



From Parental Support to Concrete Action: The Influence of Parent-Child Career Goal Congruence and Proactive Behavior on Students' Career Engagement

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Abstract

Career engagement refers to an individual's involvement in their career development activities and is closely associated with career satisfaction and commitment to a chosen profession. External factors, such as parent-child career goal congruence, and internal factors, such as proactive career behavior, are considered important determinants of career engagement. This study aimed to examine the relationship between parent-child career goal congruence, proactive career behavior, and career engagement among university students. Using a quantitative survey approach, the study involved 237 psychology students aged 18-21 years from a university in Yogyakarta. Data were collected using the Career Engagement Scale, the Parent-Child Career Goal Congruence Scale, and the Proactive Career Behaviour Scale. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed a significant relationship among parent-child career goal congruence, proactive career behavior, and career engagement ($p < 0.001$). The two independent variables jointly contributed 18.1% of the variance in career engagement. The findings indicate that students whose career goals are highly congruent with their parents' and who demonstrate proactive career behavior tend to be more actively engaged in their career development. These results have important implications for parents, higher education institutions, and career counselors in supporting students' career engagement and facilitating the achievement of their professional goals.

Keywords: Career engagement, parent-child career goal congruence, proactive career behavior, university students

Abstrak

Career engagement merupakan keterlibatan individu dalam pengembangan kariernya yang berkaitan dengan kepuasan karier dan komitmen terhadap pilihan profesinya. Faktor eksternal seperti kesesuaian persepsi karier antara orang tua dan anak (parent-child career goal congruence) serta faktor internal seperti perilaku proaktif dalam pengelolaan karier (proactive career behavior) diduga berperan penting dalam meningkatkan career engagement. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara parent-child career goal congruence dan proactive career behavior dengan career engagement pada mahasiswa. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei, penelitian ini melibatkan 237 mahasiswa psikologi (18-21 tahun) dari salah satu universitas di Yogyakarta. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei menggunakan skala Career Engagement, Parent-Child Career Goal Congruence, dan Proactive Career Behavior. Analisis regresi linier berganda menunjukkan adanya hubungan yang sangat signifikan antara parent-child career goal congruence dan proactive career behavior dengan career engagement ($p < 0.001$). Kontribusi efektif kedua variabel terhadap career engagement sebesar 18,1%. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan implikasi bagi orang tua, perguruan tinggi, dan konselor karier dalam membantu mahasiswa meningkatkan keterikatan karier guna mendukung pencapaian tujuan profesional mereka.

Kata kunci: Keselarasan tujuan karir orang tua-anak, keterlibatan karir, mahasiswa universitas, perilaku karir proaktif

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1. Introduction

Throughout the lifespan, from birth to death, individuals are expected to accomplish a series of developmental tasks. Hurlock (1993) explained that developmental tasks are social expectations, meaning that each cultural group expects its members to acquire specific skills and display behaviors considered appropriate for different stages of life. University students, who are generally in the early adulthood stage, ranging from their early twenties to their thirties, enter a period in which they are

expected to establish personal and economic independence, develop their careers, and, for many individuals, choose a life partner, learn to live intimately with another person, start a family, and raise children (Santrock, 2011).

Lent and Brown (2013) described the career developmental tasks of university-aged individuals as belonging to the exploration stage, which involves the continuation and elaboration of growth period tasks. At this stage, individuals are expected to develop work readiness and occupational skills, explore



possible career paths (through reading, observation, and formal or informal assessments of their interests, abilities, and work values), and acquire career-relevant experiences and skills (e.g., through education, part-time work, and volunteer activities). Other developmental tasks during this period include making career-related decisions (e.g., regarding recreational activities and elective courses), implementing important career decisions (such as applying for jobs, training programs, and higher education institutions), managing transitions (from one educational level to another, from school to work, or from school to higher education), and formulating more specific vocational goals and plans.

Success in accomplishing these career developmental tasks during early adulthood plays a crucial role in determining individuals' future career attainment. One factor that facilitates the successful completion of these developmental tasks is active involvement in career development. Career engagement is defined as the extent to which individuals proactively develop their careers through various career-related activities (Hirschi et al., 2014). This concept is closely aligned with proactive career behavior (Strauss et al., 2012), which refers to individuals' active efforts to manage and develop their careers through career planning, competency development, and participation in various career development activities. According to Savickas (2005), career engagement encompasses the adaptive behaviors required in early adulthood, including developing work readiness and occupational skills, exploring possible career paths, acquiring career-relevant experiences and skills, making career-related decisions, implementing those decisions, and establishing more specific vocational plans. Hirschi et al. (2014) proposed that career engagement encompasses several dimensions, including career planning, career self-exploration, career environmental exploration, networking, and voluntary career-related self-development. Career engagement is also associated with career satisfaction and commitment to pursuing their chosen career path.

