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# “Preparing Them for the Road”: African Migrant Parents’ Perceptions of Their Role in Their Children’s Career Decision-Making

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**Abstract:** There are numerous theories on parenting styles, however, they are Western-oriented and may not be applicable to collectivist non-Western societies. A qualitative study which utilised semi-structured interviews was conducted to explore the perceived parenting roles of 26 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrant parents (both humanitarian and professional migrants) in their children’s career pathways after they migrated to Australia. Data were analysed using grounded theory methods and this process facilitated the creation of a new framework to provide an in-depth understanding of how SSA parenting styles informed the migrant children’s career choices while living in Australia. The study revealed that most SSA migrant parents maintained their style of parenting as used in their home countries. Interestingly, some parents adapted their parenting styles due to their perceptions of changed circumstances within the host country. Other parents, who would normally be authoritative, became trustful due to their perceived lack of educational expertise to guide their children. Conversely, some other parents who would normally be authoritarian employed wily tactics in influencing their children’s decision, so as to circumvent the strict Australian legal framework around children’s rights. Irrespective of parenting style applied, all the parents aimed to either guide or direct their children’s educational and career development to ensure that they become economically productive adults. From the discourse of the SSA migrants’ perceptions of their parental role, we offer potential explanations for what underpins their parenting preferences and the rippling effects on their children’s career trajectories. Direction for areas of continued research are presented, and implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Sub-Saharan African migrants; career choice; adolescents; parental role; parenting style; collectivism; individualism; societal norms

## 1. Introduction

Recent Australian national census data suggested an increased influx of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrants into Australia [1]. The 2016 census data show that the SSA population in Australia increased from 3522 in 1986 to 63,213 in 2011, and to 388,683 in 2016, representing about 1.6% of the total population in Australia and remains one of the fastest flourishing ethnicities [1]. SSA societies tend to emphasise collective group goals and practice interdependence instead of personal accomplishment [2]. Families in SSA countries comprise of both nuclear and extended family members and cultural

practices usually foster kinship. According to Hofstede, people from collectivist societies, such as SSA, are predominantly patrilineal and patrimonial, upholding respect for authority figures, as well as recognising sex roles in the family and society. Lineage members are considered part of the family unit and partake in the family obligation of providing support and sustenance to cater for the needs of all family members [3]. In most SSA societies, family members pool resources together (financial and human) and depend on each other for economic and social support [4].

For many SSA parents, migration opportunities provide valuable avenues to enhance their social and economic mobility and also foster their offspring's prospects of academic development. However, upon arrival in host country, dissimilarities between cultures can affect the career development of SSA migrant children [5]. School counsellors therefore need to be aware of pre- and post-migration contextual factors that may hinder or facilitate the education and career development of African migrant students.

Following migration to Western countries like Australia, SSA migrants are challenged by the new societal climate where parenting practices are based on individualistic approaches that emphasise personal growth, freedom and independence [6]. In Australia, like most Western countries, good parenting centres on promoting children's self-determination as well as a uniqueness and assertiveness in their career choices [7]. Making a career decision in such a society becomes an individual matter rather than a collective responsibility [8,9]. The legal framework in Australia regarding children's education, training and work stipulates that children may have rights in education, training and work that differ from or override that of their parents [10]. In collectivist societies on the other hand, group interests take precedence over an individual's interests [11–13]. Additionally, the views and concerns of family, friends and significant others are essential when choosing a career path so youth depend on them for direction, advice and support [14].

Prior to migration, most SSA parents tend to use both a collectivist and authoritarian or authoritative approach to inculcate their heritage shared values and practices into their children [15]. In-group obligation, respect for authority, adherence to group norms and maintenance of harmony in family relationships are the fundamental cultural values which characterise collectivist societies [16]. Previous research on collectivist societies have featured both authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles and shown that parental expectation influences children's career selection [14,17]. Furthermore, researchers have indicated that collectivist and authoritarian worldviews are common among migrants from societies with conservative cultural practices and are likely to persist after migration [6,7].

When families transition between cultures, parental role in the career development of children becomes quite challenging [5,18]. A study by Abraido-Lanza et al. [19] stated that though migrants may assimilate to a host culture, they do not adopt the host country's parenting practices. In addition, Kotchick and Forehand [20] affirmed that migrants maintained their traditional parenting styles as a coping strategy to reinforce their cultural identity and instill culturally endorsed behaviours in their children. Studies indicate that there are different parenting typologies. Early research conducted by Baumrind in 1971 [21], conceptualised parenting styles as authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. As indicated by Baumrind, authoritarian parents demand obedience from their children and use punitive strategies when children do not comply meanwhile permissive parents demand little and do not set boundaries for their children. In between these two extremes, Baumrind talks about authoritative parenting style where parents' behaviour is consistently loving and supportive yet firm and nurtures autonomy [21]. Research conducted by Sorkhabi [22] and Bornstein [23] reported that all three parenting styles from Baumrind's [21] typology can be found in both collectivist and individualistic cultures, however, the parents in these different cultures may endorse different styles of parenting more frequently. Other researchers have also emphasised the need to understand parenting styles within the context of culture [23–25]. Wang and Leichtman [26] noted that the primary cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist societies is the concept of independence versus interdependence. Based on the cultural context, either interdependence or independence is endorsed and practiced as a normative developmental task, therefore parenting styles will differ according

