

How Adolescents' Family Socioeconomic Status Affects their Career Preparation: The Mediating Effect of Social and Emotional Skills

Haili Cui

Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200240, China

Abstract: Drawing on data of 15-year-old Chinese students from the second round of the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills in 2023, this study examines the relationship between family socioeconomic status and career preparation (including exploring the future, experiencing the future, and thinking about the future) in teenagers, as well as the mediating effect of social and emotional skills of the individual on this relationship. The results reveal that the adolescent's family socioeconomic status not only directly influences their career preparation but also exerts an indirect effect via their social and emotional skills, particularly those in the domains of open-mindedness, task performance, and collaboration.

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About the Author: Haili Cui, School of Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200240, China. E-mail: hlcui@sjtu.edu.cn

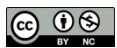
Correspondence to: Haili Cui at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China.

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Introduction

ADOLESCENTS are at a critical stage of life, experiencing a transition from childhood to adulthood, and begin to develop the awareness of career readiness. Identifying the factors that influence adolescents' career readiness is crucial for parents' and educators' efforts to

prepare them fully for the future work life. Using data of 15-year-old Chinese students, from the second round of the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) in 2023, this study examines the influences of students' family socioeconomic status (SES) and social and emotional skills (across five major domains) on their career preparation and analyzes the role of social and emotional skills in mediating the relationship between family SES and career preparation in adolescents.

Data and Methods

Data and Variables

The study's research subjects include 3,283 students aged 15 from Jinan City, China, who participated in the SSES 2023. They were the third-year students at middle schools and the first-year students at high schools and vocational high schools, distributed across 42 junior secondary schools, 26 general senior secondary schools, and 7 secondary vocational schools.

Classified into three thematic areas, namely, exploring the future, experiencing the future, and thinking about the future, student career preparation activities are the dependent variables in the study. Student family SES is the independent variable. The OECD's student questionnaire gathered information on the highest education level of the participant's parents, their occupations, and family possessions (such as electronic devices, books, rooms, internet connection, and cars). Principal component analysis is used to synthesize these variables into a continuous variable, i.e., student family SES, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Student social and emotional skills are the mediating variable. The student questionnaire measured social and emotional skills in five domains, namely task performance (self-control, responsibility, perseverance, achievement motivation), emotional regulation (stress resistance, optimism, emotional control), open-mindedness (curiosity, creativity, tolerance), collaboration (empathy, trust), and engaging with others (energy, sociability, assertiveness). In addition, personal characteristics of the student, including gender, migration status, academic performance, and the school attended, are the control variables.

Analytical Methods

First analyzed were the correlations between student family SES, social and emotional skills in five domains, and career preparation activities. After that, the statistical software Stata 17.0 was used to conduct stepwise regression analysis and Bootstrap mediation effect testing to estimate the mediating effects of social and emotional skills on the relationship between family SES and career preparation in the subjects.

Research Findings

There were statistically significant positive correlations between student family SES, social and emotional skills, and career preparation. First, the positive correlations between student family SES and career preparation in all three dimensions indicate that students with higher family SES tend to engage more in exploring and experiencing the future and have higher educational aspirations. Second, the positive correlations between student family SES and social and emotional skills in all five domains suggest students with higher family SES typically possess higher levels of social and emotional skills. Third, those between student social and emotional skills and career preparation demonstrate that students with higher average scores in social and emotional skills have more desirable performance in “exploring the future,” “experiencing the future,” and “thinking about the future.”

Students’ social and emotional skills significantly mediated the relationship between their SES and career preparation, with skills in the domains of open-mindedness, task performance, and engaging with others exerting partial mediation effects.

Furthermore, the mediating effects identified varied across different domains of skills. For the relationship between student family SES and “exploring the future,” the mediating effects of open-mindedness, task performance, emotional regulation, engaging with others, and collaboration made up 26.9%, 15.7%, 10.5%, 10.1%, and 2.8% of the total effect, respectively, in the order of strength. For the relationship between student family SES and “experiencing the future,” the figures were 22.1% (open-mindedness), 18.7% (social interaction), 10.6% (task performance), 7.4% (emotional regulation), and 2.6% (collaboration). On that between student family SES and “thinking about the future,” open-mindedness, engaging with others, and task performance had relatively stronger mediating effects than the other two domains.

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