.53%	58.82%	13.73%
Employment status of parent	Employed	Unemployed	Occasionally employed
Father	68.63%	21.57%	9.80%

Mother	64.71%	29.41%	1.96%
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When asked about parents' employment status, students' answers show that 68.63% of fathers are employed and 64.71% of mothers. According to the answers of the surveyed students, 19.61% of fathers have completed only primary school, 68.63% have secondary education, and 7.84% have a higher education qualification. A total of 23.53% of mothers of surveyed students had only primary education, 58.82% had completed secondary education, and 13.73% of mothers of surveyed students had a higher education degree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research by Ivanović and Rajić-Stojanović (2012) on the total number of 28,786 surveyed parents of 9th grade students show that the percentage of parents who have completed only primary school or less is 13.79%, secondary school 70.83%, and higher education 15.53%. If the data on the level of parents' education in this research are compared with the data obtained in the research by Croatian Employment Service (Ivanović & Rajić-Stojanović, 2012), it is evident that parents of students enrolled in three-year vocational school have to a greater extent completed secondary education (63.73%) than higher education (10.79%), and in a higher percentage than the average, they have completed only primary school (21.57%). This answered the *first research question*. Does this tell us that children of parents of lower educational status have lower educational affinities or lower educational opportunities? However, the results show that the level of education of parents is largely related to the choice of high school students.

The results of this research show that the percentage of unemployed parents of students in three-year vocational school, which is 25.49% of unemployed and 5.88% of occasionally employed, is significantly higher than the average unemployment rate in Osijek-Baranja County in the past 10 years among the population between 30 and 55 years of age, which amounts to 13.13% (Croatian Employment Service), which answers the *second research question*. Compared to the research conducted by the Croatian Employment Service (Ivanović & Rajić-Stojanović, 2012), the expected percentage of unemployed parents of students enrolling in three-year vocational schools is expected. Does this fact tell us that students whose parents are unemployed have a desire to complete their education as soon as possible, get a job and thus contribute to the family income or become independent? In other words, do students of unemployed parents have lower success in primary school and thus less choice of continuing education, so they choose less demanding secondary schools? Or that poorer material living conditions associated with parental unemployment affect students' educational success? Parents' working status is directly related to the family's economic capital and purchasing power as well as parents' ability to provide children with material goods, such as a desk, computer and Internet access, which, as research has shown, affect student achievements (Baranović et al., 2013) and, consequently, educational affinities. In addition, the economic status of the parents affects the child's access to additional content while growing up, which enables them to develop social skills, acquire additional knowledge and expand their view of the world, which influences the child's educational path. On the other hand, students gave an average higher grade to claims; they can finish school quickly and get a job quickly; they can start earning already during schooling; I want to finish school as soon as possible and become independent, which speaks in favor of the assumption that students of unemployed parents strive for faster employment and therefore shorter education (three-year vocational schools).

The results of the research showed that the majority of students completely agree with the statement that they chose the enrolled high school precisely because they wanted to, that is, that it was their choice. Additionally, the results show that students are not of the opinion that they chose a three-year vocational school due to poor results in primary school and inability to choose. The third research question seeks to answer the question of whether students enrolling in three-year vocational schools have less opportunity to choose a high school programme. Is that why they choose a three-year vocational school that is less attractive and easier to enrol in? Student statements do not have to mean that the answer to the third research question is no, but that students have adjusted their desires to continue their education to their abilities and that their subjective opinion is that their success in the

previous schooling did not affect high school choices. The data from students enrolled in a three-year vocational school where the research was conducted, obtained from the system of the Ministry of Science and Education e-Matica, show that the average general success in the 8th grade of all enrolled students is 3.33. The average general achievement of 8th-grade students in the 2020/2021 school year in the Republic of Croatia, published in the ŠER system of the Ministry of Science and Education, is 4.22. These data show that the general success of students enrolled in three-year vocational school is significantly lower than the average success of the Republic of Croatia and that students with such success have fewer choices when choosing a high school, which is positive, although the students subjectively do not have such an impression.

An interesting piece of data obtained from the system of the Ministry of Science and Education e-Matica is the average grade in mathematics in the 8th grade of students enrolled in the three-year vocational school in which the research was conducted. On average, 8th grade students have 2.47 in mathematics, which is in line with the results of a study conducted by Baranović et al. (2013) on the relationship between success in mathematics, high school choice and the socioeconomic status of the family.

The students gave an average grade to the claim that they chose a three-year vocational school because their parents wanted it to. In contrast to the results of their research by Ibeljić et al. (2020), in which it was confirmed that parents' expectations about high school choice coincided with students' professional intentions, in most cases, they did not feel that their choice of high school was influenced by parents' opinions.

CONCLUSION

Previous research (Baranović et al., 2013; Gregurović and Kuti, 2009; Ibeljić et al., 2020; Ivanović and Rajić-Stojanović, 2012; Jukić & Dubovicki, 2017) has shown a great influence of family circumstances on students' educational achievements and high school choices. These circumstances are evident in the socioeconomic status of the family, the parents' education level and work status through family values, family lifestyle, parenting style and social, economic, human and cultural capital of the family. A survey conducted among students of a three-year vocational school confirmed the results thus far on the connection between the socioeconomic status of the family and the choice of high schools. From the research results conducted among three-year vocational school students on their opinion on the importance of certain values in their family, it is evident that students have a subjective impression that all the values are very important. Nevertheless, respect, family and obedience were rated as the most important before love and friendship. Education, individuality and creativity were rated the lowest. The information that just over 60% of students live with both parents, the obtained ratings of family values that are most dominant, the expressed desire of many students to finish school as soon as possible, become independent and start earning and that a significant reason for choosing a three-year vocational school during formal education open up new questions and new topics for further research.

Future similar research should examine the attitude of parents, their wishes and expectations for the continuation of their children's education and whether they believe that they influenced the choice of their children's high school. Certainly, it should be possible to determine whether parents' wishes were in line with the real capabilities of the child. This would result in conclusions about whether students, perhaps unknowingly, met parental expectations and desires or whether the choice of high school was indeed independent of parental desires, as students state in this study.

It should be emphasized that the results of the research rely exclusively on replies of the surveyed students about their knowledge of parents' educational and work status and their subjective answers to questions about factors influencing high school choice and values promoted in their families.

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