to the cultural prescription [27]. In a study by Tamis-LeMonda et al. [18], it was concluded that parenting practices in individualistic cultures promote self-expression, independence, competitiveness and self-sufficiency as opposed to emphasis on obedience, conformity, respect for elders and social interdependence in collectivist cultures. Lansford et al. [28] recently reported that parents in collectivist cultures like Asia and Africa are more likely than Western parents to value interdependence and hold more authoritarian attitudes, which encompasses obedience, respect, authority and strictness.

While Baumrind's [21] conceptualisation is valid, these parenting styles may not adequately explain or capture the parenting styles of migrants from different sociocultural contexts. Garg et al. [29] suggested that Baumrind's approach might not have similar meaning from an ethnic or cultural perspective, indicating that parenting styles differ by racial and ethnic groups. For example, Chao [30] argued that the Baumrind parenting style conceptualisations may not be culturally relevant to migrants (in particular Asians). Using a case of migrant Chinese mothers, Chao proved that an alternative parenting conceptualisation known as "chiao shun or training" immersed in the Chinese tradition was more applicable to migrant Chinese families [30]. While chiao shun shares similar features such as a set standard of conduct with authoritarian parenting, a distinctive feature is the high involvement, care and concern among parents in the Chinese context [30]. In the Chinese context, training is interpreted as positive and involves strict or rigorous teaching, given that this concept has evolved from a sociocultural tradition [30]. By contrast, this form of parenting may be viewed as negative in Western societies, where the culture is based on individualism, independence, individual choice, self-expression and uniqueness [30]. Furthermore, migrant Chinese students have reported higher academic performance, which is not in congruence with the parenting theory if Asian parents were classified as authoritarian based on Baumrind's theory [31].

This underscores the importance of understanding the sociocultural contexts of migrant groups while determining their parenting style and its role in their children's academic performance as well as career decision-making processes [24]. Nevertheless, research on this discourse tends to focus mainly on Asian migrant groups [32–34], whilst limited research has been carried out among SSA migrant families. Our recent study emphasises the significance of family dynamics among SSA families in their adaptation processes into the Australian society. The study revealed the impact of parental influence in the course of the families' adaptation in different facets of life segments such as academic and social settings, which could potentially create intergenerational dissension in the family [35]. Not addressing this knowledge gap has the potential to undermine the interdependent nature of the SSA family unit, with rippling effects on their integration and eventual productivity level in Australia. Better understanding of parenting roles as influenced by parenting styles of SSA parents while in a different society may aid the development of parenting interventions which may curb rising family tensions and promote family cohesion for smooth integration of parents and their children into the host country.

This study aimed to explore the perceived role of SSA migrant parents living in Australia, in the career decision-making processes of their adolescent children. The research question utilised to achieve this aim was: How do SSA migrant parents perceive their roles in the career development of their children? Study outcomes may spur a better understanding of the influence of SSA migrant parents on the career pathways of their children, thereby contributing to existing literature on this topic. A better understanding on this phenomenon would be significant for enhancing the career development programs that currently exist in the Australian education system for this group of migrant families. Additionally, the findings may also inform policymakers and school counsellors about how they might support SSA parents and their children in career development. Overall, knowledge about parental perceptions would contribute to answering the broader questions of the future of the SSA adaptation, economic statuses and educational attainment in the Australian society.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study utilised a qualitative grounded theory method (GTM) [36] to collect and analyse data through interviews with SSA migrant parents. This approach aided in-depth understanding of the participants' shared life stories about their perceived parental roles in relation to their children's career development [36]. Crooks [37] contended that the GTM aids exploration of group interrelationships and attitudes in life circumstances, especially in situations where little is known about individuals and groups' lived experiences.

### 2.1. Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants among representative migrants from diverse SSA communities living in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. Prospective participants were contacted through their community association leaders who provided letters of support and encouraged their members to participate in the study. While the African migrant association leaders assisted in the initial stages of connecting the first author (PA-T) with families, additional participants were obtained through a snowballing strategy [38]. Participants were selected if they were SSA migrant parents living in Townsville, Australia and had children in secondary (students in grades seven to twelve in high school) or tertiary education (either attending Technical and Further Education [TAFE] or University). Participation in the study was voluntary with no incentives provided and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity. Ethics approval was obtained from the James Cook University's Human Ethics Committee (H7006 and H7374).