Individuals with high levels of career engagement typically demonstrate confidence in their ability to assess themselves, seek occupational information, establish career goals that align with their personal characteristics, plan their careers, and overcome career-related challenges, all of which

encourage active participation in career attainment (Mulyawati & Saraswati, 2021). Individuals with high career engagement are also characterized by strong performance, the ability to generate valuable ideas, and a genuine commitment to their own success (Nugraheni et al., 2021). Previous research has found that career engagement is positively associated with career satisfaction and job satisfaction (Hirschi et al., 2014).

However, not all young adults recognize the importance of thinking about and planning career-related matters, including career engagement. Career engagement can influence students' achievement and success throughout their university studies (Mulyawati & Saraswati, 2021). Damon (2008) explained that many individuals fail to achieve their career goals because they focus excessively on short-term objectives rather than considering the long-term aspirations they seek to achieve in life. Previous studies have shown that not all university students are engaged with their careers. Fish et al. (2026) found that students tend to demonstrate low involvement in career development, as reflected in limited efforts to seek career information, low participation in self-development activities such as seminars and training programs, and inadequate readiness for the workforce. In Indonesia, Raisunnisa and Megawati (2019) reported that many students experience difficulties in career planning and exploration, which hinders their attachment to their chosen career paths. Other studies have found that students experience uncertainty in career decision-making due to insufficient exploration of career opportunities and suboptimal career planning.

One theory that explains the complex relationship between career behavior and its influences is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent & Brown, 2013). According to SCCT, career behavior, including career engagement, is influenced by individual factors such as personality and intelligence, as well as contextual factors such as parental support, socioeconomic status, and discrimination. Together, these individual and contextual factors shape individuals' learning experiences. Individuals interpret these experiences and subsequently influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations, either independently or jointly, contribute to the formation of career interests, which are then translated into career goals. In turn, career goals

motivate individuals to engage in career-related behaviors that facilitate goal attainment.

One important contextual factor influencing career engagement is the congruence between parents' and children's perceptions of career goals, referred to as parent-child career goal congruence. Sawitri et al. (2013) defined parent-child career congruence as the alignment between children and their parents regarding career-related matters. This congruence is reflected in shared perceptions concerning the child's abilities, as well as similarities in career interests, preferences, and aspirations. Career congruence is one form of parental involvement in children's development and may manifest as parental support.

Duffy and Dik (2009) explained that parents influence their children's development through the values, interests, and skills they cultivate. Parents also play a significant role in fostering motivation and sustaining efforts toward achieving career goals. Sawitri et al. (2013) proposed that career congruence comprises two dimensions: supplementary and complementary congruence. Supplementary congruence refers to the alignment between children's career development needs and parental support, as well as the compatibility between parental expectations and children's abilities. Complementary congruence refers to the alignment of career interests, values, plans, and goals between parents and their children.

Consistent with SCCT, contextual factors may be perceived as either supportive or obstructive influences on career decision-making and its implementation. Individuals are less likely to translate their interests into goals, and their goals into actions, when contextual factors are perceived as negative or as barriers to their efforts. Conversely, individuals are more likely to transform their interests into goals and their goals into actions when contextual factors are perceived as positive, supportive, and facilitative of their efforts (Lent & Brown, 2013). Parent-child career goal congruence reflects a supportive contextual factor in career development. Individuals who experience parent-child career goal congruence perceive alignment between parental support and their career development needs, compatibility between parental expectations and their abilities, and similarities in career interests, values, plans, and goals with their parents. Such conditions may encourage greater

involvement in career development. Previous studies have found that parent-child career goal congruence is positively associated with career exploration, whereby individuals actively gather information about themselves and available career opportunities (Sawitri & Creed, 2017; Sawitri & Creed, 2021). Conversely, low parent-child career goal congruence has been associated with career indecision and lower career engagement (Widyowati et al., 2024).