### 2.2. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (ranging from 30 min to one hour) which provided in-depth insight into participants' perceptions of their parenting roles [39] were conducted between August 2017 and September 2018 at locations (either public settings or the participants' residences) chosen by participants. All interviews were conducted in English language by PA-T, with the involvement of BM-A in the first interview to ensure that the interview protocols were duly followed. The interviews commenced with the participants' description of their background and intercultural context. Their cross-cultural experiences, family compositions and the parenting roles they have adopted in relation to the career decisions of their children after transitioning to a new culture were also explored.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The participants' audio-recorded and transcribed interview responses were analysed using NVivo Software version 11 [40]. Guided by Charmaz's three phases of GTM coding [36], the transcribed interviews were examined line-by-line to develop the initial coding for descriptive categories. Axial coding was carried out to establish the relationships between the developed categories. Selective coding was the final stage of the analysis during which the participants' perceived 'parental role' in the host country in comparison to their home countries and how it has 'informed/influenced their children's career choices' were analysed to map out a meaningful and coherent story [41]. The three-phased coding process facilitated the identification of categories [36] and saturation of data for theory construction [42]. The participants' shared stories of how they perceived their roles in their children's career choices conformed to Baumrind's parenting typologies [21]. Therefore, further analysis involved the utilisation of these typologies as a point of reference to categorise participants' preferred parenting styles and how their parenting methods defined their perceived parental roles in their children's career decision-making processes. This approach was deemed applicable to the current study context because it aided deconstruction of a complex process into its component parts to enable better comprehension [43]. Additionally, Baumrind's parenting typologies have been utilised in other studies to explore parental influence on children's educational outcomes in both collectivist and individualistic societies [28,44–46] PA-T conducted the initial coding, while FA and BM-A confirmed the emerging

categories through comparisons and ongoing discussions. Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection to inform when data saturation was achieved [42]. Illustrative quotes from participants' responses were reported verbatim.

#### 2.4. Data Trustworthiness

The credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings were ensured through the iterative and concurrent data collection and analysis process [47]. In addition, reflexivity was enhanced by the involvement of two other researchers (FA and BMA) in the interpretive process [48]. To ensure theoretical data saturation, data triangulation and deeper understanding of the family dynamics, diverse participants with different family life circumstances and characteristics (such as educational level, entry status) were interviewed.

### 3. Results

Twenty interviews were conducted with 26 SSA migrant parents, which comprised of 14 males and 12 females. There were 11 humanitarian and 15 professional migrant parents from 8 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (Congo, Eritrea, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe). Table 1 portrays the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' profiles.

Names of Participants	Gender		Participants' Entry Statuses	Father's Levels of Education	Mother's Levels of Education	Length of Residency
	Male	Female				
Sam and Sarah	1	1	Humanitarian	Secondary	Secondary	8 years
Tony and Martha	1	1	Humanitarian	Secondary	Primary	1 year
Grace	-	1	Humanitarian	-	Secondary	6 years
Frank and Fiona	1	1	Humanitarian	Tertiary	Secondary	2 years
Mark	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	17 years
Craig and Mary	1	1	Humanitarian	Secondary	Primary	4 years
Veronica	-	1	Humanitarian	-	Tertiary	5 years
John	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	12 years
Matthew	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	12 years
Nathan	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	6 years
Michael and Rita	1	1	Professional	Tertiary	Tertiary	6 years
Jude and Mabel	1	1	Professional	Tertiary	Tertiary	11 years
Jeff	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	13 years
Steve	1	-	Humanitarian	Secondary	-	6 years
Celeste	-	1	Professional	-	Tertiary	6 years
Williams	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	6 years
Hilary	-	1	Professional	-	Tertiary	7 years
Charles	1	-	Professional	Tertiary	-	13 years
Helen	-	1	Professional	-	Tertiary	31 years
Olivia	-	1	Professional	-	Tertiary	8 years

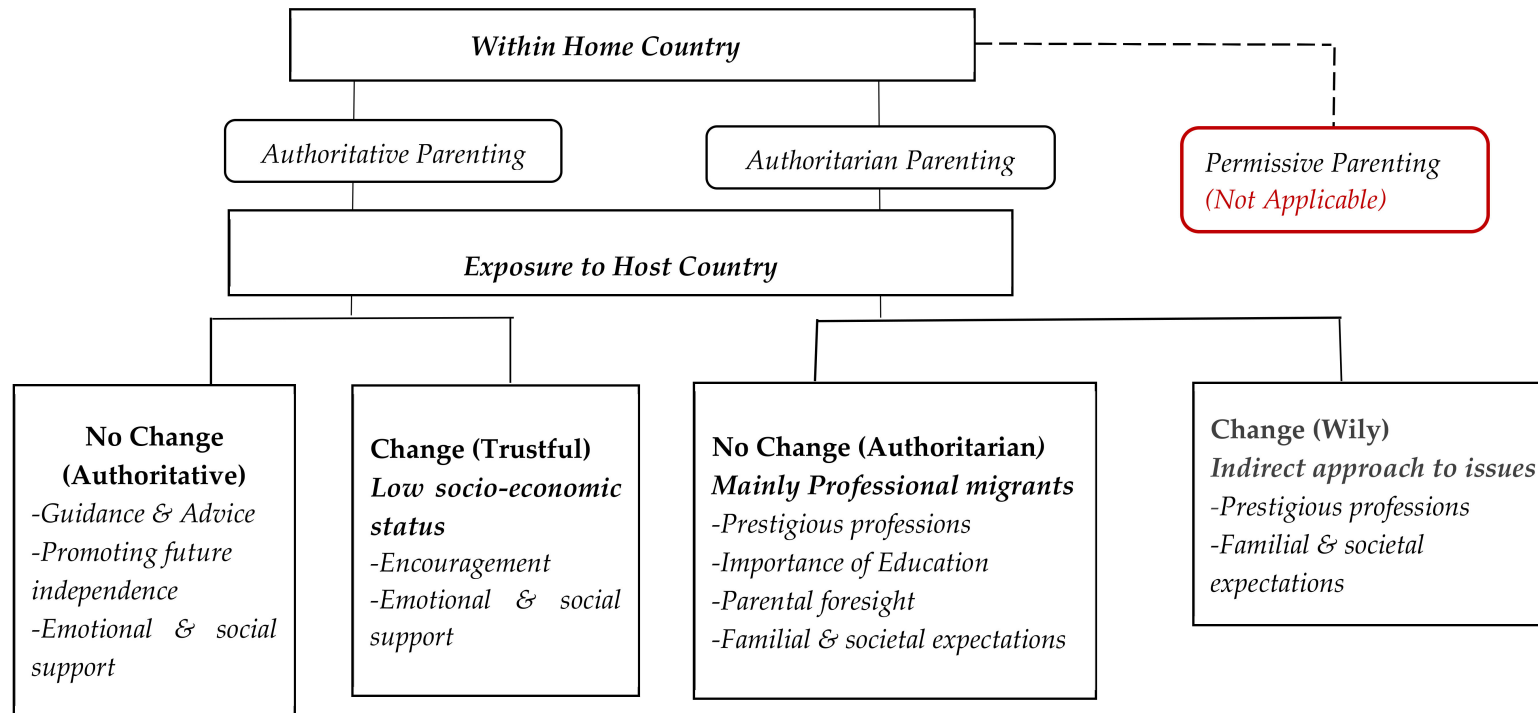
All participants wanted to create a better life for their children, therefore education was prioritised. Hence, the need to secure a better future for their offspring was a common perception of all the participants in this study. Exploration of the perceived parenting roles of the participants revealed that heritage cultural beliefs and practices shaped their values, and these were applied in their parenting styles in relation to their children's career decisions. All participants applied either authoritative or authoritarian styles of parenting, before entry into the host country. Interestingly, exposure to the host culture resulted in changes in the parenting styles of some parents. A common thread across all participants was that they aimed to "prepare the kids for the road, not the road for the kids. So, if we prepare them, even if things change ... they can still stand on their feet."

Fifteen of the participants were professional migrants who transitioned to Australia because they perceived that relocating would offer many career options and better job opportunities for their children. Nonetheless, the eleven participants who were humanitarian migrants equally had lofty career plans for their children and employed parenting strategies which they anticipated would build their children's career prospects. Regardless of their preferred parenting style or entry status

(professionals or humanitarians), all the SSA migrant parents in this study valued higher education for their children because it forms the building blocks of their career development. Overall, the outcomes of the study indicate that majority of SSA migrant parents applied either authoritarian or authoritative parenting styles when engaging with their adolescent children in relation to career decision-making. The current study outcomes demonstrate that the majority of SSA migrant parents preferred using their accustomed parenting practices after transitioning from their heritage collectivist to the Australian individualistic societies. However, there were a few outliers who adjusted their roles and parenting styles in relation to prevailing circumstances within the host culture (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 presents a model of the parenting practices utilised by the SSA migrant parents. When SSA parents transition from their heritage collectivist societies to Western individualistic societies, they tend to prefer to maintain their accustomed parenting styles, usually either authoritarian or authoritative approach. For the participants in this study, permissive parenting style was not applied. After settling in the Australian society where the authoritative parenting style is mostly endorsed, some of the SSA parents maintain their style of parenting as it is similar to the host society's practices. However, some parents who would normally apply an authoritative parenting style may feel inadequate because of their perceived educational insufficiencies in the host culture. This group of parents are more trustful of their children's career choices. Authoritarian parents are mostly professional migrants and they are high-handed and dictatorial in relation to their children's career choices. In contrast, some authoritarian parents altered their parenting style by adopting wily parenting approaches because of the legal framework in the Australian society. This group of parents employed psychological tactics to manipulate the thoughts, feelings and emotions of their children. Such parents for instance, embark on regular family holidays to their home countries to reinforce to their children the inherent privileges obtainable in the heritage and host societies, so that they will get their children's cooperation when they intervene in their life decisions.