Another factor that may influence career engagement is proactive career behavior. Grant (2000) defined proactive behavior as behavior characterized by initiative aimed at improving the current environment or creating a new one by actively challenging existing conditions rather than passively adapting to them. Similarly, Parker et al. (2006) described proactive behavior as self-initiated and change-oriented actions intended to improve current circumstances or create more favorable future conditions, rather than merely responding to environmental demands. Proactive behavior is reflected in initiatives to identify and implement changes that enhance work effectiveness, efforts toward self-development through information and feedback seeking, and anticipatory, future-oriented actions to address potential problems or opportunities in the workplace.

Proactive individuals are also characterized by spontaneously solving problems, proposing ideas to improve the status quo within organizations, actively seeking information about jobs and organizations, requesting feedback on their work and performance, engaging in social activities, and proposing innovative ideas (Grant & Ashford, 2008). In the context of career development, proactive career behavior refers to individuals' proactive efforts to explore career options, establish career goals, build networks, and develop skills and competencies to maintain future competitiveness. According to Peng et al. (2021), proactive career behavior involves actively managing career development tasks through career planning, networking, seeking advice, and acquiring skills. According to Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998) and Straus et al. (2012), proactive career behavior consists of four dimensions: career planning, proactive skill development, networking, and proactive career consultation.

Consistent with SCCT, proactive career behavior represents an internal factor associated with career engagement. Individuals with high levels of proactive

career behavior are more likely to engage actively in career exploration, self-development, and network building. These activities foster greater involvement in career development, encouraging individuals to plan their careers, establish and expand professional networks, and actively seek career consultation. Previous research has found that proactive career behavior is positively associated with employee work engagement (Pugar et al., 2018). The present study differs from previous research by simultaneously examining the influence of both internal and external factors on career engagement.

Research on career engagement has been widely conducted, examining its relationship with various psychological variables, both internal and external, including personality (Qadri & Murkhana, 2018), self-efficacy (Mulyawati & Saraswati, 2021), and career goal discrepancy (Widyowati et al., 2023), burnout (Hodkinson et al., 2022), career interventions, social support, and career barriers (Hirschi, 2011; Hirschi & Freund, 2014; Wibasari & Kustanti, 2023; Salma & Suharso, 2023). Nevertheless, much remains unknown regarding career engagement and its determinants. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining career engagement from the perspective of both an external factor, namely parent-child career goal congruence, and an internal factor, namely proactive career behavior, among university students, given that studies simultaneously investigating these two factors remain limited. The limited research on these variables may be attributed to their relatively recent emergence as constructs within the scientific literature. Furthermore, career engagement itself has received relatively limited attention, particularly in the Indonesian context, at both the individual and organizational levels. The findings of this study may provide valuable insights for parents, higher education institutions, and career counselors to support students' career engagement and facilitate the successful attainment of career goals.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the hypothesis proposed in this study is as follows: there is a relationship between parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior and career engagement.

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships between parent-

child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior as independent variables and career engagement as the dependent variable. The population consisted of active undergraduate psychology students enrolled at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year, totaling 1,491 students. The sample comprised 237 students from the 2024 cohort, including 46 males (19.4%) and 191 females (80.6%), aged between 18 and 21 years (Mean = 19.32; SD = 0.832). Participants were selected using a cluster random sampling technique, in which the population was divided into groups (clusters) and samples were randomly selected based on those clusters. In this study, student cohorts served as the clusters. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

This study employed a survey approach, using self-report scales as the primary data collection instruments. Responses were measured using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree), unless otherwise specified. Item scores were summed to obtain a total score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the respective construct.

Career engagement was measured using the Career Engagement Scale (Hirschi et al., 2014), which was translated into Indonesian via a back-translation procedure conducted by bilingual experts proficient in both Indonesian and English. Content validity was established through expert judgment by academics and practitioners in industrial and organizational psychology. The scale was developed based on one of the dimensions of career engagement proposed by Hirschi (2014), namely career planning. An example item is: "To what extent have you actively planned your future career?" Hirschi et al. (2014) reported that the original scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$). In the Indonesian version, pilot testing indicated that the items performed well, as reflected by corrected item-total correlation coefficients (rit) ranging from 0.38 to 0.72. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.861.