**Figure 1.** A model of Sub-Saharan African migrants' parenting styles in a Western society.

### 3.1. Authoritative Parenting Style to Inform Children's Career Choices

Eleven participants used an authoritative parenting style, which is nurturing and responsive; marked by firm rules and shared decisions made in a warm and enabling environment. This group of parents perceive that they have a supportive role to guide their children in their career path. Their perceived roles include providing guidance, emotional and social support as well as promoting future independence in their children.

**Guidance:** These parents indicated that they have a 'duty of care' as pathfinders who provide guidance and counselling to point their children toward desirable career pathways for a secured future. *"I am supposed to just give that child guidance and train that child . . . If you just leave them, okay, do whatever you like, there's no way they will get it right."* (Frank).

Parents made a conscious effort to guide their children's career development by offering directions. *" . . . in the Western world, things are different, children make their own decisions, like: 'I want to do this, I want to be that'. No! We feel we must tell them what's good for them. We don't impose it on them, though, but we guide them, advise them about what is good for them . . . ."* (Sam).

It was the hope of many participants that their children would pursue career pathways which could help them secure certain jobs. *"It would not be honest to say you never hope and think that your children should do certain things for a living. But I don't think you ever then force them to sort of say you are going to do this or that. You guide them, and there's no question about that . . . "* (Nathan).

**Emotional and Social Support:** They also perceived their roles as providing both emotional and social support to encourage their children and to ease any tension their children could face. *"We just kept talking and encouraging the children. Like for (our daughter), she needed a lot of encouragement because she was coming in Year 11, and she was going to do her OP in year 12. So, we just had a lot of encouragement and support for her not to lose hope"* (Martha).

Participants believe that the family home acts as a safety zone in times of need. *" . . . They are always your kids no matter what happens...you just need to keep an eye on them to ensure that all is good, everything is going well. If there is an issue, they are more than welcome to come back and discuss it with the parents, just to see how they are progressing in life"* (Frank).

**Promoting Future Independence:** These parents also perceived that it was important to prepare their children so they could live independently when they are no longer living with their parents. *" . . . we may move on, and the children might decide to stay back, because they're growing here, and they might decide to stay. Or if anything happens to us, they should be able to look after themselves. So that's why you kind of try and steer them into a direction where you think, okay, they could be independent even if they have none of us here"* (Jeff).

### 3.2. Trustful (Less Authoritative) Parenting Style to Inform Children's Career Choices

Interestingly, there were two (2) outlier parents who though had authoritative tendencies, were less responsive and involved in their children's career decision-making. These parents had humanitarian entry status with very limited prior education and so they felt inadequate to provide the needed career guidance to their children although they still offered emotional support and demonstrated vested interest in their children's education.

*" . . . I don't think that I can decide for them. They have to decide by themselves, because they're educated better than what I was. But what I will do, I will just keep praying for them and tell them the word of God. As we are in a different culture, and we are no longer back there in our home country. Here, as you see, I'm getting old and they are growing and maturing, so they know what career is good or bad. Once they know what's good and bad, their career choices will be their own decisions"* (Tony).

These parents feel they must not be too intrusive in their offspring's affairs and were not worried if their input was disregarded by their children.



*"I don't want to go through their career situations because I want them to choose something they want to do. Everyone has their own choice. However, when they ask me to share something with them, I do. Like, we share ideas which sometimes my input may not be accepted. About their career choice, this is their decision"*

(Mary).

### 3.3. Authoritarian Parenting Style to Inform Children's Career Choices

Despite transitioning to a different culture, eight participants continued to maintain their traditional authoritarian parenting style which is characterised by high demandingness and low responsiveness. Participants who used authoritarian parenting styles were mostly professional migrants, with high educational levels, which afforded them good employment prospects and a higher socio-economic status in society. Many parents in this category indicated that if they were still living in their heritage culture, they would be in charge of making all family decisions. Consequently, their parenting styles were based on pushing their children towards obtaining prestigious professions, often disregarding their children's personal interests. These parents also had strong views about obtaining tertiary education, promoted strict familial and societal expectations and perceive that they have better foresight than their children. Often these parents have divergent views to their children.

**Prestigious and Well-paying Jobs:** This group of parents revered traditional careers such as doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers and architects because of their prestigious nature as well as the higher income associated with them. Consequently, they encouraged their children to pursue pathways that would eventually help them to secure a job in one of these professions. *"... In a typical African set up, the child doesn't actually have a choice. It is the parents who say, okay, my child, you are going to be a lawyer, and they've made that pathway for you. No matter what happens ... you have to be a lawyer. That's what we have decided"* (William).

**Importance of Education:** These professional migrants were determined to impose their will on their children.

*"... because my children are university material and we come from a culture where education is very important, I tell them Okay, I am not letting you make a decision ... I am making that decision for you! This is what you're going to do, and that's it, I am not discussing it anymore. You see that the children don't like it, but I mean to stand my ground and I will not discuss it further ... "*

(Celeste).

*"... I make sure my kids know I'm there for them if they need that support. I'm sending them to good schools, but I need them to go to university! I'm not going to settle for TAFE, or any of the old qualifications! Because to me, a degree is the only qualification I want to push them towards. I will be disappointed if my children decide not to go to the university"*

(John).

**Parental Foresight:** Based on their own experiences, understanding and knowledge, this group of African migrant parents perceived themselves as having the foreknowledge to be able to caution their children to follow certain career pathways and develop good work ethics.

*"So, the career choices they make, it has to be something that it's top level, where they put in a lot of hard yards. But in the long-term it's much more sustainable. It's an area where—if you go to an area where everyone goes into it, the chances are that a time will come when that area will be saturated. But if they go to areas where we know, as parents, we know there are certain careers where normally people would try to avoid because they think it is too hard. But we always tell our kids that nothing is impossible. For as long as you put your mind and you're ready to do the hard yards that it requires, the sky is the limit. You can be anything you want"*

(Mark).

**Familial and Societal Expectations:** These parents also believed that it was necessary to ensure that their children become productive members of society.

*“I think it’s a simple thing of ensuring that they are productive citizens more than anything else, in that they are doing the right things”*

(Helen).

*“... if we as parents were to put our feet down and say, look, we think this is beneficial for you, the kids, maybe now they don’t understand it but in the long term it’s because you worry about them”*

(William).

Generally, the fathers preferred to spur the children to stand up to life’s challenges. For example, Mark challenged his children by telling them *“... if you’re ready to do the hard yards ... . The sky is the limit”*; John said *“... a degree is the only qualification I want to push them towards ... ”*, while William said *“... in a typical African set up, the child doesn’t actually have a choice ... ”*

Mothers, on the other hand, tended to act as a source of solace, using encouraging words to guide and advise their children. Martha said: *“... we just had a lot of encouragement and support for her not to lose hope ... ”*; Sara advised her children that: *“... you need to do something in addition so that in the future, if the basketball don’t work, something else will work as a job for you...”* and Rita said to her children: *“... Life is not about earning money, it’s about adding value and about being the best that you can be ... ”*

#### 3.4. Wily Parenting Style to Inform Children’s Career Choices

Surprisingly, five participants who would normally take an authoritarian approach in their parenting role tried to circumvent the legal framework of the host cultural system (which does not encourage punitive measures from parents) by applying a wily parenting style. This group of parents were particularly adamant about familial/societal expectations and their children going for prestigious jobs. They adapted to the new environment by appearing to support their children’s personal interests, but at the same time, indirectly influencing the decisions of their children. These parents begin to mould the attitudes and characters of their children while they are still young. Folktales are shared by parents about their home countries regarding economic, political, social relationships and cultural facets. *“... we always try to put something in their heads to make them focus. Because most of the time I talk to my kids on one to one level to organise and advise them. At times, I even show them what is on TV, ... something about Africa and say come and see; you guys are fortunate to be in this part of the world where you have everything. Some of us were not fortunate that way! ... like me and my wife, we’re not fortunate to have fathers. My father died at an early age; my wife doesn’t even know her father”* (Matthew).

*“... Each time I go home, I take the whole family home ... . So that when we get home, they can actually see what’s going on there ... ! Then, they really appreciate that oh, okay, at least we are in a better place than our friends and peers, because they can actually see what’s going on ... ”*

(Jude).

These participants acknowledged that guiding their children is a traditional role. *“So, like, we just advise them as our parents did, because that’s what our parents used to do for us also”* (Mabel); and perceived that it is a familial and societal expectation that they, as parents, should direct their children to choose worthwhile career paths *“... Now we know which career path is good, and probably those that are not so good! ... so, we really feel that we should have input in what our children are going to choose as their future careers, ... and we are going to do that in their best interests, using our experiences ... . So, we will be telling them here and there, and trying to mould their thinking as they go along ... ”* (Charles).

*“... Sometimes it’s just good to know that what looks easy or comfortable is not the best. I mean, I just drop out of grade 12, go to TAFE and do a trade and I can earn money. Life is not about earning*

*money, it's about adding value and about being the best that you can be, because again, things change, you know. We came for the children, there are things that we did mainly for them"*

(Rita).