Parent-child career goal congruence was measured using the Indonesian version of the Parent-Child Career Goal Congruence Scale, which has previously been used with Indonesian university students (Sawitri et al., 2013). This scale assesses the degree of congruence between parents' and children's perceptions regarding career interests, orientations, and goals. An example item is: "My

parents support my career plans." Sawitri et al. (2013) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 for the scale. The scale was re-evaluated in the present study, and the pilot test results indicated satisfactory psychometric properties, with corrected item-total correlation coefficients (rit) ranging from 0.49 to 0.68. The scale demonstrated good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87.

Proactive career behavior was measured using the Proactive Career Behavior Scale (Straus et al., 2012), which was translated into Indonesian via a back-translation procedure conducted by experts fluent in both Indonesian and English. The scale consists of 13 items measuring proactive career behavior across four dimensions: career planning, proactive skill development, networking, and career consultation. Straus et al. (2012) reported that the original scale demonstrated good psychometric properties, with factor loadings above 0.60 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92. In the Indonesian version, pilot testing indicated that all items performed well, with corrected item-total correlation coefficients (rit) ranging from 0.49 to 0.75. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.906.

Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained permission from the institution and secured participants' informed consent regarding their involvement in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all data were collected anonymously to ensure participant confidentiality. In appreciation of their participation, respondents received a small souvenir.

3. Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests were conducted, including tests of residual normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. The results indicated that the data were normally distributed. The linearity test showed that the relationship between parent-child career goal congruence and career engagement could be represented by a linear model, indicating a linear and ideal relationship. Similarly, the relationship between proactive career behavior and career engagement was also linear, although the linearity was considered less ideal. Furthermore, the multicollinearity test indicated no multicollinearity among the independent variables. This finding suggests that parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior did not exhibit problematic intercorrelations.

The partial regression analysis revealed that both parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior positively and significantly predicted students' career engagement. Specifically, parent-child career goal congruence was positively associated with career engagement, with a regression coefficient $\beta = 0.168$ ($t = 4.599$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher congruence between parents' and children's career goals was associated with higher career engagement. Furthermore, proactive career behavior yielded a regression coefficient $\beta = 0.088$ ($t = 3.932$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who demonstrated more proactive career development behaviors also reported higher levels of career engagement.

The partial correlation analysis further demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between parent-child career goal congruence and career engagement after controlling for proactive career behavior ($r = 0.305$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, a positive and significant relationship was found between proactive career behavior and career engagement after controlling for parent-child career goal congruence ($r = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$). Parent-child career goal congruence accounted for an effective contribution of 10.30% to career engagement, whereas proactive career behavior contributed 6.24%.

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicated an F value of 22.773 with a significance level of .000 ($p < .001$). These findings demonstrate that parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior jointly exerted a significant effect on students' career engagement. Accordingly, the regression model was deemed statistically appropriate. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was .181, indicating that parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior together explained 18.1% of the variance in career engagement, while the remaining 81.9% was attributable to other variables not included in the present research model.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between parent-child career goal congruence, proactive career behavior, and career engagement among university students. Based on the data analysis, a highly significant positive relationship was found among parent-child career goal congruence,

proactive career behavior, and career engagement. Therefore, the major hypothesis proposed in this study was supported. Together, parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior contributed 18.1% of the variance in career engagement. This finding indicates that individuals whose career interests, orientations, and goals align with those of their parents and who demonstrate proactive career development are more likely to engage in such activities. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of external factors, such as parental support, in fostering career engagement.

These results are consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent & Brown, 2013), which emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and proactive behavior in career management. The theory is based on the premise that individuals can take responsibility for their career development by setting goals, making decisions, and engaging in behaviors that are aligned with their interests and values. SCCT also highlights the influence of contextual factors, which are external conditions that may facilitate or hinder career development and decision-making. One such contextual influence is parental support. Parents exert a substantial influence on their children's development, including the formation of values, interests, and skills. They also play an important role in fostering motivation and sustaining children's efforts to achieve their career goals (Duffy & Dik, 2009). In addition to contextual influences, individual factors are also considered important in shaping career choices and career development. Individuals who are more proactive tend to be more engaged in their careers (Hirschi et al., 2014).