#### 4. Discussion

This study sought to explore SSA migrant parents' perceptions of their role in the career decision-making processes of their children. Various studies have reported that parenting styles influence children's career development and is dependent on different societal values and practices [6,7,49,50].

The SSA migrant parents in this study preferred authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles because these approaches were commonly used in their heritage societies [6,7,9]. In many SSA collectivist societies, family loyalty, adherence to group norms and maintenance of harmony in relationships are fundamental cultural values [16]. Getting involved and keeping a close eye on the academic, social, physical and spiritual development of their children through the imposition of an absolute set of standards is a societal as well as familial expectation of collectivist parents so that children can become responsible adults [15,18]. From the participants' perspectives, their children needed firm rules and guidance. Therefore, applying authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles was appropriate to stir the enhancement of their children's education and career development so that they can support their family and contribute to the advancement of society. The study findings resonate with Baumrind's [21] parenting typology. From the current study, parents with authoritative tendencies were approving, responsive and nurturing with moderate control. They were more facilitative in their children's development of academic career pathways and social competence in comparison to those with authoritarian parenting style. The current study outcomes also demonstrate that majority of SSA migrant parents preferred using their accustomed parenting practices after transitioning from their heritage collectivist to the Australian individualistic societies. Most participants used an authoritative parenting style, which involves high demandingness and high responsiveness, which is marked by firm rules and shared decisions made in a warm and enabling environment [51].

However, some of the SSA migrant parents who participated in this study perceived that their children were better educated than themselves. While they had confidence in the judgement of their children to make their own life decisions, they recognised the limiting effects of their own educational and socioeconomic statuses. Consequently, these parents provide encouragement, guidance and spiritual support to their children, trusting that their children would be able to utilise the economic structures and educational system of the host country to develop their potentials and make prudent decisions in relation to their career pathways. This finding is consistent with earlier research by Stull [52] who postulated that parents with low socio-economic backgrounds appear to not be highly expectant of their children.

Participants who used authoritarian parenting styles were mostly professionals, with high educational levels, which afforded them good employment prospects and a higher socio-economic status in society. This revelation is consistent with some findings by previous researchers who contended that parents with elevated educational levels are most likely to be in well-remunerated jobs resulting in a high socio-economic status and have loftier expectations for their children, which underpins their parenting styles [53].

Many SSA migrant parents who apply authoritarian parenting styles perceive that higher education will provide their children with numerous opportunities to *'reinvent'* themselves at any time in life such as changing their career, to be self-employed and have the ability to retire early. Therefore, they expected their children to imbibe the values of higher education, so they pushed them to attain university degrees rather than allowing their children to settle for lower qualifications.

Rather than adopting the authoritative parenting style, these SSA migrant parents preferred to employ authoritarian parenting methods, which is characterised by high demandingness and low responsiveness. The parents perceived that using the authoritarian approach ensured that their children conformed to familial and societal rules and they would meet the high parental expectations [9]. In their

heritage collectivist societies, it is incumbent on parents to teach their children to be respectful and obedient, to comply with rules and to have a strong interdependent spirit as participants themselves inherited this approach from their parents [9,54]. According to Amos [15], for most collectivist SSA societies, a “good” parent is one who takes the initiative in their child’s life because the parents are presumed to know best. Therefore, the participants in this study who applied the authoritarian approach tended to perceive that if they allowed their children to do whatever they like, there is no way that the children will make the right life decisions, especially the type of career path they choose to pursue. The findings of this study are consistent with other researchers who concluded that traditional societies tend to apply authoritarian parenting styles [6,49,50].

By contrast, other authoritarian parents altered their parenting style by adopting the wily parenting approach because of the legal framework in the Australian society. In matters relating to children’s education, training and work, the Australian legal framework stipulates that children have the right to decide and that their decisions may override that of their parents [10]. These parents employed psychological tactics to manipulate the thoughts, feelings and emotions of their children [55]. Such parents for instance, embark on regular family holidays to their home countries to reinforce to their children the inherent privileges obtainable in the heritage and host societies, so that after exposing them to both cultures, the parents will get their children’s cooperation when they intervene in their life decisions.

The wily parenting approach provides a different perspective on the concept of ‘parental psychological control,’ which was introduced in the literature by earlier researchers [55–57]. These researchers argued that parental psychological control typifies a hostile and dysfunctional parent-child relationship, which include the use of punitive disciplinary parenting practices. In contrast, the authoritarian turned wily parents in this current study who psychologically manipulate the affairs of their children do so in a more subtle manner.

SSA migrant parents tend to have strong expectations for their children to pursue prestigious professions for a sustained employment with good social statuses and ensured that their children conformed to familial and societal rules and they would meet the high parental expectations [9]. In their heritage collectivist societies, it is incumbent on parents to teach their children to be respectful and obedient, to comply with rules and to have a strong interdependent spirit as participants themselves inherited this approach from their parents [7,54]. According to Amos [15], for most collectivist SSA societies, a “good” parent is one who takes the initiative in their child’s life because the parents are presumed to know best [15]. Therefore, the participants in this study who applied the authoritarian approach tended to perceive that if they allowed their children to do whatever they like, there is no way that the children will make the right life decisions, especially in relation to the career path they choose to pursue.

Conversely, other authoritarian parents altered their parenting style by adopting the wily parenting approach because of the legal framework in the Australian society. These parents employed psychological tactics to manipulate the thoughts, feelings and emotions of their children [55]. The wily parenting approach provides a different perspective on the concept of ‘parental psychological control’ introduced in the literature by earlier researchers [55–57]. These researchers argued that parental psychological control typifies a hostile and dysfunctional parent-child relationship, which includes the use of punitive disciplinary parenting practices. In contrast, the authoritarian turned wily parents in this current study who psychologically manipulate the affairs of their children to do so in a more subtle manner.

Generally, fathers were more assertive than mothers. The different roles fathers and mothers played resonate with the research by Germeiji and Verschuere [58] who contended that mothers generally are intimate and symmetrical and tend to use more supportive language in communicating with their children, which eventually may have more influence on their children’s inner disposition. On the other hand, fathers are more likely to stimulate children’s exploration of their outer social world [59]. Parents with very limited prior education felt inadequate to provide the needed career

guidance to their children. This finding corroborates previous research which indicates that social class influences the extent to which parents possess the resources and afford the opportunity to engage in the educational and career choice behaviours of their children [60]. Nevertheless, the fact that they still offered emotional support demonstrates their active engagement and vested interest in their children's education.

SSA migrant parents tend to have strong expectations for their children to pursue prestigious professions for a sustained employment with good social statuses and a potentially high salary. They do this with the likely goal of upward mobility and financial stability for the family unit. However, if their children's personal interests are not fulfilled, then satisfaction and performance could be lower in their chosen professions [61]. This could thwart the children's career goals of becoming satisfied and productive workers to create life for their families and support the host country's economy [62]. Lack of independence in one's career choice could lead to lower personal interest, which affects one's motivation for achieving fulfilment in that career [62]. The study outcomes acknowledge that parental support strengthens children's expectations for success in the pursuit of their career goals. However, divergent views relating to familial expectations can be a source of tension within the SSA migrant families, therefore the intervention of a career counsellor is crucial for defusing any friction between the parents and their children.

#### *Strengths and Limitations of the Study*

To the best of our knowledge, this qualitative study is the first to explore the perceptions of SSA migrant parents living in Australia regarding their perceived role in relation to their children's career decision-making. Furthermore, the information gathered from this study is useful for resourcing career counsellors as to how best they can work with SSA migrant parents regardless of their parenting styles. However, the current study is limited to only eight purposively selected SSA migrant communities residing in the Townsville region of Australia, hence limiting the representativeness of the sample [63]. Therefore, the outcomes of the study may not be transferable to other settings due to the composition of the participant groups. Additionally, the fewer number of couples (six only) did not allow for detailed analysis of impact of joint parenting. Furthermore, there were more professional migrant parents involved in this study than humanitarian migrant parents. This may be a consequence of bias sampling in which the humanitarian immigrants may have limited English proficiency and knowledge about research which could serve as barriers to research participation among this group of migrants [64].

#### **5. Conclusions**

Existing theories on parenting styles and career decision-making place emphasis on personal interests, autonomy and cultural circumstances mostly developed in Western societies. These concepts may not fit well in collectivist cultures where decision-making is typically interdependent, with career choice guided by factors that benefit one's family and community rather than oneself. Our findings suggest that irrespective of parenting style applied, SSA parents are a significant source of support and guidance for their children's career construction. However, the approaches adopted by parents may impact on the success of their children's career choice. Authoritarian SSA parents emphasised prestigious jobs, cultural values and expectations as a way of fostering high academic and professional achievement in their children. On the other hand, authoritative parents were more supportive of their children's career choices and encouraged them to undertake careers that best suited their abilities and interest. Some parents deviated from the normative parenting styles either due to their educational deficiencies (trustful parenting style) or in order to circumvent the legal framework of the host cultural system (wily parenting style). These parental factors have significant implications for child-parent relationship and may subsequently affect the children's self-esteem, academic achievement, cognitive development and behaviour. Parental orientations that influence career decision-making processes for SSA migrant students must be understood and acknowledged by school counsellors, teachers, researchers and policymakers. Such insights would inform policy

and aid the development of effective school and community-led support programs that guide SSA migrant parents so they can adapt their parenting styles to the needs of their children. These measures will ultimately facilitate smooth and successful career paths for SSA migrant students whilst living in a different context.

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