The findings also support the first minor hypothesis. The results revealed a positive relationship between parent-child career goal congruence and career engagement. Parent-child career goal congruence accounted for an effective variance of 10.242% in career engagement. This finding suggests that alignment between students' career development needs and parental support, compatibility between parental expectations and children's abilities, and congruence in career interests and goals between parents and children contribute to greater career engagement. The present findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that alignment with parents on career-related issues enhances adolescents' confidence in handling career

development tasks. Parental expectations and career-related congruence between parents and children influence individuals' career aspirations and encourage them to engage more actively in career exploration (Sawitri et al., 2014). The findings also support the study by Sawitri and Creed (2022), which demonstrated that greater career congruence between parents and children increases young people's confidence in pursuing their desired careers and strengthens positive expectations regarding future career attainment. Such confidence may encourage individuals to become more actively involved in career preparation.

The findings also confirm the second minor hypothesis. The analysis revealed a positive relationship between proactive career behavior and career engagement. Proactive career behavior accounted for an effective variance of 6.679% in career engagement. This finding indicates that individuals who are proactive in managing and developing their careers tend to be more engaged in career-related activities. The results are consistent with previous studies showing that individuals with high levels of proactive career behavior are more adaptable to career-related challenges and are better able to manage their careers independently. They are more active in career planning and self-directed development, which ultimately contributes to career success (Smale et al., 2018).

The findings further revealed that parent-child career goal congruence contributed more strongly to career engagement than proactive career behavior. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that all participants in the present study were university students in Indonesia, a country characterized by a collectivist culture. Collectivist culture refers to the degree to which individuals are integrated into their social groups. In such cultural contexts, individuals are born into strong and cohesive in-groups, particularly the family (Hofstede, 2011). Collectivism, parent-child career goal congruence, and self-efficacy beliefs have been identified as important determinants of Indonesian adolescents' career aspirations (Sawitri & Creed, 2017), particularly when adolescents consider the extent of alignment with their parents regarding career-related matters. Previous studies have also shown that career engagement is fostered by adequate parental support combined with individuals' initiative to achieve high levels of accomplishment.

Based on the categorization results for the three variables, the majority of students were classified in the high category for career engagement (92%), parent-child career goal congruence (69.6%), and proactive career behavior (78.9%). Overall, these findings indicate that the participants exhibited high levels of career engagement, substantial career congruence with their parents, and strong tendencies toward proactive career behavior. This pattern may be explained by the characteristics of university students in the career exploration stage, during which they are generally more active in seeking information, support, and career-related experiences.

The findings indicate that parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior are associated with higher levels of career engagement among university students. These findings have important implications for parents, higher education institutions, and career counselors seeking to enhance students' career engagement and support the achievement of their career goals by strengthening parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior. Parents can support their children by developing a broader understanding of contemporary career development trends, thereby enabling them to better accommodate their children's needs and aspirations. They can also foster open communication to establish shared understandings regarding career goals. Universities and educational institutions can encourage students to develop their own learning strategies, provide information about available sources of support, and emphasize the importance of networking to foster proactivity (Geertshuis et al., 2014). Career counselors can assist students by promoting open communication with parents. Counselors may help students explore their perceptions of parental expectations and reflect on the extent to which parental support has fulfilled their career development needs.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was relatively homogeneous because participants were recruited from a single academic major at a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should employ more diverse samples drawn from different academic disciplines and institutions, or include individuals in early adulthood who do not attend university or are already employed, to enhance the generalizability of the results. Second, the gender composition of the sample was unbalanced, with

female participants substantially outnumbering male participants. This imbalance may have influenced the findings. Future research should seek a more balanced gender distribution. In addition, future studies should examine other variables that may mediate or moderate the relationship between parent-child career goal congruence, proactive career behavior, and career engagement. Finally, this study employed a cross-sectional design in which data were collected at a single point in time. Consequently, causal relationships among the variables cannot be established with certainty.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that parent-child career goal congruence and proactive career behavior jointly and significantly predict career engagement among university students. Individually, both variables also demonstrated significant predictive effects on career engagement. Parent-child career goal congruence contributed more strongly to career engagement than proactive career behavior. These findings suggest that students' career engagement is influenced by both contextual factors, particularly alignment with parents regarding career goals, and individual factors, namely proactive career behavior. The results have important implications for parents, higher education institutions, and career counselors in supporting and enhancing students' career engagement.

Ethical Statement: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee/Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, with number: F.4/2060/D.66/XI/2024

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use:

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (ChatGPT and QuillBot) to assist with paraphrasing and improving the clarity and readability of the text. All manuscript content was carefully reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and scientific integrity of this work.

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